

Van Cadenhead

was born July 11, 1948 at Marine Corps Air Station Cherry Point, North Carolina, son of Master Gunnery Sergeant Thomas R. Cadenhead and First Lieutenant Elaine Cadenhead, delivered by Dr. Leon J. Tune, or so his birth certificate claims.



And so Van's early years were spent at a variety of military facilities from Jacksonville, to Memphis, to Pensacola, to Opa-Locka.

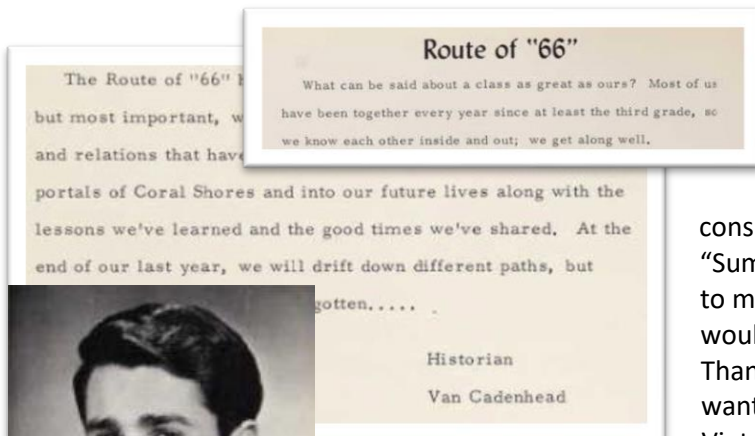
When discussing his early years, Van remembers a day in Opa-Locka when his father, then a Marine Corps nuclear weapon expert, took him to see a nuclear bomb on the military base. Van laughs when he claims that experience was what turned him into a hippie. That huge black bomb, and the thought of what it could do, was terrifying to a 5 year-old.

It was in 1956 when his parents retired and the family moved to the Florida Keys where his father operated the Mandalay Fishing Camp at MM98 in Key Largo. It was those early years in the Keys when Van learned to love the environment and perhaps most of all the underwater world he learned to explore.

The stories of Van's childhood are certainly unique and explain his diverse talents. He learned the fundamentals of carpentry at age 5 from his uncle when he stayed with him when his father was shipped off to Korea. He learned diving techniques when he worked for the famous treasure hunter, **Art McKee**, for \$.25 an hour mowing grass and working on his boat, the Treasure Princess, starting at age 8. A few years later he worked as an assistant photographer to the world famous underwater **Jerry Greenberg** while he was chronicling "Key Largo Reef: America's First Undersea Park," the cover story about John Pennekamp State Park for National Geographic's January 1962 edition.

Van spent a summer in California as a stunt double for Tommy Kirk (from the "Spin and Marty," Mickey Mouse Club series) in the movie "Catalina Capers."

Van graduated from Coral Shores High School in 1966 in a class of 42 students. The yearbook his senior year contains several multi-page stories about the class of '66 written by Van... philosophical then, just like today.



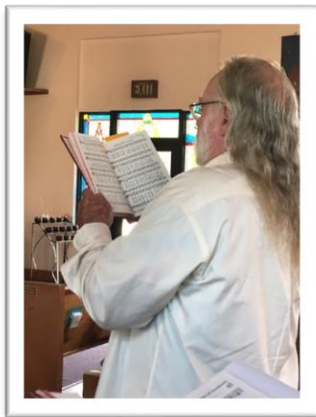
Following Coral Shores, Van went to Indian River College. And then came the summer of 1967 – known in history as "The Summer of Love" in the hippie world. Though Van always considered himself that hippie... it was a "Summer of Boot Camp" for him as he wanted to make sure that his military parents always would be proud to have him home for Thanksgiving dinner... something he'd just not want to miss. He didn't want to kill any Vietnamese so he joined the Navy and became a sonar technician.

Van put in four years in the Navy and then returned to his life in the Florida Keys. He first lived in Key West, a city he loves. He worked for Mel Fisher during the early years of Fisher's quest to find the wreck site of the Nuestra Senora de Atocha which sank in 1622. Van left the treasure salvor two weeks before Mel lost his son and daughter-in-law when their boat capsized and sank in 1975... and long before Fisher discovered the wreck in July 20, 1985 with its estimated \$450 million cache known as "The Atocha Motherlode." But while Van was diving with Fisher in 1975, they were already on the trail of the Atocha... finding gold coins, gold chains, a sword and whistle where the ship had broken up and was dragged by the 1622 hurricanes.

As a young man just out of the military, Van was married and had a young daughter. He needed to find a job that paid better than treasure hunting, so off to the Upper Keys he went to find work in the construction industry putting his carpentry fundamentals to work... first learned as a young child. To be able to live in the Florida Keys, he often worked more than one job at a time. Van worked on dive boats at Holiday Isle in Islamorada and at the Holiday Inn in Key Largo. And he was a scuba instructor.

What about his music? That started when he entered first grade at W. J. Bryan Elementary school in Miami. There was an audience of 500 when Van started first grade and the young students were invited to come up on stage to entertain classmates. Van immediately headed for the stage. The music teacher asked if he would like her to accompany him on the piano – "No, I will sing a cappella." And he sang the only song he knew from beginning to end – the Marine Corp Hymn... "From the Halls of Montezuma, To the shores of Tripoli..." Van loved the applause and attention and thus began his love of performing.

At age 14 Van played at Sunday jam sessions at the Caribbean Club in Key Largo and at 16 he started a band, the Velvetones," while a junior at Coral Shores High School. He was the lead singer for his growing band, often entertaining classmates with the likes of "Hang on Sloopy" and the popular Beatle's songs during the time period when "[Beatlemania](#)" was raging.



In the late 1970s, Van sang at some of the local venues, like Papa Joe's. Soon he added other musicians and they became known as the Matecumbe Minstrels... and he called himself Dr. Tune... yes, after Dr. Leon J. Tune who delivered him in 1948.

Van also is well known around Islamorada for his outspoken political views. Ever since Islamorada incorporated, Van Cadenhead frequents Village Council meetings, speaking up during Public Comment, in his attempt to be a voice of reason in his determination to save every tree possible and to assure development is handled appropriately when it comes to protecting our environment and the legacy of Keys residents... often bringing his guitar and singing his own musical parodies to get his points across.

Church... he attends numerous churches in the Keys from time to time since he believes that "all prayer goes to the same place no matter which church." He especially likes the Matecumbe United Methodist Church since he knows so many of the people in the congregation. And we sure love Van... and his guitar.