

Copter Escaper's Wife Says Husband Is Sick

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Mexico City

"I'm sort of sad and yet in a way I'm glad," said Irma Kaplan, whose husband made a prison escape by helicopter here August 18.

Joel David Kaplan, 45, of New York City, serving a 28-year sentence for murder, and Carlos Contreras, 24, of Venezuela, were whisked

away in a small helicopter that landed in the prison yard at dusk.

"John was very sick," said Mrs. Kaplan, a petite Mexican. She refers to him as John.

She said that her husband had suffered lung and heart ailments since his transfer to

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Santa Marta prison in May 1969.

"The last couple of years he was very tired, sick and quiet," she said as her 1½-year-old daughter Aura Guadalupe Isabel, romped about the apartment Mrs. Kaplan shares with her widowed mother.

Mrs. Kaplan said Contreras was a bad influence on her husband during the two years they shared the same dormitory.

"He caused problems between my husband and me and made John extremely jealous of me," she added.

Kaplan, said to be a CIA agent at the time of his arrest, is in hiding in this country. His attorneys say Kaplan

fears he will be killed by CIA agents if he surfaces.

Mrs. Kaplan first met Kaplan in 1964 when she visited another prisoner a year after Kaplan was extradited from Spain in connection with the death of Luis Melchor Vidal, a New York Puerto Rican who reportedly was connected with illegal drug and arms sales.

She married Kaplan in a civil wedding April 28, 1965 with a proxy standing in for Kaplan.

Mrs. Kaplan visited her husband the day of the escape. When she left about three hours before the jail break, she told him, "Well, I'll see you tomorrow."

"Okay," he replied.

"I guess I'll never see him again now," she said.