



Esther Miriam Kaplan

December 11, 1939 - September 2, 2026

New Haven, Connecticut

Esther Miriam Kaplan died in New Haven on September 2, 2026. She was eighty-six. Born there on December 11, 1939, she grew up above a bakery her uncle still called the shop, and she learned a rye crust before she learned a campus. A roll, she believed, should arrive warm enough to argue with the butter.

She spent twenty-four years behind that counter, then another dozen in a hospital gift shop that sold the same three kinds of comfort to people who did not want a gift so much as a reason to stand still. She would not let a widower be rushed toward a stuffed animal. She would not let a volunteer invent a discount that made the register a liar. After a bad afternoon she sat in the stairwell with the radio off until her hands were quiet.

She married Ira Kaplan in 1961. They raised a son in a two-family that needed storm windows and a daughter who needed a ride to Hebrew school at hours no one should be awake. Ira taught high-school history. Esther packed lunches and considered a Sunday bagel a civic obligation. After he died in 2008 she read the paper with a pencil and argued, fondly, with the letters page.

Friends remember a woman who showed up with soup as if that were the natural use of a Tuesday, who could explain a price without making it a sermon, and who kept one good coat. She loved a quiet gallery at the university museum, a cup of coffee that was never quite hot enough, and the harbor when it looked like pewter. She died in New Haven, the brick city she refused to narrate as a punch line. The counter is closed. The fairness she practiced there is harder to replace than a recipe card.

Services

A memorial in New Haven. A gift to a hospital volunteer fund or the public library suits her.

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