Geoff Lester – We had barely given Jeremy Chapman the send-off that he deserved when news filtered through that Monty Court had passed away at the ripe old age of 97. The one blessing is that, while Monty has not been as mobile as he would have liked to have been these last few years, he still had all his faculties at the end and was in great form when I spoke to him before Cheltenham.

My wife Gerry and I became great friends with Monty after he joined the Life in 1986, and he and his lovely wife Jean – known as Tom in the racing world as her maiden name was Thomas – often stayed with us at Highclere, and we enjoyed some memorable evenings at the Watermill Theatre on the other side of Newbury.

Monty and I would always look forward to the four of us joining the Ladbrokes weekend excursion to Dublin for their valuable handicap hurdle in early January, when as the clock in the hotel bar approached closing time the voices became louder and louder as we all joined the masses with a rendition or two of the Fields of Athenry, leaving the late, great Hughie McIlvanney to give his customary solo of the never-to-be-forgotten Me And Bobby McGee.

Socially, you rarely saw Monty without Tom, but he was never going to miss the 'boys only' Last Supper farewell for John Santer at The Royal Oak in Yattendon in the spring of 2016. Sensibly, Monty asked to stay over, and we got a cab both ways and enjoyed a riotous few hours going down Memory Lane, though perhaps it was unwise to have another bottle when we returned to Penwood Heights, as Monty suddenly fell off the chair, prompting me to join him on the floor, having made a pitiful attempt to get him back on his feet, and the two of us were still there giggling and laughing like a pair of schoolkids who had just been caught playing a trick on the teacher when Gerry returned from an afternoon out.

People often ask me who was the best of the five editors whom I worked under, but they all had their own particular strengths. However, in terms of knowledge of racing Monty stood head and shoulders above the other four, having not only been racing correspondent on he Sunday Mirror, but because he had become a close friend of some of the most famous trainers and jockeys in the sport, enabling him to have the inside track.

Nevertheless, our working relationship did not get off to a flying start as Monty took exception to my front page lead following the Derby in his first year. He was less than happy that I had blamed Greville Starkey for getting beaten on hot-favourite Dancing Brave, who came from too far back and was unable to reel in Shahrastani. Monty claimed that he had been on the verge of getting on the phone and demanding a rewrite, and the only reason he did not do so was because I would have said that it was because Starkey and Guy Harwood, Dancing Brave's trainer, were two of his closest friends in racing.

He also pointed out that Dancing Brave did not go up the hill, to which I replied "well, he came down ok, didn't he Mont," and when he followed up insisting that Dancing Brave did not stay the trip, I reminded him that in a feature which Sue Montgomery did in The Life the previous Sunday, the stone-faced jockey was adamant "this horse would stay six miles."

His final words on the matter were: "I maintain that you got it wrong, but let us put it behind us and go and have a drink to put it to bed," which we did, and that was one of the great things about Monty. We had respect for each other, and I saw him have several disagreements with Life colleagues over the years, but they all confirmed that, as with me, once he had aired his opinion, it was all forgotten. There were never any grudges.

Monty Court was a proper guy, a good egg and one of my closest friends, and the fact that we were still enjoyjng a bit of banter on the phone before Cheltenham earlier this month just goes to show that the post-race pow-wow that 'the Derby that Dancing Brave lost' only made our relationship even closer. It's amazing, Dancing Brave, sorry Mont, Shahrastani, was 40 years ago on June 6.

Michael Clower – How amazing to reach the age of 97! I well remember Monty ringing me on the day he took over as editor of The Sporting Life, and also many of his subsequent calls to me. He always began with a loud ‘Michael’ that had me wondering what I had done wrong! But he was always wonderfully supportive and I admired him immensely. Michael Clower (Irish correspondent) age only 82!

Paul Duffett – Having little knowledge of the racing world, I knew practically nothing of Monty when he became the third editor I worked under on the Life. I was assured by those who knew. however, that we were in good hands – and so it proved.
He was always affable and very relaxed in the role, and it was on his watch that I was given the opportunity to do some greyhound racing photography on the side. At Reg Potter's retirement lunch he was just one of the lads as he always was – until he had to wear his editor's hat.
Monty was occasionally able to come to our Life reunions, the last time he hired a driver to deliver him to and from home, and we were all honoured to have him among us again.
In later years, we often exchanged emails in which he was obviously as sharp as ever – one poignant one was where he described "one of the most memorable and longest telephone conversations of my life" with Alastair Down, ending with the sad note that Alastair was dead within hours. The email he sent me at the end of September 2024 after learning of the death of my wife brought me to tears, and reading it again today still gets me emotional, he certainly never lost his ability to move with his writing.
Shortly after Queen Elizabeth II died in 2022, he described how moved he was at her loss, and shared a little story about the Queen Mother, saying: 'How splendid to hear from you. Certainly I found the Queen's death had more impact on me than I imagined it might. She was a good person – and I had the good fortune to meet her on several occasions. As it happens, her mother "the old Queen Mum" was a good friend to me and the Life – and life under Maxwell would have been a lot more difficult without her. She never wasted an opportunity not to say to him "Oh Mr. Maxwell, what a good newspaper The Sporting Life is these days". It made him purr like a kitten.'
In retrospect, I probably got to know Monty more during his retirement than as my editor, but what a lovely man he was, and how he will be missed by so many people. My condolences to Jean, Louise, Nick and the family. RIP Monty.
Fred Parsons – Sad to hear the loss of a truly exceptional editor and character. He was inspirational to his staff and I remember how he encouraged me when I approached him about a story I had on racehorse owner and Charisma record label boss Tony Stratton Smith having his ashes scattered at the last fence at Newbury. Although I was not on the reporting staff, he told me to write the piece myself – I did and he put it in the Life. RIP Monty.
Steve Betts – Such sad news to hear of Monty's passing. A lovely man from what I remember. Rest in peace, Monty.
Tom Clarke – Monty Court was a star columnist in my time at The Sporting Life. He used his vast experience to criticise what was wrong in racing, particularly its governance, and also to salute racing's human and equine heroes, all with crisp, very readable writing. Monty had been an outstanding editor of the Life for five years. His enthusiasm for racing shone through during his 50 years in journalism, from a local reporter in Swindon to news editor of the Daily Mail, and later news editor and racing editor of the Sunday Mirror.
Carolyn Cluskey – What can I say about Monty? I'm shattered that he's gone, I thought he'd last forever. It was an absolute privilege to work with him, we hit it off from day one. He loved The Sporting Life. He was newspapers through and through, and a very caring human being.
I was chuffed to bits when, in later years, he joined the committee of the Association of Mirror Pensioners. The meetings and aprés ski were always a lot more fun when Monty was in attendance, including copious Champagne in El Vino, and countless bottles of good red at the Holborn Colony. It's a terribly sad end of an era for me personally, and for the whole Life family. Sincere sympathies to Tom, Louise and Nick.
Simon Holt – What a shame but what longevity. I have many memories of Monty during an impressionable time for me on the Life. He came with me to visit Harwood (who he knew well) during Dancing Brave's big year. In a piece on John Dunlop, I began with some background on ancient Arundel. Monty summoned me to his office and told me "I don't want a history lesson!"
He wanted me to become Newmarket correspondent but I was already commentating and he wouldn't allow me to do both. I turned him down and he was frustrated "but that's just ego!"
Anyway, a few years later when Best Mate won his third Gold Cup, he sent me an email: "Well done but I still think I was right and you made the wrong decision."

Stubborn but genial, and very encouraging of good writing. I'm glad he had a long life.
Steve Taylor – Extremely sorry to hear this, a truly lovely man and without doubt the best, kindest and most knowledgeable editor I ever worked for – and he had an infectious sense of humour.
Jim Sollis – Sad is not enough to say about this man, Jeremy now Monty, awful.
Chris Lemmon – Very sad news. What a great editor and lovely man he was! Also an amazing age. RIP Monty.
James Lambie – How depressing it must be for you, Paul, to be the messenger of all these sad tidings. And so it is for all of us who read them with increasing regularity. Monty was certainly one of the brightest stars in the Life's rich firmament. He led from the front and was respected by all. His Court Circular column was required reading, always inspired and to the point. He saw failings that those in racing's authority were blind to. He highlighted them and drove home his reasoning week after week – until the Jockey Club or BHB finally came round to his way of thinking and rectified them for the betterment of racing.
As a boss he was hard but fair. His bollockings were ferocious, but that was because he cared so much for the Life and his staff. So it's goodbye Monty. As good and faithful a servant to the Life as it ever had. My deepest sympathies to his wife Jean and all his family.
John Sexton – Monty was editor of the Life when I covered my first meeting as a freelance for the paper. It was Catterick and one of the winning owners complained I had misquoted him. Monty backed me to the hilt, albeit it was a storm in a teacup.
Geoff Duffield – God bless you Monty
Hilary Watson – So sad to hear about Monty, he was one of the good guys. He wrote me a beautiful letter when John died and we put it in John's top pocket when he passed.
George White – The hardest decision I had to take as MD of the Life was to realise that in order to combat the threat posed by the Racing Post, we needed to replace Graham Taylor with an editor who not only knew newspapers but also knew horse-racing inside out as well. The easiest decision was that that person was Monty Court.
When I first suggested it to him the prospect obviously tempted him, but as racing editor of the Sunday Mirror he knew he had one of the positions most racing journalists could only dream of. I think he said something like: 'Thanks George, but I'm too old to start working for a living.' Typical of the man Monty was, though he couldn't resist the challenge and thankfully we were soon talking about how it would work.
As others have said, he was both a remarkable man and editor. He combined an impish sense of humour (and the ability to laugh at himself) with a total commitment to good journalism and a fierce loyalty to the paper and the people who worked for it. When he needed to, he'd stand his ground but was also pragmatic enough to realise that he didn't have to win every fight. It's only right that he seems to have enjoyed life until all but his final few months.
Julian Armfield – As John Sexton's story illustrates, Monty was a formidable adversary of anyone who took a pop at one of his 'Lifers', if the circumstances required. In 1988, I wrote a colour piece about my first unforgettable stay in Listowel for the seven-day September Festival meeting. During a decidedly liquid lunch with an eminent, but sometimes volatile Irish racing journalist on day two, I asked him about a peculiar 17-runner maiden hurdle that we had witnessed the previous day in which only two horses seemed to have been 'put into the race' at any stage and the heavily-backed favourite had bolted up.
He spoke of how he had interviewed the jockey who had ridden the runner-up and asked him if he thought he could beat the winner the next time they met. "Oh, I wouldn't be worried about him again. It was the 15 behind us I would be worried about!" came the reply.
In my piece, I named the journalist and related the story. After it appeared, he rang Monty and threw all of his toys out of the pram. Monty let him have his rant, and then calmly gave me his full backing and told the caller to take a running jump. That was the measure of the man. Pat Healy told me that the Listowel directors loved the feature so much that they framed it and hung it in their private bar, where it still resides today, 37 years later!
Tony Elves – Sorry to hear of the death of Monty Court. My own personal experience of Monty was that he was as bright as a button and, to me, so inexperienced at the time, he was a proper,

proper newspaper man. I always had the utmost respect for all the time I had the privilege to work under him, and when I was despatched to Newmarket, he was there with sound advice should any problems arise. He knew so many trainers and jockeys in the Town and, basically, that the strange sounding Mackem wasn't a bad lad! I had some eventful afternoons on the racecourse with him, and at least we know in his 97 years that life was lived to the full. RIP Monty – one of the great treasures of the family we called The Sporting Life.

Mark Popham – It seems like the end of an era this year, first with stalwart Jeremy Chapman dying and now Monty Court, probably the best editor The Sporting Life ever had. I joined The Sporting Life only months before Monty Court did in early 1986, having come from Manchester with five ex-Sporting Chronicle colleagues to be the staff of the new Sporting Life Weekender in 1983.

The announcement of the formation of the Racing Post in 1985 threw a massive spanner in the works, with four Weekender staff moving to the new daily paper and one remaining with the weekly. I switched to the Life. My reporting speciality became racing politics and scandal, not a popular area with most of the Life staff or indeed the readers, but essential for the newspaper.

Graham Taylor was in charge when I started at the Life in April, 1985 but he was happy for me to combine news editing of the industry stories with writing many of them, even though I was inexperienced.

Monty's arrival as editor the following year was a blessing for me as he had tremendous newspaper experience, with over 30 years of working for British tabloids behind him. He encouraged and helped me develop my niche, which was vital as the Racing Post had a much bigger staff on the news side. Monty could be quite gruff and businesslike but was good-hearted, enthusiastic and loved racing. We worked well together even though it was a hard slog because of long hours and lots of pressure.

He remained editor for five years, but I jumped ship in August, 1988, to go freelance, and two years later form Racenews, which ironically was soon producing five or six news stories every day for the Life.

Mike Cattermole – I had the utmost respect and fondness for Monty, but was a little in awe of him to begin with. With his huge CV and experience at the top level in Fleet Street, he had an aura about him. I always thought that even his name sounded pretty cool. So, to be working in his team not only felt like a privilege, but also very "grown-up". He really went for it as Life editor, showing tremendous energy – and he wasn't a young man at that stage. The way he would encourage the news team to seek out new stories and angles was infectious. You just wanted to please him.

Monty was hugely charismatic, had a great sense of humour and, later on, it was always such a pleasure to run into him at various golf days. His enthusiasm for life was always obvious. What a top man.

Emma Hart – I've always dreaded writing this one and, to be honest, I genuinely thought the day would never come. I could probably write a small book, so apologies if its rambling! I've thoroughly enjoyed reading all the tributes.

Early Spring, 1987, a Friday lunch-time interview for a job I desperately wanted... I walked into the Farringdon building, and was introduced to the editor. He was busy, sleeves rolled up, reading an article for the next day. After a brief chat, he said: "Well, the job's yours kiddo if you want it." And I did, very much, although I admit to walking out that day rather overwhelmed and more than a little awestruck.

And that was the beginning. The self-styled "Sir Montague George Albert Maktoum Court", or just plain "Sir" – as I always called him – became a huge part of my life. He encouraged, he promoted, he included... and he championed me (sometimes directly with Maxwell). It started off as a very traditional editor's secretary role. He barked "Hart!!!" through the wall of his Farringdon office into my little cubby-hole next door, and off I trotted to do his bidding. And I loved it: every minute of it. And as time went by, my role at the Life became so much more: many other things came my way and he gave me the confidence to "just get on with it". It was never just a job.

His sense of humour was fabulous: he reiterated to me that he was once told that he "couldn't tip sh*t from a bucket", a saying which my dad used for many years afterwards. He also gave me a

very important piece of advice when backing horses: “You don’t want an intelligent one kiddo: you want a thick one who doesn’t wonder why he’s doing it”. He even gave me a scrap of fashion advice: apparently, Jim Joel’s colours suited me very well. (I do still have a penchant for a bit of red). I have numerous cards, scraps of paper and faxes with various bits of silliness written on them in his big, scrawling handwriting. For my 21st birthday, he gave me a “Happy Birthday Grandmother” card, along with a magnum of Ruinart champagne from his mate Teddy Davies. I’m still saving that magnum for “something special”. I’ll be 58 next month.

For years after he retired, he would call into my parents’ house when he was en route home from Newmarket – he’d bring a bag of Newmarket sausages for my mum. I made him a Christmas cake every year, and he brought round bags of his special roasted mixed nuts. This went on for years. He would share a drink with my dad before he finished his trip home, and my dad loved it. We never lost touch, but I wish I could have seen him in the last few years: I hope he knew how much he meant to me.

He introduced me to some wonderful people in racing and other sports, and he remains today one of the biggest influences on me, second only to my dad. Sir Montague George Albert Maktoum Court was instrumental in forming the scrapbook of my 20s and early 30s.

I never thought I would be writing this one: somehow, he was going to be immortal, but in lots of way I’m sure he will be. Monty: it was a privilege, an honour and I am truly grateful for your sage advice and friendship over the years, for the doors you opened to me, for your mentoring (as it would be called now) in my younger days, and for the many wonderful memories. You truly were one of life's good 'uns. My heartfelt condolences go out to the lovely Tom, and Louise and Nick.