

## The Knudsens

Though Kenneth Carll Knudsen was born in Miami, he learned to love the Florida Keys at an early age as his family brought their 16' boat to the Keys nearly every weekend. They explored up and down the chain of islands, often camping in tents on secluded beaches. In 1960, when he was 10 years old, his parents bought a six-acre bayfront tract of land at MM81 for \$35,000 and began developing the Kon Tiki Resort and by 1961 it was ready for the first guests.

What fond memories Ken has of those years at the Kon Tiki where the family lived and worked. They had two 16' boats they rented to guests for \$8/day plus \$.22 per gallon of gas. Starting at just 11 years of age, Ken would often take first time guests out to show them how to navigate the shallow waters of the bay, through the tricky mangrove cuts. Occasionally they would "hire" him to take them fishing, though because he was not licensed, he could not accept payment. But that was the inauguration of a long career as a backcountry fishing guide!

Throughout his teen years, Ken worked as a part time mate on numerous charter boats, employed by some of the great local legends, learning techniques from the best. He continued guiding when he could in the back country, mastering his skills, studying the special environment of Florida Bay.

Ken went to Coral Shores High School where he played football, basketball, and baseball... an amazing athlete. Some say he was one of the best football players ever at Coral Shores. He still holds the season record for interceptions with 12 his junior year.

A strange thing happened to him one day when he was a senior. As he was walking towards the door to change classes, a lovely blond he did not recognize was standing in the doorway, almost blocking the students ahead of him. As he got to the doorway, she said, "Ken, I want to carry your books to the next class."



Ken was intrigued by this sophomore beauty who grabbed the books right out of his arms and walked him to his next class. When the class was over, there she was again waiting for him at the doorway. The day was January 3, 1968 and the lovely blond was Juanita Russell. Until graduation that year, Ken and Juanita were true high school sweethearts. After that meeting in the doorway, Ken and Juanita always referred to that day as their very first date. Sadly, fifty years to the day – January 3, 2018 – Juanita died. But sandwiched into those 50 years were so many remarkable moments that will be a part of the family memory book forever.



Juanita's family had a long history in the Keys... as she was the daughter of Warren and Virginia Russell, and the great-great-granddaughter of Richard H. Russell and Mary Ann Russell, who came to Islamorada from Key West in 1854 as one of the community's founding families.

After high school it took just a year of college for Ken to decide that college was not for him and off he went to the U.S. Coast Guard boot camp... right in the midst of the Vietnam War. Initially he was scheduled to head for Vietnam and a stint on a riverboat, boats often considered target practice for the Vietcong. His two years of Spanish at Coral Shores may have saved him. He thinks when the Coast Guard saw his familiarity with Spanish that they changed his orders and sent him to the Cutter Diligence in Key West. The Coast Guard was responsible for the interdiction of Cuban refugees and protecting U.S. from Cuban threats. Ken was thrilled... he would be close to the love of his life... Juanita.

Ken valued his time in the Coast Guard, quickly advancing because of his proficiencies on the water. He ended up an E-9 (Master Chief) and was the youngest chief in the history of the Coast Guard. In 1973 when he returned home to Islamorada after serving his four years, he joined the Coast Guard Reserve. Back in 1973 the Coast Guard Station in

Islamorada was a 12-man houseboat with one reservist. The current station was built in 1976. Ken remained in the reserve for 30 years.

His real love and fulltime profession has always been his backcountry guiding. The name Ken Knudsen and his boat, the Hubba Hubba, developed a great reputation in the fishing world. Ken seemed to have endless energy and determination to help his community. In addition to his time as a reservist with the Coast Guard, Ken was a volunteer firefighter in Islamorada from 1973 – 1977, just the beginning of community service that seemed to run in the family. For several years he volunteered at a weeklong muscular dystrophy camp. His friendship with a young camper, Darryl, has continued as Ken brings joy to the life of a severely handicapped young man in a wheelchair, taking him out fishing every couple months for the last 17 years. While Darryl does not talk, his smile when fishing on the Hubba Hubba says everything.



On the 3<sup>th</sup> of July, 1976, Ken married the love of his life, that lovely blond, Juanita, in a beautiful red, white and blue bicentennial wedding ceremony at the Matecumbe United Methodist Church... “Juanita’s Church” as Ken called it... the church where she had gone every Sunday all her life.

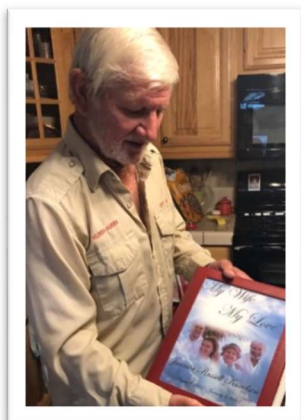
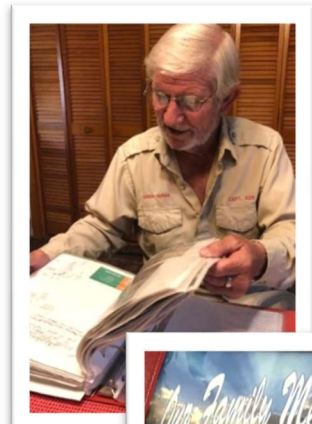


In February 1980, Juanita, almost 10 months pregnant with daughter Richelle, went into labor while Ken was sick as can be with a temperature of 104. Juanita’s mother, Virginia, would take the expectant mother to the hospital in Miami. But Virginia spent the trip laying in the backseat with a horrible migraine headache while Juanita drove herself up the 18 Mile Stretch to the hospital! The arrival of son Kenneth Carl Jr., K.C., three years later was not nearly so dramatic.

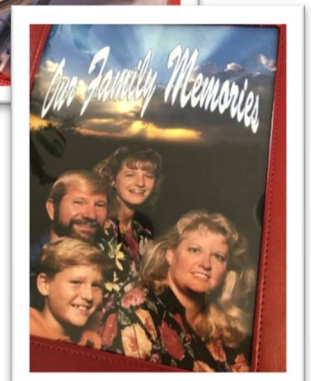
Ken always referred to Juanita as the “family planner,” as she always made certain the details of their life were carefully molded. Juanita worked for numerous local employers early in their marriage. But it was the volunteer efforts for which Juanita was well known and loved. She was a volunteer for 15 years at Island Christian School. For 21 years she was on the board of the Florida Keys Electric Co-op Charitable Trust... established in the 1990s to help fund the needs of those folks in the community who are struggling. Juanita was the perfect person for that... she was always anxious to assist. She served as chairwoman of Boy Scout Troop 914 for 14 years and as leader of Girl Scout Troop 104 for nine years. Knudsen also was active for 60 years with her Islamorada churches, Matecumbe United Methodist Church and Island Community Church.

The role that was without question the one she cherished most – mother and wife. And eventually grandmother too! [Click here](#) to read the 2020 Mother’s Day tribute from Richelle and K.C.

Ken and Juanita had such a happy life.... two extraordinary friends together forever. Ken was energetic and passionate about life and fishing. Juanita loved helping make the community a better place. But the Knudsens’ priority was always family. Ken was so proud of Juanita, the perfect mother and wife. He loved her with all his heart.



After Juanita died in 2018, a broken-hearted Ken wanted to find a way to share the wonders of their life with the kids and grandkids.... A permanent tribute. He decided to write a book of memories to present to the kids as a Christmas gift. The fact that Ken does not use a computer and has arthritis in his hands would not be deterrents. Even when he could only write for minutes at a time, he wrote page after page of the love story he had lived with Juanita. He wrote on lined paper and filled a large three ring notebook... eventually 200 pages of hand-written, poignant emotions.



But when he finished **“My Wife, My Love,”** he felt there was even more to tell. It was the family that made life so rewarding... so many special days together, family trips, fishing together, Cub Scouts and Boy Scouts, Brownies and Girl Scouts, sports. Ken set about to tell story after story of special family times.... **“My Family Memories”** this time another 150 hand-written pages of love and pride.

The book details so many incredible family trips to places across the country as well as a dream trip with Juanita to Norway to see the land of Ken’s ancestors. Perhaps most memorable are the pages and pages detailing the fishing exploits of Richelle and K.C.

When the kids were growing up, the Metropolitan South Florida Fishing Tournament (The Met) was considered the world's largest and most respected fishing event. It ran from December to May and included dozens of eligible species of fresh and saltwater fish in a variety of divisions, which included two divisions especially for youngsters.

Back in 1986, when Richelle was still just 5 years old and weighed in at 50 pounds, she was determined to catch “a big fish.” And that she did – a 101 pound lemon shark that she brought in, unassisted, a 2 hour and 10 minute battle, a Met record, and need we mention she made Ken one proud dad. And from that day in 1986 until Richelle and K.C. outgrew the Met youth divisions in 1999, the family set aside every possible Saturday for 5 months each year to have the kids compete in the Met... a real family affair. On Sunday mornings, Rev. Honaker would always tell the congregation at MUMC church services about the kids’ successes the day before.

Not to be outdone, K.C. was determined to land a big shark while still registered as a peewee. Though he had had so many outstanding records, it was the shark record he wanted. At age 9, K.C. was 4’ 5” tall and weighed 73 pounds. Aboard Capt. Roy Lindback’s Tiki, K.C. caught a tiger shark that was 11 ft long and weighed 475 pounds.

Ken’s stories of the kids’ fishing exploits demonstrate the joy and pride that fishing and family provided for the Knudsens. Now there are grandkids... and Ken has so many joyous memories to share with them. His pride seems to explode when he talks of Juanita and the family and all the friends they made along the way!



A family favorite photo – with Juanita – and two of the grandkids. There are two more grandkids and one on the way.