

The society mourns the passing of Christine Roed.



Christine Roed with her granddaughter, Anya Gutman

If you close your eyes and picture Christine Roed, you're picturing someone with a smile. For well over a decade she has been one of the El Cerrito Historical Society's most valuable volunteers, helping to archive our collections, clipping news articles to keep track of history as it happens, and helping out at society events.

It was at those events that she really came into her own, greeting program goers with a warm welcome, cheerfully flagging down passersby to encourage them to learn about history at our booth during the July 4 festivities.

Christine (Kutulas) Roed died June 18 at age 96.

Christine, who taught for many years in the West County school district, also knew about the city's history from living in the area since 1950. Often she would supply details about people, properties, creeks and changes she had seen over the years.

Earlier this year the society honored Christine with a plaque recognizing her contributions to El Cerrito history.

Joann Steck-Bayat, a former officer of the society, worked with Christine and others when the society moved its collection from a musty spot in the basement of the library to our new Shadi history room.

“For me, she was a great help and had such an uplifting spirit when a group of women ten years ago sat in the Shadi room and sorted through and started to catalogue everything that was brought up from the temporary housing spot in the library,” Joann recalled. “We met every Wednesday at 1 p.m. for two hours for more than a year. Those hours were relaxing as we read articles, found a treasure, and the women would tell their El Cerrito stories that related to those finds.”

Christine got involved with the society through a chance meeting with board member Tom Panas. He was manning the society’s booth during the July 4 festival circa 2005 and she was at the next booth. She noticed that his name was Greek and they began speaking. It turned out that their families came from small villages just a few miles apart.

Christine helped Tom translate a book about his family village, which was difficult because parts were written in an archaic form of the language. “She spoke great Greek,” Tom recalls. Christine grew close to Tom’s family, and celebrated Greek holidays with them. “We all called her ‘Thea,’ which is the Greek word for Aunt.”

Barbara Hill, who was the society’s archivist, says Christine did a superb job at organizing. Christine would work two hours every week in the society’s Shadi room, then take files home to organize them further. “If anything in those A-to-Z files is too easy to find, you can thank her,” Barbara says.

Although Christine was not officially an El Cerrito resident (her home was a few doors from the city line), she made the city her home. She was active not only in the Society but with the El Cerrito Garden Club, Christ Lutheran Church and the senior center at the church. With the garden club she helped raise Penny Pine funds to restore forests, Panas says.

Carol Kehoe, who runs the senior center, remembered Christine as a lively woman. “She loved to talk about the historical society, anything Greek, and her daughter and grandchildren.”

Christine attended church faithfully every Sunday, says retired pastor Sharon Lubkeman, a good friend. Both big readers, they would exchange books. “She was so informed in every aspect of life,” the pastor says.

A regular at the Women’s Bible Study, Christine would entertain participants with stories. “She knew Greek, of course, and would inform us what the words in Greek meant, and about the traditions,” Lubkeman says.

“She had a coming of age story,” said Anya Gutman, Christine’s granddaughter.

Christine Kutulas was born in Merced in 1923 and lost her father, who had a shoe repair shop and later a janitorial business, to a stroke when she was 13. “They were very, very poor when her

dad died, and her Mom was distraught,” Anya said. Family provided some help but life was hard. Christine was the oldest of three children followed by brothers Peter and John. The family moved to San Francisco in 1938.



Christine Roed with her brothers, John and Peter

“She had to become the head of the family,” Anya said. “Her strength, independence and resilience definitely can be seen throughout her life. That’s a big part of the reason she has lived so long.”

Christine’s mother later found work in a factory, and Christine herself worked for a men’s clothing store as a teenager, Anya said. After graduating from San Francisco State with majors in social science and education in 1945, Christine began teaching at Roosevelt Junior High in Richmond, commuting from the city.

She met the man she would marry on a bus that each used for their daily commutes. Max Roed worked for the Maritime Commission in charge of supply removal from ships. He and Christine married in 1948. In 1950 they bought the house where she would live for the rest of her life. Max Roed died in 2002.

Christine, who got a masters in social science from SF State in 1957, taught social science, biology and other subjects at several schools in the district, including Kennedy High and Pinole Junior High. Anya said Christine created a curriculum, Emerging Nations, of which she was very proud.

Max Roed and Christine, who was always proud of her Greek heritage, adopted a child from Greece. The girl, who came to America at age 11, was Christine’s first cousin. Life was hard in a country devastated by the war, and her parents wanted her to have better educational opportunities, Anya said.

During the summers, Christine often traveled to Europe – Norway, Greece, Denmark, Sweden -- and camped in California with Max. After Christine retired in 1978 she enjoyed community life, travel, and helping raise her grandchildren, Anya and her brother, Aaron Gutman, Anya said.

“Christine was very, very involved in raising us, especially the first 10 years,” Anya said. “She was at our house and taking care of us while our parents were working, and we went to their house every other weekend.”

About her grandmother Anya said, “She is incredibly sharp and very good with dates and facts. She has a very strong passion for education and learning. She is very generous and loving. She loves cats. And she’s a big talker! She goes on and on.”

“She likes to tell stories about the past. She loves history and genealogy. She loves knowing about people and their stories. She’s subscribed to National Geographic since god knows when.”

Christine also wrote a memoir.

“She always talked about the historical society,” Anya said. “I think that was one of the highlights for her since she started with them. She loved talking about Barbara Hill (the society’s former archivist).”

Anya said her grandmother was a natural to serve as an archivist. “She was really good at organizing things. At Mom’s house she would automatically start organizing her Tupperware. Her house was always very organized. That was a great way for her to contribute.”

Besides her daughter and grandson and granddaughter, Christine is survived by four great-grandchildren, Alexander, Adam, Camila and Natasha.

Photos courtesy of Anya Gutman