

To whom it may concern,

I was hired to work at the Miramichi Leader by owner and publisher, David Cadogan in September 1999. Prior to that, I did some freelance work and wrote a column about the community I lived in.

I was not a trained journalist. I had a passion for writing, was curious about a lot of things, and hated injustice.

While I was inexperienced, I worked with two great editors who helped guide me as I got my feet under me.

I'm not a typist and never will be, but I learned how to work the keyboard to get stuff written quickly. Dave, as well all called him was nothing but supportive to me and to any new hire that came into the newsroom. He just asked that we work hard and produce quality work.

At Dave's request and from things he was hearing in the community, I began attending the monthly meetings of the Miramichi Regional Hospital's board of directors. There was talk of bonuses being paid to executive staff, fake companies, fake expense claims and more.

Immediately, you feel the tension among board members and the hospital CEO. Some board members wanted questions answered and the chair, a provincial court judge and the CEO were having none of it. But their secrecy caught up with them. By late 2000, some board members took their concerns to the Minister of Health. Within months, he suspended the board, put a trustee in place and the RCMP were asked to investigate. As a result, three top hospital executives and the former board chair were charged with breach of trust and fraud. After numerous delays, a five month judge and jury trial was held in 2005/2006. All four were found guilty on numerous charges and sentenced to jail.

As a result of my coverage of this story, I received the Stephen Shaw Memorial Award for Best Story in a weekly newspaper with a circulation of up to 10,000.

And through it all, Dave was one of my biggest cheerleaders and was at the awards ceremony in Winnipeg when I received it.

Dave was always about cheering on the community, celebrating the good things but he could also call a spade a spade and made sure the coverage of it was fair.

He provided employment opportunities to many in the Miramichi region and in the towns where he owned other community newspapers. The day Dave announced he was selling the Miramichi Leader was emotional for us all. We knew things would change in a big way under new ownership and they did. Dave certainly deserves to be in the Atlantic Journalism Hall of Fame for all that he did to operate community newspapers in many communities in New Brunswick. He gave so many journalists, like me, their start in the news business. He created a bunch of news junkies and I think we are all the better that he did.

Thank you,

Gail Harding

Former reporter, associate editor and editor of the Miramichi Leader