

PETER GAME – 2000

By John Trevorrow

Not many journalists can say they helped bring down a government, won a Walkley award, a Melbourne Press Club Lifetime Achievement award, initiated RMIT's school of journalism and had the Italian mafia hot on their heels.

But Peter Game says it was just part of the job.

Game, who spent 61 years as a journalist with the Herald & Weekly Times, has covered some of the world's biggest stories. He has seen the media evolve from using Remington typewriters where reporters typed the story “slip by slip on pieces of paper”, to computers and the world of online.

“I remember when new technology came in with computers,” Game says, “but journalists are still doing what they have always been doing . . . they are just using a new form of typewriter.”

Game regards himself fortunate to have worked through what he regards as the heyday of newspapers. But new media technologies, he says, will never change the role of the reporter: “The great thing about all these new advances is that while they will come and go there will always be the need for journalists.

“It doesn't matter a damn if you are working for television, online, radio or newspapers, somebody has got to be out there asking the questions and writing the stories. The great encouraging thing is that it will never change; people are addicted to news.”

Hired by Herald & Weekly Times chairman Sir Keith Murdoch, Game began as a cadet reporter on *The Herald* in December 1947. He wrote the shipping column. He recalls it as a humble beginning, and so was the pay -- three pounds a week.

He cut his teeth covering suburban courts and police rounds.

Game recalls his first published story: "It was a great thrill for me, but not so good for the subject, who was an unfortunate worker who slipped into a bath of acid."

He worked in *The Herald's* Sydney office and returned to Melbourne as a general reporter. In 1956 he was sent to the London bureau, working in Fleet St.

Back in Melbourne, he spent more time "chasing cops and robbers", then became deputy chief of staff in 1960 and chief of staff in 1962. He was known as a tough boss who expected a lot from his reporters.

"On an evening paper it was pretty hard work, more like the *Front Page*," he says, recalling the Broadway play and Hollywood movie about the rough and tumble days of newspapers. "You wouldn't get away with it today, everything is pretty gentle now.

"You very rarely hear people getting abused or ticked off, but you sure did then; that's how life operated." Four years later he was appointed assistant to the then editor-in-chief, Archer Thomas.

In 1971, a childhood passion about explorer Robert Scott's last expedition saw Game travel to the South Pole with the US Navy where he landed and filed a story which carried his byline and favourite dateline: Peter Game, South Pole, Today.

He later wrote the *In Black and White* column and then tackled feature writing and investigative reporting.

Game's landmark story was his expose of the Khemlani loans affair, a scoop that played a major part in the fall of the Whitlam Government in 1975.

He persuaded Tirath Khemlani, who had been approached by the Whitlam Government to arrange a controversial loan, to tell his story. This resulted in 19 hours of taped interviews after Game flew secretly to London in a cloak and dagger operation. He won a Walkley Award for his reportage.

Another expose had Game revealing drug links between the Calabrian mafia and Italian migrants in Griffith, NSW.

The story took him to Plati, Italy, the stronghold of the Calabrian mafia. He and an interpreter slept in their hotel rooms with one eye open.

“We each had a chair under the door handle”, he says, “not that that would have done much good to a determined Mafioso.”

Game’s next big story was revealing self-styled cancer guru Milan Brych as a quack and he received an award from the Australian Medical Association for his reporting skills.

The award-winning reporter then wrote a book on Allans music house in Melbourne, a history of music in Australia. The book won him a commendation in the local history section of the 1977 awards given by the Fellowship of Australian Writers.

Game helped others start in journalism by persuading the then vice-president of the Victoria Institute of Colleges, Dr Philip Law, to establish the journalism course at RMIT. Peter was chairman of the course advisory committee for about 15 years.

In 2000, he won a Melbourne Press Club Lifetime Achievement Award and in 2006 the MEAA/AJA made him an honorary life member.