



Norma Phyllis Kutzer

January 19, 1940 - August 8, 2023

Norma Phyllis Kutzer was born on January 19, 1940 in Brooklyn, New York, where she grew up. Her parents were Sol and Olga Kutzer. They were Russian Jews, and Olga had suffered from, and been traumatized by, the violent Cossack attacks on Jewish villages.

When I heard that Norma had passed, my first thought was that I had lost not only a close friend, but a sister. Even though, due to the complications of life during the last few years, we ended up seeing each other less, we never forgot each other. But who could ever forget that incredible smile, which exuded warmth and love and gratitude, always gratitude, for every small favor? I will never forget the last time she came to my house for a little celebration for her birthday. Before she left, she stood up in all her height and with gentle seriousness she told us—her friends: “I want to say this: I know I didn’t deserve such a beautiful celebration but I want you to know that I enjoyed every minute of it.”

After graduating from high school in Brooklyn, Norma went to college in upstate New York. When she returned to Manhattan after graduation, she taught high school, and acted in several theater productions. She particularly enjoyed acting in Chekov’s *Three Sisters*. The photos of the drama show her as a beautiful young woman.

During her New York years she became part of the music scene. A poet and lyricist, she wrote at least a dozen songs, some by herself and some in collaboration with Norma Tanega. Some of them are still being performed. One of the best known is “Walkin’ My Cat Named Dog,” which was based on a true story: The two Normas shared an apartment, and were not allowed to have a dog. So they adopted a cat, called him Dog, and wrote a song about him.

For another of her songs, Norma was awarded a BMI (Broadcast Music Incorporated) crystal. The song was “You’re Dead,” and it is the theme song for the comedy / horror TV series “What We Do in the Shadows”.

After many years in New York, Norma moved to Los Angeles and worked in an administrative position at Pepperdine University. Several years later she met Bill Spring, and he became the love of her life. She followed him to Santa Barbara, where they shared their lives until his sudden and tragic death in a motorcycle accident. Years later, Norma shared with me that during the car trip to a hospital specialized in head traumas, she had felt Bill’s presence inside the car with her, even though he was in the hospital miles away.

Norma was active in many groups and political organizations. She worked for the wellbeing of the most underprivileged in our community, especially homeless individuals and groups. She loved domestic animals, especially cats, and rescued many. She also rescued many humans. A young Chinese woman, whom she fortuitously met at a local coffee shop comes to mind. After a pleasant chat, the young woman asked Norma if she would play the role of grandma for her. Norma accepted and she became a grandma during all the years the young woman spent in Santa Barbara, and stayed in touch with her after she left.

The social and financial disparities of our society affected her deeply—to the

point that she often gave up her own modest income to help those who had even less. No questions were ever asked.

For several years we both belonged to a group called "The Soul Community." Norma was the peacemaker for the often belligerent group. Her firm kindness helped break several fights.

Later on, after being diagnosed with Alzheimer's, Norma moved to the Garden Court Independent Senior community, where she immediately befriended a resident, Lorna Culp, who was a former nurse. They quickly became close friends, and stayed that way until Norma died. Mimi Sonju, Seattle WA./Manhattan, NYC was a dear friend and remained in touch.

Maria Marotti (author of this obit), Thomas Robinson and Caterina Freeman were Norma's long time Santa Barbara friends. The Center for Successful Aging (Suzanne Sears - Peer Counselor) was very supportive for Norma. Susan Dickinson, Age in Place Santa Barbara, advocated for Norma in her last few years. Norma appreciated all who cared for her. We all will miss Norma's wonderful sense of humor and human spirit. We will celebrate Norma in the courtyard at Garden Court 1116 De la Vina St, Thursday November 16 at 11- 12 pm. Questions to Susan@ageinplacesb.com.

Previous Events

Celebration of Life

NOV **16**. 11:00 AM - 12:00 PM (PT)

Garden Court
1116 De La Vina St.
Santa Barbara, CA 93101

Tribute Wall

SS

“ Norma and I were in a journaling group together for many years. I'll never forget her gentleness, thoughtfulness and sensitivity. When my long-time partner died, she went out of her way to be helpful and show me kindness, bringing me flowers on my birthday shortly after his death. The last time I saw Norma was on a street corner near Ralphs, with a friend from Garden Court and her dog. She apologized that her memory wasn't what it used to be, but I didn't notice much change. She radiated joy and delight at the small pleasures of life. This is how I will always remember sweet, kind Norma.

Sherryl Smith - December 08, 2023 at 03:18 PM

MM

“ Norma was a kind and strong advocate for what is right in this world and worked towards making the world a better place. Norma was a lifesaver when I had to move and could not take my beautiful black kitty, Piewakitt, with me. I had a friend who promised to take her, but when it was time to go, Piewakitt would not go in his truck. My friend looked for Piewakitt but couldn't find her before he had to leave town. Poor PiePie was left behind. I was away at a conference when I found out this news and my heart sank. I was beyond myself, as I wasn't sure where PiePie was. Luckily, I reached out to Norma and she offered to have little PiePie live with her. I feel strongly that the two of them formed a strong and loving bond with each other when they were living in the Micheltorena cottage. I owe a lot to Norma for her willingness to help not only a friend in need, but a kitty who almost didn't get her forever home.

Maureen Mina - November 15, 2023 at 05:14 PM

KT

“ Norma was my next door neighbor for many years and truly was a Grace-filled being of loving, wisdom and delight! In the day my mother died, I had surgery and due to the anaesthesia, could not drive. She and another friend drove me (in one car) and my car, to my father’s home. What a service this was, and so typical of the many ways Norma extended herself to those in need!

Kay Turbak - November 11, 2023 at 07:20 PM

JC

“ Norma was a very precious & good hearted soul.
Dearest Norma: May the roads rise to meet you,
May the wind be always at your back,
May the sunshine warm your soul,
And, until we meet again,
May the Divine hold you in a sweet embrace.
Your Memory will always be a blessing for
those of us who had the honor of knowing u.
With loving memories JoAnna Chartrand-Benz



joanna chartrand - November 09, 2023 at 06:09 PM

Jl

A lovely person. Our world needs many more like her. Norma was a trainee, colleague and friend for forty years. While I wish i had talked with her more regularly, I did spend some loving time on the phone with her two years ago. Love you Norma. Joel Isaacs

Joel Isaacs - March 04, 2024 at 02:06 PM

SS

“ *Norma and I were friends for many years. She was one of the kindest and most sensitive people I have ever known. She cared about everyone and she engaged deeply with books, poetry, theater and education. She enriched my life and taught me a lot about compassion.*

Susan Shields - November 09, 2023 at 05:20 PM