

Obituary

Constance Elizabeth Gates 1948—2020



Constance (Connie) Gates completed her earthly life on October 19 after a short bout with advanced cancer.

She was born in Los Angeles, California, on March 21, 1948 to Rev. Dr. Elbert "Pearly" Gates and June Davies Gates. At age 11, Connie moved with her family to Hong Kong while her father headed Church World Service's work with refugees. After five years the family moved to Mystic, Connecticut, where she graduated from Fitch High School. She then attended Colby College in Waterville, Maine, from which she graduated in 1969. Following that she completed one year of training at the Kathryn Gibbs Secretarial School in New York City.

From 1970-1973 Connie worked as Secretary for Publications of the Christian Medical Commission of the World Council of Churches in Geneva, serving as the founding editor of the renowned magazine on community-oriented primary health care, *Contact*. It was during that time that she met Drs. Raj and Mabelle Arole, founders of the Jamkhed Comprehensive Rural Health Project in India along with many other luminaries in global primary health care, including Dr. Carl Taylor and Dr. Jack Bryant, who became lifelong friends.

Connie also worked in Hong Kong and Kimpese, Zaire (now D.R. Congo) before moving in 1978 to Chapel Hill, North Carolina, to complete her master's degree in public health from the University of North Carolina in 1978. She worked with migrant farm workers in North Carolina for the next 14 years (1979-1993). From 1993 to 1997 she worked with the health ministries of the United Methodist Church and the National Council of Churches, based in New York City.

Beginning in 1997, Connie served as International Training Coordinator of the world renowned Jamkhed Comprehensive Primary Health Care Project (<https://www.jamkhedcrhp.org/>) in Jamkhed, India, for six months a year from 1997 until the time of her death. There she worked tirelessly with trainees from around the world who had come to Jamkhed to learn. She facilitated and coordinated training programs for students, as well as supported groups coming there to learn about community-based primary health care. During her time supporting Jamkhed CRHP, the program received 45,000 trainees – 42,000 from India and 3,000 from more than 100 countries around the world.

The other six months of each year, she spent in Chapel Hill, NC, where she was a member of two congregations, Olin T. Binkley Memorial Baptist Church and Community Church of Chapel Hill (UU), progressive congregations where she served in multiple groups, always working for social justice and providing assistance to vulnerable members of the community, especially immigrant children and refugees. When Connie was in Chapel Hill, she made her “office” at Vimala's Curryblossom Café, run by her dear friend Vimala Rajendran, whose life was transformed by her visit to Jamkhed in 2009. She also participated in Ragging Grannies International protests locally.

Connie was a founding member of Christian Connections for International Health (in 1988), a founding member of the Working Group on Community-based Primary Health Care of the International Health Section of the American Public Health Association (in 1993), a founding member of the Spirit of Alma-Ata Caucus of the Global Health Council, a member of the People's Health Movement, and Chair of the National Ecumenical Action of Church Women United. She was also active in the CORE Group, an association of organizations and individuals working to strengthen community health programs around the world. From 2013 to 2016, she also worked with the International Ministries of American Baptist Churches USA as a Special Assistant to Promote Primary Health Care in Asia.

In 2018 Connie received the Gordon-Wyon Award for Excellence in Community-Oriented Public Health, Epidemiology and Practice of the International Health Section of the American Public Health Association. Just before her death, Connie was notified that Christian Connections for International Health had named her its Christian International Health Champion for 2020.

She was a long-time member of the American Public Health Association, its International Health Section, and its CBPHC Working Group. She made many presentations over the years at international conferences, mostly about Jamkhed. She was an advocate for

community empowerment, for women's and children's health, and for the marginalized and underserved around the world. Her mentorship of those early in their careers who had a nascent interest in community-oriented public health has been perhaps Connie's greatest contribution.

Our world needs more "quiet champions" like Connie who offer support and provide on-the-ground training experiences to enable people to breathe, touch, and see first-hand what community health really can be.

Connie's parents and her brother Elbert (Ted) Gates 3rd predeceased her. She is survived by her sister Carol Morschhauser (and her husband David) of Mystic, Connecticut, one niece and one nephew.

A memorial service will be held on-line at 11:00 AM EST on Wednesday, October 21. The Zoom link is

<https://us02web.zoom.us/j/7097229400?pwd=Umw4dUtYajF6T0daTUljOXNlclRNQT09>, passcode: 938242. Contact Henry Perry at hperry2@jhu.edu or 443-797-5202 if further assistance is needed.

In lieu of flowers, tax-deductible gifts in Connie's memory can be given to the Curryblossom Foundation (<https://curryblossomfoundation.org/>), 244 Indian Trail Road, Chapel Hill, North Carolina 27514, USA. At Connie's request, one-half of these gifts will go to the Jamkhed Comprehensive Rural Health Project and the other half will be used to support feeding the hungry and different local groups doing peace and justice work. Gifts should be designated in memory of Connie Gates.