

Remembering Paul Morantz

By **the Palisadian-Post** - November 17, 2022



Photos courtesy of Chaz Morantz

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Following the death of longtime Palisadian Paul Morantz on October 23, Palisadian-Post Contributing Writer Marie Tabela shared stories about his life and legacy.

I first met Paul Morantz when I sought his opinion on a particularly litigious “empowerment group.” I knew about his work with similar organizations in the past, most notably Synanon.

Synanon operated as a drug rehabilitation program that was eventually shut down after garnering a violent reputation and, ultimately, running a cult. Paul was instrumental in its downfall, and over many decades, he saved countless people from Synanon and multiple other cults and cult-adjacent organizations.

The cult made an attempt on his life by putting a rattlesnake in his mailbox that attacked him as he reached for his mail. Though it did not kill him, it left him with a lifetime filled with physical pain and difficulties that could

have otherwise been avoided.

They tried to kill him, but they didn't consider his spirit. He would not be broken. He would just yell the truth louder.

Paul's prodigious career is well documented and was the source of inspiration for many films, books, essays and more. But I am not writing this to talk about his career. I am writing this to talk about the man.



I only knew him for a short time, and won't pretend I knew him as well as some, but I did get to know him in a way that I won't soon forget. The first time I sat down with Paul to interview him for an article I wrote for the *Palisadian-Post* in 2018, I had no idea that he would become a fixture in my life.

He was a character that added more color sitting in his home in Rustic Canyon to my life than most people could ever do. I spoke with him for nine hours that day—my husband sent me text messages to make sure I had not been kidnapped.

Paul had more to talk about than cults. He had more to talk about than Synanon. Paul had opinions, and you were going to hear them. Whether or not you agreed with them was irrelevant, you would hear them through his quiet, raspy voice more clearly than if he yelled them directly into your ears.

The snake may have taken his physical strength and even some of his contagious energy, but it didn't take the twinkle in his eye. His sense of humor. His passions.

What Paul loved, he displayed in his home to share with others. He loved his border collie, Nicky, and he was featured in photos throughout his home. He loved Davy Crockett, The Beatles, Disney memorabilia, vintage Mickey Mouse, his alma mater, USC, and much more.

Above all, he loved his son, Chaz, and was deeply proud of his accomplishments in his field.

More recently, his love for his grandchildren was all encompassing. He was a very proud grandfather. I wish he could have had more time with them.

On a lighter note, when Paul was a young sports editor for *The Daily Trojan*, he earned the moniker "The Wolf" for his love of beautiful women. If you knew Paul, you knew he had no shortage of stories he'd tell with a laugh that would echo throughout his home, often involving said beautiful women.

While Paul's sense of humor may have harkened back to another time, you couldn't help but laugh with him. It was contagious.

While some of these may seem to be just some of life's simple pleasures, Paul was also a deeply complicated man. I won't assume he had regrets, but I do know he wished certain things could be different.

I also like to think of Paul as a collector of people. He was a magnet for people of all different walks of life, and they often came together for his annual Christmas party. This party was a great point of pride for him, where he'd choose items to give each guest and put them under the tree.

Often, he would pluck something from his home if he thought it would put a smile on your face. My daughter still has the vintage Mickey Mouse from his mantel he gave her as a baby.

Traditional highlights included the compilation video he would have made of classic scenes and songs from Christmas films throughout history, as well as when he would wind up each and every vintage Santa Claus he had collected over the years and watch them all clang cymbals and play music in a chaotic yuletide cacophony. This delighted him every year. This Christmas will be a lot quieter without that discordant, though somehow enjoyable, display.

Paul often spoke of a woman he met in the Palisades in the '70s, Nikki. His friendship with Nikki is something that left a lasting imprint on his heart, and he wrote of her in a piece titled "Chasing Annie Hall." He referred to her as his "Annie Hall" for how closely her ways aligned with that of the movie character.

The last time he laid eyes on Nikki was at her funeral in 2008. He had always hoped he would be reunited with her one day, when his time on this earth came to an end.

For Christmas this year, Paul, I hope you get the gift of giving your Nikki a long-awaited, pain-free, warm embrace while you listen to the sounds of the Santa I will wind up in your honor. Enjoy a dinner of 7-11 hotdogs that you so inexplicably seemed to love.

Take it easy, Wolf. You've earned a break.