

The *Connie Lee* Story

She may have grown up near the tiny town of Urbank and her stature may be on the shorter side, but there's nothing small about Connie Lee Stich.

When she steps her country-kicking cowboy boots on stage, the sound that resonates from within her five-foot, one-inch frame lets the audience know where her passion lies.



Uncle (Davey Stich) & Dad (Ben Stich)

From a very young age, Connie Lee knew what she wanted to do, what she wanted to become. "It was a feeling I've always had," said the now 44-year-old. Born and raised into a musical family, she grew up listening to the sound of country music legends up on the Grand Ole Opry stage in Nashville. She idolized Tammy Wynette, Loretta Lynn and Dolly Parton. Patsy Cline was also a huge influence on her style of singing. "She was so good with ballads," said Connie Lee.

As a young girl, she remembers going out to her back yard, singing to an audience of trees with the rustling branches clapping after each performance.

The stage – her stage – let Connie Lee become someone else instead of the modest young woman who graduated from Parkers Prairie. "I'm in control when I am on the stage. I can be someone different, not the shy girl who used to make her relatives turn toward the wall so they couldn't watch me sing."

Listening to old albums of Merle Haggard, Connie Lee would imagine herself standing beside him on stage singing to her heart's content, not knowing at the time that one day that dream would become a reality.

Her musical career started at the tender age of 3. Connie Lee started singing professionally with her dad, Ben Stich Sr., and three older sisters – Detsie, Sharon and Dory – at weddings, church services, creamery meetings, and other community events.

After several years of singing on the road with her family, Connie Lee went on her own and, at the age of 12, made her very first record in Nashville. At the age of 14, she auditioned for the Grand Ole Opry Road Show in Duluth, making the cut and touring with the show for the next six years. She cut her first album at 16, an age when most teenagers are learning to drive. "Miss You Minnesota" was recorded in Nashville.



Connie & Best-Friend
Chet Atkins

She was in the parking lot of CBS Records with her sister when all of a sudden, they saw Atkins pull in. Mustering all the courage she could, Connie Lee walked up to him and said, "Mr. Atkins, I am Connie Lee and I have something I think you should listen to." His reply, "I'll take your tapes and listen to them."

While in Nashville, trying to make a name for herself, Connie Lee happened to meet country music guitar legend, Chet Atkins.

Still touring with her three older sisters doing country family shows, Connie Lee was always headlining. At the age of 20, she was nominated the "Most Promising Country Female" by the magazine, *Music City News*.



And listen he did.

Over that weekend, Connie got the call she had been waiting for. Atkins heard the sweet sounds of Connie Lee and made an appointment to visit with her. He also booked her on *Ralph Emery's morning television show*, to which she eventually became a regular guest.

She met Atkins when she had just turned 21 years old. Her career, although it started long before, was just taking off the ground. Connie made the move from her small town to the city where country music stars were born – Nashville.

Working side by side with Chet Atkins for 10 years, Connie Lee developed a deep bond with Atkins. He was her best friend and mentor. She still owns cassettes with her and Atkins singing and playing together on them – which is something she will always treasure deep inside her heart.

Working with Atkins also meant working with and meeting many other country music greats, such as Minnie Pearl, George Jones, Conway Twitty, Ronnie Robbins, Charlie Pride, Freddy Fender, Ray Price, Ricky Nelson, Roy Clark, Marty Stuart, Blake Shelton, Ronnie Milsap, Bellamy Brothers, Oak Ridge Boys, Connie Smith, John Conlee, John Anderson, Keith Whitley, Freddie

Hart, The Judds, Tanya Tucker, Tammy Wynette, and of course, Merle Haggard.

Connie Lee was set to open for Merle Haggard at a concert. But she did more than that – she sang with him as one of his backup singers. "He was exactly how I had always pictured him. He didn't let me down," she said of meeting one of her favorite country music artists.

Over the years, Connie Lee recorded six albums. She had a number one record in Europe on the BBC radio charts called "Up This Hill and Down," and in 1995, she even co-hosted the British Country Music Awards for the BBC.



Connie & Dad on stage

With all that Connie Lee has set out to do, one of her greatest accomplishments was on August 30, 2006, when she was inducted into *The Traditional Country Music Hall of Fame* before a crowd of 20,000 guests.

It doesn't matter if she's singing on a large Nashville stage in front of thousands or at a casino in front of hundreds, one thing is for certain – Connie Lee is full of energy, passion and spunk. Whether it's playing an instrument like the piano, guitar, fiddle, mandolin, dobro, steel guitar, auto harp or even the bagpipes she received as a Christmas present, Connie Lee performs from the heart.



Connie Lee and her husband, Kevin Cunningham, who own and operate *Tennessee Roadhouse* in Alexandria, were married in 2005. This event added three children, Mike, Megan and Molly, whom she loves dearly. She still tours and records her music in Nashville, some of her material can be purchased at *Tennessee Roadhouse*. Connie Lee is the daughter of Ben and Rose Stich of Urbank. She has three sisters, Detsie Wagner, Sharon Bitzan and Dory Hammer, and one brother, Ben Stich Jr. *And the music lives on.*



Connie & Kevin
(Husband)