

Introduce Yourself

What's Your Story?

Hi, I'm Connie Bennett. I've been a member of Temple Emanuel since about 1960. I was born and reared in Ohio, but California's been my home since college at USC. I truly feel my roots are deeply sunk into our adobe soil. My Jewishness is quite linear – I started Sunday school classes in first grade in a reform temple in Akron. I still take classes here with hardly a break.



Connie Bennett

The most powerful Jewish influence in my life was my grandfather, Rabbi Berthold Kleinberg, the one and only rabbi in Ashtabula, Ohio (no, I didn't make up that name, honestly). I'm still amazed at how often a word, a melody of a chant, a biblical story or a bit of philosophy will zap me back mentally to grandpa's porch swing on a sunny Shabbos afternoon. There we'd sit together, happily discussing his morning sermon.

My professional life could best be described as continuous studying and teaching. I graduated college on a Wednesday and got married the following Sunday. Within weeks I found myself in Germany where my husband was serving in the armed forces. In a way I was drafted as well. The American independent school put me to work teaching children of the U.S. military. Later, in the states, I continued to teach but also went back to school. While working on my master's in liberal arts at USC, I taught fourth and fifth grades in Beverly Hills. I also substitute taught every subject and grade—yes, even auto mechanics and football!

I loved to travel. Even as a little girl I wanted to see the world. That led me to a second concurrent profession as a tour director and cruise host. With a certificate from the International Tour Management Institute in San Francisco, I began escorting groups, by land and by sea, to places that had enflamed my imagination. I started with three back-to-back tours of fall foliage in New England. I led groups to the Caribbean and South America in the winter. The spring meant Australia and New Zealand. I saved summer for our national parks, the West, Canada, whatever sounded exciting. In between I taught school.

On occasion I had to look at a calendar to re-anchor time and place. What month was this? Which holiday was coming up? A few of the special skills I acquired in my travels were the ability to eat any meal at any hour of the day or night and to enjoy coffee of any temperature, from scalding to tepid, particularly if it's some shade of brown or black.

Another unexpected bonus of my life is that neither my sons nor my grandchildren are surprised at anything I do. I tease them that if I told them I was escorting the next rocket to Mars one of them would remind me to take a sweater because it might be cold there.

I'm delighted with the concept and the reality of ChaiVillageLA and send my thanks to all those who work so hard to contribute to my enjoyment.