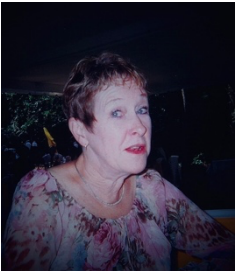


In Memoriam: Connie Rae Johnson

Editor-in-Chief, *MEXTESOL Journal*, 1998-2001¹

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Connie Rae Johnson

Connie Rae Johnson made an indelible mark on the people who knew her. She was born during the summer solstice in Sissonville just outside of Charleston, West Virginia in the Allegheny Mountains. Her soft accent and gentle manners revealed her Southern upbringing. Connie was clearly influenced by her parents; her mom, Nell Rae Johnson and her dad, Adam B. Johnson who was a WWII veteran, were both teachers. She attended Sissonville High School and studied Education at West Virginia State College, only a few miles from home.



Connie and her father, Adam B. Johnson

After a lifetime of living in Charleston, traveling became a big part of Connie's life. She visited or lived in different parts of the U.S., South America, Europe and Africa. After college and time spent as a social worker, in the midst of a Master's program in West Virginia, Connie decided to continue her studies at the University of the Americas, UDLA, in San Andrés Cholula, Puebla, México. In her typical brave fashion, she packed up her belongings and moved. It would be the first of many decisions in her life that would bring her success and earn her the admiration of colleagues, friends and family.

Connie obtained her Master of Arts in TESOL in 1978 and became a full professor at the UDLA's language department the following year. During her time there, she conducted research on CONACYT and INIP projects; published dozens of articles and held various coordination positions, including that of the Language and Applied Linguistics program and the Master's Program in Applied Linguistics. In 2006, Connie obtained her PhD in Language Sciences from the Benemérita Universidad Autónoma de Puebla while also working on a *Diplomado* in Critical Thinking at the UDLA.

At around the same time that Connie became a full professor, she also became involved with MEXTESOL, the Mexican Association of English Teachers. In 1978, she became Second Vice President of the Puebla Chapter; becoming President the following year. After that, her participation in the organization grew. She first held the position of Program Chair for the MEXTESOL National Convention in 1995 and then held the Program and/or Academic Chair positions for the National and International Conventions from 2001 to 2014.

Connie's UDLA colleagues remember her love for MEXTESOL. Even though she had a busy and demanding schedule at the University, she would spend her summers preparing for the various MEXTESOL events which culminated in the annual convention where thousands of teachers would gather to share ideas and experiences, all the while celebrating their profession. It was during these conventions that Connie would shine dashing from one commitment to another, smiling as she went, knowing full well that the time she volunteered was well worth the effort.

Connie once wrote that she was often frightened by new endeavors because she didn't know if she would succeed, but she inevitably did. She began speaking at conferences in universities across Mexico moving on to TESOL in the U.S. and Canada, giving over 100 different presentations in a 30-year span. Later, she expressed trepidation when she initially took charge as Editor of the National MEXTESOL Journal in 1998, but remained in the position until 2001 and stayed on as member of the Editorial Board until 2009.

Connie also expressed the belief that her time in MEXTESOL had helped her grow and had she not had the opportunities to achieve her goals in the association, she would have been a different person. The truth is, the organization would not have achieved the status and prestige it had were it not for the efforts of Connie and people like her. In recognition of her work, Connie was given an award "in appreciation of your

¹ If you would like to read more about Connie's interactions with MJ, we invite you to read her article, *The MEXTESOL Journal: 1999 to 2001 and Beyond My Personal Journey with MEXTESOL*, (2016). *MEXTESOL Journal*, 44(3), http://www.mextesol.net/journal/index.php?page=journal&id_article=1496

outstanding support to the ELT community in Mexico" at the 40th MEXTESOL International Convention in Querétaro in 2013. In 2014, the year Connie retired, her lifetime contribution to the association was acknowledged with a standing ovation from the two thousand plus teachers attending the opening plenary at the MEXTESOL International Convention held in Puebla.

Connie built a life of professional success and made her mark at the Universidad de las Américas, MEXTESOL and the MEXTESOL Journal as well as the other organizations with which she collaborated. However, most people will remember her for being a mentor, a teacher, a friend and a beautiful person.

When she officially retired from the University, her love of teaching led her back to teach part-time. She finally left, only because the pandemic closed down the school; but it wasn't the only place she taught. Connie could go into teacher mode with great ease. One colleague remembers that she

didn't understand what the colloquial expression *yada yada yada* meant and that Connie launched into a master class on both meaning and origin. Her children reminisced about her love of horses; their visit to the International Museum of the Horse in Lexington; and how Connie would talk about Kentucky and its horse culture as they drove through the state on the way to visit her parents. Long family trips were the perfect opportunity for experiencing different cultures, having significant learning experiences and creating fond memories.

Family lore has it that Connie first saw her husband of over four decades, Antonio, while he was riding a horse and that was what drew her to him since she was also an accomplished rider. She learned to ride as a young girl in rural West Virginia and passed on her love of horses to her youngest daughter.



Connie and her horse, *La Tabaca*.

Connie's life was rich, varied and full. She attended Woodstock as a young woman and loved Black Sabbath and Jimi Hendrix, a love she passed on to her son. She traveled with the Ringling Brothers Circus, *The Greatest Show on Earth*, with her older daughter for a time. Her love of linguistics continued in her free time when she attended meetings of *Lenguas Anónimas*, a group of friends who chatted about linguistics—for fun—over drinks. During spring break, she would sell her *tacos de la gringa* at her husband's public pool.

Connie touched many lives. Her children remember her as a courageous woman, a dedicated and loving mother and as a teacher who was greatly respected and appreciated. Others who knew her well have their own warm memories and anecdotes; there will soon be a time when people can share them in person over coffee or a beer.

Connie Rae Johnson died on February 27, 2021 in San Andrés Cholula, Puebla in Mexico. She is survived by her husband, Antonio Lorenzini Bertoni; her children: Kimberly Rae Morgan, Antonio Adam Lorenzini Johnson and Amanda Andrea Lorenzini Johnson; her grandchildren: Scott, Matthew and Dakota; and her great-grandchildren: Aubrey, Tyler, Alex, Henry and Madeleine. May she rest in love and in peace. She will remain firmly in minds and hearts, always.



Connie and her young family.



Left to right: Pia White, Louisa Greathouse, Connie at the 40th International MEXTESOL, Convention in Queretaro, 2016.