



John Cruickshank, editor *The Toronto Star*

Some of my favourite memories of Jim Travers go back to the bar at the Prince Hotel where we Southam editors gathered nights in the mid-90s before the interminable and far too frequent re-education sessions at the chain's Toronto head office.

If there were ever an Academy Award given for scoffing, as in the Academy Award for a starring role in scoffing at the idiocies of senior management, Jim Travers would have been the certain recipient.

His ability to capture the ridiculousness of our plight as editors, the senility or venality of our masters and the absurd indifference of an ignorant world all in a short sharp quip and a disgusted snort, invariably reduced the rest of us to helpless hilarity.

He was our leader in the amused deprecation of bad leadership. He was never unfair. Never unkind. But his boundless idealism about our profession made him ripe for disappointment, a condition he brilliantly battled with insight and humour.

Years later, when we first chatted as publisher and columnist, he assured me that his views of the intellectual and moral limitations of senior management had not altered for the better over the years. "Welcome to the *Star*," he said to me. "Glad to have you at the paper, you poor bastard."

The blunt intelligence, the caustic wit, the deep idealism, the unwavering fairness, these were the qualities of a respected news leader and correspondent, a vital national columnist.

And as our great friend Don Newman said "a gentleman's gentleman and a journalist's journalist."

Too many of those who would speak truth to power have surprisingly little useful to say. Others become captured by power's trappings or intimidated by its amorality and might. Many run out of the faith in the future that's required to fight the spinmeisters' insistence that we inhabit the best of all possible worlds.

Jim had something to say. The courage and independence to say it. The talent to say it well. The faith that it mattered.

The words from his National Newspaper Award winning column still ring in our ears: "Canada has become a situational democracy. What matters now is what works. Precedents, procedures and even laws have given way to the political doctrine of expediency."

Words that matter, stark and strong.

Like all great columnists Jim was far more than a mere commentator or partisan heckler. He was a dogged reporter, always ahead of the backward-echoing national conversation. And he was a campaigner. He wrote to exert influence. To effect change. To play address the fast-rising democratic deficit in Canada.

Why else would you write a column?

Speaking on behalf of all the employees of the *Toronto Star*, this is a time of sorrow but also one of appreciation. We have the joy of remembering Jim's great career, the joy of reviewing in our minds the fun Jim brought to his work, his life, his friends – and to his colleagues.

When he first joined the *Star* in 1997, Jim had already had a storied career. He toiled in Toronto as executive editor long before I arrived at the paper, but his colleagues from those days tell me of how he changed the organization -- from top to bottom, and all for the better.

He was the first senior editor to really embrace the power of the Internet and started us thinking about "web first" years ahead of his time.

He refocused the *Star* on local news as the paper's first priority and beefed up investigative reporting. He hired some of the best and brightest editors, reporters and columnists in the business -- many of whom remain key figures in our newsroom today.

He knew the value of continually training journalists, and hired a senior editor whose primary job was "training," a unique position for any news organization. He put new emphasis on mentoring young journalists.

He reorganized the newsroom, bringing a sense of openness and cooperation that had been unheard of before at the *Star*.

When he returned to Ottawa in 1999, he soon became one of the most influential journalists in Canada.

In the *Star's* Ottawa bureau, he was the person everyone consulted. And without fail, he obliged, because he firmly believed that good journalism was a team effort, and Jim saw himself as just one of the members of that team.

In his coverage of Ottawa during the time of Jean Chretien, and then Paul Martin and now Stephen Harper, Jim wrote as an outsider in search of the truth.

He was contemptuous of fake devotees of free expression or those who cared more about their corporate pals than about helping the poor, the ill, abused prisoners, the hopeless and the helpless.

He was famous for his attention to detail, for catching nuances that other journalists missed, for his unerring accuracy and his nose – yes, that remarkable nose – for news.

He never stopped gathering information. He never stopped talking to politicians and storekeepers alike. His curiosity knew no end.

What defined Jim was his deep love for the news -- and for the journalist's trade. He was always the first in the Ottawa office and often headed home long after most journalists had shut up shop.

Indeed, he was working on his next column right up to his untimely death.

Jim Travers was an inspiring figure because of his talent, his courage, and his faith that what we do still really matters. We shall miss him greatly.

On behalf of all the employees at the *Toronto Star*, I want to express our deepest sympathy to Jim's family, his wife and sons, and thank all of you very much for coming to help remember our friend and colleague, an exceptional man.