

= Verna Fields =

Verna Fields (née Hellman , 21 March 1918 ? 30 November 1982) was an American film editor , film and television sound editor , educator , and entertainment industry executive . In the first phase of her career , from 1954 through to about 1970 , Fields mostly worked on smaller projects that gained little recognition . She was the sound editor for several television shows in the 1950s . She worked on independent films (including The Savage Eye (1959)) , on government @-@ supported documentaries of the 1960s , and on some minor studio films such as Peter Bogdanovich 's first film , Targets (1968) . For several years in the late 1960s , she was a film instructor at the University of Southern California . Her one major studio film , El Cid , led to her only industry recognition in this phase of her career , which was the 1962 Golden Reel award for sound editing .

Fields came into prominence as a film editor and industry executive during the ' New Hollywood ' era (1968 ? 1982) . She had established close ties with the directors Peter Bogdanovich , George Lucas , and Steven Spielberg early in their careers , and became known as their " mother cutter " ; the term " cutter " is an informal variation of " film editor " . The critical and commercial success of the films What 's Up , Doc ? (1972) , American Graffiti (1973) , and Jaws (1975) brought Fields a level of recognition that appears to be unique among film editors . Jaws in particular was enormously and unexpectedly profitable , and ushered in the era of the " summer blockbuster " film . Fields ' contributions to this success were widely acknowledged . She received an Academy Award and an American Cinema Editors Award for best editing for the film . Within a year of the film 's release , she had been appointed as Vice @-@ President for Feature Production at Universal Studios . She was thus among the first women to enter upper @-@ level management in the entertainment industry . Her career as an executive at Universal continued until her death in 1982 at age 64 .

= = Early life , education , and training = =

Verna Hellman was born in St. Louis , Missouri . She was the daughter of Selma (née Schwartz) and Samuel Hellman , who was then working as a journalist for the St. Louis Post @-@ Dispatch and the Saturday Evening Post . Sam Hellman subsequently moved his family to Hollywood , where he became a prolific screenwriter . Verna Hellman graduated from the University of Southern California with a B.A. in journalism . She then held several positions at 20th Century Fox , including being the assistant sound editor on Fritz Lang 's 1944 film The Woman in the Window . In 1946 , she married the film editor Sam Fields and stopped working . The Fields had two sons ; one of them , Richard Fields , became a film editor . In 1954 , Sam Fields died of a heart attack at the age of 38 .

= = Career in sound editing = =

Following her husband 's death , Fields began a career as a television sound editor working on such shows as Death Valley Days and the children 's programs Sky King and Fury . She installed a film editing lab in her home so that she could work at night while her children were young ; she told them that she was the " Queen of Saturday morning " .

By 1956 , she was working on films as well . Her first credit as a sound editor was for Fritz Lang 's While the City Sleeps . She worked on the experimental documentary The Savage Eye (1959) ; the co @-@ directors Ben Maddow , Sidney Meyers , and Joseph Strick and the other connections she made on this film were important to her subsequent career . In 1962 Fields won the Motion Picture Sound Editors ' Golden Reel Award for the film El Cid (directed by Anthony Mann) .

Following El Cid , Fields was the sound editor on several lesser @-@ known films , including the experimental film The Balcony (1963) with her Savage Eye colleagues Strick and Maddow . Peter Bogdanovich 's first , low @-@ budget film Targets (1968) was one of her last sound @-@ editing projects , and represents her mature work . Bill Warren has described the scene in which the character Bobby starts sniping at freeway drivers from the top of a large oil storage tank : " The

sound is mono , and brilliantly mixed -- the entire sequence of Bobby shooting from the tanks was shot without sound . Verna Fields , then a sound editor , added all the sound effects . The result is seamlessly realistic , from the scrape of the guns on the metal of the tanks , to the crack of the rifles , to the little gasps Bobby makes just before firing . "

= = Film editing and teaching = =

Fields ' career as a film editor commenced in 1960 , when the director Irving Lerner recruited her to be the editor of the film *Studs Lonigan* ; Fields and Lerner had both worked on *The Savage Eye* . In 1963 she edited *An Affair of the Skin* , which was directed by Ben Maddow (another *Savage Eye* contact) . Over the next five years , Fields edited several other independent films ; the best known is *The Legend of the Boy and the Eagle* (1967) , which was shown on the television program *Walt Disney 's Wonderful World of Color* . She also made documentaries funded by the United States government through the Office of Economic Opportunity (OEO) , the United States Information Agency (USIA) , and the U.S. Department of Health , Education , and Welfare (HEW) .

Starting in the mid @-@ 1960s , Fields taught film editing at the University of Southern California (USC) . Douglas Gomery wrote of her time at USC that : " Her greatest impact came when she began to teach film editing to a generation of students at the University of Southern California . She then operated on the fringes of the film business , for a time making documentaries for the Office of Economic Opportunity . The end of that Federal Agency pushed her back into mainstream Hollywood then being overrun by her former USC students . " Fields ' students had included Matthew Robbins , Willard Huyck , Gloria Katz , John Milius , and George Lucas .

Fields left no written lectures from her USC years , but a transcript exists from a 1975 seminar that she gave at the American Film Institute . In one characteristic excerpt she said that , " There 's a feeling of movement in telling a story and there is a flow . A cut that is off @-@ rhythm will be disturbing and you will feel it , unless you want it to be like that . On *Jaws* , each time I wanted to cut I didn 't , so that it would have an anticipatory feeling ? and it worked . "

In 1971 Peter Bogdanovich , with whom Fields had worked on *Targets* , recruited her to edit *What 's Up , Doc ?* (1972) ; Bogdanovich had edited his previous films himself . The film was very successful , and is now considered as the second of Bogdanovich 's ' golden period ' that commenced with *The Last Picture Show* (1971) . *What 's Up , Doc ?* established Fields as an editor on studio films . She subsequently edited Bogdanovich 's final golden period film , *Paper Moon* (1973) , as well as his less successful film *Daisy Miller* (1974) .

= = George Lucas and *American Graffiti* = =

In 1967 , Fields had hired George Lucas to help edit *Journey to the Pacific* (1968) , which was a documentary film that she 'd directed for the USIA . She had also hired Marcia Griffin for the job , and introduced Griffin and George Lucas ; they subsequently married . In 1972 , Lucas was directing *American Graffiti* . While Lucas had intended that his wife would edit the film , Universal Studios asked him to add Verna Fields to the editing team . Over the first ten weeks of post @-@ production , George and Marcia Lucas , along with Fields and Walter Murch (as sound editor) , pieced together the original , 165 @-@ minute version of the film . Each of more than 40 scenes in the film had a continuously playing background song that had been popular around 1962 , when the film 's story was set . Michael Sragow has characterized the effect as " using rock ' n roll as a Greek chorus with a beat " .

Fields then left *American Graffiti* . It took another six months of editing to create a shorter , 110 @-@ minute version of the film , but upon its release in 1973 *American Graffiti* was extremely successful both with critics and at the box office . Shortly after its release , Roger Greenspun described the film and its editing : " *American Graffiti* exists not so much in its individual stories as in its orchestration of many stories , its sense of time and place . Although it is full of the material of fashionable nostalgia , it never exploits nostalgia . In its feeling for movement and music and the vitality of the night ? and even in its vision in white ? it is oddly closer to some early Fellini than to

the recent American past of , say , The Last Picture Show or Summer of ' 42 . "

Verna Fields and Marcia Lucas were nominated for an Academy Award for Film Editing in 1974 for their work on American Graffiti ; while the film won no Academy Awards , both of the Lucases , Murch , and Fields all won Academy Awards for later work . The commercial success of the film gave George Lucas the opportunity to direct his next film , Star Wars .

= = Steven Spielberg and Jaws = =

Fields edited Steven Spielberg 's first major film , The Sugarland Express (1974) . She became widely celebrated for her work as the film editor on Spielberg 's next film , Jaws (1975) , for which she won both the Academy Award for Film Editing and the American Cinema Editors Eddie Award in 1976 . Leonard Maltin has characterized her editing as " sensational " . Gerald Peary , who interviewed Fields in 1980 , wrote that , " Jaws scared the world , brought in a fortune for Universal , and made Verna Fields , who won an Academy Award , about as famous ' overnight ' as an editor ever gets . " He then quoted Fields as saying that , " Steven told me it was because I had cut the first picture that was a monumental success in which you can really see the editing . And people discovered that it was a woman who edited Jaws . "

The editing of Jaws has been intensely studied for over thirty years . In film editor Susan Korda 's 2005 lecture , " We 'll Fix It in the Edit ! ? " , at the Berlinale Talent Campus , she broadly explained the contribution of editing to the film : " What is fascinating in Jaws is that the shark has a personality , the shark has an intelligence , indeed sometimes I think the shark has a sense of humor , morbid as it might be . And that was all achieved in the first two acts of the film before you see the shark . So the cutting was very essential for that . " David Bordwell has used the second shark attack scene in Jaws as (literally) a textbook illustration of an editing innovation that occurred in the late 1960s . The innovation , which Fields herself named the " wipe by cut " , can be used when a character is filmed from a distance using a telephoto lens . The cut to a different framing of the character occurs during the interruption by a figure who passes between the camera and the character . The cut thus masks itself , and avoids drawing the viewer 's attention away from the narrative of the scene .

The critic David Edelstein 's affectionate comments on Jaws and its editing are also a good indication of the film 's lasting influence 30 years after its release :

Jaws is still one of my favorite movies . I didn 't know I could be manipulated like that ? so wittily , so teasingly , in a way that made me laugh at my own fear . (The only Hitchcock film I 'd seen in a theater was Frenzy , which was too sick to appreciate in the same vein .) What clinched it was that unbelievably brilliant sequence that begins with a high @-@ angle shot of Roy Scheider dropping fish entrails in the water as shark bait . He was resentful ; he said to Shaw and Dreyfuss , " Why don 't you guys come down here and shovel some of this shit ? " And we started to laugh ? he said " shit ! " heh @-@ heh ? and then the head of the shark appeared in the water (no music , no foreshadowing) , and I felt my mind detach from my body and my laugh turn into a shriek and merge into the collective shriek of everyone in that huge theater . I literally shook for the rest of the movie : Every cut by the late Verna Fields had me poised to leap out of my seat . (I really learned to appreciate editing from Jaws .)

On a 2012 listing of the 75 best edited films of all time that was compiled by the Motion Picture Editors Guild , Jaws was listed eighth .

= = Management for Universal Studios = =

Shortly after the completion of Jaws in 1975 , Fields was hired by Universal Studios as an executive consultant . Some insight into Universal 's reasons for hiring her can be gleaned from the fact that during the filming of Jaws , in addition to her editing , Fields had been " omnipresent ... at Spielberg 's beck and call by means of a walkie @-@ talkie . Often she would shuttle back and forth on her bike between the producers in town and Spielberg at the dock for last @-@ minute decisions " . The producers of Jaws were David Brown and Richard Zanuck . Along with Brown , Zanuck , and Peter

Benchley (the book 's author) , Fields helped promote Jaws on the " talk show circuit " in the eight months before its saturation release to 464 theaters on 20 June 1975 . Fields had plainly earned the confidence of the producers and of the studio executives at Universal .

Throughout her career , Fields had worked independently , but in 1976 , and following the unexpected success of Jaws , she accepted a position as the Feature @-@ Production Vice @-@ President with Universal . She was thus among the first women to hold high executive positions with the major studios . In a 1982 interview , Fields was quoted as saying , " I got a lot of credit for Jaws , rightly or wrongly . "

Fields had come " up from the cutting room floor " and out of the customary , near @-@ anonymity of film editors . Regarding this change in her career path , Fields told Peary in 1980 that " All these young filmmakers are possessive . They feel I belong to them , and they feel a certain resentment - that I went to the other side . In calmer moments , of course , they know it isn 't true , that I can do more for them now . " Of Fields ' work at Universal , Joel Schumacher was quoted in 1982 as saying : " In the record business , you have Berry Gordy and Ahmet Ertegun . They 're executives who actually made records . In the movie business , as an executive who 's worked with film , you have only Verna . She saves Universal a fortune ... every day . "

= = Final cuts = =

In 1981 , she was awarded the Women in Film Crystal Award for outstanding women who , through their endurance and the excellence of their work , have helped to expand the role of women within the entertainment industry .

Fields held her position as a Vice @-@ President at Universal until her death in 1982 . Jaws was the last film that she edited . There had apparently been some discussion that Fields might edit Spielberg 's next film , Close Encounters of the Third Kind (1977) , but Michael Kahn edited that film , and went on to edit all but one of Spielberg 's films for the next thirty years . After John D. Hancock , the initial director of Jaws 2 , was sacked , it was suggested that Fields co @-@ direct it with Joe Alves . Jeannot Szwarc , however , was hired to complete the film .

Fields died of cancer in Encino , California in 1982 . In her honor , Universal Studios named a building at its Universal City , California lot the " Verna Fields Building " ; it lies immediately across from the Alfred Hitchcock Building . The Motion Picture Sound Editors (MPSE) sponsor an annual Verna Fields Award for Student Sound Editing . The Women in Film Foundation , which honored Fields with its Crystal Award in 1981 , presently administers the Verna Fields Memorial Fellowship for women film students at UCLA .

= = Selected filmography (editor) = =