

RIP: Editor and journalist, Shaun Johnson has passed away

Sanef has announced the untimely passing of journalist and writer, Shaun Johnson. Johnson died yesterday at the age of 60.



Shaun Johnson's Facebook

Johnson was the founding chief executive of The Mandela Rhodes Foundation, dedicated to building leadership excellence in Africa. He also served as chief executive of the Nelson Mandela Foundation. He was associated with Mandela for 23 years.



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Johnson showed an outstanding commitment to journalism. He wrote the feasibility study for the New Nation newspaper in 1981 and was one of the early members of the Weekly Mail team (now the *Mail & Guardian*). He was deputy editor and political editor of the *Star* newspaper during South Africa's transition to democracy and went on to edit several newspapers including the Cape Argus and *Saturday Star*.

He was the founding editor of *The Sunday Independent* in 1995. In 2003 he was appointed deputy chief executive of Independent News & Media South Africa, the post he held prior to his current position. Johnson was a founding member of Sanef.

Journalist and author, John Battersby, also a Sanef founder member, remembers him saying,

“We both shared an overwhelming admiration for – and relationship with the late Nelson Mandela. But it was Shaun he chose to head his foundation and inspire a generation of young scholars.”

Battersby remembers him as:

“ A force of nature who inspired many young journalists and scholars who benefitted from the work of the Mandela Rhodes Foundation. He had a passion and drive which set him apart. ”

Sanef founder member and former editor of the *Weekly Mail*, Anton Harber, remembers him by saying,

“He played an important role at the *Weekly Mail* at a tough time. He arrived back from Oxford in the late 1980s to do his doctoral research and offered to freelance for us if we let him use the newspaper's name to get access to the right political circles. He quickly became an indispensable part of the operation, both as a writer and a political figure. When we were facing a banning order, he opened the door for us to an international anti-censorship network and was able to rally important support from the Western embassies and capitals, which became key to our survival”.

Harber says he had a formidable presence. He states:

“ He left a strong mark on the journalism of the 1980s and 1990s. I am not sure that any writer or editor did better than him in conveying the joys and fears of the transition period, which he covered tirelessly. ”

Journalist and editor, Chris Whitfield remembers him saying, “I was *The Star*'s political correspondent when he was political editor, his deputy when he launched the *Sunday Independent* and his deputy when he was editor of the *Cape Argus*. Shaun was an astonishingly gifted journalist. He wrote beautifully but was also highly accomplished in every facet of newspapering – from subbing to design to analysis and, well, everything.

“ His writing from the years before and after the 1994 election reflected another part of Shaun: his burning desire to see South Africa transformed into a successful and thriving democracy. He had plenty of writing in him still and his tragic death has robbed South Africa of one of its most eloquent voices. ”

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