

Ken Gaines – Bio

Ken Gaines was born on 17th March 1951 in Washington D.C., the oldest of three siblings [one sister, one brother], he was raised on a series of military bases and his high school years were divided between establishments in Wiesbaden, Germany and Wheatland, California. Outings in the family car always included a song-a-long so it's little wonder that Ken and his younger brother, Erwin, went on to pursue careers as performing musicians. Truth to tell Gaines' ancestors had mostly been preachers, and Ken admits to having been inspired musically, principally, by the family record player. As a youngster he listened to recordings by artists such as Tennessee Ernie Ford, Merle Travis, Frank Sinatra, Perry Como, Ella Fitzgerald. Gaines sang in church choirs during his early teens, and went on to appear in high school plays and musicals. During his early teen years Erwin was given a ukulele as a gift, but it was his older brother who taught him to play the instrument, and Ken picked up his first guitar soon afterwards. During the late nineteen-sixties, in clubs on American service bases, Ken performed in a number of folk-rock bands covering songs made famous by Simon and Garfunkel, The Mamas and the Papas, and Peter, Paul and Mary. Once his family relocated to California, Gaines was exposed to the music of the initially underground bands, Big Brother & The Holding Company, The Youngbloods, Jefferson Airplane and more. Ken went on to become the lead singer in a rock band, Sounds Contemporary, before forming an acoustic folk-style duo with Steve Green. As a high school graduating present, Ken's parents gave him a 1968 Martin D-28 guitar.

Moving to his mother's hometown of Biloxi, Mississippi, post high school, Ken enrolled at the University of Southern Mississippi in Hattiesburg, where he first earned a degree in Theatre [1969 - 1974] and, later, a Visual Arts degree [1979 - 1983]. Ken began to perform as a solo musician in college, and during vacation periods was a singing marshal at 8 Flags Wild West Show in Biloxi, and trained sea lions and dolphins at Marine Life. Following graduation, commencing in the mid nineteen-seventies, for four years, Gaines went on to serve in the U.S. Air Force. Gaines spent part of his service years stationed in Southern England.

During Ken's second spell in Hattiesburg his wife enrolled in the Reserve Officers' Training Corps [ROTC] programme, and went on to join the U.S. Air Force. In 1984 her first posting was to Colorado Springs, Colorado. As a result, Gaines became acquainted with established local performers such as Chuck Pyle, who encouraged him to pursue writing and performing his own songs. Ken's wife was subsequently reassigned to upstate New York, allowing Ken to tour major coastal and inland cities in that region - Pennsylvania, Boston, Chicago and New York City. Befriending fellow folk performer Bernice Lewis, she introduced him to numerous New England venue bookers.

His wife's next assignment, circa 1989, was to Randolph Air Force Base in San Antonio, and in the Spring of the following year Gaines attended his first Kerrville Folk Festival. Pyle, a veteran performer at the event, had told Ken about the festival years earlier. As for the local music scene, Gaines became a regular at venues such as Cibolo Creek Country Club [currently closed] and Leon Springs Cafe, and in Austin he hosted an open mic. at the now defunct folk haven, Chicago House. Gaines went on to tour folk clubs on a national basis during the opening half of the nineteen-nineties. Austin engineer and Kerrville regular, Lindsey Haisley, helped Gaines record the 'live' house concert cassette **"No One Else"** [1992].

Following the 1993 Kerrville Festival, Ken relocated to Houston, was subsequently divorced and, later, remarried. Gaines contributed to the charity release/song cycle **"The Silverwolf Homeless Project"** [1995] and his music featured in the Jennifer Payson [aka Jennifer Tamez] written and directed movie **"Blue Days Lost"** [1995]. Ken has also co-written two children's musicals **"Noah And The Ark"** and **"Journey Of The Wise Men"** which were produced by the Excellent Theatre Company in Houston. During the latter half of the closing decade of the 20th century, Gaines' focus turned to performing with other local songwriters "in-the-round" in Texas venues. Eventually Ken and Ron Perry launched a Tuesday evening 'songwriters night' at The Mystery Manor. During the series Ken began working on a regular basis with guitarist Wayne Wilkerson. When the Manor subsequently closed, Gaines began producing and hosting a Thursday night songwriters' series at Houston's legendary listening venue, Anderson Fair. Although the focus at the Fair is on encouraging local songwriting talent, national touring performers also feature in the series. For a couple of years Gaines presented a Sunday afternoon series, The Open Circle Coffeehouse, at a local Unitarian church.

Ken has shares stages with Caroline Aiken, Tom Paxton, Arlo Guthrie, Michael Smith, Shake Russell & Jack Saunders, Bill Staines, James McMurtry, Jerry Jeff Walker, Johnsmith, Karen Mal and Bill Ward and the late Rachel Bissex [d. 2005] and Townes Van Zandt [d. 1997]. Gaines' sophomore solo outing **"Real Men"** was recorded at Bill Ward's Houston Livingroom Studio, and Ken and Bill produced the collection. The sixteen songs featured included "Biloxi" co-written by Ken and his brother Erwin 'Scooter' Gaines. Early in the new millennium Gaines began touring/performing again on a national basis, and in addition to being accompanied by Wilkerson, in recent years, he has worked/toured with Austin based solo recording artist, Karen Mal. **"Catfish Moon,"** a thirteen-song collection, and Ken's third album, was released by Bill Ward's label Songdog Records in the Spring of 2007. Once again co-produced by Gaines and Ward, it features contributions from Wayne Wilkerson, Karen Mal, Gary Sapone, Jeff Duncan and Ron Rebstock.

Discography : **"No One Else"** cassette only release [1992] ; **"Real Men"** [2002] ; **"Catfish Moon"** [2007] :

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