

Introduce Yourself

What's Your Story?

Hi, I'm Ellen Isaacs, one of the original organizers of ChaiVillageLA. I look forward to meeting you!



Ellen Isaacs

In 1960, my parents bravely uprooted from New York and moved my brother and me to north Orange County, CA for my Dad's new job at Hughes Aircraft working on space program projects. There was one synagogue in all of Orange County, and I think my parents saw it as a life raft in a sea of unfamiliar faces, palm trees, desert plants, stucco homes, and freeways. I went to Cornell University and graduated with a French history major (so I could spend junior year living in France), and an English minor. I became a lawyer because I couldn't figure out how to make a living as a writer. I tried 27 jury trials over three years in the DA's Office, worked in real estate litigation, and schemed about ways to move to LA from OC. I craved diversity, and the attractions of big city life.

Finally, my moment came: I took a job working for the LA Olympic Organizing Committee in 1984 directing services for over 2,000 technical officials (referees, umpires, linesmen) from 140 countries in 26 sports. That got me to LA. Several other gratifying jobs followed: In 1989, I worked at Public Counsel (the public interest law office of the Beverly Hills and LA County Bar Associations) where I started and ran one of only two affordable housing projects in the country, matching community-based nonprofits with pro bono legal services from major law firms to help them build housing for their constituencies. The vice chancellor of student affairs at UCLA hired me to conduct outreach to, and negotiation with, underserved school districts and local community-based organizations so UCLA could provide resources for after-school programs and teacher development. I served as transportation deputy for former Assemblymember Mike Feuer, in whose office I helped draft legislation that enabled LA County Metro to put a ½-cent tax for transportation on the ballot. (I also learned why subways can be safe places in an earthquake.)

Some lifetime highlights:

- Meeting my husband, getting engaged, selling my house, buying our house, getting married, and getting pregnant with our first child – all in one year!
- Winning third place playing piano in an LA County Bach Festival
- Learning Spanish one word at a time with a family in Bogota, Colombia as a 16-year-old AFS student.
- Drinking shark soup at the night market in Hong Kong.
- Meeting Itzhak Perlman at an apartment in Tokyo hosted by a couple who escaped the Holocaust by way of Shanghai.
- Meeting the President of West Germany in Berlin with a Jewish delegation from Los Angeles.
- Running the LA Marathon at 49.
- Helping to start ChaiVillageLA!

When I have free time, I enjoy writing, reading (most recent book read – *Exit West* by Mohsin Hamid), traveling to and/or living in new places (most recent trip - Galapagos Islands), listening to music of all kinds, except Phillip Glass, reggae and country western (although 'Crazy' by Patsy Cline and 'Folsom Prison Blues' by Johnny Cash are great). I like to attend dance and theatre performances, shows at 'alternative' venues, art exhibits, and movies. I love sports. Thirty years ago, I ran 5 miles a day. Now I walk and pretend to jog. I adore a rare dinner out with my family and exploring LA with friends (Echo Park pedal boats! Thomas Payne Foundation Native California Plants!). I look forward to more adventures in the future.