

LOCAL

Pulitzer-winning journalist Michael Lindenberg, a former Courier Journal reporter, dies

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Michael Lindenberg, a Kentucky native and former Courier Journal reporter who earned a Pulitzer Prize in May as an editorial writer for the Houston Chronicle, has died. He was 51.

He and three of his colleagues were recognized by the Pulitzer board for a series of editorials called “The Big Lie” that judges said “revealed voter suppression tactics, rejected the myth of widespread voter fraud and argued for sensible voting reforms.”

The editorials exposed how Texas leaders used false claims to justify voter suppression and called on Sen. Ted Cruz to resign for his role in sowing doubt about the legitimacy of the 2020 presidential election, the Pulitzer board said.

Lindenberg’s death comes just a few months after he was hired by the Kansas City Star as editorial page editor and a vice president.

“So many things were going right for him,” said Chris Poynter, a former Courier Journal reporter and Lindenberg’s college roommate at Western Kentucky University.

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Hudson Lindemberger, who was one of his four siblings, confirmed his death, in Kansas City.

“He had gotten to the pinnacle of where he wanted to be in his life,” Lindemberger said.

He said Michael, the youngest child, was adopted when he was 4 after living in a series of foster homes. Hudson said that fueled his interest in “social justice and calling out what is wrong with the world.”

Although he left The Courier Journal 18 years ago, he still loved Louisville, loved the newspaper and loved Trinity High School, where he got his start on the school newspaper, Poynter said.

“He always carried a little bit of Louisville with him,” Poynter said.

Poynter said Lindemberger was ill when he visited him about a month ago. He had lost about 50 pounds and couldn’t eat, which was unusual for him because “he loved food,” Poynter said.

After friends were unable to reach him, Poynter called Kansas City Police at 5:30 a.m. Monday and asked them to check on him, he said. Police found him dead in the bathroom of his home, which he had just bought.

Poynter said his doctor had been unable to identify the cause of his illness and he was scheduled to see specialists.

Lindemberger is thought to have died Sunday, his brother said, exactly one year to the day after his partner, Phil Clore, died of cancer.

Lindemberger served as a regional reporter and bureau chief in Elizabethtown for The Courier Journal and also covered the legislature.

He worked previously for LEO as chief political writer and before that was editor in chief at the Louisville Cardinal for two terms in the the mid-1990s.

“Michael had a love for telling stories,” Poynter said. “He had an absolutely brilliant mind and was a brilliant writer.”

A cocktail connoisseur, Lindenberg founded BourbonStory.com, a blog about the worldwide bourbon boom. He was also a college teacher, a public speaker and a graduate of the Louis D. Brandeis School of Law at the University of Louisville. He spent the 2012-13 academic year at Stanford University as a John S. Knight Journalism Fellow.

He liked to boast that he had interviewed every Kentucky governor since Wallace Wilkinson.

He was a voracious reader and when he died, had been working on a book about Kentucky-born poet and novelist Robert Penn Warren for 10 years, Poynter said.

He put his law degree to use as a contract employee for Time magazine and its website, writing more than 100 articles over a decade, including several on the rights of gays and lesbians to marry.

Although he interviewed with some Louisville law firms after getting his law degree, he said, “my heart was still in journalism.”

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He worked in multiple roles for 14 years at the Dallas Morning News, including reporting on City Hall, transportation and as the paper's Washington correspondent for business.

He moved to the Houston paper in 2018, where he was deputy opinion editor and oversaw the daily operations of the newspaper's eight-member editorial board.

“We really do believe ... that the work we do changes lives,” he said after he and his colleagues won the Pulitzer. “We change opinions and that changes lives because it changes conditions in the state.”

Poynter said he and Lindenberger cried on the phone when he called in May to tell him about the honor.

Now-former Kansas City Star Editor Mike Fannin said after hiring Lindenberger as editorial page editor and news executive that “Michael believes in well-reported, incisive commentary and editorial writing that serves local communities.”

“He has a long track record of distinguished journalism to back that up,” Fannin said.