

Thirty-three year old Paul Williams has been named Campaigning Journalist of the Year – the second year in a row that he has picked up an award in the competition. The judges in the E.S.B. National Media Awards lauded him by declaring:

*"The name of Paul Williams has become synonymous with courage, crime reporting and campaigning. Threats against his life have not diverted him from the single-minded pursuit of those whose activities undermine society."*

When I was asked to write an article for the Leitrim Guardian I hadn't a clue what to write about. I was told to write about what life is like being a crime reporter. So I still hadn't a clue what to say. To begin with I decided to use the following story. It is one of many grisly crime stories of which I had an intimate knowledge. I use it in an attempt to shed some glimmer of light on a dark, dangerous world which is a million miles from Leitrim. To many who are perhaps lucky to have encountered the underworld, this story will seem unbelievable. But the reader should remember the lesson that all professionals on the rougher side of life learn early on in our careers, the truth is stranger than fiction.

The name William "Jock" Corbally means nothing to the ordinary man in the street, especially in rural Ireland. But the story of the life and death of this small-time criminal who was more Walter Mitty than Al Capone, is a chilling indictment of gangland in modern Ireland.

I knew Jock Corbally. He was a colourful character who, in his naivety, liked the glamorous side of being a villain. Corbally was a handsome bloke, whom women were very attracted to. Although he was 44 when I last met him, he certainly didn't look it. Corbally was originally from Finglas in North West Dublin, a sprawling working class suburb where crime is only too often a way of life. He was described by Gardai and criminals as a "harmless bloke". He was however an extremely intelligent guy who, in different circumstances, could have been a successful businessman. But Jock was one of those luckless characters who spent his criminal career in pursuit of the "big job", the million pound "stroke", which would set him up for life. The unfortunate thing for Jock was that every time he tried it he ended up in prison.

In February 1995, Corbally was released from prison after a three year stretch for attempting to hi-jack a truckload of Larry Goodman's beef. The Gardai caught him even before he started up the engine. I met him the day the judge released him on condition that he stay away from crime. But half an hour later, over a cup of coffee he was already planning another big job.

# PAUL WILLIAMS

A NATIVE OF BALLINAMORE,  
CRIME CORRESPONDENT, SUNDAY WORLD.

On February 28th of 1996, Jock Corbally disappeared. He was lured into a trap set by one of the most dangerous, psychotic killers in the country. I call him the Psycho. The name is well deserved. Jock and the Psycho were, as we say in Leitrim, neighbour's children. Both men were the same age. But in recent years Jock had crossed swords with his sinister neighbour who was now one of the biggest heroin suppliers in Dublin. The Psycho was using one of Jock's young sons as a drug pusher. He had also success in giving the kid a hopeless heroin addiction problem.

Jock beat the Psycho up over the situation. But the heroin dealer having lost face was hell bent on getting his revenge such was his warped ego. He waited over four years to get his revenge.

It took me months to finally unravel what happened to the likable rogue. I talked to sources on both sides of the fine line which runs between law and disorder. Jock Corbally was taken to a flat where the Psycho and his henchmen were waiting for him. He was trussed up and severely beaten. He was then dumped in the boot of a car and driven to a field in the depth of night near Baldonnel on the South Western edge of the city. According to eye witnesses, in other words, criminals who were there, Jock was dragged out of the boot. What happened next has served to send a terrifying message to every criminal contemplating crossing the Psycho.

The heroin dealer stood over his helpless victim who cried for mercy. He beat him with an iron bar. Those who were present were stunned to silence as they watched the Psycho take great pleasure out of his atrocious crime. One person there claims that he actually pulled out Jock's pearly white teeth with a pliers. And when it was all over his battered and bloodied body was dumped back in the car. No one who was there on that dreadful night knows whether Jock was alive or dead. The Psycho and another henchman drove into County Kildare where they dumped his body into a grave. At the time of going to print Gardai are hopeful of finding the spot where his body is buried. At least then his heartbroken family can give him a Christian burial.

For several months I have written stories in the Sunday World about the case of Jock Corbally. It has become a personal thing, so personal in fact, that the Psycho has ordered his henchmen to have me kidnapped. At the time of going to print Jock's body is still missing and I am getting police protection. Threats have become an occupational hazard for journalists.

From the day a gunman got off the back of a motorbike in broad daylight and cold-bloodedly murdered Veronica Guerin the fun and the glamour went out of crime reporting. We all had known for a long time that it was a potentially dangerous job, but no one, including Veronica, though that they - the criminals - would actually take that fatal step across the fine line which had kept them from killing us.

Her murder finally brought home to the man in the street the stark reality which we had been writing about - that Ireland has a very powerful and pernicious organised crime network. The swaggering gangsters were no longer confined to the TV screen or the streets of LA or New York.

It terrified an entire nation which began asking the kind of pertinent questions its politicians had successfully sidestepped for 20 years. Why and how could things get so much out of control that one man could - justifiably it seems - think himself so omnipotent and untouchable that he could send his henchmen to strike at the very heart of our civilised society? That he could, in a democratic country, commit the type of atrocity not even contemplated by the IRA in their darkest days.

It also caused intense media and public interest about the work and personal life of the crime reporter. It has made life in this twilight world a little more uncomfortable. People everywhere are fascinated, and frightened by crime. Everyone wants you to tell them about the shadowy figures who populate gangland, the men with weird names like the Monk, the Penguin, the Tosser. How do they make their money, how do they live, what makes them tick? It becomes difficult to have a pint in peace or get a break from them.

For the past ten years I have worked in the twilight world of real life cops and robbers. It is a strange, unpredictable place. Growing up in Leitrim, I never dreamt that my average day would be taken up with multi-millionaire drug barons, hitmen and dead bodies. It may sound exciting, and sometimes it certainly is that, but it has major drawbacks.

They, the criminals, have watched my home, followed me, sent death threats in the mail. I have received full-time Garda protection, my car has been searched for a bomb, my home is patrolled all the time. Every morning, on Garda advice, I check under my car for a suspected device. The Sunday World has equipped my home, a modest semi-detached house in South Dublin, with a sophisticated security system which a bank would envy.

It would be macho self-delusion to claim that it doesn't get to you. It scares the daylights out of you. It has also caused a lot of concern for my family, especially my wife Anne, who has had to put up with all the chaos. We have two small children aged seven and two, and for her the tension and stress associated with this crazy job is even worse. My parents, my sisters and friends also feel that fear. My fellow Leitrim man, colleague and friend Mick McNiffe has endured it too. The day Veronica was so mercilessly gunned down we were both there within minutes. I recall us sitting at a bar drinking brandies trying to stop the shaking and not being able to verbalise what we were feeling.

But the murder also served to stiffen our resolve to keep up the pressure on these swaggering thugs. It is not being brave or crusading. It is just that I personally despise with an intensity anyone who thinks he can bully, intimidate or



Paul Williams receiving his award from President Mary Robinson.

walk on anyone else. The man with the gun and the balaclava is the ultimate coward. As long as I am in this business these people will be exposed because that's all they deserve.

On a lighter note one of the good things I have discovered through the years covering crime is that Leitrim does not figure in the negative sense. Apart from our other less glamorous statistics, there is one figure we can be proud of. We are probably the only county in Ireland which has not produced even one major league villain!

But we have produced some of the best thief takers in the business. Leitrim cops are among the finest in the force. There are enough members in the force from Ballinamore and its hinterland alone to fill a large station. And most of them are literally involved at the cutting edge of crime. The Gallagher brothers, Sean and Tom, from Aughnasheelin are both involved in serious crime investigation.

In fact Sean, a Detective Superintendent, is one of the officers spearheading the Veronica Guerin investigation. Tom, a Detective Inspector, who is based in Coolock in the North of the city, has been heavily involved in serious crime investigation for most of his career. He has also been involved in the Guerin investigation which has seen the biggest push against organised crime in the history of the state.

In city police circles they say that nothing can move in Dublin without the Gallagher brothers having a handle on it. Another Ballinamore man involved on the front line is Detective Inspector John McKeon. John has spent practically all of his distinguished career in the city too. A detective for many years, he was stationed mainly in the city centre and then the Drug Squad where he was an undercover officer. In recent years he has been attached to the high profile Bureau of Fraud Investigation.

Then there is my nearest neighbour who I never met until a few years ago, Mick Mahon, the biggest detective in the country. Mick has been involved in several high-profile cases in the south of the city including the investigation into the activities of Martin Cahill, the General. ○