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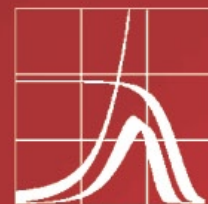
Heiner Maier
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Editors



Exceptional Lifespans

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Demographic Research Monographs

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Editors

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Chapter 1

Preface



James W. Vaupel

The advance of the frontier of survival is documented, verified, and brought to life in this monograph.

A dedicated international team has worked for two decades to gather data on supercentenarians, aged 110+, in 12 European countries, Japan, Quebec and the United States. For the last several years, additional information has been compiled on semi-supercentenarians, aged 105–109. The findings are stored in the International Database on Longevity (IDL), which was founded by Jean-Marie Robine and me, originally housed at INSERM, the French National Institute of Health, in Montpellier, France and now managed by the Max Planck Institute for Demographic Research in Rostock, Germany, in collaboration with the French Institute for Demographic Studies (INED). An updated version of this database will be released at the same time this book is published. The database is meticulously described in Chap. 2 by Jdanov, Shkolnikov and Gellers-Barkman, key researchers in the Laboratory of Demographic Data at the Max Planck Institute. France Meslé and Jacques Vallin at INED, as well as Jean-Marie Robine, at INED and INSERM, Bernard Jeune at the University of Southern Denmark, Michel Poulain at the Université catholique de Louvain and many of the authors of chapters in this book and its predecessor (Maier et al. 2010) helped develop the database.

In addition to the IDL data, carefully validated reports based on painstaking scholarship have been prepared on specific individuals with extraordinarily long lifespans. Some of these reports are presented in Chaps. 14, 15, 16, 17, 18, 19, 20, 21 and 22. Other reports were published in our 2010 monograph *Supercentenarians*. Chapter 14 provides references to additional case studies, including the book *Validation of Exceptional Longevity* (Jeune and Vaupel 1999). The exacting research

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Chapter 20

Validation of 113-Year Old Israel Kristal as the World's Oldest Man



Wacław Jan Kroczyk and Robert Young

20.1 Biography

Mr. Kristal's life story is remarkable, as being a Holocaust survivor was only the worst of many hardships he had to face. Israel Kristal was born as Izrael Icek Krysztal to Mojżesz Dawid Krysztal and Brucha Krysztal (nee Rojt) in the village of Malenie (then part of the Russian Empire; now located in Łódź Voivodeship, Poland) on Sept. 15, 1903. His mother died just 10 years later, in 1913.

As his father was drafted during World War I, Kristal was forced to work hard on a farm to earn his living as a teenager. In 1920, he was reunited with his father and siblings in Łódź, where the family opened a confectionary. Israel Kristal became a candy maker, which would remain his lifelong profession; in articles written about him later, his candy making career would prompt reporters worldwide to refer to his "bittersweet long life." In 1928, at the age of 25, Israel Kristal married Chaja Fajga Frucht in Węgleszyn, Poland. The couple had two children. The Kristal family ran a local chocolate and candy business until the outbreak of World War II, when Łódź was occupied by Nazi Germany. The Nazis forced the Jewish population of Łódź, including the Kristal family, to move to a district called the "Litzmannstadt Ghetto." Israel Kristal lived there for 4 years, until he was deported to Auschwitz in August 1944, where he remained for another 3 months. Subsequently, he was a prisoner in the labor camps of Wuestegiersdorf, Doernau, and Schottenwerk. He regained his freedom in May 1945, when the Allied forces liberated the Schottenwerk camp. Although his wife and children had been killed in the Holocaust, Israel Kristal did not lose his will to live after this devastating loss. Instead, he returned to Łódź, where he restarted his confectionary business and married his second wife, Szejwa (nee Chuda). Together, they had a son: Chaim Dawid. In 1950, Mr. Kristal and his family decided to leave Poland to settle in Haifa, Israel, where he lived until his

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death. In September 2016, Israel Kristal turned 113 years of age, and the family celebrated his Bar Mitzvah. This coming of age ritual is traditionally held at the time of a Jewish boy's 13th birthday, but Israel Kristal was unable to celebrate his Bar Mitzvah 100 years previously because when he turned 13, World War I was raging and his family was separated. He died at his home in Haifa on Aug. 11, 2017, at the age of 113 years and 330 days (Stephenson 2017).

20.2 Research

The research performed to validate Mr. Kristal's age turned out to be very challenging. The investigation lasted a total of 2 years, and can be broken down into four phases.

Phase I (May 2014 – July 2014)

Reports that Mr. Israel Kristal was the oldest living Holocaust survivor first appeared upon the passing of Alice Herz-Sommer in the spring of 2014 (even though he was already older than she was). This marked the beginning of the validation effort. Some early reports mistakenly named his place of birth as Tarnów (instead of Żarnów), a city located in Lesser Poland Voivodeship. Thus, an attempt to obtain a record of his birth from the Tarnów registry office was unsuccessful. The focus of the investigation shifted to confirming that Mr. Kristal had lived in the Jewish ghetto in the occupied city of Łódź. With the assistance of GRG-Germany correspondent Stefan Jamin, we obtained several registration lists from the Litzmannstadt Ghetto dated from 1940 to 1942, which provided middle-life evidence of Mr. Kristal's age. We then suspended our research because of the lack of sufficient information.

Phase II (August 2014–October 2014)

The second phase of the research started when reports on Mr. Kristal's upcoming 111th birthday appeared in August 2014. At that time, more detailed information about Mr. Kristal's place of birth was disclosed, which indicated that Mr. Kristal had been born in Żarnów, not Tarnów. Further research was therefore performed at the local archive unit in Piotrków Trybunalski and at the registry office of Żarnów. The Jewish registry books from both places were checked, but the requested birth record was not found. There were two gaps in the documentation. The books of births for the years 1905 and 1907 for Żarnów synagogue district were reported as missing, and no entry for Mr. Kristal's birth could be found in the Żarnów birth registry books for the years 1903, 1904, 1906, 1908, or 1909. Independently, the registry office of Żarnów checked the Jewish community's birth records until 1945, but could find no mention of the name Kristal. At that time, it was common practice among Jewish families in Poland to report the births of several of their children in a single year. Hence, it was possible that the children of Moszek-Dawid Kristal, Israel's father, were reported in one of the missing years. We continued our research

in the Łódź archive in the hopes of discovering a registration list that included Israel Kristal's name. Meanwhile, we filed a request with the Kielce archive to grant us permission to research the population lists for Żarnów. Unfortunately, neither the research in Łódź nor in Żarnów proved fruitful. Researchers at the Łódź archive combed through the collections of the Łódź Jewish religious community, electoral lists of the Jewish religious community in Łódź, alphabetical lists of taxpayers of the school and synagogue in Łódź, city acts of Łódź, and records of the resident population of Łódź for the years 1903–1931. Still, the name of Israel Kristal was nowhere to be found. By October 2014, it appeared that the research on Mr. Kristal had hit a dead end.

Phase III (July 2015–December 2015)

The third phase began when we established contact with Mr. Oren Kristal, Israel Kristal's grandson. Oren Kristal provided us with more detailed information about his grandfather's place of birth than had previously been reported: namely, that Israel had been born in a village with a name that could be translated into English as "Little nothing" (Polish: *małe nic*). After looking at the map of the region, found two villages that might fit this account: Malenie and Maleniec, both of which were within the Żarnów synagogue district. Meanwhile, Mr. Kristal provided us with additional materials, including middle life evidence dated to 1949 and 1955. Oren Kristal also gave us information on the exact place of Mr. Israel Kristal's first marriage, which he referred to as "Wingelsin." After a thorough examination of the maps of the region, we found the village of Węgleszyn, which lies 60 km south of Żarnów. Currently, Węgleszyn is located in Oksa Commune, Świętokrzyskie Voivodeship. When contacted, the registry office in Oksa said they did not have the record, and advised us to contact the state archive in Kielce. Another request was sent to the archive to investigate the population lists for the village of Malenie. The response to this inquiry, which arrived in October, was negative. However, it came to our attention that at the time of Mr. Kristal's marriage, Węgleszyn belonged to the Małogoszcz Commune and not the Oksa Commune, as was previously thought. When we called the Małogoszcz registry office in December, we finally made our long-awaited breakthrough. The record of Israel Kristal's first marriage to Chaja Feige Frucht from 1928 was discovered. Although the document was not issued within the first 20 years of the claimant's life, and thus does not meet modern early-life evidence standards, the chances that Mr. Kristal's reported age was authentic increased substantially with this discovery. Under a law enacted by the Second Polish Republic, all Polish brides and grooms, including all Jewish couples, were required to present a valid document verifying their reported date of birth, such as an extract of a birth record, if they wished to marry in another synagogue district. As Israel Kristal had been born in the Żarnów synagogue district but was marrying in Węgleszyn, he would have been required to present such a document. Due to some bureaucratic issues, we had difficulties obtaining that particular document. Although we also asked for permission to research the population lists of the other, similar sounding village of Maleniec and the village of Węgleszyn, we were unable

to obtain any new information from these lists due to the lack of surviving documentation. Oren Kristal confirmed reports that the Kristal family was impoverished at the time Mr. Kristal's father was called to serve in the army, and that his mother had died young. As we pieced this story together, it became clear that young Israel's family was in such dire straits by the time he reached age 13 that he was unable to follow the Jewish tradition of celebrating his Bar Mitzvah. Because Mr. Kristal had no Bar Mitzvah celebration, there was no document providing evidence of his age for that period of time.

Phase IV (January 2016–February 2016)

Mr. Yasutaro Koide of Japan, the GWR- and GRG-recognized World's Oldest Man, passed away on Jan. 19, 2016, at the grand age of 112, leaving Israel Kristal as a leading candidate for the Guinness World Records' title of World's Oldest Man. The research into Mr. Kristal's case entered the decisive phase soon thereafter. Also around that time, Mr. Kristal's life became a topic of interest for Haaretz journalists. We contacted Stanley Diamond and Michael Tobias of Jewish Records Indexing-Poland, an organization specializing in the field of Jewish genealogy. They had contributed to the important discovery of the 1918 Łódź Registration Card for the Kristal family, on which Izrael Icek's name had been added when he reunited with his family in 1920. This evidence of his arrival in Łódź in order to work in the family's confectionery business was consistent with the reports and stories of the Kristal family. After the war, Mojżesz-Dawid Kristal settled in Łódź with his surviving family members. Young Israel was not present in Łódź at the time the record was made, but he joined his family 2 years later. This timeline explains why his name was added to the entry for the Kristal family in the 1918 Łódź census, and why a corresponding notification was added in the margin. At that point, a piece of early-life evidence that meets modern validation standards had finally been discovered. Shortly thereafter, Oren Kristal provided us with late-life evidence in the form of an ID card issued in 2013, which was translated from Hebrew.

20.3 Validation

The age of Israel Kristal is confirmed by the following documents:

- I. Łódź census (1918) – This bilingual document, written in German and Polish, mentions a Kristal family residing in the city of Łódź as of 1918. The document was created before the end of World War I, when Łódź, along with part of the Congress Poland, which was still a de-jure part of the Russian Empire, was administered by the German Empire. In the document, Kristal, or the German form of the family name, was used instead of Kryształ, the Polish version of the name. We were therefore able to confirm that the document was created before Nov. 11, 1918, which marks the end of WWI and the independence of Poland. The document mentions Mojżesz Dawid (given names in

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Fig. 20.1 Israel Kristal's entry in the 1918 Łódź census

Polish), head of the family, who came to Łódź from Maleniec on Apr. 15, 1918. His profession was recorded as glazier, which is in line with news reports and family stories. His religion was listed as Jewish and his nationality as Polish. Several other household members were also recorded: Perla, Zirman, Abram, Abram, and – importantly for the purposes of our study – “Israel Icek”, born in Maleniec, on “1 V 1903” (see Fig. 20.1). It is notable that Israel Icek was added to the list later, just as the 1920 paragraph says. This event accords with reports and family stories that claim that Israel Kristal, aged 17, arrived in Łódź in 1920 to work in the family confectionary business. He lived with his family at 27 Średnia Street, District V. The paragraph next to the addition of Israel Icek's name was written on Oct. 29, 1920. Oren Kristal confirmed that the information on the document corresponds to a family story in which it was claimed that Israel's father did not know that his son was alive. According to this story, Israel, who had been on his own since the beginning of the war, was 16 years old when he left the farm where he had been working after the war ended, and walked barefoot until, a year later, he finally reunited with his father. This document is of crucial importance. It is the only piece of early-life evidence that supports the claim that Israel Kristal was born in 1903. Thus, the requirement of modern age validation standards that evidence from the first 20 years of life is provided has been met (Poulain, 2010).

- II. Delayed birth record (1927) – This document was attached as an allegato to the marriage record found in the Małogoszcz registry office. The document mentions Israel Icek Kryształ (the Polish version of his name), a son of Moszek Dawid [Kryształ] and Brucha Rojt. In this document, the entries on his year of birth (1903) and his place of birth: (Zarnow) are consistent with his claims. The delayed birth record of his wife, Haja Feigla Frucht, who was born in Wegleszyn on Nov. 12, 1909, was also attached.

- III. Marriage record (1928) – The document mentions the marriage between Izrael Icek Kryształ, aged 25, and Haja Fajgla Frucht, aged 19. The document was issued in Małogoszcz on Apr. 22, 1928. Israel Kristal was mentioned as having been a resident of Węgleszyn at that time. The names of his parents (Moszek Dawid and Brucha Rojt) and the place of birth (Żarnów, Opoczno County) entered in the document are consistent with information in previous records. The years of birth listed for both Israel and Haja (1903 and 1909) are in line with those recorded in the Litzmannstadt Ghetto documentation from the 1940s.
- IV. Application for the ID card (1931) – The details on this card are consistent with those of previous records. The document contains the earliest known picture of Mr. Kristal, who was then a young man in his late twenties.
- V. Litzmannstadt Ghetto documentation (1940–1944) – This collection of documents consistently mentions Izrael Icek Kryształ as living in the ghetto together with his wife in residences on the following streets: Veit Stoss, Cranach, and Muehlgasse.
- VI. Relocation documentation (1944) – The documentation mentions the exact date of Israel Kristal’s birth: “Sept. 15, 1903,” as well as the correct names of his parents. It also mentions his former places of residence. The documentation indicates that Israel Kristal lived in Litzmannstadt (German name of Łódź) until the liquidation of the ghetto in August 1944. On Aug. 23, 1944 he was deported to the Auschwitz-Birkenau concentration camp, where he remained until October 1944. He was then transferred to the Wuestegiersdorf, Schottenwerk camp in October 1944; to the Doernau camp in November 1944; and again to the Schottenwerk camp in February 1945. He was freed on May 11, 1945, when the Allied forces liberated the Schottenwerk camp. Chaja Feige Krysztal and their two children did not survive.
- VII. Confirmation of Polish citizenship (1949) – This document mentions Izrael Icek Kryształ (again using his Polish name) living in Łódź after World War II. The unique identifiers are consistent with those in the earlier documentation: birth on Sept. 15, 1903, in Żarnów; parents Moszek Dawid and Brucha Rojt. It also includes details on his second wife, whom he married after the war: Szejwa nee Chuda, born in Łódź on Apr. 24, 1923. The couple had one son, Chaim Dawid, born in Łódź on Feb. 24, 1948. The document was issued on Apr. 12, 1949. This is the earliest document that was in Oren Kristal’s possession.
- VIII. ID card (2013) – This is the piece of late-life evidence that confirms Israel Kristal’s identity. It mentions his birth place and year as Poland in 1903, the names of his parents as Moshe and Brucha, and his current residence as Haifa (Table 20.1).

It should be noted that the name of Mr. Kristal’s father appears in three different versions throughout the documentation. Which version was used varied depending on which country’s administration was operating in the region at the time each record was made. The region was part of the Russian Empire until 1918, when it

Table 20.1 Examination of unique identifiers for Israel Kristal

Year	Given name	Spouse	Father	Mother	Family name	Residence
1913	Not stated	–	Moszek Dawid	Brucha Rojt	Kryształ	Żarnów
1920	Izrael Icek	–	Moszek Dawid	Brucha Rojt	Kryształ	Łódź
1928	Izrael Icek	Haja Fajgla Frucht	Moszek Dawid	Brucha Rojt	Kryształ	Węgleszyn
1931	Izrael Icek	–	Moszek Dawid	Brucha Rojt	Kryształ	Łódź
1940	Izrael Icek	Chaja Fajga	–	–	Kryształ	Łódź (Litzmannstadt)
1940	Izrael	–	Moszek	Brucha	Kryształ	Łódź (Litzmannstadt)
1941	Izrael	–	Moszek	Brucha	Kryształ	Łódź (Litzmannstadt)
1942	Izrael	–	Moszek	Brucha	Kryształ	Łódź (Litzmannstadt)
1942	Izrael	–	Moszek	Brucha	Kryształ	Łódź (Litzmannstadt)
1942	Izrael Icek	–	Moszek	Brucha	Kryształ	Łódź (Litzmannstadt)
1942	Izrael Icek	–	Moszek	Brucha	Kryształ	Łódź (Litzmannstadt)
1942	Izrael Icek	Chaja Fajga			Kryształ	Łódź (Litzmannstadt)
1942	Izrael Icek	Chaja Fajga			Kryształ	Łódź (Litzmannstadt)
1944	Israel	–	–	–	Kristall	Auschwitz-Birkenau
1945	Israel		Mosche David	Bracha Rojth	Krystal	Łódź
1945	Israel	Chaja Feigel	Mosche David	Bracha Rojth	Krystal	Łódź
1949	Izrael Icek	Szejwa Chuda	Moszek Dawid	Brucha Rojt	Kryształ	Łódź
2013	Israel		Moshe	Bracha	Kristal	Haifa, Israel

became part of Poland. Between 1915–1918 and 1939–1945, the region was occupied by Germany. Mojżesz and Moszek are two Polish versions of the same name, while Mosche is the German version. The family name was also variously recorded as Kryształ, the Polish version; or as Kristal, the German and Yiddish version. Similarly, there were two versions of his mother's name: Brucha Rojt in Polish and Bracha Rojth in German and Yiddish. Litzmannstadt is the German name of the city of Łódź. According to his family's reports, which were confirmed by the 1918 Łódź census, the exact place of Mr. Kristal's birth was Malenie, a little village that

Table 20.2 Israel Kristal's age validation

Time	Sort of document	Documented age/date of birth
Dec. 1913	Mother's death record	–
1918 (de facto Oct. 29, 1920)	Łódź census	"1 V 1903" – May 1, 1903
Nov. 10, 1927	Delayed birth record	1903
Apr. 1928	Marriage announcement	25 (accords with Sept. 15, 1903 -age possibly rounded)
May 8, 1931	Application for ID card	1903
May 24, 1940	Litzmannstadt Ghetto registration card	1903
Dec. 3, 1941	Litzmannstadt Ghetto registration card	1903
June 19, 1942	Litzmannstadt Ghetto registration card	1903
June 21, 1942	Litzmannstadt Ghetto registration card	1903
Oct. 4, 1942	Litzmannstadt Ghetto registration card	1903
Oct. 5, 1942	Litzmannstadt Ghetto registration card	1903
1940	Litzmannstadt Ghetto residents' list	1903
1942	Litzmannstadt Ghetto residents' list	1903
1942	Litzmannstadt Ghetto residents' list	1903
1944	Deportation record	Sept. 15, 1903
1945	Vad Yashem card	Sept. 15, 1903
1945	Relocation record	Sept. 15, 1903
Apr. 12, 1949	Citizenship confirmation	Sept. 15, 1903
Jan. 1, 2013	ID card	1903

currently has fewer than 30 inhabitants. The village belonged to the Żarnów synagogue district and to the greater region of Łódź (Łódź Voivodeship between 1918 and 1939). Given these unique identifiers, it has been proven beyond a reasonable doubt that the gathered documentation concerns one and the same person: Izrael Icek Kryształ, who later became known as Israel Kristal (Table 20.2).

The gathered documentation confirms Mr. Kristal's claim that he was born on Sept. 15, 1903. Indeed, the earliest document mentions an earlier date, May 1, 1903, which suggests that Mr. Kristal might have been even older than he claimed, and thus reached age 114. However, no other piece of evidence supports that date. All of the other documents either mention a birth date of Sept. 15, 1903, or are otherwise in line with this date. It is important to note that the date of Sept. 15, 1903, appears in the documentation for the first time in 1945. In the earlier documentation, with the exception of the Łódź census, only the year of birth (1903) is mentioned. Yet this

information still corresponds to the reported birth date of Sept. 15, 1903. There is a considerable amount of middle-life evidence and early-life evidence from the first 20 years of life that supports the claim that Israel Kristal was born in 1903. Thus, there is sufficient evidence that meets modern age validation standards. In sum, we contend that while the case of Mr. Kristal was extremely difficult to confirm, there is strong reason to believe that Israel Kristal was born on Sept. 15, 1903, as Izrael Icek Krysztal in Malenie, Russian Empire (now Poland), and died in Israel, on Aug. 11, 2017, at 113 years of age.

20.4 Conclusion

The authors confirmed the authenticity of Israel Kristal's age on the basis of the gathered documentation, which includes early-, middle-, and late-life evidence. The biggest concern that arose in the case of Israel Kristal was the lack of a birth record. Given that the census records are often a reflection of the respondents' memories, both May 1, 1903, and Sept. 15, 1903, may have been manufactured dates of birth. It is worth noting that one of Izrael Icek's brothers, Abram, was recorded as having the same date and month of birth. Hence, it is possible that the census enumerator wrote the same details twice, or that the younger Abram was an adopted child, as there were many war orphans at that time, and giving the same name to two children in a row was not common practice. The theory that the younger Abram was adopted is strengthened by the mother's death record from 1913, which mentions that she was survived by three children. The oldest of those children, Perla, would have been 20 at the time of the mother's death, so it is possible that she was no longer counted as a child. Based on our experiences in researching cases of extreme longevity and supercentenarians in Poland, we believe that reports of the ages of people born in the territory of present-day Poland are reliable, because in the early twentieth century, Poland had a well-developed system of birth registration. Moreover, cases of age exaggeration are rare in Poland, and the few cases that have occurred were mainly among the population of repatriates who may have misreported their age when they needed to produce new documents after moving from the territory of one country to the territory of another. Whether Israel Kristal had the need to recreate documents at any point in his life in Poland is unknown. It is peculiar that his delayed birth certificate, which he presented at the office where he married Chaja Frucht a few months after, listed the year (1903) but not the day and month of his birth, whereas his future wife was able to present a delayed birth certificate on which her full date of birth was recorded.

Israel Kristal's case represents an important intermediate step in the expansion of the worldwide IDL and GRG databases into Poland and Israel. Mr. Kristal's age is significant, as it is one of the 10 oldest ages ever validated for men. Mr. Kristal is also the oldest Polish-born person on record, the oldest Jewish man on record, and the Guinness "World's Oldest Man" titleholder for over a year and a half (January 2016–August 2017). There is consistent documentation of Mr. Kristal's age from



Fig. 20.2 Israel Kristal's claim was unaffected by the migration between countries

both of his countries of his residence: first Poland, and then Israel. His reported year of birth is consistently supported by all of the gathered evidence, including one document issued within his first 20 years of life. Thus, there is evidence that meets the early-life evidence requirements of modern validation standards. Given that Mr. Kristal was born in the area of present-day Poland, and not outside its modern eastern border, he is not among the population of emigrant supercentenarian claimants who have been suspected of age exaggeration. While some Polish individuals who claimed to be supercentenarians were found to have exaggerated their age, this exaggeration occurred while they were migrating between countries in the World War II era. It has been proven that Israel Kristal did not exaggerate his age either during the war or upon his migration from Poland to Israel (see Fig. 20.2; confirmed by the located evidence). The risk of age misreporting was therefore low in this case. As Poulain (2010) has pointed out, age validation is never definitive, and may always be reconsidered if a new piece of evidence that seems incompatible with the previous conclusion is discovered. In sum, given that the documents that were uncovered in the case of Israel Kristal span nearly a century and contain many unique identifiers that confirm his identity – and that the gathered documentation is consistent with the stories told by the family – we consider this case to be validated at least to the standard of validation by proxy, as an early-life census entry was substituted for the original proof of birth.

In conclusion, based past research of similar cases and the gathered evidence, Guinness World Records and the Gerontology Research Group deemed the case of Israel Kristal validated, with his official date of birth recognized as Sept. 15, 1903.

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