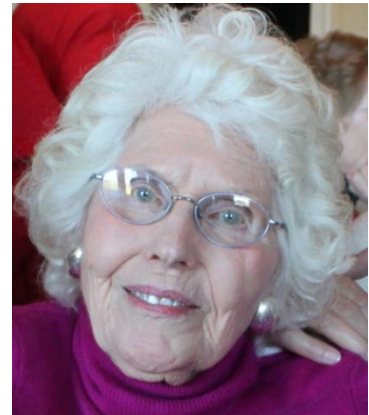


Remembering Elena Moreno

January 7, 1922 – November 26, 2016

By Carol O'Hare

Elena Moreno was a lifelong resident of Morgan Hill and an Honorary Life Member of AAUW. She served on the first Wildflower Run planning committee in 1984 and is credited with giving the run its name. She was the oldest member of the branch.



This article is based on stories that Elena told me when I visited her. Although her memory declined in recent years, she still had vivid recollections of her early life.

Early Life and Education

Elena Moreno was born Ellen Oberg on January 7, 1922. Her mother's family was originally from Britain; her father's was from Sweden. She grew up on prune ranches north of town and had to help with drying prunes and other ranch work.

Ellen attended the old Burnett School in Madrone through 8th grade. It was located on the corner of Monterey Road and Burnett Avenue (where Josephine's Café is now). She recalled how the students all stood in the courtyard at 9 am to salute the flag. She also remembered meeting Charles Kellogg, the "bird singer," when he came to speak at Burnett

She started babysitting for Jean Skeels (Pinard) and her sisters Rae and Bobbi when she was 12 years old. Her father and Lloyd Skeels (the town constable) had gone to school together.

Ellen attended Live Oak Union High School, the present location of Britton Middle School, on Monterey Road, graduating in 1939.



When her family moved into town, her parents ran the restaurant at Skeels Hotel (located where Ladera Grill is now). Ellen had to work in the restaurant after school, helping serve and doing dishes.

After high school she attended the new Hartnell Junior College in Salinas for two years. Her brother Sonny drove the school bus. Ellen then went on to San Jose State College (now University) but lived at home and commuted. Her aunt Virginia Horton had been to San Jose State and encouraged Ellen to continue to education.

John Moreno

Elena met John Moreno, her future husband, when she was 16. Her brother introduced him as “new in town.” John’s parents had come from Spain and first lived in Santa Clara until they were able to purchase a ranch north of Morgan Hill.

A 2006 article in the *Morgan Hill Times* by Marty Cheek quoted Elena, "We met in an apricot orchard in what's now Coyote Valley when I was 16. I was working on a ranch and his mother and sisters were working there, too. And then, suddenly there was this mysterious long, stringy fellow who rode in on the truck that brought boxes for fruit. And he came up and talked to his mother and looked at me. We first met then, but we each were interested in other people so we didn't get together for a while."

The article also described how Elena remembered her attraction to the 6-foot-4 inches tall John – especially his rugged good looks and outgoing personality. "He was so different from everyone I knew. He had a beautiful voice. He could sing. Practically on our first date, he sang to me. He sang 'Maria Elena' to me and called me 'Elena,' even though my name is Ellen, a Swedish name."

Elena and John were married in 1942. Although Elena had hoped to experience life away from her hometown, John wanted to live in Morgan Hill, as he thought it would be a good place to raise a family. He took a job on the two-member police force in 1945, and five years later he was named chief of police. After retirement in 1975, he twice served as interim city manager. Elena and John were married 61 years before he died in 2003.

Teaching Career and Community Activities

Elena and John's first child was Glen, followed by twins Kim and Candice. When Glen was five years old, Elena went back to San Jose State to get her teaching credential. She recalled how she was still a few months shy of completing her certificate when she was asked to replace a sick kindergarten teacher at the old Morgan Hill School that was located on the corner of East Dunne Avenue and Monterey Road. (The Community and Cultural Center is there now.) That began her long and dedicated career as a Morgan Hill educator.

Although Elena never had the opportunity to live elsewhere, she and John traveled extensively throughout the world. She also spent a summer in Mexico with the children that led eventually to a master's degree in Mexican American Studies.



Elena 1996

In 1995 Elena was selected as Women of the Year by the Chamber of Commerce for her many years serving the community. Among her activities and volunteer positions, it was noted that she was instrumental in starting a wildflower program in Morgan Hill schools. She also participated in the dance troupe, the Fabulous Flappers, that performed at senior centers, nursing homes, and benefit events.

Elena loved her garden and often talk about the one at the house on Easy Street where and John lived before moving to a new home closer to downtown. She was happy with her smaller garden, too, and liked to share her roses with visitors.

AAUW

Elena joined the Gilroy branch of AAUW in 1966, a year after that branch was chartered. She didn't immediately transfer her membership to the new Morgan Hill branch, which was founded in December 1981, but was listed as a member by February the following year. Thus she was not an "official" charter member of Morgan Hill, but very nearly so. In 2016 she became an AAUW Honorary Life Member, having been a member for 50 years.

AAUW Morgan Hill and the Wildflower Run

Elena was part of the first Wildflower Run committee in 1984, in charge of publicity. She is quoted in the 30th Wildflower Run history book, “When Marilyn Gadway first presented the idea to the branch of putting on a “run”, I had no idea what she was talking about. The only ‘run’ I knew about was a run in a stocking! I quickly learned, however, and volunteered to be on the first planning committee. I think that my major contribution that year was coming up with the name ‘Wildflower Run.’ I also remember that for several years I scattered wildflower seeds along the route, hoping the flowers would sprout and cheer the runners, but this was not very successful. It seemed that the city regularly sprayed weed killer along the roads, which killed my wildflowers, as well as weeds. I gave up, and we just handed out wildflower seeds to the runners instead.”



Elena served on the board in several capacities in the early years: public information, hospitality, and chair of the scholarship committee.

She also created a block for the Morgan Hill History Quilt in 1989, selecting the subject of El Toro Mountain. The quilt was donated to the Morgan Hill Historical Museum, where it is currently displayed.



Elena loved participating in the 4th of July parade with AAUW, then watching it from the sidelines when limited by her physical capabilities.

2008 parade



With Ann Ward, May 2006, Spring Brunch at Wards' Oak Glen Ranch



September 2010



Elena with Candy and Kim,
Founders Day Dinner
September 2015

Elena always supported the Wildflower Run, both with a donation and her volunteer time as long she was able.



Working in the snack shack at the 2006
Wildflower Run

2016 Wildflower Run t-shirt



AAUW and her AAUW friends meant a lot to Elena. “Women who give their efforts to AAUW are the best.” (April 2016)

And Elena was the best, too.

For more information about Elena Moreno, see her [OBITUARY](#) in the *Morgan Hill Times*.