
World's Oldest Man Turns 113, Readies For Bar Mitzvah

15/09/2016



Jerusalem: The world's oldest man turned 113 on Thursday and the Holocaust survivor living in Israel readied for the Bar Mitzvah he was denied a century ago, his family said.

Yisrael Kristal, an observant Jew from Zarnow in what is now Poland and currently living in the port city of Haifa, was born on September 15, 1903, three months before the Wright brothers' first successful powered airplane flight.

Guinness World Records in March recognised him as the world's oldest man.

While he turned 113 on Thursday under the Gregorian calendar, his family will celebrate the birthday at the end of September according to the Hebrew calendar, his daughter Shula Koperstoch told AFP.

The festivities will include a Bar Mitzvah that will come 100 years late.

The Bar Mitzvah is one of the most important ceremonies in the life of a Jew.

Usually marked at 13 for boys and 12 or 13 for girls -- a Bat Mitzvah in that case -- it marks the transition into someone responsible for their actions.

Kristal was unable to celebrate his Bar Mitzvah in 1916 because his mother had died three months earlier and his father was a soldier in the Russian army at the time of World War I.

"My father is religious and has prayed every morning for 100 years, but he has never had his Bar Mitzvah," his daughter said.

Around 100 family members will attend, with the date and location being kept secret to avoid Kristal having to contend with a crush of journalists, she said.

Asked about his health, Koperstoch said only: "He is ageing."

After World War I, Kristal moved to Lodz where he worked in the family confectionary factory, married and had two children.

But his life was disrupted when the Jewish quarter of the city became a ghetto under Nazi occupation during World War II and Kristal was sent to the infamous Nazi death camp Auschwitz-Birkenau.

Around 1.1 million people, most of them European Jews, perished in the camp between 1940 and 1945 before it was liberated by Soviet forces.

His wife and two children died but Kristal survived, weighing just 37 kilos (81 pounds) at the end of the war.

He then moved to Israel, where he has lived for over six decades. He re-married, had a son and opened a sweet shop.

He is four years younger than the world's oldest woman, Emma Morano, an Italian who turns 117 in November -- meaning she was born in the 19th century.

The previous oldest man, Yasutaro Koide of Japan, died in January at the age of 112.

Jeanne Louise Calment, who died in 1997, was the oldest verified person ever -- passing away in France aged 122 years and 164 days.
