

April 24, 2002

Paul Grimes, 77, Travel Writer, Editor and Times Correspondent

By WOLFGANG SAXON

Paul Grimes, a former editor, foreign correspondent and travel columnist for The New York Times, died yesterday in Abington, Pa. He was 77 and lived in Glenside, Pa.

The cause was complications from hip surgery after a fall, his family said. He had been in failing health, undergoing both dialysis and chemotherapy.

Mr. Grimes originated and wrote the Practical Traveler column, a weekly collection of travel advice. He left The Times in 1987 to help establish Condé Nast Traveler, a magazine of which he was the founding news editor.

Mr. Grimes first wrote for The Times in 1955 as a stringer in Bangkok; he was then an editor at The Bangkok Post. He joined the staff of The Times in 1957 as a copy editor on the city desk.

From 1959 to 1962 he was the Times correspondent in New Delhi, covering India, Pakistan and Afghanistan as well as the remote Himalayan kingdoms of Bhutan and Sikkim.

Mr. Grimes went to Bhutan in 1960 with the first group of reporters permitted to go there; his reporting was the first glimpse that many American readers had of that country.

"Urgent military and economic needs are catapulting the kingdom of Bhutan into the jeep age," he wrote, "but until a year ago most of its people had not even heard of the wheel."

In fact, roadwork for a paved access to the capital was barely under way, and the journalists spent the better part of 11 days riding mules to and from Paro in central Bhutan. Aside from their professional paraphernalia, they carried insect repellents and rock salt to fight off the leeches that infested dense forests.

After his return from Bhutan, Mr. Grimes recalled in an article for Times Talk, the house organ, that his mule, Nobjum, and he "never really trusted each other," and his saddle sores were only part of it:

"The real enemies were the drenching mountain rains and the leeches -- the millions of them that wriggled in the mule track and clung to bushes and trees, waiting for humans and mules whose blood they could suck. Fortunately I became the victim of only two."

Paul Mark Grimes was born on May 8, 1924, in Manhattan and grew up in Mount Vernon, N.Y. He interrupted his education to serve as a sergeant in the Army in Europe in World War II. He graduated from Cornell University in 1947 and worked as a reporter and copy editor for The Kansas City Star and Women's Wear Daily.

In 1950, he got a taste of Asia as an information officer for the United States government in Bombay. He returned to the United States for a job at The Providence Journal, then took the editing job in Bangkok. He was a copy editor at The Daily News until he got a full-time position at The Times in 1957.

After his assignment in Asia, Mr. Grimes was an assistant to the foreign editor in New York but left in 1966 to become special projects editor and a foreign correspondent for the old Philadelphia Bulletin.

He started the Practical Traveler in The Times in 1977, writing it every other week. It drew an avid response from readers and became a weekly event within less than two years.

His book "The New York Times Practical Traveler" (Times Books, 1985) derived from the column.

At Condé Nast Traveler, he was news editor and then editor at large, a position he held until two years ago.

Most recently he wrote a syndicated column on consumer travel issues.

Mr. Grimes is survived by his wife of 44 years, Miriam Blechman Grimes; three sons, Robert N. of Potomac, Md., Seth L. of Takoma Park, Md., and Joshua L. of Penn Valley, Pa.; a brother, Walter, of Arlington, Va.; and six grandchildren.

Photo: Paul Grimes (The New York Times, 1986)