

# Ten years on, a new brave cohort tends the legacy of Marie Colvin

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Where would Marie Colvin have been last week, as President Putin gathered his forces on the borders of Ukraine, ready to strike? Probably in some freezing trench with Ukrainian soldiers, learning far more about them than she could ever fit into a single Sunday Times dispatch. Or maybe she would have tried to sneak into Russian-held Crimea, in search of the untold story of Russian conscripts readying for war — her editors and friends beside themselves with worry. Marie had no regard for borders, or any kind of limit really. That's why she's not with us today.

I will never forget the moment — ten years ago this week — when my phone flashed with a message from a journalist friend in Beirut. I was on the bus to work. “I think something terrible has happened to your friend Marie,” it read. Syrian government forces had fired rockets directly into the rebel media centre in Baba Amr, where Marie and the photographer Paul Conroy were staying. Marie, 56, and a 28-year-old French photographer, Rémi Ochlik, were killed. Paul and a correspondent for Le Figaro, Edith Bouvier, were seriously injured.

I would love to say that Marie's reporting changed the course of the war in Syria, but it didn't. A civil case brought by her sister, Cat Colvin, in the US in 2019 found the Syrian regime liable for her murder. But President Bashar al-Assad remains in office, presiding over a ruined country that has become a narcostate.

Few of us dared report from rebel-held Syria after Marie was killed, and several who did met a similar fate. Media organisations had to change tack. We gleaned what information we could from the government side, and began to rely on a network of “citizen journalists” — Syrians brave enough to report under appalling conditions in rebel territory. Many of them were also killed. Out of this came some of the greatest war journalism, including the Oscar-nominated film *For Sama* by the brave videographer Waad al-Kateab, who chronicled her life under bombardment and siege in Aleppo as she gave birth to her daughter.

The Marie Colvin Journalists' Network, set up by three of Marie's friends — Lyse Doucet of the BBC, the writer Jane Wellesley and me — encourages a new generation of female Arab journalists. I think Marie would have been happy that the organisation has given safety advice to the family of a kidnapped Iraqi reporter, and helped a photographer in Gaza obtain body armour to replace the bin bag she wore.

It wasn't until I read Marie's diaries, while researching her biography, that I learnt how troubled she was. Marie's story is exemplary — she was a great, brave journalist — but also cautionary, as she didn't take enough care of either her mind or her body. Her death, and the story of her life, alerted editors and aspiring Marias to dangers that they might have ignored in the past.

Budgets and resources are even tighter than they were ten years ago. Fewer reporters are sent out to be on the ground. Yet as Marie herself wrote: “War reporting is still essentially the same — someone has to go there and see what is happening. You can't get that information without going to places where people are being shot at, and others are shooting at you.”

Young journalists frequently contact me to say they want to follow in Marie's footsteps. The award-winning Sudanese CNN correspondent Nima Elbagir, who gave this year's Marie Colvin lecture at Stony Brook University on Long Island, where Marie grew up, said she felt part of “a lineage of awkward, obstinate female journalists”, Marie being the lodestar. The trade magazine *Press Gazette* has a prize in Marie's name for a young journalist — male or female.

This is Marie's legacy: a new global generation dedicated to the eyewitness journalism for which she gave her life.

*Lindsey Hilsum is Channel 4 News international editor. Her book *In Extremis: the Life of War Correspondent Marie Colvin* is published by Chatto & Windus*