

Paul Eddy, a master of storytelling who loved nothing more than a mystery

We remember our former colleague Paul Eddy, one of The Sunday Times greats

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I was thrown together with Paul Eddy in 1976 after one of those passing conversations that ranked as career development at The Sunday Times.

Harry Evans, the editor, met me outside the office lift and said he wanted me to join the Insight team, which was then being re-formed after a fallow period.

"We want you to work with Paul Eddy," he told me. "We think you'll get on well."

I knew little of Paul then, but we soon found we did get on well. He was a slight figure, tidily dressed, who spoke in a measured way, smoked heavily and drank inordinate amounts of coffee. He was open about his strategies and ambitions.

Paul was in love with journalism and wanted to expand its possibilities. But there was still a hinterland that he protected, even when we were touring the wilder shores of journalism - meeting Palestinian militants in Gaza, doorstepping the families of the US hostages held in Iran, plunging around the Middle East in a bid to find out who had murdered David Holden, the Sunday Times foreign correspondent, at Cairo airport.

Only in the past few days, since Paul's death on Thursday night, have I pieced together aspects of his early life that had remained closed to me and there are still puzzles to be solved.

What I do know is that Paul was one of the great journalists of his generation. He deserves to be remembered for a meticulous approach to journalism that produced watertight stories in the most demanding areas. They covered the broadest of spectrums, with an emphasis on the fallibility of both systems and the people who run them. Each story rested on the evidence he mined from a morass of obfuscation and denial. He was also scrupulous in laying out that evidence for others to judge.

He revealed new talents when he moved on from journalism to fiction and appeared on the verge of relaunching that career when he was prematurely struck down.

Paul would have been 65 tomorrow. He was born in Leamington Spa. His mother was a department store buyer who travelled abroad and his father, a local newspaper journalist, undertook much of his upbringing in a pioneering role as house husband.

He attended King Edward VI school, where he ticked all the boxes for a pupil at a prestigious grammar: joining the choir, the drama club and the CCF and winning the English literature prize. Then, abruptly at 15, he left without taking any exams.

Even now the precise reasons remain obscure; but he had already become enamoured of journalism and his father helped secure him a job at the Leamington Spa Morning News. After performing his regulation stint of calling on bereaved parents and visiting mortuaries, he went to work for a news agency in London, graduating to the Daily Mirror, where his battle honours included acting as a minder to Mandy Rice-Davies, notorious from the Profumo scandal.

His skills were recognised by the newly arrived Evans, who was recruiting streetwise journalists to mix with The Sunday Times's coterie of Oxbridge alumni (of whom, I confess, I was one).

In 1973 Paul was assigned to cover the crash of a Turkish Airlines DC10 near Paris in which 345 people had died. He won the confidence of the crash investigators, who revealed that a cargo door had blown open - and that a Turkish baggage handler was being blamed. Paul and two colleagues, Elaine Potter and Bruce Page, learnt that the airline had known of a fault in the door design all along. Their book, *Destination Disaster*, is a classic text of investigative journalism, and Paul sustained his aviation contacts for the rest of his career.

After being brought together by Harry, Paul and I forged a working alliance that matured into a close friendship. When he became editor of *Insight* in 1979, he was brilliant at deploying reporters and assembling their information. On Friday evenings we would convene over supper at the Kolossi Grill, near the newspaper offices in Gray's Inn Road, to settle two key questions: What was our story? How should we write it?

With Paul acting as ringmaster, each of up to five team members would offer a view. It was an exemplary exercise in talking through our opinions, resolving disagreements and settling on our story. We would then start writing, sometimes through the night, sometimes snatching a few hours' sleep and resuming the adrenaline ride that saw us through to deadline around 4.45pm on Saturday.

Paul's forte was reactive stories, covering plane crashes, fire disasters, oil rig collapses. He delighted in pushing deadlines to their limits and had the concomitant skill of reassuring executives that the copy would come. We never failed to meet a deadline, and we never failed to deliver.

Paul left the paper in 1985. He had persuaded an American publisher to fund a series of investigative books and departed to live in the United States. It was a bold move and yielded two books on drug trafficking. He stayed in touch with Sunday Times colleagues and was unfailingly generous to those who stopped by, offering story leads and, as one put it, "emptying his contacts book for me".

In 1991 he returned to Europe, setting up home in the idyllic Provençal village of Ménerbes. By then Paul was into his third marriage. His first was in his early twenties and brought two sons. That ended in divorce and he married Elaine Davenport, the US journalist.

The demise of his first marriage led him to promise never to spend a night away from Elaine - a difficult pledge for a journalist to keep as it meant that she travelled with him on his foreign assignments, but he maintained it for several years.

After a second divorce, he met Sara Walden, then a researcher at The Sunday Times, and they married in 1989. (Sara said she was "the third and final Mrs Eddy".) Their home in Ménerbes was cool and stylish, overlooking vineyards with the Luberon peaks beyond. Together they pursued the demanding freelance life, writing for The Sunday Times Magazine and elsewhere. Then Paul resolved to seek a new adventure.

He had read fiction widely, particularly thrillers, and he proposed trying to write it himself. He created a character, Grace Flint, a British cop operating in territory Paul knew well - money laundering and international investigations. It had a brilliant opening that had publishers salivating and, having been recruited by the agent Ed Victor, he raked in advances and a sale of film rights reaching well into seven figures.

Paul and Sara moved into a larger house in Ménerbes and their lives appeared to have been transformed from the slog of journalism to that of fully fledged writer, as Paul travelled in Europe to research locations for scenes, secure in his critical and financial success.

Although he wrote two more Flint novels - the second is considered the best - he failed to maintain the momentum needed to sustain his new career, partly because of poor health.

Characteristically, he decided on another bold move: he abandoned Flint and started a new novel, set in the post-9/11 world of war on terror and extraordinary rendition. By the spring of this year he had completed 60,000 words. Bill Massey, his British publisher, praised its clever plot, its convincing tradecraft and its strong characters.

But at Easter Paul was struck down by an aneurysm that blitzed his mental faculties. Afterwards, his conversation was fractured and his memories jumbled. Sara brought him back to London, where, after treatment at University College London hospital, he spent five weeks undergoing rehabilitation at Homerton hospital.

His care workers were pleased with his progress but then one of his old medical problems, suspected to be diverticulitis, resurfaced and he rapidly developed peritonitis. He died within 48 hours.

I valued Paul's friendship and observed his generosity in helping others. There are still aspects of his early life and character that intrigue me; but I am sure that he would enjoy the sense that he has left mysteries to be unravelled: one last journalistic challenge to be solved.