

Journalists Jim Tucker and Glenn McLean remember their classmate and colleague Mike Watson.

LIFE STORY: The death of Taranaki journalism colleague Mike Watson reminds me of the saying “a contradiction in terms” - as it applied to Superman.

Apparently, the superhero’s alter ego, Clark Kent, was a “mild-mannered reporter”. But no such thing, surely. As unlikely as a shy insurance salesperson.

It fitted Mike, though, who was 63 when he died. Without needing to fly or wear a cape, he was as good a journo as any of the thousands I’ve known or taught. His heroics were all the better for being quiet.

Any doubts about this even-tempered man when he attended the Taranaki Polytechnic (now Witt) journalism diploma in 1998 were dispelled when we pitted the two halves of the class against each other to report a made-up weather disaster.

Mike was one of the editors. He led calmly and with precision...until late in the day when it looked like his team would be scooped.

A hellfire and damnation Fleet St-style persona emerged, yelling at his charges to get their act together. After the shock, we thought: “Yeah, Mike’s going to be fine.”

Youngest of the family of Inglewood GP Dr Bob Watson, he became a respected local government and sports journalist on various newspapers in the Bay of Plenty, as *Stuff’s* central North Island reporter in Taupō, a stint at the *Marlborough Express* and latterly on the *Taranaki Daily News*, where he covered Taranaki Regional Council.

Given what’s coming out of Parliament grounds, it’s newsworthy to consider the inner character of New Zealand’s news media.

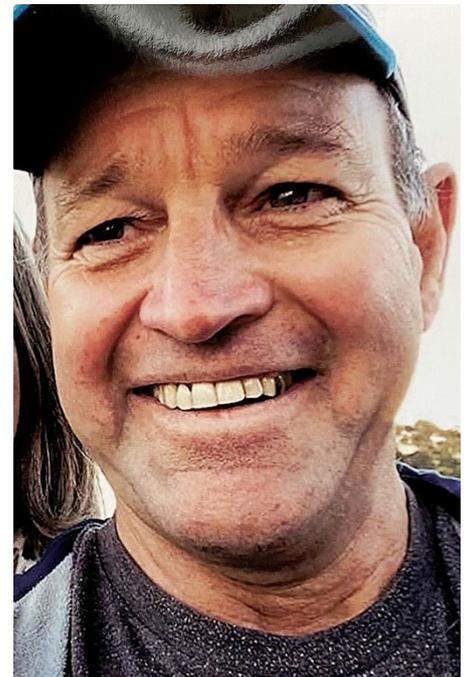
Taranaki Daily News senior journalist Glenn McLean - Mike’s closest friend on that journalism course – takes over at this point to tell more about the kind of people who report our news.

For starters, there will be a number of new generation journalists who might take issue with our former mentor’s headline, as well as some who have ridden the bureaucratic gravy train for decades.

Mike might not have been a wolf in sheep’s clothing, but there was something that simmered and eventually boiled over if it was left on the stove too long.

He admitted it himself as he lay on a hospital bed falling victim to the true extent of the illness he had refused to fully acknowledge for so long.

“I just thought everyone saw me as a grumpy bastard,” he said, after reading a card penned by the last of his work colleagues.



Well, yes, a lot of them did. But they also saw the integrity he worked with as he battled with longing thoughts of days gone by when newsrooms were full of layers of staff and a dark humour abided next to political incorrectness.

However, Mike adapted, albeit at his own pace. He scrutinised agendas as closely as the rugby matches he loved, while he was never afraid to pencil in a meeting with like-minded contacts for which time was never an issue.

Being popular was never near the top of Mike's to-do list, while he seldom or maybe never backed down from an argument, no matter the foe.

Time might not have been on his side in the end, but he went to his grave unrepentant in his approach.

Since his death there have been numerous tributes, including some from those who hold office in different parts of the country, who were shocked by "Little Scoop's" passing.

The news will carry on. It just might be a little more mild-mannered.

Jim Tucker is a regular contributor to the Taranaki Daily News and Glenn McLean is a reporter at the Taranaki Stuff office.