



Evelyn Graf Harris

September 17, 1947 – December 25, 2025

Evelyn “Evie” (Graf) Harris passed away peacefully on Christmas morning 2025, in Riverside, California.

Born in Aberdeen, South Dakota, on September 17, 1947, to Ephraim “Abe” Graf and Evelyn (Burris) Graf, Evie’s life was defined by her warmth, her advocacy, and her deep connection to the Deaf community. She graduated from the South Dakota School for the Deaf in 1966, attended Gallaudet University for one year, and later graduated with honors from the University of Minnesota in 1981 with a degree in human services.

A fierce advocate for accessibility, Evie successfully campaigned for sign language interpreting services at the University of Minnesota and later testified before the Minnesota Legislature on the importance of ASL interpreters in hospitals. She shared her love for American Sign Language with many, teaching hearing students at the University of Minnesota, training officers at the Minneapolis Police Department, and even hosting informal classes for her neighbors so they could communicate and become friends.

In 1976, she met Robert Harris at a Deaf Leadership Training retreat in Brainerd, Minnesota. They married in 1980 and shared 39 years of marriage and friendship, raising two children (Rachel and Ray). Evie was the backbone

of their family and a vital part of the success of Robert’s company, Harris Communications. Her caring personality made her a favorite at trade shows, where she loved connecting with the Deaf community.

As a mother, Evie was devoted and tireless. She took immense pride in her children, Rachel and Ray, never missing a dance recital or a basketball game. She cherished family vacations, creating memories that her children will carry forever.

In her later years, Evie found happiness in Riverside, California, with her long-time companion, Dave Fontana. She enjoyed the warm weather, playing cards with friends, traveling overseas on Deaf tours, and becoming an active member of her church under the ministry of her favorite Deaf pastor.



Evelyn Graf took the role as Virgin Mary during the SDSD’s Christmas program in December 1964.

An animal lover at heart, she spent much of her time with her beloved Shih Tzus—Bobby, Belle, and Lily—and volunteered at local vet clinics & pet adoption centers in both Minnesota and California.

Evie is survived by her partner, Dave Fontana; her children, Rachel (Russell) Pruitt and Raymond (Kaitlin) Harris; and her beloved grandchildren, Hadley and Finn Harris. She also leaves behind her sister, Janice (James) Mitchell; her aunt, Eileen Whittlinger; her former husband, Robert Harris; and many beloved nieces, nephews, and friends.

A private funeral service will be held. Memorial donations may be made to the Mary S. Roberts Pet Adoption Center, where Evie loved to spend her free time volunteering, or The Grove Community Church, where Evie found a sense of community and acceptance.



Evelyn Graf standing at far left as SDSD Cheerleader during the year of 1965-1966