



Karen M. Consolini

DEC 26, 1931 - JAN 13, 2024



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Karen McCorkle Consolini, 92, passed away on January 13, 2024, at The Moorings at Lewes, a continued care retirement community in Lewes, Delaware, where she had resided since 2010.

Born in 1931 in Tulsa, Oklahoma to Maxine Elizabeth Boesche and John Morris McCorkle, Karen grew up primarily in Pasadena, California, graduating from South Pasadena High in 1950 (Senior Class President). She attended Colorado College.

When Karen was a teenager, she had an experience that profoundly influenced the person she became: in 1949 she traveled to Europe with a youth group mission, an “Odyssey,” organized by activist pastor Dr. Henry David Gray of the Oneonta Congressional Church, South Pasadena. The experience of meeting her peers in the still war-ravaged UK, hearing their stories and helping to rebuild the literal rubble of their lives, changed hers forever.

Karen was a smart, brave, independent and liberated young woman of the ‘50s. After leaving Colorado College, she moved alone to New York City, into a tiny walk-up apartment (with a wood-burning fireplace!) in the heart of bohemian Greenwich Village. (When she married in 1958 her mother moved East from California and into that apartment, where she lived for the next 30-something years.) Karen embarked on a career in the fashion industry, which occupied her for the next 25 years. She started in retail, but it was in the fashion textile industry where she made her mark. At Chemstrand, her job was planning programs and advertising campaigns with both fashion-textile manufacturers and retailers across the U.S. “Actually, it was more fun than work,” she said. One of her favorite projects was decorating the “Monsanto House of the Future” at Disneyland’s Tomorrowland in the late ‘50s: a raised, revolving home, designed to be a futuristic showcase for products made by both Monsanto & Chemstrand (textiles, linoleum, wall coverings, electronic devices etc.). Her budget was over \$1M- in 1963 dollars!

In 1963, Karen and her former husband Bob Consolini, were co-founders with 4 other couples of a Montessori school on Manhattan’s Upper West Side, St Michael’s Montessori, which both their



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children attended. Originally occupying the basement of a church, it continues to this day as a much larger, expanded institution in its own building, Metropolitan Montessori. This was one of Karen's proudest life achievements.

In the late '60s Karen went to work for E.I. duPont as Fashion Director for Women's Wear Retail. Two years later she pioneered a program of fashion trend analysis, resulting from the requests of retailers eager for textile & fashion trend information in advance of their seasonal buying trips. Through interviews with textile mills, clothing manufacturers and leading fashion journalists, this research culminated in a bi-annual report which Karen delivered twice a year, in person, to retailers in 22 U.S. cities, 7 European countries, and Mexico.

A passionate and talented lifelong cook (her Christmas Eve open houses were legendary), Karen moved away from the fashion industry in the early '80s and started cooking professionally. For many years she was the personal chef to Pare Lorentz, the first documentary filmmaker in America, and his wife Elizabeth. Lorentz's groundbreaking films were "The Plow the Broke the Plain" and "The River." A frequent guest in their home was Elizabeth's sister, Katherine Graham, publisher of the Washington Post.

Karen was a ham, loved an audience, and could have had a successful career on the stage. At her 80th birthday party she stood and told a very long, involved joke, the brilliant delivery of which her friends remember to this day. At Marcus's wedding (2013) she gave an extemporaneous toast that brought the house down. There are a million more stories. A family friend says "...she had a memorable and piquant personality." He got that right.

Along the way, Karen had some wonderful adventures. A few tidbits:

- A post-performance midnight supper with renowned choreographer George Balanchine and ten of his ballerinas.
- A Christmas Sunday brunch at the Player's Club in NYC, singing around the piano with Richard Rodgers and Mary Martin.
- Being on set for some of the filming of "To Catch a Thief" with Cary Grant and Grace Kelly.
- When Karen was 14, Rosalind Russell and her husband Frederick Brisson held a secret meeting at Maxine & Karen's house about a film project.
- In 1954, Karen was the very first contestant on the first televised episode of Art Linkletter's TV show "People are Funny." She won a mink stole when she convinced the proprietor of an all-



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male boarding house to rent her a room, along with a bowl of goldfish, a trumpet, a St. Bernard dog, a chimpanzee, and a trained seal.

- Karen was a friend of Major General Bela Kiraly, who in 1956 was instrumental in overthrowing the Communist regime in Hungary.
- In the late '80s, she became friends with actor William Hurt, and at his request gave him cooking lessons, including how to cook a turkey for Thanksgiving. She also decorated his house, near hers in Piermont, NY.

Karen is survived by her daughter, Marella, 63, who lives in NY's Hudson Valley with her husband James Rodewald; and her son Marcus, 55, who lives in Osaka, Japan with his wife Meg and daughter Mirella (Mimi), 7 ½.

During - and after - her years living in Piermont, Karen was a devoted member of Palisades Presbyterian church. A gift in her honor may be made to <https://palpresny.org/give-online/>
or

Palisades Presbyterian Church
P.O. 687
Palisades, NY 10964

Services will be held privately.



Tribute Wall

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Pamela Sanford posted:

I rented Karen's lovely home in Hartwick, N.Y. in 1998 for a year while I attended SUNY Oneonta while she was downstate as a cook. I loved her home in the country and also her 3 cats which I remember to this day, Yoda, Tortie and Melody . I knew Karen as a very special person and I am glad to read more about her very full life.

May 6 at 2:54 PM



Misha Milton posted:

I was a CNA a few years ago where Miss Karen resided and she was my absolute favorite resident. She was incredibly sweet and had the best sense of humor. She used to show me her photo albums and tell me about her life in the fashion industry. On some mornings, I'd do her makeup for her. Sometimes I'd joke with her and say she was my grandma and she'd look at me & say "you gotta be kidding me" and start laughing. I miss her and she holds a special place in my heart.

July 17 at 7:16 AM



Michael Jonesdougherty lit a candle in honor of Karen.

My heart breaks for my little buddy Karen I had the pleasure of being friends with Big heart fun Karen when I worked at theMorning Lewes in 2017to 2019 the wonderful stories about NYC and the fashion world about her cocker spanielMy dear little friend ❤️ I'll miss u you'll always be a thought and smile in my heart mind you for ever friend Michael



January 26 at 9:36 AM



Marella Consolini January 31 at 8:38 AM

Oh Michael, thank you for this! She adored you - just the other day I was reminiscing with some of the staff and they said "Do you remember Michael? There was no one she ever asked for as much as a Michael - 'where's Michael? When will Michael be here?'" Hope you are well.
Warmly, Marella



Parsell Funeral Homes & Crematorium shared an album called **Karen Consolini Memories Album.**



January 18 at 5:22 AM



Media

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Parsell Funeral Homes & Crematorium shared 4 photos to the **Karen Consolini Memories Album** album.

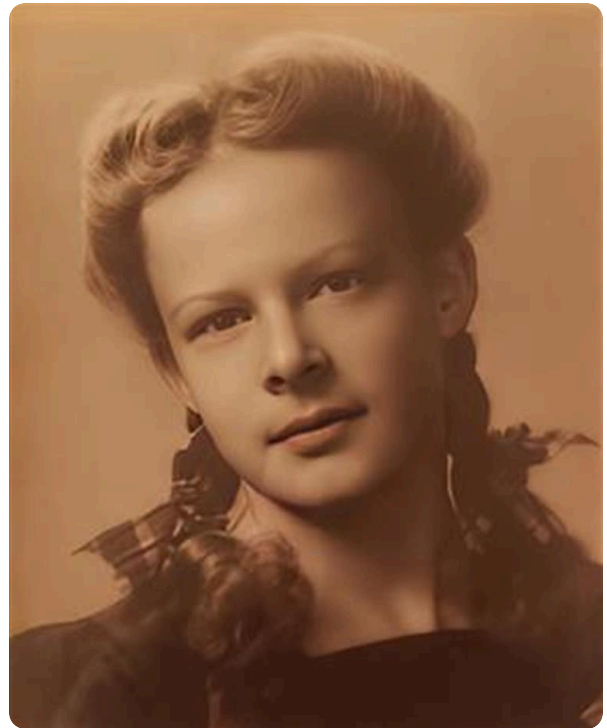
January 18 at 5:22 AM





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Memories only last if you share them

Join us in honoring Karen by contributing to a collection of shared memories.



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