



Maynard Lee Kaufman

February 6, 1929 - July 11, 2021

Kaufman, Maynard

Age 92

Arlington Township, Michigan

Maynard Kaufman was born on February 6, 1929 and raised on a small farm in a Mennonite community near Freeman, South Dakota. Although he cherished many cultural aspects of his religious background, he did very little to practice it or pass it on. He did, however, affirm and respond to its moral and ethnic values.

He was the second of six siblings: Lorraine Ortman, Alice Suderman, Anette Eisenbeis, Lawrence (deceased) and Roy. His education in a one-room country school and in a Mennonite high school and colleges was minimal but adequate for him to maintain an excellent record at the University of Chicago where he received a Ph.D. from the Divinity School. After graduate school he taught in the Religion Department at Western Michigan University in Kalamazoo, Michigan. Although he began teaching courses on Religion and Literature, he ended as Associate Professor of Religion and Environmental Studies, an interdisciplinary program he helped to organize. He retired from teaching in 1986.

Maynard was married three times. His first marriage was with Marian Kleinsasser in 1951, and they were divorced in Chicago in 1961. They had one son, Karl Morgan Kaufman, born in 1958. In 1962 Maynard married Sally Wright Towne and became a step-father to the three children she brought into

that relationship, Mary Michal (deceased), Jonathan and Nathan Towne. Before she died in 1990, they had two sons, Conrad Wright Kaufman in 1963 and Adrian Lee Kaufman in 1966, who died November 29, 2019. After Sally died he and Barbara Geisler were married in 1991.

Very early in his teaching career in 1963 Maynard took his family to live on a small farm near the city of Kalamazoo. This kind of living arrangement may have been an attempt to recover the joy of a childhood on a small farm and it was decisive in shaping the direction of his career. At a time when his departmental colleagues asked him to accept the chair of the department, Maynard decided to start a School of Homesteading instead. This was in 1972, when the first energy crisis was perceived as a threat to the basis of industrial society and many people were moving back to the land.

In order to conduct a School of Homesteading Maynard sought and received a half-time leave of absence from classroom teaching, at half of his regular salary. In 1972 he also moved his family to a 160 acre farm he purchased near Bangor, Michigan which was suitable for a residential learning facility. He had lived on this land since then. His work at the school led to working with other organic farmers and eventually Maynard was recognized as a leader in the organic farming movement in Michigan. He was co-organizer of Michigan Land Trustees in 1976 and organized a state-wide group, Michigan Organic Food and Farm Alliance in 1991. In 2003 he organized the first organic harvest festival in Southwest Michigan. In 2017 a book he co-edited, *The Organic Movement in Michigan*, was published. This was followed in 2018 with his Memoir, *From James Joyce to Organic Farming*.

In 2000 Maynard and Barbara began building a house they called Sunflower on a part of their land. It was totally dependent on renewable energy for heat and electricity. This allowed for the sale of other parts of their land and buildings to three different organic farmers and retirement from the more onerous farm activities. During this time Maynard published a book, *Adapting to the End of Oil: Toward an Earth-Centered Spirituality*. He also published several articles on agrarian issues in the context of the end of oil and global

warming. In 2008 he ended his work with the Green Politics movement and organized local groups of the Transition Towns Initiative which was designed to help people recognize the threats of peak oil and global warming and prepare for them. He considered these activities as a continuation of his work on homesteading and organic farming. He self-published Autobiographical Fragments in 2011 which includes records of his thoughts and activities. Although Maynard often worried about whether his farming activities distracted him from achieving his academic potential, he ended up feeling he had done the right thing in the face of the hard times that are coming at the end of cheap oil and the beginnings of climate change. Beyond this, he ended up satisfied that he had done what he enjoyed. The main regret he had in his final years was the fact that he could not live the life he had chosen over again.

Following his wishes cremation has taken place. A memorial gathering is being planned for a later date. Arrangements entrusted to the Bangor Chapel, D.L. Miller Funeral Home, www.dlmillerfuneralhome.com.

Cemetery Details

Cremation

Events

Details are pending.

Tribute Wall

RG

“ Nancy Vande Vrede-Tiller said it so well (see above or below) — it was a great privilege to know, work, talk and be with Maynard!

Robert Glidden - August 25, 2021 at 11:56 PM

LH

“ We received Maynard's Collected Agrarian Writings this past winter. What a visionary. In 2007 Maynard worked with teachers who came from around the country to take "hands-on" agricultural history workshops at Tillers International. His down to earth passion and clarity of vision so obviously inspired these teachers, and all of us.

Lynne and Phillip Heasley - July 19, 2021 at 10:21 AM

MC

“ I'm so glad I got to sit with him and ask him questions about the old times with MOFFA and his memories of my parents. He did more than he will ever know.

Merry Clark - July 15, 2021 at 11:28 PM

MB

“ Maggie Brooks lit a candle in memory of Maynard Lee Kaufman



Maggie Brooks - July 13, 2021 at 04:08 PM

NV

“ If it were not for Maynard and Sally starting the School of Homesteading I would not have met my husband of 39 years (married Aug 13, 1982), Jim Tiller. My husband came all the way from New Jersey to Bangor, MI in response to an ad he saw in Mother Earth News, to be a student. We have since been long time friends of Jonathon and Bobbi, Conrad and Adrian (although he was so quiet and kept mostly to himself), and many others via relationships formed there. When I became a professor of Sociology at Lake Michigan College, I brought several of my classes to visit "Sunflower", Maynard and Barbara's oasis of tranquility, and totally off the grid farm. My students would leave amazed and aware of a possibility of how to live without being tethered to the destructive corporations that enslave so many of us in our addiction and dependence on the "power" generated by their polluting and life destructive practices. Maynard, long ago, was able to see the danger, greed, and carelessness inherent in this luxury. He was a visionary, and like the canary in the coal mines, he did his best to try to warn us. He was a unique and awesome role model. He walked his talk. He practiced what he preached and taught it. Honest and hardworking he dedicated his life to future generations. It is hard to believe he was 92--he defied aging! His rugged stature was a testament to his healthy lifestyle. The twinkle in his eyes reflected his reverence for life and Earth. One felt proud to know him and be known by him. May his spirit rest in the peace he tried to bring to this planet.

Nancy Vande Vrede-Tiller

Nancy Vande Vrede - July 13, 2021 at 10:21 AM

JD

“ *Janice Dupler lit a candle in memory of Maynard Lee Kaufman*



Janice Dupler - July 13, 2021 at 09:29 AM

MZ

I was in a book club with Maynard and about ten other special book club members. Maynard always had incredible knowledge and insight on most any book topic discussed. He was an inspiration to all.

He will be missed. May he Rest In peace.

Max Van Zoeren

Max Van Zoeren - July 13, 2021 at 02:53 PM