



## 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 was born on March 19, 1941 in the city of Albi, France. Her future parents, Anna and Michael, had previously fled separately from Poland to Paris in the 1930s, crossing the border illegally in search of work. Facing the impending occupation of Paris in June 1940, they fled to the south of France in hopes of safety in the "free zone." Michael and Anna met during their flight, fell in love and moved together into a small house, provided by the Red Cross and situated in the village of Milhars, 60 miles from Toulouse.

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 the Kaufman's house. Marie and her mother went into "open hiding", using false identity passes. Marie's new baby sister, Helene, was born in 1943 and was even baptized by the local priest in order to conceal the baby's Jewish identity. 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 a silent resistance to save Marie and her family's lives.

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 Anna's and Michael's 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 already 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 since 1986, she has been married to Ken Johnson. 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 "Righteous among the Nations", but they refused, emphasizing 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 hopes "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."