

# CONNIE Regan-Blake

## Short Bio

Connie Regan-Blake is one of America's most celebrated storytellers. She has captivated the hearts and imaginations of people around the globe with her powerful performances and workshops. Entertaining audiences in 47 states, 18 countries, and 6 continents she brings the wisdom, humor, and drama of stories to main stage concert halls, libraries, and into the corporate world.

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## Full Bio

Growing up in the American South, Connie's family introduced her at an early age to the joy of stories, both telling and listening. At family gatherings, they would sometimes start telling tales at breakfast and find themselves still around the table at lunchtime.

After graduating from Loyola University in New Orleans, Connie took her hard earned wages from summer waitressing and bought a one-way ticket to Belgium. With only a backpack and her sense of adventure, she traveled throughout Europe for over a year.

Upon her return to America, Connie landed in Chattanooga, TN where her first-cousin, Barbara Freeman, opened the door to storytelling for her by way of a job at the Chattanooga Public Library. Then in 1975, Connie and Barbara quit their beloved library jobs and hit the road in their yellow pickup truck. As "The Folktellers," the duo toured the country thrilling audiences with this emerging art form of performance storytelling. Their original two-woman play, *Mountain Sweet Talk*, holds the record as Asheville, NC's longest running theatrical production.

Connie helped to ignite and shape the American storytelling revival. She was a founding board member of the National Storytelling Association (formerly NAPPS) and continues to be a frequent host and featured performer at the National Festival in Jonesborough, Tennessee. It is through this community that Connie met her dear friend and mentor, Ray Hicks, the "giant" of traditional, Appalachian storytelling. His stories and his wisdom continue to have a great impact on Connie's storytelling and life.

After a rich, flourishing partnership as The Folktellers, Connie and Barbara embarked on new journeys as solo performers. Connie has continued to enjoy sharing the stage with other artists. In 1995, Connie was invited by The Kandinsky Trio to help create and perform, *Tales of Appalachia: Stories and Chamber Music*. This innovative work, composed by Mike Reid, interweaves storytelling and classical music. With over 350 performances, this collaborative touring show has been hailed as "a new art form."

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Connie's rare talent can transform a convention hall into a wondrous landscape and turn a packed theater into an intimate circle of friends. Throughout her career, she has performed at the nation's top folk music and storytelling festivals, including the Smithsonian Folklife Festival in Washington D.C., the Timpanogos Storytelling Festival in Orem, Utah, and the National Storytelling Festival in Jonesborough, Tennessee. (It is Connie's unique honor to be the only performer invited onstage for every NSF since its conception in 1973!) She has received the trifecta of "Oracle Awards", including the *Distinguished National Service*, the *Circle of Excellence*, and the *Lifetime Achievement Award*.

Connie has also been honored recently by the Library of Congress. In recognizing her as a leading central figure in America's storytelling revival, that prestigious institution has asked to house the compilation of her life's work as a storyteller. It is to include papers, sound recordings, moving images, photographs and artifacts that document Connie's 40+ year career as well as the birth and beginnings of the American Storytelling Revival. Eventually all her materials will be accessible online in the "Connie Regan-Blake Collection".

For more than a decade, Connie has been an active community partner with Bead for Life, a nonprofit that empowers Ugandan woman by giving them a helping hand so that they can pull themselves out of poverty. She is passionate about bringing these women's stories to life.

Today, Connie continues to tour, entertain, and educate as a performer, coach, and workshop leader. Her original workshops, from 3 hours to 7 days, are available for booking locally as well as throughout the US and beyond. She also offers a series of them online as well as in her hometown of Asheville, NC. Her workshops and her one-on-one coaching encourage, instruct and challenge participants to discover and tell their story with great presence and connection to listeners - be they family, audience members, corporate staff and more.

Connie resides with her husband, Phil in the Blue Ridge Mountains of Asheville, NC. In her free time, she loves to enjoy the beauty of her flower garden, do Crossfit, and create collages. She is a nature-watcher and frequently sights uninvited bears and bobcats around her mountain home.