



British Polio  
Fellowship

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Bringing the Voice of Polio Survivors to Stormont

# Joni Mitchell – b. 1943

**Joni Mitchell is a musician who needs little introduction. She has received countless awards including a Grammy Lifetime Achievement in 2002, a Gershwin Prize (2023) and was rated 9th on Rolling Stone's 2015 greatest songwriters list.**

Roberta Joan Anderson was born in Fort McCleod, Alberta Canada, to Myrtle and William, contracting polio in the virulent epidemic in 1952, just three years before the vaccine became available – like many of us, bad timing. She was hospitalised in quarantine for some months but, soon after returning home, the family moved to Saskatoon which Joni thinks of as her hometown. She had lost the ability to walk and much of the use of her left hand, which accounts in many ways for the unusual guitar tunings that she became notable for using,

At school she was not very academic, concentrating on paintings and classical piano. When she learnt to walk again, she discovered rock'n'roll and danced her way through her teens. She is quoted as saying that, during her hospitalised isolation, she discovered her inner life - that made an artist of her. She started playing ukelele, soon graduating to guitar thanks to Pete Seeger's songbook. She dropped out of school and mixed with a fairly wild crowd, playing for them at bonfires around the nearby lakes before starting to get paid gigs at Saskatchewan clubs in 1962, just before her 19th birthday.

She moved to Toronto in 1964 and found herself pregnant by ex-boyfriend Brad MacMath, giving birth to her daughter, Kelly Dale Anderson the following February. She met and married Chuck Mitchell soon after, but it meant that Kelly was given up for adoption and remaining a secret for the next thirty years. Joni wrote her first song on her way to playing The Mariposa Music Festival in 1965. Then she and Chuck moved to Detroit and started gigging around the U.S. In 1967 she and Chuck divorced and she continued playing around New York and the East Coast.

She was getting noticed, gathering a following, enjoying some TV appearances. In Florida she was

spotted by David Crosby and taken to Los Angeles, introduced to Eliot Roberts who became her manager and soon was recording her first album, "Song to a Seagull" – released in 1968. This laid the foundations for her breakthrough album "Clouds", in 1969, which included her hit single "Both Sides Now", also recorded by Judy Collins, herself a polio survivor and an artist Joni had long admired. She settled in Laurel Canyon, California at this time in a neighbourhood shared with David Crosby, Judy Collins and her then partner



Stephen Stills, Neil Young and a number of successful musicians of the era. She was in a relationship there with Graham Nash, who had relocated from England, having left The Hollies, to form Crosby Stills and Nash. Here she recorded her third album "Ladies of the Canyon" including her compositions "Woodstock" and "Big Yellow Taxi".

This was followed by "Blue", arguably her most acclaimed album. It included a song "Little Green" for her lost (at the time) daughter, now named Kilauren Gibb by her adoptive parents. It also included "California" and "River" among a collection of now legendary songs, reaching number fifteen in the

American Billboard chart and number three here in the UK. A triumph for the young polio survivor making an impact on the world stage being voted Top Female Artist in 1970 by Melody Maker. She has gone on to release another 15 studio albums, making 19 in all, ending with "Shine" in 2007 which reached number 15 in the U.S., where she has sold 7 million albums overall, and reaching 19 in the U.K., where she has sold 3 million albums!

Joni was reunited with her daughter, Kilauren Gibb in 1997 after a college roommate had betrayed her secret, selling the story to a British tabloid in 1993. Kilauren has two children, Daisy and Marlin, making Joni a proud grandmother. The family are now reconciled. **b**

