

Dave's Fantastic

David & Esther Berkowitz



Location

Virginia Ave
& The
Boardwalk
Atlantic City,
NJ
Atlantic
County

Years Active

1960s - 1970s

Dave's Fantastic Storefront in 1964

About David and Esther Berkowitz

David and Esther Berkowitz were born in Wielun, Poland; David in 1913 and Esther in 1916. In 1939, David was drafted into the Polish army. Shortly thereafter, they were married and fled Poland for sanctuary in Russia. They were offered citizenship, but declined as they naively believed they would go “home” to their families when the war was over. As punishment for refusing citizenship, they were sent to a labor camp in Siberia, where they spent the remainder of the war. In 1940, their son Daniel was born and, after the war in 1946, their daughter Aida was born in Kazakhstan. After time in a displaced person camp, they settled in Munich. Ironically, Germany, being occupied by Allied military governments, was the place where Jewish “displaced persons,” found refuge after the war while they

waited for immigration to the United States, Palestine/Israel, or other countries. There was no going “home” to their former home in Poland, as the majority of their families had perished in the Holocaust, and their Jewish communities no longer existed.

After 5 years in Germany, in 1951 they were finally granted visas to immigrate to the United States. Arriving in New York Harbor, they lived in Brooklyn for a few months, and then settled on a chicken farm in Egg Harbor City, New Jersey. Esther and her children tended to the chickens while David bought eggs from local chicken farms and sold them to restaurants and markets from South Jersey to New York City.

In the early 1960s, they moved to Atlantic City, where Esther owned and operated a fifteen unit guest house, The Ocean View. At the same time, David bought and operated Dave’s Fantastic. David passed away from leukemia in 1973 at age 60; Esther passed away in 2015 at age 99.



Dave’s Fantastic

David Berkowitz founded Dave’s Fantastic in the mid-1960s. While still operating the family poultry farm in Egg Harbor Township, David supplemented the family income by operating a hot dog stand on the Atlantic City boardwalk. Even after retiring from the egg business and selling the family farm, David continued to run the eatery, which also served short order breakfast, hamburgers, and other menu items..

The food stand boomed after a widely published promotion of Dave’s mile-long hot dogs. The business succeeded at a prime location in Atlantic City, immediately adjacent to large entertainment facilities such as The Steel & Steeplechase Piers. The hot dog stand was an icon of the Atlantic City Boardwalk during the late 1960s and early 1970s.

Dave Berkowitz working the fryer at Dave’s Fantastic in the 1960s, which his daughter called his “happy place”



In addition to being incredibly hard-working, David Berkowitz had a reputation for being generous and charitable. He regularly donated food from his hot dog stand in the summer to the homeless of Atlantic City.

Today the site of Dave's Fantastic is occupied by The Hard Rock Hotel & Casino.

Boardwalk businesses owned by Holocaust Survivors

Holocaust Survivors operated several businesses on the Atlantic City Boardwalk. Among them was Dave's Fantastic at Virginia Avenue, owned by David Berkowitz, and Playcade between California and Texas Avenues, an arcade owned by the Tracht family.

For more information see

South Jersey Holocaust Survivor Digital Archive, Sara and Sam Schoffer Holocaust Resource Center at Stockton University.

Esther Berkowitz Testimony, USC Shoah Foundation Visual History Archive.

Schoffer, L. B. (2009). *A Dream, A Journey, A Community: A Nostalgic Look at Jewish Businesses In and Around Atlantic City*. Comteq Publishing.

Photo Sources:

Family Provided Photos.

Vintage Everyday, 9/26/2018.

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