

SIR HAROLD EVANS – CITATION

Delivered by Lucian Hudson, Director, Communications, The Open University, 6 November 2015

Sir Harold Evans has been one of the most significant journalists of our times. Known to his friends and colleagues as Sir Harry, as editor of *The Sunday Times* for fourteen years, he pioneered national investigative journalism in Britain, epitomised by the campaign to win justice for victims of the Thalidomide scandal. And he persists today. Recently for Reuters and *The Guardian* he wrote blockbuster reports, one on how the German Thalidomide trial was corrupted, the other on how Rupert Murdoch and Mrs. Thatcher conspired to get round the monopolies law to give him control of Times Newspapers.

Born in Eccles and raised in Manchester, at the age of sixteen Harry began working for *The Reporter* in Ashton-Under-Lyne. After national service in the Air Force, he studied politics and economics at Durham University, before returning to journalism to work on *The Manchester Evening News*.

A Harkness Fellowship to Chicago and Stanford universities enabled Harry also to travel widely for nearly two years, notably in the Deep South at the birth of the civil rights movement. Nationally, he saw how city and regional newspapers prided themselves on investigative and campaigning journalism of a scale and ambition unknown in Britain. When appointed editor of *The Northern Echo* he adopted the very best of this approach. He investigated how early tests to detect cervical cancer could save thousands of lives and persisted long enough to get the government to begin a regional and then a national program.

Appointed to run *The Sunday Times* in 1967, Harry brought together some of the most talented writers and photographers in the famous Insight team. Their efforts to get to the bottom of the Thalidomide tragedy – a scandal that killed 100,000 babies worldwide – was a shining example of what journalism can achieve.

It took more than a decade of legal battles, but the team won compensation for the victims and exposed how the British law of contempt had for years suppressed the truth that the drug had never been properly tested and was fraudulently marketed as safe in pregnancy. He then went on to challenge the British law of contempt and won a free speech victory in the European Court of Human Rights, freeing all the British press from an over-restrictive law. In the days before social media, Harry's team informed hundreds of families of rights they didn't know they had.

Under Harry's leadership, *The Sunday Times* successfully took on the Establishment multiple times. The Insight team challenged the secrecy that had protected Kim Philby, the most important Soviet spy; published the Crossman diaries which uncovered the inner workings of Whitehall; and revealed the government's abuses of the honours system.

Unfortunately, in the late seventies guerrilla warfare by inter-union rivalries in the pressroom lost *The Sunday Times* millions of copies – including the first Thalidomide revelations – and the Thomson family sold to Rupert Murdoch. He appointed Evans editor of *The Times* with guarantees of independence. They were not fulfilled. A year later Harry resigned citing pressure to withhold criticism of some of the policies of Margaret Thatcher. His book *Good Times, Bad Times* confronting Murdoch before it was fashionable, has been described as 'the best non-fiction book ever written about journalism'.

Moving to the US, Harry editorially directed US News and World Report, The Atlantic Monthly and The New York Daily News. In 1986 he founded Conde Nast Traveller under the banner Truth in Travel. Its success led to his becoming President of Random House from 1990 to 1997. He continues

to contribute to *The Guardian* and the BBC and moderates public debates with leaders, as Editor at large of Thomson Reuters – most recently with Secretary Kerry on the Iran nuclear deal. His bestselling and critically acclaimed books include two histories of the United States: *The American Century* and *They Made America*, a study of innovation. His memoir is *My Paper Chase*.

I am especially pleased to present Harry for this honorary doctorate because he has been such a defining influence in my own career. He was the reason I became a journalist in the first place, and had the honour of joining Harry and his investigative journalists at the 50th anniversary celebrations of the Thalidomide campaign. I am only one example of the many journalists working today who has been inspired by Harry: his influence shaped the outlook of an entire generation.

Harry has worked with integrity, tenacity, and grace throughout his career to protect the freedom of the press, to uphold the highest standards of journalism, to uncover injustice and search out truth. He was knighted in 2004 for services to journalism and I am delighted we are adding our own tribute to his unparalleled contribution to British and international journalism.

By the authority of the Senate, I present to you for the degree of Doctor of the University, Sir Harold Evans.