

Opinion

Twitter haters hiding behind offensive wall

Gemma Jones



KARL Stefanovic seems like a genial bloke, certainly he is a talented journalist and successful television presenter turned Sydney to Hobart yacht race champion.

Yet his unlikely ocean racing victory has unleashed some foul commentary on social networking site Twitter.

This is what Ashleigh, whose Twitter name is AshMcFunk, had to say: "It's a national tragedy that @karlstefanovic wasn't lost at sea somewhere between Sydney and Hobart."

Why would anyone wish that about anyone, let alone an inoffensive father of three?

What an awful thanks for Stefanovic and the rest of *Investec Loyal's* celebrity crew — Kurt Fearnley, Anthony Minichiello, Phil Waugh and Phil Kearns — who, with skipper Anthony Bell, raised hundreds of thousands of dollars for the Humpty Dumpty Foundation.

The Foundation buys much-needed medical equipment for children's hospitals and paediatric wards specially designed for young and often critically ill patients.

But that's the thing about Twitter, you can dole out such comments without ever having to assign your real name to it.

I suspect Ashleigh's reserves of courage would evaporate before making a comment in person to Stefanovic or *Investec Loyal's* crew. Others joined Ashleigh from Newcastle in wishing Stefanovic ill.

There was MisdaMagoo, who claims to be a political commentator. MisdaMagoo asked: "Anyone else hoping Karl Stefanovic falls overboard?"

SometimeSpez Ezza, whatever that means, asked "Who do I pay to push Karl Stefanovic overboard?"

Alan Jones, a target of Twitter haters, backtracked on comments last year after he said Julia Gillard should be put in a chaff bag and dumped into the sea.

What's the difference between that comment and advocating a television presenter be lost at sea? Twitter's haters have long amused themselves by

belittling and abusing anyone whose views they disagree with, and they are prolific about conservative bloggers.

But comments calling for harm to Stefanovic simply, it seems, because he is successful and a celebrity is a new low for these online haters.

The macabre wishes about Stefanovic are being replicated about journalists and political bloggers.

Consider this about *The Daily Telegraph's* Tim Blair, who a few years ago defeated a tumour: "F... tim blair. Pity he didn't die from his cancer."

Or this aimed at News Limited blogger Andrew Bolt: "Andrew Bolt can die in a fire for all I care."

The Twitter haters are stooping pretty low wishing these men dead.

What's their crime? Offences against the Twitter haters' zealous view of the world order?

Freedom of speech for them and their extreme lefty friends but no one else, seems to be the zealots approach.

More than a few regimes around the world have operated on similar principles. It's rarely ended well.

There must be responsibility exercised with freedom of speech.

There is a gulf between being free to criticise another, taking up a contest of ideas or simply not liking someone for whatever reason and wishing another person dead simply because you don't like their views.

A search of Tony Abbott's name brought up this: "Happy New Year @JuliaGillard & @KRuddMP — please do us all a favour and bury the hatchet (preferably in Tony Abbott's head) in 2012."

The author did identify himself in this instance and he claimed to be an ex-journalist.

If a real journalist made a comment like this, I doubt it would make it into any mainstream publication. Yet it is the mainstream media currently the target of a government inquiry.

It is easy to say ignore these comments but they offend a standard of decency.

In Stefanovic's case it is Australia's tall poppy syndrome on full display. In the case of the political commentary it is a symptom



Hoist by his own success: Karl Stefanovic up the mast on *Investec Loyal*

Picture: Ella Pellegrini

of a Titanic ideological struggle being played out.

There would certainly be examples of abuse of Julia Gillard and the government which could be identified from the zealous right over the past couple of years.

Surely these haters started somewhere, perhaps even the playground as petty bullies. Pity the poor kids who copped

“ A new low for these online haters

it in the schoolyard. Ignoring them clearly hasn't worked if they have just grown into adults who are potentially worse now they can sit anonymously behind a computer screen.

So, to the haters, here's a New Year's challenge: Man or woman up, when tempted to unleash a nasty tirade, sign it with your real name.

They said it

"If they steal from us they're stealing from sick koalas." **Sunshine Coast Koala Wildlife Rescue Service founder Ray Chambers, whose rescue car was robbed of \$370 in equipment, cash.**

"It's like any job. It has its ups and its downs." **Cover model Catherine McNeil returns to swimwear shoots after two years off.**

"I just take a note of what he wears and if I have a booking maybe put on... fake tan." **England's Craig Waldron explains his life as a part-time celebrity impersonator of Australia's Peter Andre.**

"She's like me. When tennis gets too much, she goes fishing. She's a woman after my own heart." **Wimbledon champion Evonne Goolagong Cawley backs 15-year-old Ashleigh Barty.**

"There are always rumours, aren't there? In the end you have to just not engage with internet technology. I've treated the whole internet now like it's a wicked little liar. I am happily married to Katy." **Comedian Russell Brand (pictured) last month denies rumour his marriage to Katy Perry was in trouble.**

"Katy and I are ending our marriage." **Brand announces that it's over after just 14 months.**

"If you were taking a shower, he'd come in and talk to you. You were taking a shower and he's busy assessing you and that kind of thing. That was a little bit odd." **Zimbabwean lawyer Psychology Maziwisa, who first met cricket writer Peter Roebuck at 16 and became, according to the Fairfax press, the "love of his life".**

