



Norma Greenaway, former correspondent Southam News

As a boss and an editor, Jim Travers was a reporter's dream. An elegant writer, crackerjack analyst and a top-notch reporter himself. He was smart, funny, fair, tenacious, compassionate, generous, tough, demanding and, thank god, even forgiving from time to time.

He also had an unswerving moral compass.

Just as we tend to up our game when we play tennis or golf with someone better than us, reporters lucky enough to come into Jim's sphere were able to up their game. He cared deeply, he cared passionately about good journalism, about putting in print the best and truest version of events.

I'll never forget the time he called me at the crack of dawn on a Sunday morning in Washington in the midst of the first U.S.-led war on Iraq after Saddam Hussein invaded Kuwait.

Well, I was dead to the world – slated for my first day off after many long days and nights of writing Iraqi war roundups and watching Stormin' Norman's made-for-TV briefings about the neat, clean air war. No allied casualties, we were repeatedly assured.

Almost before I uttered a groggy hello, an excited Travers – in his customary full voice – let loose:

“Greenaway, I've been thinking about this all night. It's outrageous. Do you realize we have no idea how many Iraqis are being killed. We HAVE to get that story.”

Of course, I recognized it was THE untold story of the war. But it seemed like a tall order on that Sunday morning.

So, we swapped ideas for a few minute and just as I was getting up my nerve to admit I just didn't think I could pull the story off for Monday papers, Travers suddenly went – “Oh, my gosh! Is it really only 6:30? Sorry, I've been up for hours. Go back to sleep. We'll talk tomorrow.”

Phew, I thought. So he wasn't thinking today.

But that was vintage Jim. He Was always thinking. He oozed ideas. He was always wanting us to get at the real story. There was no such thing as mission impossible. I cherished his enthusiasm, as did others. We also cherished the confidence and trust he put in his reporters.

I mean it was a bit intimidating having Travers as a boss when I was first assigned to the Middle East bureau. He had done a humdinger of a job in the region. He knew so much – and I knew so little.

He was generous with his knowledge and, of course, I valued his guidance. There were a few times, though, when we had differences of opinion on what was “shaking,” as he put it. When the conversation was finished, he would simply say: “Hey Greenaway, you’re the one who is there. You tell it as you see it.” Words like that are pure gold to a reporter.

No question – Jim was inspired and inspiring – a potent combination that made his reporters want to report better, write better, dig deeper and fly higher every day in what, I know Jim would agree, has to be the best job in the world. His death leaves a humongous hole in our hearts. But thanks to Jim, he’s left a gazillion memories of a man who believed and helped us believe that good journalism matters.

To Joan and Patrick and Ben, I want to say thank you so much for sharing him with us.