

JAMES DAY, 89
PUBLIC TELEVISION PIONEER
Obituary

James Day, a pioneer in public television for more than five decades - including the creation of San Francisco's PBS station KQED, the presidency of WNET in New York, and chairmanship of the CUNY-TV Advisory Board -- died on April 24, 2008. He was 89. His son Ross, of New York City, said he died peacefully at Mount Sinai Hospital in New York of respiratory failure.

He is survived by two other sons - Douglas, of San Jose, California, and Alan, of Sunnyvale, California. His daughter, Meredith Day Johnson of New York City, died in 2000. They are joined by Jeanne Alexander, his partner of fifteen years.

Day created KQED in 1954; it was one of the nation's earliest public television stations. For 16 years, he was its president and general manager. Under his aegis, KQED won a worldwide reputation for its imaginative and bold programming, including its precedent-setting nightly *Newsroom*. The station's inventive fund raising techniques -- notably, the concept of audience memberships, pledge nights, and televised auctions -- became the national funding standard.

Day was equally at home behind as well as before the television camera. While president of KQED, Day hosted a weekly program, *Kaleidoscope*, on which he interviewed several hundred famous people, among them Eleanor Roosevelt, Buster Keaton, Robert F. Kennedy, Bing Crosby, Aldous Huxley and Alexander Kerensky. His interviews with philosopher Eric Hoffer (12 half-hours) and historian Arnold Toynbee (6 half-hours) were distributed nationally on public television.

In 1969, Day left his native San Francisco for New York to accept the presidency of NET (National Educational Television), public television's national network at the time and thus the predecessor to PBS. Later, when NET was merged with New York's WNDT/Channel 13, he became president of the New York channel, renaming it WNET. His tenure at NET and WNET is associated with such innovative programs as *The Great American Dream Machine*, *An American Family*, *Banks and the Poor*, *VD Blues*, and *The Forsyte Saga*. His on-camera interviews with the cast of *The Forsyte Saga* were an afterword to each episode when that popular BBC series aired on NET. After resigning the presidency of WNET in 1973, Day formed his own production company, Publivision, Inc., and created the nationally-distributed nightly interview program, *Day At Night*. The 130 half-hours brought him face-to-face with an equal number of famous persons in the arts, sciences, literature, sports, entertainment and public service, including Ray Bradbury, Aaron Copland, Alger Hiss, Muhammad Ali, Jason Robards, and Ralph Ellison.

In 1976, he was appointed professor of radio and television at Brooklyn College of the City University of New York (CUNY). For twelve years he taught graduate and undergraduate courses and was named Professor Emeritus upon his retirement in 1988. In 2000, the City University's cable television channel (CUNY-TV) named him chairman of its Advisory Board, where he served to make the station a model of local, quintessentially "public" TV.

Day's pioneering efforts in the public medium were manifest in his memberships on the original boards of the Children's Television Workshop (*Sesame Street*), the Public Broadcasting Service (PBS), and the International Public Television Screening Conference (INPUT).

Prior to entering public television, Day was Director of Public Affairs and Education for NBC's San Francisco station, a Civilian Radio Specialist with the Allied Occupation of Japan, and Deputy Director of Radio Free Asia. He has been a consultant on broadcasting to several East African nations, the government of Venezuela, and the State of Hawaii.

His book, *The Vanishing Vision: The Inside Story of Public Television*, was published by the University of California Press in 1995.

James Day was born December 22, 1918, in Alameda, California, to James Magee Day, a supervisor for the Southern Pacific Railroad, and the former June Reeve. His early years were spent in Alameda; El Paso, Texas; and Sacramento. He graduated in 1941 from the University of California, Berkeley, and earned a postgraduate degree from Stanford University in 1951. During World War II, he served in the U.S. Army. In April 1943, he married Beverley Elizabeth Hare; she died in 1999.

No funeral services will be held. A memorial service is being arranged for December. Contributions may be made to the Meredith Day Johnson Fund, San Francisco Foundation, 225 Bush Street, Suite 500, San Francisco, Calif., 94104.