

Greenwich High School
Wreadin Writin n Wreminiscin
Weekly Wreader
Special Edition 01 April 2005



We Often Called Her Mama, But her Real Name was Mrs. Gross

There are many of you out there who worked at one time in your high school years, at the now "Long Gone" Clam Box Restaurant. Even if you hadn't had that opportunity, you and your family may have had at least one dinner at the "eatery". We often called her Mama but never to her face, unless you wanted an early dismissal from your job. I was the cashier on many a Saturday and Sunday and watched Mama "work the room"... she was the best.

Clam Box Owner Anna Gross Dies at 100

By Sabrina Banes Staff Correspondent
The Greenwich Time

01 April 2005

Anna Gross always told waitresses at the Clam Box Restaurant to take care of the children parents brought to her Cos Cob establishment. In a few years, she said, those children would grow up and come to the restaurant on their own. She was right. Gross was at the helm of the seafood restaurant for more than 40 years, and her customers spanned generations.

Gross, 100 died of natural causes Wednesday at Edgehill Lifecare Community in Stamford. She co-founded the Clam Box Restaurant in Cos Cob, which she and her family owned and operated from 1939 to 1985.

Born March 3, 1905 in Tisminitz, Austria, she came to the United States with her mother, Bertha Kook Weber, in 1913. The two planned to return to Austria, but remained in the United States when World War I broke out. Gross was 12 when her mother died in 1917. She went to live with an aunt in New York City and had to leave school to work the next year. "She had the normal immigrant's life of struggle," said Gross' daughter, Doris Nussbaum, of Wilton.

When she was 17, Gross married George Gross. They owned two restaurants together in New York City before opening the Clam Box in 1939. "The restaurant was their whole life," Nussbaum said, explaining that the pair would wake in the mornings and go directly to the restaurant, where they would stay until it was time to go home and get a few hours of sleep. Gross was the face of the Clam Box. She greeted every customer who walked through the door. "Her forte was hospitality," Nussbaum said. "She was always the front man."

She also had very specific ideas about how things should be done. "One year, she fired a busboy the day before Mother's Day because she didn't like the way he stacked his tray," Nussbaum said, recalling that her father had been angry because the restaurant needed all the help available for the busiest day of the year. But Gross insisted it was more important to have a small staff of well-trained employees than a large staff of mediocre workers.

Gross' children called her "a professional eater" in recognition of her passion for food. The recipes served at the Clam Box were all hers, from the chowders to the coleslaw. After George Gross suffered a heart attack in 1941, his wife ran the restaurant by herself for five years, until her son, Arthur Gross, now of Palm Beach, Fla., came to work alongside her in 1946. Over the years, the family operated three restaurants, all bearing the Clam Box name. In addition to the original Cos Cob location, the Gross family owned a second in Westport and another in Wethersfield.

The Clam Box era came to an end in 1985, when the Cos Cob restaurant closed. Gross spent her remaining years spending time with her family. In addition to her daughter and son, she is survived by a second daughter, Barbara Lorenzo of Stamford; 10 grandchildren; 12 great-grandchildren; and one great-great-grandchild.

She was predeceased by her husband in 1960. A funeral will be held at 3 p.m. Sunday at Temple Shalom, 300 E. Putnam Ave. Burial will follow in Riversville Cemetery on Memory Lane. After the burial, the family will hold a reception at Gross' home at 25 Ledge Road, Old Greenwich.