

## Introduce Yourself: Renee Cronenwalt

### What's Your Story?



Hello, my name is Renee Cronenwalt. I started the 80's+ Group for ChaiVillageLA two years ago. I am now 90. I found that ChaiVillageLA offered many wonderful activities in which I could not participate because of physical limitations, but I certainly could organize a monthly salon for people in their 80's and older. That's exactly what I did. My very close friend, Barbara Weinstock, agreed to co-chair the group with me. Barbara is from Temple Emanuel, I'm from Temple Isaiah. Together, we keep it going.

About 20-25 of us meet each time, usually in each other's homes. We enjoy light refreshments and talk about the news or politics or personal issues or upcoming trips. Rabbi Zoe often joins us. Recently she led a discussion on the High Holy Days and their relevance at this stage in our lives. She's been generous with her time. The 80's+ group is like a chavurah, a place for friendship, community and stimulating conversation.

Organizing is something I enjoy. The skill serves me well. It was the common thread through a variety of my careers, each with a surprising and delightful twist.

I was born in Newark, New Jersey. My family moved to the Beverly-Fairfax area when I was 5, and later I attended Fairfax High. I fully intended to go into social work. That was the plan after I got my bachelor's in psychology at UCLA and my master's in liberal arts at USC. But when I heard I needed to wait two-three months for an available position, I took what I thought was a temporary job at the old Ohrbach's Department Store in L.A.'s Miracle Mile.

They needed a comparison shopper. That's the person who compares prices at competing retail stores to get the best deals with vendors. I had no idea there was such a thing. Yet with some well-honed chutzpah, I bluffed my way into the job. When the social worker position came through, I turned it down. I realized I loved the fashion industry. That decision changed the course of my life.

Ohrbach's hired me permanently and promoted me. That led to my getting hired by what was then Grayson Robinsons Chain Stores. Eventually I moved up to sportswear buyer.

During all of this, I married my husband, Jay (known as Bud). When I got pregnant, lo and behold, I lost my job because Grayson's didn't want pregnant buyers. Then Bud, who had an auto repair business, decided to become a salesman of women's ready to wear. Together we opened a showroom in the California Mart and for many years I worked with my husband, running the office. Bud's interests then morphed into real estate. I got a real estate license to work with him. We had such a good time together. We always found time to travel the world.

One thing always leads to another. I spent the next decade buying furniture and interior decorating for Hathaway Home for Children in Lakeview Terrace. Then we had our second child. My son is in the tech field and my daughter is an attorney.

One of the more important and productive parts of my history involved opening and establishing a West Coast chapter of the Israel-New York-based America-Israel Cultural Foundation. The mission of the AICF is to award grants and scholarships to promising Israeli artists. We primarily brought in young musicians from Israel and we had concerts in public venues and private homes. I had the great honor of working with violinist Isaac Stern who was president of AICF. I spent 10 wonderful years with this organization.

Eventually I retired. But I continued serving on several boards: the Los Angeles Jewish Federation; Aviva Family and Children's Services; and Jewish Family Services. While at JFS, I created the Los Angeles Jewish Aids Services and did fundraising for them.

Bud has been gone now for six years. I'm still very busy enjoying my children and my grandson and traveling with them. I love to play bridge and go to the movies and dine with friends. I'm very fortunate.