



## Jim Kanas: By Kelly Prindle World Class Musician and Father

By Kelly Prindle

Jim Kanas has been described as "world class" by five-time Grammy Award winner, Victor Wooten and the Tribune calls Kanas "a master". Who is this guitarist/multi-instrumentalist who lives amongst us here in Ogle County? Why did WTTW, channel 11, come out to Kings to do a feature on Jim?

You can read more about Jim and his music on his website, [www.jimkanas.com](http://www.jimkanas.com), but what you won't read on his website is that Jim is a "world class" single parent to Sarah (15), who has Asperger's and epilepsy and twins Dustin and Brooke (11). I am a fan of Jim Kanas' musical talent, as a performer and educator, but I am even more in awe of his skill at juggling his professional life and family life, since the death of his beloved wife, Claudia.



Jim and Claudia Kanas had been married 22 years (together 32) at the time of Claudia's death. As a friend, I witnessed the love and care Jim provided to Claudia during her almost four-year illness of living with ovarian cancer. Much like the music he composes, produces and plays, it was beautiful and inspiring.

Yes, Jim is in a class of his own, whether he is devoting time to his family or as a performing musician. These days, Jim is almost consumed by his inherited roll as "mom/dad," but has managed to be at the top of his game as a guitarist. He has kids who consistently make the honor roll and stay active in music, sports, and clubs. In addition, he takes care of his daughter who has special needs.

### How does he do it? How did he cope?

**KP:** What were your first thoughts when you learned of Claudia's illness?

**JK:** My first two thoughts were 1) I want to quit playing music and 2) I need to talk to my insurance guy. Only number two transpired.

**KP:** Why do you think you wanted to quit playing guitar? I am grateful that you didn't by the way.

**JK:** I don't think many or most successful men realize how responsible their partner is for their success. In my profession in particular, I deal with emotions. There is lots of physical and intellectual, but what is really comes down to is feeling and expression. The loss of my life-partner really impacted my feelings. Some would argue that in the long-run, because of her death, she has continued to influence my art form by giving me more life experience to convey and draw upon.

**KP:** Do you believe that?

**JK:** I believe there is an element of truth to it.

**KP:** I do, too. I have heard that said about singers, so why not musicians? You and I have talked about "the grieving process". Is there something in particular you would like to share with our readers—unique to your own experience?

**JK:** I was in anticipatory grief before she passed and I did not know it. I was listening to a radio interview with a serviceman's wife and she was describing what I was experiencing at the time. She was describing various scenarios that might be if her loved one was killed. That is when I realized I was preparing myself before she (Claudia) was gone. It was difficult because we both did everything possible to prolong life. I believe this positive attitude along with great medical attention did add years to her life and a memory for the children. It was quite a fight.

**KP:** Yes, it was. I don't ever remember Claudia complaining... about anything! What about the children? They are doing remarkable well, aren't they?

**JK:** Yeah, Dustin, Brook and Sarah are the true living heroes here. Their mother was quite a model for us. She was incredibly brave and strong—more that I can describe. She gave her life for the kids in every imaginable and unimaginable way.

**KP:** I know. I will never forget the elaborate Halloween costumes Claudia made for all the kids. Even when she was so sick for her recording/reading *T'was The Night Before Christmas* for the kids.

**JK:** Even though she is gone, she still influences them.



Claudia with their children: Sarah, Dustin and Brooke

**KP:** How so?

**JK:** She set values to adhere by. I can easily refer to her and "what mom would do" in day-to-day living, and for special circumstances or challenges. She left a "way of being" so to speak.

**KP:** That's beautiful. Okay, so tell us some of your day-to-day routines and how you go about it?

**JK:** I think farm living sets a good example. The kids take part in every aspect of taking care of things that they are ready for and can succeed at. Yesterday, Dustin was 15 feet up a tree hanging on with one hand and sawing limbs with the other. It might sound extreme and dangerous but he and I knew he was ready for it. Brooke is a big player in our family and seems to take care of everyone including me, but she requires lots of attention and keeps losing cell phones. Sarah, even with her special needs gets more independent each day and keeps track of her own medicine schedule. She is a big fan of *Cybershase*, a PBS show and has an active imagination. She refers to her mom all the time but in a healthy way. Dinner is like a chow line and they eat whole foods. I like to cook. I have literally not set the table for at least three years. The kids do it. They fold all the clothes and each have jobs to do to keep the house clean. Having said that, they also have active social lives and laugh a lot.

**KP:** Wow! What about you? How do you keep going?

**JK:** At first I over-compensated by keeping an ambitious performance schedule, but I am still searching for the balance of work and family I used to have. The kids travel with me often and we take turns going "on tour". I drop them off at their grandparents (Yiayia and Papou's) sometimes for the weekend, but not that often. My mom and dad's nicknames reflect our Greek-American Heritage. The kids also spend time with friends when I work. My 15-year-old would YouTube or work on her creative writing rather than go with me. I have been more stressed lately with a busy schedule, but still find time to ride my motorcycle, bicycle and enjoy life. I am also in a long-distance relationship now.

**KP:** So, have your career goals changed now?

**JK:** Yes. I knew right after Claudia passed that I had two choices. 1) I could self-destruct or 2) I had to find opportunities. I chose the latter. I look at the glass and see if half full. I had to decide what was most important in my career and prioritize. I had to find alternatives to achieve my goals, including delegating to produce and promote. Early on, I had the opportunity to explore a broad scope of skills and various aspects to music (thank you Claudia) but after she passed, it was time for me to narrow things down. My main emphasis has always been guitar and it seems like everything I have done has been to serve my guitar playing. I have played many other instruments to sustain myself as a sideman and soloist. Now I focus on guitar and maintain my other skills. I don't do much recording for others anymore and my traveling educational programming has been somewhat replaced with conventional teaching.

**KP:** Plus, you play locally.

**JK:** Yes! A number of years ago before Claudia passed, we were in Aldo's for dinner with the family. I was so impressed with the uniqueness and hospitality at Aldo's that I offered to play on a regular basis. I needed a place close to home to work on new material and I felt it was a good fit. Aldo was smart enough to recognize a good thing, if I do say so myself. I love it there. Aldo and his family have taken me in, and we have a win-win situation. I usually play a couple times a month on Thursday. This schedule is maintained on my website.

**KP:** Finally Jim, what does the future hold in store for you both musically and personally?

**JK:** Well, personally I 'd like to see my personal relationships continue to grow. I'd like to find more time to contribute to the local community, but that is a tough one. Professionally, I need more time to record, perform, and promote and as the kids get older, the time is gradually coming to me. My playing is really good right now, and I need people to need what I'm doing and enjoy it. I need to make it happen.

**KP:** You will!

**JK:** God willin' and the creek don't rise.

Jim performs both in solo and group formats. His music takes you on a musical journey through American roots music like no other. He weaves various genres and an assortment of instruments and even offers a glimpse of "straight ahead" jazz guitar. Jim's instruments include guitars, fiddle, banjo, dobro, harmonica, and Native American flute in his narrated solo performance. He sings and combines bluegrass, swing, blues folk, and other elements to bring a musical montage of American roots music. It is a concert for the entire family and one that you will surely never forget.





The son of an engineer, Jim started playing guitar in 1967 at the age of 11 but, was already immersed in music prior to that through school music programs. At an early age, he was in the company of well-known musicians including, Pat Metheny and George Benson. He grew up in the same town that Muddy Waters resided in (Westmont and later zoned Darien). He has jammed with Alison Krause, Steve Goodman, the Nashville Cats, Harvey Reid, and others. Jim still resides in Kings with his three children. ■



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