



CITATION: IRWIN MANOIM

Irwin Manoim was born on 29 July 1954 in Johannesburg. After matriculating at King Edward VII School in Johannesburg, Manoim was planning a degree in architecture when he discovered the joys of computing during a weekend job on the Sunday Times in the late 1970s. It was at a time when mainframes began appearing in the works departments of newspapers around the country. Manoim, who had a major interest in journalism, soon showed remarkable talent for working with the new technology - coding as well as newspaper design.

At the same time, he was studying for a master's degree at the University of the Witwatersrand, where he had earned his BA degree several years earlier. His MA thesis was titled: *The black press 1945-1963: The growth of the black mass media and their role as ideological disseminators*, and was conferred upon him in 1983. By the time he earned his master's degree he was Assistant Editor of the Sunday Express.

In his spare time, he trained members of the South African Students Press Union (SASPU) in gathering and editing news, and designing pages people would want to read. The publication he helped them put out, Saspu National, was an important forerunner of the alternative press of the 1980s, which played a critical role in the struggle against apartheid.

When the Rand Daily Mail and Sunday Express were closed two years later, Manoim was unwilling to give up the newspaper world. He approached the Rand Daily Mail's political reporter Anton Harber with a mad notion: that they should start their own newspaper. The Weekly Mail was launched six weeks later, on June 14, 1985, with Manoim and Harber as co-editors.

Internationally lauded for its challenging anti-apartheid journalism, it was also the world's first example of a newspaper produced using desktop publishing - now the way most papers are published in the world. That was one of



Manoim's major contributions to the world of journalism. He cobbled the system together with the equipment he could source, improving it as the years went on and as the paper could afford PCs and better laser printers.

As the designer, Manoim was responsible for some of the Weekly Mail's front pages which became famous, and were reproduced around the world, for their eloquent condemnation of apartheid, and their witty nose-thumbing at authority, such as, the one with blank spaces ("We can't say anything bad about the emergency ... But we'll try"). The Weekly Mail became a leader not only in innovative and creative newspaper design but in a journalism that relentlessly campaigned for freedom and democracy and pushed the limits of press censorship.

The Weekly Mail is best known also for its investigative journalism, in particular for the Inkathagate revelations of 1991, which revealed secret state support for Inkatha at a crucial time in the peace negotiations, but this was one of the many exposés the paper did of illegal "Third Force" action by the security arms of the apartheid state.

The investigative exposés did a lot to further diminish the compromised morality and legitimacy of the apartheid regime.

Having designed the system for the Weekly Mail - now the Mail & Guardian - he was in great demand to help community newspapers throughout the country put together similar setups. It is safe to say that without Manoim's help and advice - both at the initial stages and whenever problems surfaced - he tough and feisty little papers that sprang up during the late 1980s - and came to play an important part in the anti-apartheid struggle - would not have survived.

This is true too of the Weekly Post in Zambia, which sent a sub-editor to Johannesburg to lift the Weekly Mail's design templates and desktop publishing system - and went on to become that country's biggest and best-



known paper. The Weekly Post played a critical role in the late 1980s and early 1990s in Zambia's transition from one party rule to a multi-party democracy.

In 1995, when a major shareholder, the Guardian, balked at the idea of co-editors, Manoim - again ahead of the curve - started a daily web edition of the newspaper. The Electronic Mail & Guardian was the first online news service in Africa and for many years the largest news website on the continent with news updates several times a day and - in pre-Google days - a searchable online news archive. Within a year it had more subscribers than the print edition and went on to win a number of awards.

There is a danger in being ahead of your time - often your shareholders don't understand what you're doing. Today, electronic editions of newspapers worldwide are seen as the newspapers of the future. But in 2000, when the Electronic M&G was not making a profit, it was sold.

Manoim then co-founded Big Media Publishers, a web development company that conceives, produces, edits and packages words and images for online use. Big Media has a range of clients, many in government. Big Media not only designs websites - it maintains them, with news and - in the case of government websites - crucial information. Manoim is the company's creative director.

Every product Manoim has put his hand to has won prestigious awards. The Weekly Mail won Manoim and Harber (jointly with Zwelakhe Sisulu) the Pringle Award for courageous journalism, the Missouri Medal of Honour and the International Press Directory's International Newspaper of the Year 1995 and was featured by the BBC in its series "Great newspapers of the world". The Electronic Mail & Guardian won the Loerie Award for Web Design. Manoim has won the Business Day Award for Best Government Website.

Manoim still teaches, running design courses at the Institute for Advanced Journalism and at Wits University and at a range of newspapers in Africa. He has been instrumental in setting up small newspapers throughout Southern



Africa. He has also designed newspapers across the continent including Business Day, The Zimbabwe Independent, and This Day.

He played a key role in the establishment of the Weekly Mail Training Project, which produced a generation of future journalists, including Mondli Makhanya, Ferial Haffajee, Jacob Dlamini, Phylicia Oppelt and Phil Molefe, who have in post-apartheid South Africa become leading editors in their own right.

Manoim can be counted among those who fought in the struggle for democracy, freedom of expression and the press. He is a pioneering newspaperman who has made immense contributions to innovation and recreating how news and information are understood, produced, presented and consumed in the computer and digital age in South Africa and Africa.