



## POST-WORLD WAR II RESOURCES

### Essay

# The Kaplan Family Story

by Jane Hedeem

When the Kaplan family arrived in Indianapolis on March 15, 1949, they were not only embarking on a new adventure in a new land, but they also were bringing their stories of an incredible journey to America.

Berek (Benny) and Frania (Fanny) Kaplan, with their two children, Rosie and Morris, arrived in America aboard the U.S. Army Transport *Gen. S.D. Sturgis*. The ship dropped anchor in New Orleans on March 14, carrying 843 displaced persons from Europe. The Kaplans' trip from Bremerhaven, Germany, to America had taken fifteen days. From New Orleans, the Kaplans continued by train to Indianapolis, where Nathan Berman of the Indianapolis chapter of Jewish Social Services met them at the station and helped them settle temporarily into an apartment.

Upon arrival, Bennie told the *Indianapolis Star* that he left his home in Radom, Poland, and had struggled to survive since Adolf Hitler's troops invaded Europe almost a decade earlier. Fannie had spent time in forced labor and concentration camps. In Poland after the war, the Kaplans met ten other Jewish families and fled west through Czechoslovakia, arriving at the Stuttgart displaced-persons camp in Germany's American zone. The Kaplans' two children were born at the camp.

### Arrival in a New Place

In March 1949 the *Jewish National Post* reported the Kaplans were the first Jewish family to arrive in Indianapolis after the U.S. Congress had voted to accept displaced persons a year earlier. The Jewish Social Service agency in Indianapolis had little advance notice of the Kaplans' arrival and publically appealed to the local Jewish community for help. Kaplan had been a baker in Poland and was given a job at Kraft Bakery. His wife remained at home with their two young children.

The *Indiana Jewish Chronicle* did a follow-up article on the family one year after their arrival in Indianapolis and reported that they were doing well. After sharing quarters with a host family, the Kaplans were now living in a home on Union Street. Kaplan still worked at the bakery and was financially able to support his family. His wife was taking a nutrition class. The whole family, who spoke Yiddish and Polish when they arrived in the United States, was learning English.

### Survival and Remembrance

The Kaplans were part of the large number of Jews and other groups who survived the atrocities of the Holocaust during World War II. Once safe on American soil, Kaplan shared stories of his experiences in a concentration camp and hiding in caves outside Warsaw.

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He lost his first wife and two sons in the concentration camps. After surviving the Warsaw Ghetto Uprising, Fanny was forced to sew Nazi uniforms during the early years of the war. The Nazis killed her first son in the Warsaw Ghetto. She lost her parents, brother, four sisters, and her first husband in the concentration camps.

Like many survivors, the Kaplans coped with strong emotions and memories. They also grappled with ways to share their stories with new friends, fellow survivors, other Jews, and, especially, their children. We will never know the full extent of their experiences.