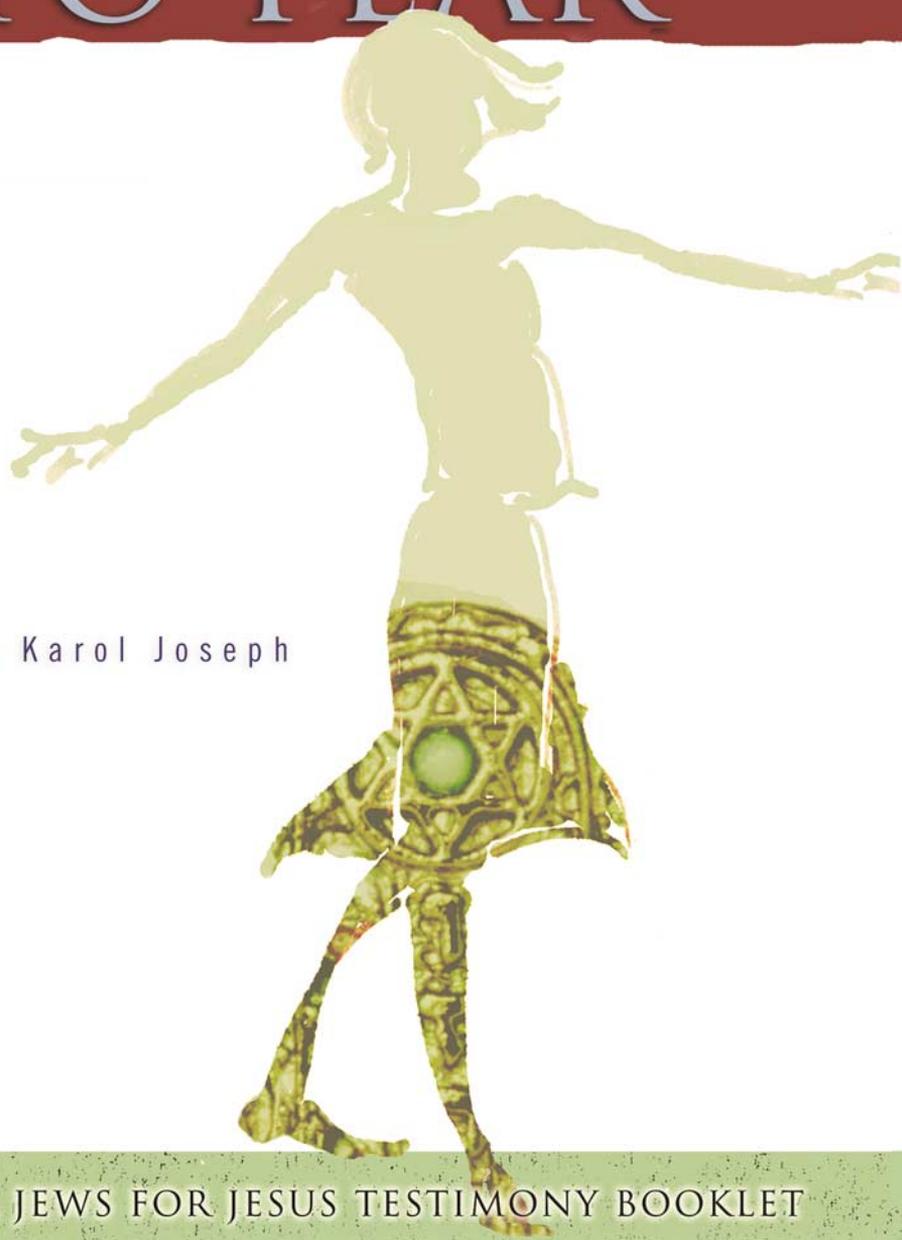


NOTHING TO FEAR



By Karol Joseph

A JEWS FOR JESUS TESTIMONY BOOKLET

NOTHING TO FEAR

By Karol Joseph

Edited by Naomi Rose Rothstein



A Purple Pomegranate Book
Purple Pomegranate Productions

Nothing to Fear

by Karol Joseph

edited by Naomi Rose Rothstein

© Copyright 2002 by Purple Pomegranate Productions

Cover design by Daniela Meyer

All rights reserved. Nothing in this book shall be reprinted or reproduced, electronically or in any other manner, without express written permission.

For more information, write to:

Reprint Permission

Purple Pomegranate Productions

80 Page Street, San Francisco, CA 94102

Published by

Jews f̄r Jesus®

60 Haight Street

San Francisco, CA 94102

USA

www.jewsforjesus.org

ISBN 1-881022-13-7

NOTHING TO FEAR

I emerged from the subway hole into the crowded streets of New York City, terrified. I looked around Times Square and saw pimps, prostitutes and drug addicts. I said aloud, “Now this could be dangerous.” I wanted to disappear. But that was nothing new. I had been afraid for most of my life.

My name is Karol Beth Joseph. I was born in Boston, Massachusetts on August 16, 1952, the third of four children born to my mother, Renee, and my father, Alvin—both Jewish. My father is a Certified Public Accountant. My mother—a Brooklynite who moved to Boston to marry my father—made a career of raising us kids and was a very active volunteer with organizations like the ORT (Occupational and Rehabilitation Training).

I grew up in Newton, Massachusetts (about eight miles from Boston) in a community so Jewish I only knew one Gentile girl in my whole elementary school. Christmas was the only time I even noticed that the whole world was not Jewish. Suddenly, programs about Jesus appeared on television and Santas showed up on street corners. When I asked my parents why we couldn’t celebrate Christmas, they explained that we were Jews, and Jews don’t believe in Jesus.

Living in such a Jewish community, everything we did seemed “normal”—not necessarily Jewish. Bagels and lox and whitefish were a Sunday ritual in our house; challah (still my favorite food), chicken

soup and gefilte fish were abundant on Friday evenings, and we were never allowed to mix milk with meat. (I never understood this to be a religious observance—my mother simply said it would make my stomach sick.)

Each year, we drove to Brooklyn to celebrate Passover with my mother's family. My great aunt Lil had to rearrange her entire dining and living rooms to seat more than 20 of us. I remember vividly how difficult it was to concentrate on the whole seder service while smelling the *tsimmes* from the kitchen.

Every year someone suggested that we skip parts of the seder and move straight to dinner. Despite the distraction of the tantalizing aromas, I always sided with the family members fighting to go through the whole service. I was also the only child willing to recite the four questions, even after my younger sister Patti was old enough to say them.

In that respect, I often found myself in the minority. My father was raised Orthodox, but he and my mother raised us in a Conservative Jewish home. Dad always wanted to go back to the Orthodox synagogue for High Holiday services, and when I was seven or eight years old I started to go with him. Nobody else was interested, but somehow, that shul felt more “holy” to me. Maybe it was because people at the other synagogues often seemed to be chatting and looking at what everyone else was wearing and such. The Orthodox seemed to take their faith more seriously; the men wore *tallit*, (a ritual fringed garment) knew all the prayers and recited them from beginning to end. They seemed less interested in socializing and more interested in God.

All this fascinated me because I truly wanted to connect with God, whom I pictured as a gentle old man living in the clouds. My mother had always told me that heaven was up in the clouds. She also said that her mother, who died before I was born, looked down from heaven and watched over us. I'll never forget my first airplane ride. I was about seven years old, and was terribly disappointed when my

grandmother's face did not appear as we soared through the clouds!

I never doubted that God existed. I knew that he talked to Abraham, Isaac and Jacob, and I was sad that he did not talk to me—though I tried initiating conversations. I loved God and wanted to please him. I hoped to do so by lighting Shabbat candles, going to Temple, learning prayers and “living right.” But I knew that I fell short of what he expected of me. I knew I wasn't perfect, I didn't pray enough and of course we did not follow all of the laws. I therefore did not blame him for his silence. After all, halfway through the Orthodox services I was bored and regretted having come with my father. What must God think of that? I remember leaving synagogue on Yom Kippur, wondering if God had forgiven me.

My mother often joked that one day I would marry a rabbi because, even as a child, I always said I was going to read through the whole Bible. Despite many noble attempts to do so, somehow I never made it past Leviticus.

I began Hebrew school in second grade. I had a major crush on our cantor; he chanted the Hebrew so beautifully, and he always had a cheerful grin and a hug for me.

I also had a Hebrew teacher, Mr. Cohen, whom I did not like very much. I remember telling my mother that he wasn't a very kind man, and she suggested that I talk to him after class and get to know him. So one day I did. As we talked, he rolled up his sleeve and I saw numbers tattooed on his arm. He told me how his wife was killed in a concentration camp. Mr. Cohen was the first Holocaust survivor I ever met. I felt bad that I hadn't been kinder to him.

Around that time, our family saw a movie about the Holocaust together. In one scene, a crowd of naked people were gathered in a room. My father explained that they were being prepared for what they thought were showers, but that they were really going into gas chambers to die. “That's what the Gentiles will do to the Jews,” he explained. From then on I knew that we Jews needed to stick together, and that we must never allow something like the Holocaust to happen again.

As sobering as this was, I was generally happy. I could hardly wait as my bat mitzvah approached. I recalled the gift my uncle Dave had given my older brother when he was a bar mitzvah. I absolutely adored Uncle Dave. He was the principal of a Hebrew school, and seemed to know everything. He could lead the prayers and, like me, he always wanted to do the whole seder. He gave my brother a huge Bible, with a gold cover. Right in the center of the cover was a beautiful picture of a Torah scroll.

I couldn't wait to have a Bible like Warren's. I had no idea that my parents, my grandfather and all the great aunts and uncles had ridiculed Uncle Dave's gift. They felt it was not appropriate for a modern 13-year-old. As a result, he gave me something else. I don't even remember what it was, only that I was extremely disappointed. (Years later, my brother gave me his Bible as a gift. It still has a prominent place on my bookshelf today.)

That year, I was in synagogue every Shabbat—for the bar and bat mitzvahs of all my friends. Most people I knew endured the long services for the party that followed, but I sought a connection to God during those times. Even if I didn't know what all the Hebrew words meant, I could follow the siddur, and I was proud of the fact that I knew the liturgy.

I was awed to think that Jewish people around the world were reciting the same words, at the same time, in the same order as I was in Newton, Massachusetts (I was not yet aware of time zones!). I loved feeling connected to my people around the world. I knew that being Jewish was special, that we were a chosen people.

Even so, after my bat mitzvah and graduation from Hebrew school, my involvement in synagogue deteriorated—I only went on holidays and for special events, like weddings. I was as Jewish as ever culturally, but I no longer looked to Judaism for spiritual answers. It was the late sixties, and drugs and Eastern religions suddenly seemed very appealing.

When I was 16, I encountered the Jehovah's Witnesses on a street corner, and agreed to allow them come to my home. I still didn't

know much about the Bible—except for the stories I’d heard about King David and Elijah the Prophet from Hebrew school. The Jehovah’s Witnesses talked about the Garden of Eden and sin. They raised a question from one verse, then suggested turning to another verse to find the answer. I remember thinking the connection was questionable. I went to one of their meetings, and was very attracted to their joy. However, within three weeks of study, I concluded that what they were saying didn’t make much sense.

The following summer I tried my hand at Scientology, partly because I had a crush on a guy who was into that. I attended meetings a few times a week for two months. I learned about “getting clear.” This term refers to ridding oneself of all the negative garbage instilled in us over the years. I also learned to manipulate circumstances to get my own way, to convince people to do things against their will. I tried out this technique when I wanted a sales clerk to change her mind about selling me only one part of a two piece set. It worked! At that point, I realized I was dealing with a power that I was not equipped to handle. While Scientology seemed to offer solutions, they were not the spiritual solutions I was seeking. In fact, the solutions catered to the very selfishness I wanted to overcome.

During college I studied Eastern religions, both in class and on my own. Buddhism attracted me the most for several reasons. I liked the idea of breaking the cycle of bondage and achieving nirvana through my own efforts. The fact that Buddhism treats men and women as equals made it even more appealing.

I was no longer thinking about pleasing or displeasing God; I was just looking for something meaningful, and something that would help me deal with my fears.

For some reason, fear often seemed to dominate my life. As a child, and well into my teens, I was terrified of fire. As a young adult, I was afraid to leave my apartment. I imagined my car breaking down and leaving me stranded, or that someone would break into my apartment while I was gone and wait to harm me when I returned.

Most of all, I was afraid that I wouldn't be able to support myself and live a functional life.

I doubt that anyone knew how fearful I was; I managed to hide my anxieties under a covering of success. I graduated from the University of Vermont with a BA in sociology, entered the professional world and established myself in the health care industry. Yet, secretly I feared that people would somehow discover that I wasn't as smart or as capable as the positions I held warranted.

In 1984 I was working on a Ph.D. in health care policy at Brandeis University. Fearing I wouldn't pass an economics class I was taking, I hired Chris—one of the brightest students in the class—to tutor me. We eventually formed a study group to prepare for our comprehensive exams.

One night, after our study time, Chris and I got into a discussion about abortion. As a Jewish woman from Massachusetts, I was pro-choice, of course. I was surprised to learn that Chris was what he called pro-life (a view I had only seen as anti-choice prior to our discussion). When I asked why on earth he took such a stance he told me that he was a Christian.

I was 32 years old and had never met anyone who confessed to being a Christian. To think that such a talented scholar would take the Bible so seriously captured my attention. I had accepted the common belief that the Bible is a mixture of Jewish history, myth and good moral teaching, but not the word of God. It was startling to think that someone as intelligent as Chris would take the Bible literally.

What impressed me about Chris even more than his intelligence was his peace. He was always calm. I never saw him waver in his faith. He knew that God existed, he knew that God was the God of the Bible, and he knew why he believed what he believed. In fact, he knew more about my Bible and more about Jewish history than I did. He knew things that I felt I should have known as a Jew. I was jealous of the peace he had, yet I knew that what he believed couldn't be for me—because I was Jewish.

When Chris showed me the fifty-third chapter from the prophet

Isaiah, I could not believe that I was seeing something from the Jewish Scriptures. As soon as I got home I checked my own Bible. Sure enough, the passage Chris had read was the same. I was amazed by how clearly it seemed to describe the Christian view of Jesus.

Still, I looked for ways to challenge Chris and his faith. Once I asked him, “Tell me, do you REALLY believe that God created the world like the Bible says?” Chris calmly replied, “Absolutely, don’t you?” Then he challenged me in turn: “And do you REALLY believe that an amoeba jumped out of a puddle of water and eventually became you? Tell me, which do you think takes more faith?” That made me think.

And then one day, in the fall of 1988, a famous televangelist announced that if people didn’t send him six million dollars for his ministry, God would “take him home” (in other words he would die if he didn’t get the money). Soon after, Jim and Tammy Bakker were implicated in the PTL scandal. I figured this would give me the upper hand with Chris regarding faith issues. I marched into his office with a newspaper article about the Bakkers and said, “Okay, Chris, explain that.” Still, he didn’t waver. He simply said, “Karol, these are just people. People will always fall and make mistakes. Don’t judge Jesus by what people do; judge Jesus by what Jesus did.” That was the last time I challenged him.

In the meantime, I saw an ad in the *Boston Globe* from a group called Jews for Jesus. They offered a free book called *Testimonies*, which I ordered. I was shocked to read about Jews who actually believed in Jesus. Some time later, Jews for Jesus sent a letter asking if I wanted further information, and I ordered a booklet called *Questions and Answers*. I also indicated that I would be willing to talk with someone from Jews for Jesus.

Neither my discussions with Chris nor the books convinced me that Jesus was my Messiah. But in 1987 I faced a problem that I knew I could not handle without God. And when I called out to him for help, I was amazed that he answered.

Despite various fears, I had proven to be pretty self-disciplined



Karol, age 3

Age 6



Age 16



Age 18



Age 48



Handing out broadsides in NYC



and competent in most areas of my life. But there was one area which always seemed to get the best of me. Food. It was clearly an addiction and an obsession. I could diet with the best of them...for a while, but inevitably I would gain all the weight back and then some. I continued to ride this roller coaster for many years. Occasionally, I was a borderline anorexic, but usually I was overeating. I was out of control.

A friend suggested that I go with her to an Overeaters Anonymous meeting. From my first meeting I knew I was a compulsive overeater, and that I would never be able to handle my problem by my own strength and willpower. This program suggested certain steps toward a solution. The first three involved:

1. Admitting that I was powerless over food and that my life had become unmanageable.
2. Realizing that a power greater than myself could restore me, and
3. Turning my will and my life over to the care of God as I understood him.

I had already taken the first step. As for the second step, I already knew that God existed, but I wasn't sure that he would help me.

Nevertheless, the next day I asked God for his help. The people at the program said that I'd need to abstain from sugar and flour to break the eating cycle. So that is what I asked God to help me do: abstain from eating sugar or flour for one day, just one day. At the end of the day, God had answered my prayer—talk about a miracle!

Day after day God continued to answer my prayer and help me do what I could not do for myself. I soon realized that God could and would restore me completely, if I would turn my will and life over to him. I began to pray every morning, “God, show me your will for me and I promise I'll do it—no questions asked.” It was during one such prayer that I felt a tug on my heart: “What are you going to do

about Jesus?”

I wondered if the tug was from God. I felt certain that the Jewish God would not want me to believe in Jesus, but I decided to ask him about it. For three weeks straight, every morning I asked God to show me if Jesus was really the Messiah. I also prayed that if Jesus was *not* the Messiah, that God would protect me from believing in him and thus committing idolatry.

The truth is, I was afraid to believe in Jesus because I knew that if I did, my friends and family would consider me an outsider and a traitor. I was also concerned about other ramifications. I remember asking Chris, “If I believe in Jesus, do I have to change my political views?” He responded, “The only thing you have to believe is that Jesus died for your sin and rose from the dead. The rest you don’t have to worry about now.” When I weighed my fears against the possibility of having a personal relationship with the God of the universe, what choice did I have?

I’d been praying about this for three weeks when I had lunch with Chris. At one point during our meal he looked at me and said, “I think you are ready to accept Jesus.” In that moment I knew that I already had. A week later, a man named Steve from Jews for Jesus called in response to the card I’d sent a few months earlier. Coincidence?

“I can’t believe you’re calling now,” I said to him. “I just came to believe in Jesus, and I don’t know what do next.” Steve and I began to study the Bible together weekly, and he was able to help me navigate some of the questions and concerns I had as a Jewish believer in Jesus.

Once I even handed out literature about Jesus in downtown Boston. Having done so, I could not imagine that I would ever go back out there, to stand on street corners in the freezing cold and have people look at me like I was crazy (or through me like I didn’t exist). No way. One evening Steve approached me and said, “I think you might like to become a missionary with Jews for Jesus.” I remember my unspoken retort, “And I think you must be crazy.”

Still, I agreed to pray about it, and ask God what he wanted from me. After all, that was my original prayer; that I would do what God wanted, no questions asked.

While I was grateful for the role Steve had played in my life, I had no desire to go and do likewise. I thought that it would make much more sense for me to reach out to addicts, or something of that nature, since God had helped me with my food addiction.

Then I went to church one Sunday, and the pastor's message, from Isaiah 54, was about missions. I knew that God was telling me to bring the good news I'd received to my own people. In fact, it was such a strong sense that it was almost as if the finger of God was poking me in the chest, as he clearly said, "YOU!" I half expected the whole church to turn around and stare as God was speaking to me. Somewhat embarrassed, I finally said to God, "Okay, okay, I hear you!"

I joined the staff of Jews for Jesus in 1990. That July, I went to New York City with 25 or so Jewish believers from around the country. As is tradition with Jews for Jesus, we had come to spend a month handing out literature on street corners and talking to people about Jesus.

I was terrified to approach complete strangers, especially in Times Square at night! I expressed my anxiety to a more experienced member of my team, and he left me on a corner with three police officers, hoping their presence would make me feel safer. It didn't.

I could have asked God for courage to tell people about my faith that night, but I must confess that instead I prayed, "God you are the creator of the universe and you can make me invisible." All I wanted was for the next two hours to pass quickly, without having to interact with anyone. But that is not what happened.

A tall, lanky street preacher came and stood a few feet from me. He opened his Bible and began to preach his heart out. And, as I heard the Scriptures preached, I felt a new joy and boldness. A young woman saw my Jews for Jesus T-shirt and stopped to talk. I asked if I could tell her about Jesus. By the end

of our conversation she was ready to ask God to give her a new life based on forgiveness through Jesus! It was the first time I had ever seen someone come to faith before my very eyes. When she went away that night, I owned that corner, and actively and eagerly looked for anyone else that I could talk to about Jesus. It wasn't long before I realized that all of the police officers were gone, and so was my street preacher...and so was my fear. And that fear has never, ever returned!

If you would like to read other stories of Jews who are for Jesus, check out the Jews for Jesus web site (www.jewsforjesus.org) or write to request a catalog.

Jews for Jesus International Headquarters
60 Haight St.
San Francisco, CA 94102-5895

Look for titles such as:

Drawn to Jesus: The Journey of a Jewish Artist by David Rothstein
Disowned by Steve Cohen
But I'm Jewish! by Richard Harvey
Testimonies of Jews Who Believe in Jesus, Ruth Rosen, Editor
Jewish Doctors Meet the Great Physician, Ruth Rosen, Editor
Who Ever Heard of a Jewish Missionary? by Bob Mendelsohn
From Yeshiva to Y'shua by Lev Leigh