

Poetry in blue

Who is the greatest song writer of all time?

Okay, maybe that is a tough question, so perhaps we can ask: who are the top 5 songwriters of all time?

If you are a child of the 70s, it is almost certain that your list would contain the name **Joni Mitchell**.

In 2000, the *New York Times* selected 25 albums that represented pinnacles and turning points in popular music and Joni's album **Blue** (1971) was among the list.

Here is the title track, **Blue**, which fits perfectly with our Blue Tunes...



Would you like more music? Listen on!

[Willie Nelson: Blue Skies](#)

[Indigo Girls: Tangled up in Blue](#)

[Emmylou Harris: Blue Kentucky Girl](#)

[Etta James: Misty Blue](#)

[Flunk: Blue Monday](#)

[Linda Ronstadt: Blue Bayou](#)

When scrutiny is sub-standard, democracy suffers



Image: The Florida Times-Union.

Something very troubling is happening in our community when it comes to the local media's scrutiny of those in power.

Since returning to Warrnambool in January, I have watched with growing disbelief at the apparent reticence of our once-proud local newspaper, The Standard, to go in hard and ask the tough questions of our leaders.

This is what journalists do. This is the role of the so-called 'Fourth Estate' – to be the watchdog of the powerful and give voice to the powerless.

It is an essential part of our democracy and ensures that we retain an open, transparent and accountable government – on all levels.



This past week, we saw national scrutiny of MPs' spending, sparked by revelations that Prime Minister Abbott had claimed allowances for trips to weddings, triathlons and cycling events.

Was our local federal MP **Dan Tehan** asked by our paper to detail the \$873,992.35 that he spent from 2010-12? No, instead this figure was not even mentioned, but rather [the paper's story \(10/10\)](#) reassured us that he had claimed \$321,000 in 'legitimate government entitlements'. End of story.

There is no suggestion that Mr Tehan used his allowance improperly, but nor is it improper for a journalist to forensically examine this spending. This is exactly what independent journalist **Margot Kingston** did when she [broke the story](#) about Tony Abbott claiming more than \$9000 in taxpayer funds to promote his book.

It is only by drilling down into the detail that all the facts can come to light.



Mayor Michael

Neoh. Image: ABC.

Earlier this year, Warrnambool Mayor **Michael Neoh** visited China as part of a Sister City relationship with Changchun. Shortly after his return, [The Standard ran a story \(29/6\)](#) about Mr Neoh visiting his ancestral home in China and catching up with relatives.

Was this part of the official tour for which ratepayers paid \$3500 for both Mr Neoh and Council CEO **Bruce Anson**?

Did Mr Neoh pay for this portion of the trip himself? Again, there is no suggestion of impropriety by Mr Neoh, but we don't know the answer to these questions because, it appears, they weren't asked.*

And when others *do* ask the prickly, difficult questions, the response is sometimes extraordinary.

Last month, **Cr Peter Sycopoulis** and several council colleagues questioned whether Mayor Neoh and Mr Anson needed to attend a Sister City function in Japan – expected to cost ratepayers \$4000 – given they had just been to China.

For this, the councillors were chastised by the newspaper as [being 'party poopers'](#) (11/11). What?

And let's not forget the infamous '[Wilma Wright' letters to the editor](#)'. These were published by The Standard for four years – four years – without anybody apparently checking the identity of the author, who was revealed as Mr Anson's son and who at one point used the cover of his pseudonym to openly attack several councillors, including Cr Sycopoulis, in the lead up to a council election.

(Mr Anson, it must be noted, was cleared of any involvement in his son's activities).



Cr Peter Sycopoulis

The names in this column – Mr Tehan, Mayor Neoh, Mr Anson – are irrelevant: it is the public, important positions that they hold that makes them open to scrutiny and a higher standard of accountability.

This is the hard work of journalism.

It is much harder, more time consuming and nerve-wrecking than writing story after story about courts and crime (ie. the powerless) where all of the leg work has been done, yet it is critical if we are to have faith in our media as the watchdog it is intended to be.

If it fails in this task, it is nothing less than our democracy which suffers.

** The Warrnambool City Council has since confirmed to Bluestone that Mayor Neoh did fund this portion of his travel.*

Disclosures:

- I began my journalism career as a cadet at The Standard in 1989.
- I was an open supporter of ALP candidate Michael Barling during the last federal election because I thought he was the best option for Wannon. It was the first time I

voted Labor in many years: I normally vote Green.

- I know Cr Sycopoulis through his family: his older sisters and I went to school together.

SUBSCRIBE

Our quiet hero: Susie Alexander



[dropcap style="font-size: 60px; color: #A02F2F;"] T
[/dropcap]HIS week's quiet hero is somebody rarely caught without a smile on her lovely face, even when life throws the greatest challenges her way.

Susie Alexander and I (Carol) went to school together at East Warrnambool Primary and later, Warrnambool High School, and because she was an Alexander and I was an Altmann, we tended to be in the same alphabetical order line-ups for the selection of the fun stuff (sports teams) and the not so fun

stuff (innoculations).

I would joke that I was glad Susie had to go first, then I would know if it was going to hurt or not.

Susie was always much braver than me.

When I met Susie again for the first time in a long time, she told me her mother was very ill with cancer and that she was making the most of the time they still had together. We were suddenly at that age, it seemed, when our parents became vulnerable and fragile.

[dropcap style="font-size: 60px; color: #A02F2F;"] E
[/dropcap]arlier this year, I saw Susie again and she told me that she had been diagnosed with breast cancer. It is the sort of news that shrinks the world down to the small stuff, the important stuff and reminds us that, no matter how old we are, we – as humans – are all vulnerable and fragile.

Despite her diagnosis, Susie has not retreated. She is facing her illness head on and undergoing a series of treatments (including what she calls her ‘cocktail days’) that she hopes will see her well enough to join the **Sussan Women’s Fun Run** on December 8 in Melbourne to raise money for the **Breast Cancer Network Australia**.

Yes, you read that right: *fun run*.

Susie always was so much braver than me. I know that to be truer now, than ever.

We normally donate a coffee and cake voucher to our quiet hero, but this time we have made a donation toward Susie’s run on December 8.

We hope you might do the same by clicking on this link: [Susie’s run](#).

Good luck Susie.



Meet our other quiet heroes...

[Holden Club helps out](#)

[Caring for the environment](#)

[The Warrnambool artist](#)

[The face behind Fifteen Minutes of Fame](#)

[Embracing diversity](#)

[The musician](#)

Need a little gardening?

Each week we post a gem from Gumtree – the online buy, sell, swap site – that is odd, unusual or just plain different. Most items are/were for sale in South-West Victoria or not far beyond.

This week we have a tradey with a twist (we added the image):



[box] Todd Henry's Gardening services: I'll mow your lawn ☐
with the best manscaping around. [/box]



If you enjoy Gumtree gems, read on:

[Couch with an ouch](#)

[All I need is the air that I breathe](#)

[Always check the auto-correct!](#)

[Too short for this Hill's Hoist](#)

[12 things for \\$12](#)

[Can't afford a real horse?](#)

Couch with an ouch...

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beyond.

This week we have unearthed a piece of furniture in need of a new home:

[box] Couch: For sale! Need GORN ASAP pick up only. The left side is a bit hard to push in because its bent. Brought fit 800 selling for 250 0no. Just need to put bent bit back □
[/box]



Don't miss our other Gumtree gems...

[All I need is the air that I breathe](#)

[Always check the auto-correct!](#)

[Too short for this Hill's Hoist](#)

[12 things for \\$12](#)

[Can't afford a real horse?](#)