



MARIE KAUFMAN

“It took a whole village of people who followed their conscience to do the right thing, to ensure that my parents, baby sister, and I would survive the war.”

Marie Kaufman’s parents, Anna and Michael, had fled separately from Poland to Paris in the 1930’s, crossing the border illegally to find work. Facing the impending occupation of Paris in June 1940, they each fled to the south of France in hopes of finding safety in the “free zone,” Anna and Michael met on this journey and fell in love. They moved together into a small house, provided by the Red Cross and situated in the village of Milhars, 60 miles from Toulouse. Many of the residents of Milhars were descended from French Huguenots, who had been religiously persecuted during the Middle Ages. These villagers welcomed the young couple and sought to protect them.

Marie was born on March 19, 1941, in Albi, France. In December 1942, Marie’s father was ordered to a labor camp. He immediately went into hiding, spending eight months in a cave and later in the basement of a house. where Marie and her mother were living in “open hiding,” using false identity passes. Marie’s baby sister, Helene, was born in 1943 and, in order to conceal the baby’s Jewish identity, was “pretend” baptized by the local priest.

It was a “conspiracy of kindness” that saved the Kaufman family: village teenagers took care of Marie; the owner of a cement company secretly paid 50 percent of Michael’s salary to Marie’s mother; two Christian families provided necessary food and clothing, and the mayor, priest, doctor, policemen and the remaining 100 village inhabitants conspired in a ‘silent resistance.’ Their moral courage saved the lives of Marie and her family. Marie gratefully and fondly remembers the teenagers who took responsibility for her each day, playing games, singing songs, building her a playhouse, and even scaring her with ‘boogie-man’ stories so that she would listen to them.

After the occupation ended in 1944, the Kaufman family remained in Milhars for a year and then moved to Paris where Marie’s parents got married in 1947. After learning that almost all of their family members had perished during the Holocaust, they decided to immigrate to the

United States with the help of Marie's great aunt and uncle who had immigrated in the 1920s. The Kaufman family moved to Los Angeles in 1951.

Marie married Edward Poll in 1960, and together they have two children, Deena and Mitchell Poll, and four grandchildren, Trevor, Matthew, Eva and Gibby. Marie divorced Edward, and married Ken Johnson in 1986. They have built a wonderful life together.

Since she was too young to remember what happened during the Holocaust, Marie did research and returned to Milhars in 1996 to meet the people who had saved her family. She wanted these people to be honored by Yad Vashem as the "Righteous among the Nations", but they didn't feel that this was called for, saying that it was "normal to do the right thing."

Marie Kaufman became a speaker at the Museum of Tolerance in Los Angeles in 2006 because she hoped "to encourage each of us to take action, to stand up against injustice and to help those in need – just as the inhabitants of Milhars did during the Holocaust." During Marie's many years as a "Witness to Truth" Holocaust Survivor Speaker, she inspired thousands of listeners with her message of goodness and hope. Marie Kaufman z"l passed away on January 2, 2022. Her memory will always be a blessing at the Museum of Tolerance.

In the Jewish tradition, when someone passes away, z"l is added after the name. In Hebrew, z"l stands for *zichrono/zichrona livracha*, which means "May his/her memory be a blessing."