

Koehl, M RG-50.028.0116.01.01

Summary of Interview

Mary Koehl was born on January 16, 1903, in Mulhouse, France. Husband: Adolphe. Father: Sebastian Simon. Mother: Lami Simon.

Mary Koehl first became acquainted with Jehovah's Witnesses around the year 1925 when her husband, Adolphe, told her about a slide presentation he attended called "*The Photo-Drama of Creation*." This was organized by Jehovah's Witnesses [then called Bible Students] and Adolphe was excited to see an account of God's purpose for mankind starting from the creation of man. He and Mary were later baptized in Switzerland as Jehovah's Witnesses around 1936 or 1937.

Mary and Adolphe attended meetings of Jehovah's Witnesses until the second world war began. Although they had heard that Jehovah's Witnesses in Germany were being persecuted, they did not expect that Germany would invade France and cause trouble in the Alsace region where they lived. They heard about the persecution going on, but they did not know whether or not to believe the rumours.

Mary and Adolphe ran a barber shop where many of the Gestapo had their hair cut. It was very stressful for Adolphe when they would come to the shop and greet him with "Heil Hitler!" Adolphe would reply by saying "grüß Gott!" ("Salute God!") instead. The Gestapo told them that they could get into trouble for not displaying a picture of Hitler in the barber shop and for not contributing money for the Nazi regime. The Gestapo told them that even if they only pretended to contribute by dropping a button into the money box, they would not be reported to the authorities. Adolphe and Maria refused even to feign support for the Nazis. Adolphe said to the Gestapo, "You do your duty, and I'll do mine." Although the Gestapo threatened Maria and Adolphe for four years with arrest, neither of them were ever arrested during the war.

Each month, Adolphe met another one of Jehovah's Witness at a secret location in the mountains near the French-German border to get a single copy of *The Watchtower* magazine in French. If it had been discovered that Adolphe was secretly obtaining this banned magazine, he could have been arrested and sent to a concentration camp. However, Adolphe felt that doing this dangerous work was his duty and that it provided faith-building "spiritual food" for his Witness brothers. Another Witness, Brother Graff, would work at night to translate the French magazine. Afterwards, translated copies were printed on a hand-driven mimeograph machine. As this work was done, Brother Graff's wife would stand guard to ensure they would not be discovered. Female Witnesses would travel by train from other cities to collect a copy of the translated magazine from the barber shop. Maria and Adolphe held Witness meetings at the back of the barbershop. When it became too dangerous to hold the meetings in the shop, they moved the meetings into the apartment upstairs.

It was a great relief for Maria and Adolphe when the war ended, because although they were never arrested, they knew they could have been at any moment. After the war, they continued their bible educational work along with other Jehovah's Witnesses in France.

Keywords:

Jehovah's Witnesses literature – *The Watchtower*

Jehovah's Witnesses literature – secret translation and printing

The Photo-Drama of Creation