



# Mark Edelson

FEB 9, 1951 - APR 23, 2015



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# Table of Contents

|                       |         |
|-----------------------|---------|
| <b>Obituary</b> ..... | Page 3  |
| <b>Events</b> .....   | Page 10 |



# Mark Edelson

FEB 9, 1951 - APR 23, 2015

**E**DELSON, Mark 64 passed away April 23, 2015. Beloved husband of Helen Travers, loving father of daughter Vaughn and son, Peter.

A Memorial Service will be held at 3:30 p.m. on Sunday, April 26, 2015 at Levitt-Weinstein Eternal Light Funeral Center, 18840 West Dixie Highway, North Miami Beach, Florida 33180  
Arrangements by Blasberg-Rubin-Zilbert (305) 538-6371

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The man behind the pictures-Article in the Palm Beach Post  
by Barbara Marshall

If there's been a photo in The Palm Beach Post in the last 22 years that made you cry or laugh or marvel or made you sputter with outrage, it was likely because Mark Edelson, The Post's long-time picture editor and multimedia director, chose that image.

Often, he would have fought for it.

In Edelson's hands, pictures weren't just worth more than words. They elevated words. The photos he selected filled the emotional gaps in a news story's recitation of hard, implacable facts.

His award-winning work brought humanity to the newspaper, showing us the joy, beauty, laughter, cruelty and pain behind the stories.

Edelson was a legend in American photojournalism when he died Thursday evening at the University of Miami's Sylvester Comprehensive Cancer Center after a two-year bout with lymphoma. He was 64.

He reminded us that journalism is ultimately storytelling. And the center of those stories is people.



## Obituary

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“For 22 years, Mark was the humble genius behind thousands of beautifully edited photographs and pages in The Post,” said Palm Beach Post publisher Tim Burke. “His numerous awards speak to the brilliance of his work, and also to the immense respect and admiration of all of us who worked alongside him.”

No one did it better.

Edelson was named Newspaper Picture Editor of the Year nine times, more than anyone else in the industry’s history.

Earlier this year, the National Press Photographers Association (NPPA) presented Edelson with a “Special Citation” for his significant contribution to photojournalism.

Since joining The Post in 1993, he was the lead picture editor or designer on Palm Beach Post projects that won more than 200 other awards from NPPA as well as from the Society for News Design. His career highlights include awards for Best of Photojournalism, Pictures of the Year International and Best Use of Photography.

Not that anyone stepping into his dimly-lit office decked out like a vintage Florida room with paper lanterns, palm trees and strings of colored lights would have known they were in the presence of greatness.

He kept his awards under his desk. Or tossed in a jumbled pile.

He cared about the work, not the honors. Not that he was modest, exactly. He was competitive and knew his gifts, which he happily shared.

This ruffled genius with shoulder-length hair (when chemotherapy took it he grew a full beard to compensate) looked like a refugee from an R. Crumb cartoon and remained a proud, unreconstructed child of the Sixties who loved telling stories of going to Woodstock as a college student. Proudly wearing his nickname, “The Hippie,” he never lost his ’60s idealism — or his ’60s fashion sense.

Walk into his office in the evening and you’d find him in his usual flannel shirt, toothpick glued to the corner of his mouth, hoisting a disgustingly crusty coffee cup or eating fast food mustard



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---

straight from the pack, muttering to the images he was moving among four computer screens as he shaped them into stories for Post readers.

Presiding over it all from a pedestal was Edelson's spirit animal, a stuffed, menacing-looking squirrel named Sparky.

The magic of the picture editor

Few people outside a newspaper or magazine know what a picture editor does.

Think of it this way: Words make a reader think. But pictures make a reader feel.

"Being a great picture editor is also being a great journalist, a natural-born storyteller," said Don Winslow, a former Post picture editor, now editor of the NPPA magazine, "News Photographer." "Mark was one of those people (with) a sixth sense about images and how we would respond to seeing them collected together on a printed page."

After winning another slew of awards last year, Edelson reluctantly agreed to be profiled in his own newspaper.

"I start with the belief that words and pictures work together, with neither subordinate to the other, to tell a story. The words and pictures should complement each other, not repeat each other," he said.

Photojournalism, whether in print or online, should do more than illustrate a story, Edelson believed. It should allow readers to imagine what it was like to be in a particular place, at a particular time.

"This is critical: The photographs we use aren't 'art' — they're information," he said. "They may be beautiful, creative, composed perfectly, but the best ones tell stories; they inform and enlighten. You look for pictures that surprise, intrigue, entertain; show people what they otherwise wouldn't see — or sometimes want to see; bring them, at least visually, to places to which they don't have access."



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Edelson's brilliant eye could give a lackluster story zing and turn a good story into a piece readers would remember for days.

"Every photographer, reporter, editor and designer wanted Mark's special touch on their work. No one mastered the art of blending visuals with the written word better than Mark Edelson," said The Post's Content Editor Nick Moschella. "He made bold and courageous decisions but never used photos to shock readers. Mark carefully chose and clearly explained the times when a disturbing image was necessary to illustrate an event or story."

In a newsroom culture full of bustle and bravado, Edelson stood out for his quiet but persuasive voice. Co-workers describe his gentle grace and generosity of spirit. His peaceful collaboration. His lack of ego.

"He created an atmosphere of complete creative trust— because everyone who worked with Mark knew he was motivated by doing the right thing for the story," said Jan Tuckwood, The Post's presentation editor, who worked with him more than 20 years. "And that's what we miss most: We miss his soul. We miss the soul he infused into everything he did."

Edelson saw photojournalism through the lens of a youthful idealism he never lost, said Larry Aydlette, The Post's culture editor.

"I think he saw it as a righteous calling and one where photos could tell stories that needed to be told, and might be overlooked otherwise. It was his way of telling a story, of telling truth, and I think those truths are '60s truths, in a way, or at least what some like to think of as the best part of that era."

As journalism transitioned from the page to online, Edelson evolved, too.

He created The Post's gorgeous Clik/Hear galleries, where he turned the week's best pictures into compelling online storytelling. He worked on them while on vacation, even from his hospital bed.

Edelson, a Queens native, discovered photojournalism in his late 20s, at the University of Miami. From 1981 to 1988, he worked at The Sun-Tattler in Hollywood, first as a photographer, then photo editor, page designer and graphics editor. He was director of photography at the Sun-



## Obituary

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Sentinel in Fort Lauderdale before coming to The Post in 1993.

His hospital soundtrack: The classic folk rock he loved

Diagnosed with rare nodal marginal zone lymphoma in March of 2013, Edelson underwent chemotherapy and returned to work that September. On his first day back, his staff stuffed his office with balloons. As they deflated, one by one, he saved them in a bag.

A year later, a CT scan revealed his lymphoma had returned, along with two other forms of cancer: chronic lymphocytic leukemia and an aggressive form called b-cell lymphoma.

His doctors agreed that a stem cell transplant was his only hope. In January, he received stem cells from his brother, Ron, after undergoing a brutal course of chemotherapy designed to prepare him for the transplant. Within weeks, he started a new fight against graft vs. host disease as his body tried to reject the transplanted cells.

He fought to recover, while his family played a constant soundtrack of the classic folk rock he loved: Joni Mitchell, James Taylor, and Crosby, Stills, Nash and Young.

As much as he loved his work, Edelson's primary passion was his family: his wife Helen Travers, his daughter Vaughn and son, Peter. For 22 years, he commuted to West Palm Beach from Miami rather than disrupt his family with a move north.

He documented his children's every event, creating dozens of albums, CD photo collections and books. In recent years, he took the family to China where he was invited to teach a photo workshop. After, he said it was one of the highlights of his life.

For the past two years, Vaughn and Helen have turned documentarians themselves, chronicling Edelson's cancer journey with moving blog posts on Caring Bridge.

Cancer, Vaughn noted, marked a turning point in her father's photography: He had become an interesting subject he wanted to document.

When he was too sick to take photographs of himself, he encouraged Vaughn to shoot him, even during some of the worst moments of his treatment.



## Obituary

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“The day of his stem cell transplant, he told me I’m a good photographer (although I need to learn to edit). It might be the best compliment he’s ever given me,” she wrote.

A mentor to hundreds: ‘Mark taught me how to see moments’

Edelson mentored hundreds of photographers and picture editors at The Post and around the country through seminars and workshops. His disciples routinely call him a visual genius.

“Mark taught me how to see moments. He taught me a lot about patience and the art of observation, of staying in one place and waiting for the moment to happen,” said Robert Cohen, a member of the St. Louis Post-Dispatch photo department, which won the Pulitzer Prize last week for Breaking News Photography for its Ferguson coverage. Edelson was Cohen’s boss in 1987- 89 at the Sun-Tattler.

“He was a great photographer before he was a great editor, so he knew what good pictures were and how to make them,” said Greg Lovett, The Post’s assistant multimedia director. “He was insistent on picking pictures that matched the tone of the story.”

“I still hear his voice in the back of my head when I am on a photo assignment,” said Mike Stocker, who worked with Edelson at the Sun-Tattler and the Sun Sentinel. “Get the safe shot and put it in your back pocket, and then go wild and shoot whatever pictures you would shoot for yourself. ‘Shoot from different angles.’ ‘Shoot the backstage, not what the audience is seeing.’ Invariably it would be those pictures ...that would be published, not the safe shots.”

Edelson was among the last of a breed of picture editors inspired by the documentary photojournalism of the 1960s and ’70s, said Winslow, of NPPA.

“It was a way of looking at and thinking about pictures that shaped our generation’s vision of what was happening in the world. Newspapers emulated the weekly news magazines – such as Look and Life and the Saturday Evening Post and National Geographic – and great photographs were given great play on well-designed pages. But for this to happen it took more than just great photography, it also took a person who was usually invisible to the readers and the rest of the world, and that was a great picture editor.”



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“He taught me how to be an editor,” said Becky Lebowitz Hanger, a former Post photo editor, now The New York Times sports photo editor, “but his critiques never felt like criticism, it felt supportive.”

In a tribute video Edelson’s friends made called “Because of You,” Mark Mirko, a former Post photographer now working at the Hartford Courant, said “because of you, I believe that elevating others is the best way to elevate yourself.”

“Humble, kind and considerate, it was a joy to be in his company,” said Scott Sines, former deputy editor at the Memphis Commercial Appeal who taught with Edelson at the prestigious Kalish visual editing workshops. “Not only did Mark make a lot of people better picture editors, he made them better people.”

Edelson is survived by his wife and children; his parents, Frances and Ira Edelson, brother Ron (Beth, children Marisa and Hayden;) and sister Ellen Edelson Bortz (Jon; children Adam and Marc.)

### Mark Edelson Scholarship Fund

In lieu of flowers, Mark’s family has asked donations be made to the newly established Mark J. Edelson Picture Editing Scholarship ([www.nppf.org](http://www.nppf.org)).

Recipients of the scholarship/fund receive \$750 aid in attending The Kalish, a visual editing workshop in which Mark was a cornerstone faculty member for 20 years.




# Events


**Mark Edelson**

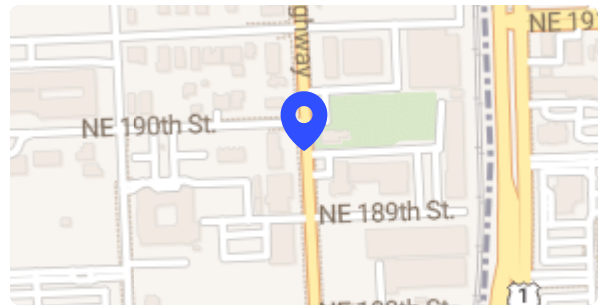
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## Memorial Service

 **Sunday**, April 26, 2015

 3:30 PM ET

 **Levitt Weinstein Eternal Light Funeral Service Center**  
18840 W. Dixie Highway, North Miami Beach FL 33180





## **Memories only last if you share them**

Join us in honoring Mark by contributing to a collection of shared memories.



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