



## Tuneful talents shape ex-Californian's life

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By Elizabeth Lowe

elowe@theburtonnews.com • 810.766.6281

BURTON - If Dave Kimber seems to hail from a planet of talent and unabashed ambition, blame his Hollywood roots.

If he seems an unlikely Burton transplant, blame his wife.

Remember the sing-song phrase "Give a hoot, don't pollute," made famous by Woodsy Owl in the 1970s?

So does most of over-30 America, thanks to Kimber, now 59, who helped write and record the song Dec. 7, 1971.

"Music is just in me," Kimber said. "If there's such a thing as a gift, that's my gift. I can't think of a time I haven't played."

Growing up in Los Angeles, Kimber inherited a love for music from his mother, a performer on radio shows of the 1930s and '40s, such as "The Lucky Strike Hour." He began playing piano at 6, but his hero was Mouseketeer drummer Carl "Cubby" O'Brien.

"I lived about an hour from Disneyland and wanted to be a Mouseketeer in the worst way," Kimber said. "I think that's why I wanted to play the drums. I ended up taking lessons from Hack O'Brien, who turned out to be Cubby's father and later ended up buying Cubby's drum set."

It was the first in a series of star-sightings for the California surfer boy.

Kimber and his brother, Danny, were in constant trouble with their music teacher, Tom Fox Jr. The boys didn't realize Fox was the son of the late Dale Evans, until Kimber noticed Evans one day while riding his bike through his teacher's neighborhood. It didn't change his relationship with their teacher, though.

"I was still a real pain in the butt," he said.

Danny, who gained fame as co-author on several of Leo Buscaglia's books, was seated next to Evans at a dinner years later.

"Isn't Tom Fox your son?" Danny asked. "Give him a message from the Kimber brothers - just tell him we're sorry."

Kimber's hair grew as fast as his musical aspirations during the hippie era. But he didn't make it to Woodstock.

"I was seriously sick, paralyzed in the hospital during Woodstock," Kimber said. "I was a great surfer, skier, I never thought about not walking. Then all of a sudden it was all I thought about. It was really scary."

It took him eight months to recover from the mysterious illness and leave his wheelchair behind. He emerged with a new appreciation for life, which had begun an upward spiral.

### QUICK TAKE

Give a hoot

- To hear the Woodsy

Owl song, see a photograph of Dave Kimber and to hear another song, go to [www.mlive.com/flintjournal.com/extra](http://www.mlive.com/flintjournal.com/extra) and look the Woodsy Owl entry.

His band Maggie signed a contract with MGM Records, and he got involved in the Woodsy Owl campaign to reduce pollution through the U.S. Department of Agriculture's Forest Service. Kimber helped a family friend pen the music and his band recorded "The Ballad of Woodsy Owl."

The song broke up the band, whose other members called it "cheesy," but Kimber was optimistic, handing out Woodsy products every chance he got.

Since Kimber's synthesizer work and job at a prominent California music store brought him in frequent contact with stars such as Frank Zappa, Linda Ronstadt and Joni Mitchell, he'd roped them into service by having them pose with a poster or Woodsy sheet music to promote the campaign.

The one person who stands out among the noteworthies he met in the music store was a fellow musician in the market for a piano. Her name was Pam Ballge and she was the daughter of a Burton Girl Scout leader.

They married Aug. 17, 1979, and moved to Australia shortly afterward. There, Kimber wrote network theme tunes as music director of Australia's Channel 7, a sister company to NBC. The couple returned to the U.S. in 1989, settling in Pam's hometown of Burton.

While Genesee County doesn't offer the same career lineup as Hollywood or Australia, Kimber has carved out a niche. Inspired by his wife - who's now an award-winning literacy educator at Atherton High School - he returned to college to earn his master's degree in education.

"I had no idea how hard it was," said Kimber, who now teaches sixth-grade history at Flint's Neithercut Elementary. "I almost quit the first year."

Kimber said the best day of his life was 13 years ago when his daughter Allison was born.

"I waited a long time for her."

Allison and Simon, 6, have inherited their parent's talent, said Kimber, and the family's life has become a whirlwind of violin and cello lessons and activities.

On weekends, Kimber performs with his band "Rodeo Drive" at Sherman's Lounge in Flint Township and composes music at night.

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