

Pete Hamill, Acclaimed Reporter and Novelist, Dead at 85

A titan of New York City journalism, he also profiled John Lennon for *Rolling Stone*, wrote Grammy-winning liner notes for Bob Dylan

By **JON BLISTEIN** 



Pete Hamill — the celebrated reporter, novelist and columnist who also wrote occasionally for 'Rolling Stone' — has died at age 85.

George Rose/Getty Images

Pete Hamill — the celebrated journalist, novelist, columnist, and a titan of the New York City tabloid and journalism world — died Wednesday morning, the *New York Times* reports. He was 85.

Hamill died after his kidneys and heart failed while in the hospital, his brother, journalist Denis Hamill, confirmed. Hamill had fallen Saturday, August 1st, and was rushed to the hospital where he underwent emergency surgery; he was then placed in the intensive care unit.

Hamill was born in Brooklyn in 1935 to immigrants from Northern Ireland. He got his first newspaper job at the *Brooklyn Daily Eagle* when he was just 11 and a prestigious high school

trying to become a painter in Mexico City.

Hamill's career as a journalist began in earnest in 1960 when he returned to the United States and scored a job as a reporter for *The New York Post*. He spent a few years in Europe as a correspondent for the *Saturday Evening Post*, and upon returning to New York, settled into an illustrious career that found him hopping between many of the city's major tabloids and newspapers — the *Post*, the *Daily News*, *The Village Voice* and *New York Newsday*. He would go on to serve as an editor at the *Post* and editor-in-chief of the *Daily News* as well.

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Hamill's longer journalism appeared in publications such as *New York*, *The New Yorker*, *Esquire* and *Rolling Stone*. In June 1975, he **interviewed John Lennon for this publication**, writing of the former Beatle at the time: "As an interview, it is far from definitive, but nothing will ever be definitive in John Lennon's life: He is the sort of artist, like the aforementioned Picasso, who is always in the process of becoming. I think of this as a kind of interim report from one of the bravest human beings I know. Oh yes: He looked happy."

That same year, 1975, Bob Dylan asked Hamill to write the liner notes for *Blood on the Tracks* (Hamill even earned a Grammy for his work). He told *Rolling Stone* of Dylan: "What I love about Dylan is what he leaves out because then he gives us a chance to help create it. It's the most democratic form of art there is. Totalitarian art tells you every fucking thing. Dylan leaves the spaces. Listen, what I love about these love songs is that there's a terrific sophistication of feeling in them and a generosity of feeling. You know it's not just like 'You left me, you cunt,' or 'Come mother me, you bitch,' it's not at that level at all."

Hamill's work as a writer was extensive — he covered wars in Vietnam, Nicaragua and Lebanon, and also returned to his parents' homeland, Northern Ireland, to report on "The Troubles." As a columnist and reporter in New York City, his purview was literally the whole swath of the city — from its sports heroes, musicians and artists to its politicians and underserved communities.

Hamill published an array of short stories and multiple novels as well, many of which were set in New York City. He wrote non-fiction books on Diego Rivera and Frank Sinatra (among many others),

Breslin, were featured in the HBO documentary about their careers in NYC journalism, *Breslin and Hamill: Deadline Artists*.

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As of last year, Hamill was working on a new book titled, *Back to the Old Country*. As he told the *New York Times*, the book wasn't exactly a memoir, but a recollection about the borough where he grew up. "I grew up with what I call the "Tenement Commandments," Hamill said. "One of them was, 'Remember where you're from.'"

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