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Port Austin History Center

1424 Pointe Aux Barques Road

Port Austin, MI 48467

989 551 5532

Free Admission (Air Conditioned)

Thumb button group will meet March 27th at 1 pm at the Port Austin History Center, 1424 Pointe Aux Barques Road. Guest speaker, Hedgie Cartwright, will share her collection of Civil War Uniform Buttons.

Everyone is welcome. Refreshments will be served.

The Port Austin History Center's 2023 Season will open weekends beginning April 1st., 1 - 4 pm.

Stop by for a visit.

A MAN, A VOICE, AND A GUITAR

by Dennis Hafeli



Through my involvement with the Port Austin Porch Fest since its inception in 2016, it has been my honor and pleasure to contact, meet, and schedule scores of musicians to perform at this very popular mid-summer event. Despite receiving no stipend and having to travel variable distances to get here, musicians continue to apply, a testament to our village, our residents, the appreciative audiences, and their intense devotion to what they do.

One of my personal favorites, a man for whom I have the utmost respect, is a 67 year-old singer/songwriter named Kenny Lang. Four years ago, Kenny and his beautiful wife Che, herself an accomplished cellist and nurse practitioner, moved to Port Austin; he will be performing at his fifth Porch Fest this coming June 24. With his proximity, we have shared many conversations and experiences since our first meeting, and I have come to greatly admire and respect this man for the way he manages his life and shares his musical talents.

Born in Detroit and spending most of his formative years in Dearborn, Kenny developed a love for music, both instrumentation and words, very early in life. Singing early-on in church choirs; learning to play the guitar, bass, and mandolin by age 13; and performing in a rock band with high school friends, music was definitely in his blood. However, after high school, he continued on with music, uniting with some friends and forming a group called the Lone Star Revue. This band favored country music, a style which, in Kenny's mind, portrayed "honesty in music, both in words and instrumentation."

After five years playing mostly the bar scenes, Kenny decided to focus on the bass guitar, and eventually became a member of a band called Nightbird. The group purchased its own bus and traveled the country, going wherever the job offers called. During this time, Kenny began dabbling in songwriting. Inspired by one of his heroes, Waylon Jennings, he wrote a song titled "Should I Laugh or Should I Cry," about life on the road. Beginning to feel burned out by the lifestyle and the travel, he left Nightbird at age 32 and opted to run sound for other musical groups, as an employee of Blues Factory Records.

Five years later, he left the sound business, decided to focus ex-

clusively on playing the acoustic guitar, and began to seriously pursue songwriting. He has presently written about sixty songs, seemingly not a sizeable number over a thirty year span. However, Kenny strives for absolute perfection in his songs, both with words and with music. He regards his works as "divinely inspired," and they must be "personal, from the heart." He believes that you can't write what you don't know. If he feels that he is not using the correct phrasing, or the music just doesn't feel right, that idea will be set aside until the time comes when he can get it right. One of his musical heroes, country legend Rodney Crowell, once stated, "When an artist gets it right for himself, then it's right for everybody!"

Kenny has a deep affection for the War Dog Memorial in South Lyon, Michigan. After his first visit, walking through the grounds and spending hours gazing at the tombstones, he felt compelled to write a song about these "heroes." The result, achieved after re-writing and re-working it many times, was a song called "Four Legged Hero," an emotional ballad which brings tears to his eyes virtually every time he plays it. He has recorded the song, and is invited to perform it live regularly at memorial services held at the cemetery.

A letter he sent to the director of American House Independent Senior Living introducing himself and requesting the opportunity to entertain residents changed his world dramatically. He was signed on to perform at several of their locations; word began to spread, and before long he was in popular demand at numerous assisted living facilities throughout Michigan. At its peak, he was performing over four hundred times a year, a solitary man wearing a cowboy hat and carrying an acoustical guitar. Whether he is playing for two or three people, or for a sizable group, Kenny and his music tell stories that everyone present can relate to, from their own life experiences to familiar songs from their past.

Coincidentally, one of the groups for which Kenny plays regularly is Catholic Charities, a day-care facility for adults with dementia, based at St. Lucy's Church in St. Clair Shores, which happens to be my down-state parish. When he makes his monthly appearance there, I go down and listen to him, and I watch the pleasure and gratitude present on the faces of the four or five assembled. He treats everyone with great respect and puts his heart and his soul into every song, regardless of the crowd size.

I personally could listen to Kenny for hours. His sincerity, his warmth, his authenticity, plus his outstanding talent are unique. Ask Alexa to play songs by Kenny Lang, or google him. You are in for a real treat.