

It's a Bird, a Plane—It's Kaplan Busting Out: With the CIA's Help?

By Barry Cunningham

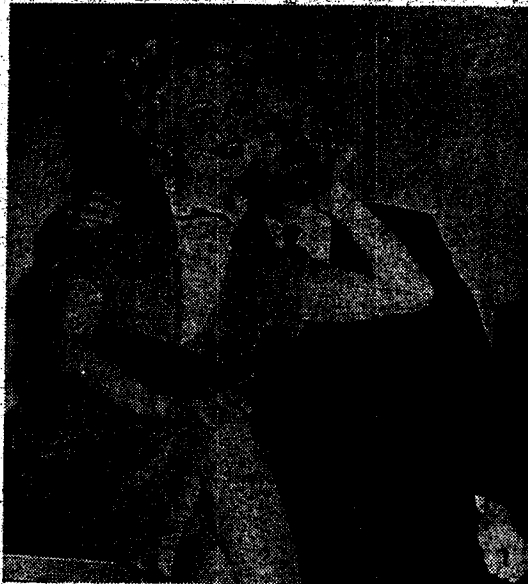
New York philanthropist J. M. Kaplan claims he hasn't heard from his estranged nephew Joel David Kaplan, since the 41-year-old heir's latest escapade—a daring escape from a Mexican prison by helicopter.

"Joel is a troubled person. But his problems are his own problems," the wealthy molasses tycoon said through a family spokesman.

Because of the nephew's family ties to his uncle's J. M. Kaplan Fund, an acknowledged CIA "conduit," "people are determined to substitute 'James Bond' for the Kaplan family name," the spokesman added.

It said the chopper was found abandoned last night near the Gulf Coast fishing village of La Presca, about 150 miles south of Brownsville, Tex., and some 300 miles northeast of Mexico City.

The escapees switched at La Presca to separate Cessna planes that had been rented in Phoenix, Ariz., the office said, Kaplan flying by way of Brownsville to Sausalito, Calif., and



Post Photo by Louis L'Orfe
Joel David Kaplan in 1953 with his wife Bonnie Sharie, former showgirl. They were later divorced.

Castro possibly going to Guatemala. The plane carrying Kaplan was said to have been piloted by a Victor E. Stadler, whose home address was not given.

The FBI in San Francisco, across the bay from Sausalito, confirmed that Kaplan was being sought in that area.

Kaplan, whose check-

book had been involved in gun-running to both pro- and anti-Castro groups.

In Mexico City, attorney Victor Velazquez, who defended Kaplan in the murder case, was quoted as saying that he believed Kaplan was a CIA agent and that the escape had been engineered by the agency.

The Kaplan Fund was later identified by Congressman Wright Patman of Texas as a "secret conduit" for transmission of CIA funds abroad. The fund's 79-year-old founder, whose full name is Jacob M. Kaplan, later acknowledged that he had funneled \$1-million to schools in Mexico and Central America, feeling it was his "patriotic duty to do so."

The \$20,000,000 J. M. Kaplan Fund was based on the fortune Kaplan accumulated through his South American sugar interests and as president of the Welch Grape Co.

Joel Kaplan was arrested by Interpol in Spain in 1962 and tried in 1964. In 1967, the Mexican Supreme Court upheld the 28-year sentence.

ered past included a widely-publicized assault on his shapely pin-up wife, Bonnie Sharie, before their divorce in 1958, was serving a 28-year sentence for the murder of his business partner, Luis Melchior Vidal in 1961.

The mysterious case attracted national attention because of suggestions that Vidal also a