

Jake Erlich
Son of Leib & Chana Erlich
Aug. 20 - 26, 2020 – Interview via Zoom led by Kiel Majewski
(Danny Spungen was present)

All notes are considered “Draft” – Fact checking & more research is OK !!!
Additional notes added after Danny’s visit to Jake’s apartment in Toronto June 7, 2025

Revised last: ~~Aug 26, 2020 5:00pm~~

Jan. 2, 2026

I. Arolsen Archives – Leib Ehrlich

https://collections.arolsen-archives.org/en/archive/5825282/?p=1&s=leib%20ehrlich&doc_id=5825289

1. Mauthausen document. Arrived April 13, 1945.
Only 5.0” tall. Died at 4’ 10”

June 7, 2025 meeting additions: Jake now said he was 4’10” and not 5’0” as stated on the Canada certificate. The conclusion is that he was on the shorter side!

April 28th or May 28th

*The document has a pencil crossed out the “5” May and changed to April. Jake thinks April and uses April.

Born in Osiek, Poland

Born 1905 or 1908. Father did not know.

June 7, 2025 meeting additions: Yes, not sure if 1905 or 1908. Chana thought 1905 but Leib did not know. “We just picked out 1908” at some point.

2. Buchenwald document. Lejb Erlich. Says born April 22, 1905.

Another document crosses out the “22” and changed to “28”

Buchenwald assigned prisoner #587.

Eric saw a document and said, “that’s my dads signature” – on what seems to be a signature card when receiving script (RM) – Image# 14. This document spells his name with the “h” – Erhlich.

II. USHMM website.

https://secure.ushmm.org/online/hsv/person_view.php?PersonId=4483568

Has only the image of the Mauthausen card.

III. Adolf book – The Devil’s Workshop Leib Ehrlich - #46852 (April 28, 1905 – Printer – born in Poland).

IV. The Norway book – Pages 203-204 – Erlich stood calm and cool.....did Erlich confess?....no....

V. Interview questions from Kiel.

1. Leib Erlich.

Leib = “Little Lion” in Polish. In Canada = Leon. Best friend Joe Rosenthal called him “Leo” ...Joe died last year. Has one daughter (Susan Rosenthal).

Why the “h” ???. His father did not know why. Happened in Canada?

Leib Passed away on - Jan 27, 1987 – the date of Auschwitz liberation.

June 7, 2025 meeting additions: For the last ten (10) years of his life, he had Alzheimer’s.

2. Mother – Chana Honigman: April 25, 1915 (100%). Born in Shebgeshen (phonetically) – Kiel knows the town. Jake went to the town with the mother. He does not know the grandparents (on both sides).

English nickname = _____

Chana passed away on Nov. 5, 2001 in Walkerton, Ontario.

June 7, 2025 meeting additions: Ann was her English name. She was blond blue eyed, spoke twelve (12) languages. Setup Yiddish schools for the Polish government. Master Degree. She hid at various homes during the war in Poland...and continued her education as well.

3. From birth town Osiek, Leib went to Warsaw. Printing business.

4. It was in Warsaw Leib became one of the 5 founding members of the Bund – a political group....not Zionist. “My father absolutely was anti-Zionist.” “My mother was sympathetic to the Jewish cause but did not want the Palestinians to be forced out of their land.”

My father did not believe in borders. He wanted Jews to live anywhere. Father was a “student” – morning to night – “to nourish brain to contribute to society – a theoretician.” But did not tell Jake his direct views.

5. Only one of 10-13 Erlich siblings survived. The sole survivor brother went to Israel. His son was Dov.

June 7, 2025 meeting additions: Jake said 13 siblings today. Would need to be verified.

“Dov” was father’s brother’s son. Dov married “Kate” – two son Ronny and Danny. “I have not seen them in 25-30 years....I think 27 years ago.” “Nothing in common.” “family rift a long time ago.”

“I don’t know the name of Dov’s father’s name.”

6. Lieb came to Canada in 1946-1947. He 1st walked back to Warsaw...met Chana. Lieb was giving a political speech related to the Bund and they met. They both went to Sweden. From Sweden to Canada.

June 7, 2025 meeting additions: Chana knew about Leib being a politician before the war. She had knew about him and then heard him speak after the war.

7. Leib’s war experience “not carved in stone” ...I think arrested in 1942...“I could be full of shit”....I think arrested in Warsaw.

Arrested as a political activity...arrested by the Poles – in prison for 2 years. He was an “anarchist” – against the Polish government of its day.

*Kiel: Ghetto establish in 1940.

8. A Polish Professor “August Grabski” (brother in Toronto) in Poland.....Jake sent him original documents (regrets it....took 3 years to get back....bad)....and was told he was an editor of two publications. He met Jakes son, Simon, and he wrote a book and put a chapter in the book about the Bund. Not sure if Lieb is mentioned in the book. He got back all the material in 2019.

9. Jake said he father was released and then arrested again...but again he does not know the story.....I don’t know the path of when and where he went (which camps).

He thinks he was sent to Auschwitz in 1942 and when prisoners were asked if they had printing talent...he got selected. But Jake said he was not really in the business...he did not work with his hands...he did not do laundry.

10. Until today (Kiel’s website research), “I understand he was in Buchenwald, Sachsenhausen and Mauthausen” but did not know for sure....now I know.

I know he was in sub-camps as well.

Father told Jake that he had to work in a quarry – carry big rocks on his back. He was forced to “run” with the rocks on his back. He was “taunted” and forced to run....if not, he would be killed...a daily setting. I think this was “before” Operation Bernhard.

I believe June 5, 1945 liberated....Ebsensee – the big cave with where the printing presses and Operation Bernhard workers were going to be blown up.

*Kiel: Ebsensee was May 6, 1945.

“Oh...I don’t know....maybe it was May 5th...I don’t know. I don’t know for sure...maybe I read in June.”

11. Jake’s knowledge: “As a small child I learned about the Holocaust....my parents...I don’t know the context.” Maybe parents were preparing me in bits and pieces. Jake guessing around 10 or a bit younger...but not in detail. Maybe at 12 years old, I began asking for more information about their background....I was becoming more aware – normal.

12. Did parents interact with other survivors? Not sure....he went to a survivor’s company (Canada Sportswear) with my parents...and saw the tattoo....I knew he was a survivor.....but does not know the names.

Was Jake curious about learning about the Holocaust? “It was more matter of fact....I did not know about the severity.”

Parents associated with other Jewish families...my mother wanted to have a sense of Jewish community...the culture. But my father was more “international”...less about Jewish life. Both parents not religious....”atheist.”

No recordings of his father...nothing. Jake has 8 hours of tape from mother. Not much in the tapes about the father’s Holocaust experiences. “She did not know about Operation Bernhard....no clue.” She died in 2001....”we did not know until 2008 the words ‘Operation Bernhard’Cathy (Jake’s girlfriend) and I learned about it in Costa Rica.

13. Jake asked his father, “what did you do in concentration camps?”

A. Counterfeiting...but never the money....”government type stuff – passports, visas”never money.

B. Warsaw Ghetto. It was in High School – “if there were so many in Ghetto...why not go after the Basterds.” My dad did not like my cockiness, attitude! Father told me they had guns. “I was callus” ...so that was a bad experience for Jake (he had some tears/fluctuations in his voice in talking about this...emotional moment).

C. Jake asked, “did you kill anyone?”

There was a shed...a prisoner would hide in shed. Other prisoners would lure a Nazi guard in and father would say “TSIK TSIK” ...it means DEAD...Jake motioned his arm like a slice...an axe. Father did not say Nazi was killed....just yelled TSIK and gave the hand motion.

14. Jake: Appox. 1973 Leib and Chana traveled...retired....when they traveled, father would meet up with others from concentration camps...mom did not go....she respected his space when it came to his experiences. She did something else...minded her own business.

15. Jake was making money in his 3 stores in 1975 so I wanted my parents to travel. They were not poor...but not a lot of money...they did own 2 buildings....they saved a lot. They did get a small amount of restitution. I'm not sure if they took it. "I remember the conversation – is it blood money?"

"This is when he came into all this money." C\$ 366,000 (all denominations) found when father died....July 27, 1987. Literally months before, I bought them a house because bedroom on 1st floor for aging father...and my mother could have backyard. When moving from apartment to house – she found the boxes...and only told Jake about it after father died at the memorial service. She showed me the boxes of money.

*The stores did not make this kind of money to hide it...shelter it...hide cash over the years. Jake said It was impossible for this kind of money to be taken from the business/stores.

Jake said too dangerous to keep money in house. Jake bought some safes....put in 3 stores. Converted some of the money. I kept the money for several years and at some point put it all the bank. After a period of time, I was audited by the Canadian Government.

At one point when thinking of retiring (one of a couple of times I think Jake said), he hired a company to help and have a big "going out of business sale." Jake told the guy about the father's mystery money. The company advisor "squealed" on me, thinking he stole from the business...and that is when the audit came.

After all the penalties, taxes, etc....he ended up paying C\$ 500,000. This settled around 1996-1997. After Jake learned about Operation Bernhard in 2008 – he tried to tell his former lawyer and lawyer said Jake just had no proof.

*My speculation is that when he met with people traveling, they would give him "his share" of money from some type of counterfeit operation or "something" related to Operation Bernhard. Maybe some of the Operation Bernhard notes were somehow washed/changed around the world. I don't know!!!!

16. Yes, father had a wife before the war....not a family. Father told him this..."he said so." Maybe not a wife....maybe a girlfriend?? "Remember, my parents did not get married...they did not believe in it.....but my mother did take my father's last name."

June 7, 2025 meeting additions: The 1st wife was murdered {in the Holocaust}

17. Jake's sister (Roma) was born in Poland (Breslow – Wroclaw) ...believe December 8, 1946 (passed away July 14, 2005) "100%, I have death certificate." She was not well for much of her life. Had several diseases including one form of cancer inside her bones...very sensitive to breaking bones (for example).

18. As refugees in Poland, I believe I have documents saying Leib, Chana and Roma went to Sweden.

Sponsored by an organization in Montreal lobbying to bring in Jewish families.

For a "very short period of time" they lived in Montreal... they could not make a living. Mother was qualified teacher but was able to teach. Jake has no idea what she did...."she was very practical...she could do anything...but I don't know what she did." I think my father tried to get factory work – but he did not know anything about factory work" – not how he was built.

They went to Toronto. I don't know what my mother did....she would do anything.

Father found a job at a "dry goods wholesaler." Maybe he moved things around (stock boy?). A guy (last name) Solnitzky – wealthy, sons were lawyer – bankrolled father to open a store in a shithole town (does not know name)...the shamotte store – clothing etc.

Maybe Solnitzky felt pity (emphay) on him? My father was friendly and loveable...so maybe how he got customers. My mom was "amazing" as well....emotionally connected with everyone. "Incredible experience...I witnessed it myself." Maybe Solnitzky had Leon buy his wholesale items as well.

They moved from town-to-town with a store on their back...stay until it failed...and moved on (all southwest Ontario - Killensburg, Lemington, Brandford.....) . "Simcoe" is the town I was born in (May 29, 1952).

I started school in Toronto (store) and moved around a lot. In "Collingwood" 1st time of stability. Grade 4-8 was a long period of being in same school.

My mother was too short to drive...the mother drove.

*At one point he mother got raped on a driving experience. Mother as "matter of fact about it.). "Every immigrant has issues.....that is why I am so pro-immigrant."

19. When did Jake learn about Operation Bernhard? In **2010** (not 2008) in Costa Rica on vacation, a couple from England told Jake about the movie – ***The Counterfeiters***. He found an Italian numismatics (Stefano Poddi) guy online by chance. "A hail Marry" and very quickly emailed back asking if Jake's father – was Lieb and born in Osiek, Poland.

At this point Jake saw the movie "after" I learned details from Stefano.

(*See Danny, Jake email introductions for complete history of how Jake, Pam West and Lawrence Malkin connected).

20. Jake's kids

Simon 27 years old. Simon is most interested. Simon is the guy to interview (now in Netherlands with girlfriend. Planning a 3-year bike tour, including Central America & Argentina.

Jesse 31 years old. As of late, Jesse is interested but is now very busy in life. Least exposure.

Jason Born Sep. 7th 1987. Same year father passed away but father never saw. 33 (he likes "Jay"). Jason went on "Birth Right"

Jason interviewed Joe Rosenthal (Leon's best friend) in college. Joe was an acclaimed artist. Jake thinks Jason asked about Leon's past. Jake thinks Jason went to Auschwitz.

21. "I happen to be born to two Jewish parents....I am culturally Jewish but I am an international person." The kids know grandparents are survivors..."in the depths of their souls."

"For me, my goal is to honor my mother and father. I carry their ashes with me. I have a powerful sense of my parents. They really really really kept the Holocaust story away from me...they knew it would hurt me." "It matters in principle to keep the memory for the long term...has long term value."

"I believe people who have been harmed....they have an inherit right to be treated well."

Jake thinks his sons are more knowledgeable about the Holocaust from a broader view...and not the micro view of their grandparents. They are modern kids....

Simon is more sensitive....travels a lot....before he went to Netherlands, Jake showed him the documents and Spungen Foundation website....he had never seen the material before....just last week...just before he went to Netherlands. Simon was also in Poland...he met with Professor August Grabski.

22. Jake's business.

Landscaping business (as a kid).

*Danny will send Jake my landscaping letter to Mr. Mahl.

Went to Trent University with Jeep "and" snow plow to make money. Did Economics course paper on his snow plow business.

Moved to a 2nd college. "Quelth?"

Then opened a store in Dec. 2002 (?). Same type of store (Sandy's Sportswear).
Sandy's = unisex and wanted a name not related to anyone in the family.

Parents demanded he go to college. Jake took night school and ran store during day.

But never finished college...too many stores.

Remember, his mother got an MS from Univ. of Vilnius.

Below are additional notes taken June 7, 2025 at the apartment of Jake Erlich while Danny Spungen was in Toronto for the AHO (Association of Holocaust Organizations) conference:

23. Officially Jake's name is Jacob Erlich. No middle name. Born May 29, 1952

24. Jake has 3 boys:

- 32 year old psychotherapist
- 36 year old fire fighter
- 37 year old Musician (with 3 degrees)

25. Leib was friend with Ernst Mandel: https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Ernest_Mandel
Ernst was well known Marxist and wrote a book about the Marxist Economic Theory.

Jake believes there are possible letters between the two of them.

In Jake's collection of his fathers material, there are "many" letters and papers written by Leib related to Marxism.