



A documentary film by Elkan Spiller

L'CHAIM! TO LIFE!

Life is not about surviving, it's about living.



WITH CHAIM LUBELSKI & NECHUMA LUBELSKI | PRODUCER ELKAN SPILLER | EDITOR GÜNTHER HEINZEL
CINEMATOGRAPHER VIRGINIE ST. MARTIN, GUILLAUME VANDENBERGHE, SIMON ARAZI, RAPHAEL KOLACZ, RON RAMIREZ
COMPOSER MICHAEL BENHAYON | SOUND RECORDIST ALEX DAVIDSON | SOUND ENGINEER ROBERT WIESNER
LINE PRODUCER ANDREAS LOUIS | FISCAL SPONSOR KATAHDIN PRODUCTIONS | WRITER & DIRECTOR ELKAN SPILLER

AMSTELFILM.NL/LECHAIM

LECHAIM-FILM.COM | © 2014 ELKAN SPILLER ALL RIGHTS RESERVED

Film und Medien
Stiftung NRW

FFA

TARGUM
SHLISHI



PRESS KIT L'CHAIM! – TO LIFE!

L'CHAIM! – TO LIFE!

Genre	Documentary
Length	92 min
Production country	Germany
Original language	German, English, Yiddish & French
Subtitles	English
Technical specifications	HD, 16:9, Stereo Sound, Color
Screening format	DCP, (Blue Ray, DVD, mov.)

Crew

Director	Elkan Spiller
Cinematographers	Koksijde/Antwerp: Virginie St. Martin Antwerp: Ron Ramirez, Guillaume Vandenberghe, Raphael Kolacz, Simon Arazi, Elkan Spiller Jerusalem: Asaf Ben Ami Dead Sea: Yigal Elimelech New York: Elkan Spiller St. Tropez: Gregoire Foucher
Editor	Günter Heinzl
Music	Michael Benhayon
Sound	Alex Davidson / Sound Engineer Robert Wiesner
Line producer	Andreas Louis
Producer	Elkan Spiller

With

Chaim Lubelski, Nechuma Lubelski,
Usher Lubelski, Shoshana Spiller, Mirsad Hadzikaric und Bernard Dukan

CINEMAS:

L'Chaim! - To Life! was released into German cinemas in over 30 cities on 27th of August 2015.

The tour with Chaim and Elkan was a huge success mostly sold out. The press coverage could not be better. From prime time news Arte Journal, biggest cultural magazine ttt and many major newspapers and many radiostations.

On October 8th 2015 the film will be released in the Netherlands into 20 cinemas.

PRESS KIT L'CHAIM! – TO LIFE!

FILM FESTIVALS/SCREENINGS

World Premiere 1st July 2014 at the 32nd MUNICH INTERNATIONAL FILMFEST („New German Cinema“ section)
<http://www.filmfest-muenchen.de/en/filmprogramm/film-abc.aspx?filmId=4224>

05.10. 2014:	Berlin Premiere a special screening of the Jewish Filmfestival Berlin (sold out)160 people)
13.10. 2014	Jewish Culture Days in Munich (Germany).
06.11.2014	Jewish Film festival in Warsaw (Poland)
19.11.2014	International Film festival St. Louis (USA).
24.11.2014	Film festival Exposed in Cologne (Germany)
26.11. 2014	OPENING FILM of doc section for "FILMZ" Film festival in Mainz (Germany) only 6 of 125 submitted documentaries in competition.)
27.12. 2014	"La Grand Filiale" International Film festival in Speyer (Germany)
07.01. 2015	Special event Filmpalette in Cologne (Germany)
12.02.2015	Kino AG Gilder Screening at the Berlinale (Berlin International Film Festival)
20.02.2015	"Jewish-Film- Days" in Fuerth (Germany)
27.02.2015	Richmond International Film Festival (USA)
June 2015	8th FILM FEST KOSOVA "THE GODDESS ON THE THRONE" (Official Selection, Kosovo)
06.06.2015	DOKKA – DOKUMENTARFESTIVAL KARLSRUHE (Competition, Germany)
18.06. 2015	UNIVERSITY OF COLOGNE special screening (Germany)
19.09.2015	INDIAN CINE FILM FESTIVAL MUMBAI (INDIA)
11.10.2015	MARBELLA INTERNATION FILM FESTIVAL (SPAIN)
26.10.2015	JEWISH WEEK FESTIVAL "Heimat/Babylon" DRESDEN (GERMANY)
01.12. 2015	11th HUMAN RIGHTS FILM FESTIVAL IN BARCELONA, NEW YORK, PARIS

AWARDS

- * The German film review board (FBW) rated L'CHAIM! - To Life! with "Prädikat Besonders wertvoll". **Seal of Approval: Highly recommended**
- * **Audience award** for best documentary at the Film Festival FILMZ in Mainz, Germany
- * **"Documentary of the month in Germany"** The German film board (FBW): "...the film L'Chaim! convinced us at the FBW so much, that we in addition to the Seal of Approval, "Highly recommended" award this film as a documentary of the month. "
- * **Special Festival Mention (Documentary) - 3rd Indian Cine Film Festival 15 Mumbai**



Logline

Life is not about surviving, it's about living. L'CHAIM! – TO LIFE!

Short Synopsis

L'Chaim! is an intimate film about Chaim Lubelski, who had a wild past from a hippy and dealer in Germany, Paris, London and Afghanistan before he became a successful businessman in New York and a professional chess player in St. Tropez. When his mother needs care, Chaim decides with 63 to move in with her into the home for the elderly in Antwerp. He cares for her around-the-clock with remarkable love, lots of laughing and singing. Shaped by his mother's history as a Shoah survivor, Chaim feels his mission is to ease her pain. The film is a story about altruistic love and deep humanity. Furthermore the film demonstrates how the trauma of war still affects everyday life of the next generation. Despite all Chaim is not complaining or accusing. He chooses to accept his legacy with love, humor and joy.

Long Synopsis

L'CHAIM! – a traditional Jewish drinking toast, a guiding principle, and the eponymous protagonist of the documentary by filmmaker Elkan Spiller. L'CHAIM! means "To Life!" and tells of a life full of compassion and fulfillment. The polyglot, multilingual bon-vivant Chaim Lubelski accepted what life had in store for him. With humor and love, he managed to transform tragic moments into lightness, even with a heavy legacy weighing upon his shoulders. As the son of Holocaust survivors, he carries their profound traumas with him, traumas that robbed him of his childhood and determined his entire life. As a young man, he always placed the needs of his parents – who left the concentration camp as broken human beings – before his own. He read practically all medical writings in search of a way to help his father, who was only able to forget his pains with morphine. Even when he freed himself from his parents and traveled the world so as to squeeze every last drop that life had to offer, he still put his needs on the back burner. In New York he earned millions with the export of jeans, with which he supported both his parents as well as homeless people in his area before losing his fortune in stock-market speculations.

PRESS KIT L'CHAIM! – TO LIFE!

Before this, he had made a name for himself on the Côte d'Azur as a semi-professional chess player and won many jet-set friends, who are still in contact with him today. Then as now, Chaim's impact on people results from his charisma and intellect. He wears worn-out clothing so as not to win the sympathy of others through his outward appearance. Today, he is active in Antwerp's Jewish community and cultivates friendships among rigorously orthodox Jews with whom he prays at the Wailing Wall.

At the center of L'CHAIM! – TO LIFE! is the special relationship between Chaim and his mother in the last years of her life. When, after the death of her husband, she moved into a senior residence in Antwerp, he too moved into the one-room apartment at the age of 63 to be able to take care of her whenever she needed anything. He wanted to make it easier for her to endure the last years of her life - a time that gave him deepest satisfaction. The viewer becomes the witness of a mother-and-son relationship that is infused with humor, love and affection. We marvel at a woman who can still make jokes about her time in the concentration camp, but who has also never forgotten what crimes were perpetrated there on her and her family – nor by whom.

L'CHAIM! documents how the lives of the postwar generations were radically influenced by the suffering of the parents. It is a fate that affects in some way or other all whose parents were marked by the horrors of the Third Reich. It is totally off the mark to see L'CHAIM! as a Holocaust film for this reason. It is about a universal fate, that of a man who goes his own way in search of himself. On his way, he succeeds in developing a very personal treatment of the legacy, which he assumes without any bitterness and regrets. Chaim Lubelski touches the viewer because he shows how, despite everything that he went through, he maintained his humanity and love, and how man can still be humane (a Mensch), even when coping with a harrowing fate. In spite of his legacy and his active, restless life – or maybe precisely because of it? – Chaim Lubelski is a man who never lost his humor, his faith and his optimism, and continues to uphold them without any complaints.



Biography Elkan Spiller



Elkan Spiller was born in Cologne, Germany. As the son of Holocaust survivors, his interest in Jewish history was sparked at an early age, and he went on to write his Master's thesis on the topic of "Anti-Semitism in German television" at the University of Arts in Berlin in 1992. Since then he lived in New York, Tel Aviv and San Francisco and has been working as a freelance journalist for German television broadcasters. His short film MAMA, L'CHAIM! was screened at over 50 international film festivals, amongst others at the Berlinale and at Rotterdam International Film Festival, and received

numerous awards. He returned to Germany to shoot and produce L'CHAIM! – TO LIFE!, which is his feature documentary debut and had its world premiere in the "New German Cinema" section at Filmfest Munich July 2014.

Filmography

2009 MAMA, L'CHAIM! / AUF DAS LEBEN, MUTTI! (Short Film, Director & Producer)

Over 50 festival screenings, e.g. Berlinale, Rotterdam International Film Festival, DOXA Documentary Film Festival Vancouver, San Francisco International Film Festival

Awards for Mama, L'CHAIM!:

1st Prize of international short film competition at Los Angeles Museum of the Holocaust 2009,

Grand Prix in "non-fiction" section at Saint-Petersburg International Short Film Festival 2010

The German film board rated MAMA, L'CHAIM! "Prädikat Besonders wertvoll". Seal of Approval:

Highly recommended.



Interview with Elkan Spiller

Many filmmakers shoot documentaries about their grandparents and parents. You are filming a documentary about your cousin Chaim. Can you remember the initial moment when you thought: I have to make this documentary!

Already as a child and as an adolescent I felt that Chaim's life should be recorded on camera. It always fascinated me how he affected others. He either touches them with his helpfulness and his humanity or he makes everyone around him laugh. There are always these ludicrous scenes and moments that deserve to be seen by others as well.

In 1997, when Chaim and I lived in New York at the same time, I had borrowed a camera from a friend and had started to film him without the intention of making a film. Ten years later I then watched INTO THE WILD which tells the true story of Christopher Mc Candless. He renounced civilization completely and went into the wilderness of Alaska to be fully on his own. This film inspired me to finally make the documentary about Chaim, because Chaim is also a distinct character that always went his own way.

Except that Chaim did not go into the wilderness. Where are the parallels?

He stays among people but renounces civilization. That is a much greater form of art. He can keep to himself and doesn't follow any trends. He gets along well with all people – with children, elderly people, the poor, the rich. My initial intention was to shoot a film about a person with exceptional human characteristics. I was going to call it A REAL MENTSCH. It was meant to be about a person who manages to be loved for who he is, and not for what he does or what he looks like. Even when he made it from being a hippie to being a millionaire, he consciously wore old jeans and shirts which were clean but pretty threadbare, in order to not to be liked for his outer appearance. He despises this game. He doesn't have to appeal to people because he doesn't rely on people liking him. He is also very good on his own.

Yet he wins people over. How does he do that?

I saw how he was frowned upon in fancy hotels, yet he managed to convince these people to lay down their prejudices. He more or less has them in his pocket due to his own way and his intelligence, so much that they will even seek his company at the end of the day. He meets them at eye level and is never arrogant.

What does the Jewish term 'Mensch' mean?

In the Yiddish language „Mensch“ means a person who is humanly correct, integer, upright, selfless. Somebody who has a good heart and who takes a stand for other people, up to the point of self-sacrifice.

What did Chaim say when you proposed making a film about him?

Chaim generally thinks very little of films and “the world of vanity”. He doesn't need a film about himself and initially didn't really take it seriously, but we always had a good relationship and therefore he trusted me and participated. He also came to realize that I am trying to express something with the film that is beyond merely documenting his crazy life. He said that if there is only one anti-Semite less because the audience can identify with him, since they have never seen a Jew like that, the film would be worth it.

What makes Chaim's life so special that it may also appeal to others?

On the one hand, the character, the “Mentsch” Chaim. But yet another aspect soon started to play a role. When I decided to make a film about him he was already living with his mother in a retirement home to take care of her around the clock. Then it became clear that Chaim's story had an additional dimension to it: that of the children of Holocaust survivors and what it meant for the second generation to be confronted with the war and the Holocaust through their parents.

Chaim had always claimed that this was not an issue for him, but the intense community with his mother and her terrible memories, which surfaced increasingly with old age, eventually confronted him with the burdensome legacy of being the son of concentration camp survivors. The fact that I filmed him and asked questions was somewhat a trigger for this. Things were addressed that we almost never talked about. And by the way he talks about the subject in the film you can tell that it does concern him after all.

What is this second generation all about?

Even though the second generation has never experienced the war it remains to be affected by it. Chaim takes the subject to a universal level, in the sense that no war is truly ever over, and that all those who deal with the people who experienced war, grandparents or parents, is also confronted with its repercussions. This has been scientifically researched and is referred to as “epigenetics”. This means that an environment can affect children similar to a genetic cause. If parents are traumatized by war then this will be transmitted to the children, like a genetic defect. In the case of Chaim it was him having to endure his father's screams of agony, who was severely abused in the concentration camp and who could only bear the resulting pain with morphine.

What effect did this have?

He had to endure anti-Jewish hatred and insults as a child in Regensburg especially from his neighbor until he had saved up enough money to buy a pair of pointy cowboy boots with whom he kicked the neighbor in the shin. That got him some respect and no more insults from the neighbors. He later read volumes of medical literature to find a way to help his father with his pain. Children feel the repercussions of war in their parents, it inhibits them from being free. This creates an elevated feeling of responsibility towards their parents, which also restricts them, as they are willing to put up with more than they should. This is also a topic that the second generation needs to deal with. Chaim did manage to break free and broke contact with his parents for a year, but in the end he returned to take care of them. At the end of the day this means that he had no opportunity to live a truly independent, self-determined life.

Why did Chaim look after his parents?

Chaim wanted to make his elderly parents lives as comfortable as possible, after all they had been through. He did this within an uncompromising, passionate way, like everything he did. After his father had died his mother moved to Antwerp, close to her daughter. When the daughter unexpectedly died from an accidental overdose of medicine, he decided to move in with his mother, so that someone would be there at all times. He furthermore had to keep his sister's death a secret because he feared that his mother would not survive such news.

The film is also about the adventure of life. Chaim is neither bitter nor does he have any regrets about his life. He is constantly active and surrounds himself with other people. This seems to make him enviably balanced. How is that possible, regardless of the burden he has to carry?

He isn't like that, even if it seems that way. He tried everything throughout his life. What makes his lifestyle enviable is the fact that people tend to restrict themselves more than being open and to have the courage to try new things. Chaim liberated himself from norms and restrictions. What seems like mental balance is in fact the freedom that he emanates. Today we believe that we are free, but most of us have to face a pressure to perform and the expectation that others have of one, and Chaim doesn't do that. He is above all of this. He doesn't run in the mill. He more or less enjoys the privilege of fools. What he lacks is inner calm. If he had that he could have been a chess master or a doctor. But how could he have achieved inner calm? It is very hard to get the paranoia out of those who are part of the second generation. Most of them don't live, they survive. They are almost on the move, driven, unable to settle down. Chaim is constantly on the road. Either literally or mentally. But he can deal with this, he can be above it.

What can we learn from Chaim?

How to be human. No matter how heavy the burden is or the legacy that you received. Chaim does not complain. He accepts his fate and makes the best of it. He doesn't see himself as a victim. He is not bitter or hateful and he doesn't accuse. That is rare and inspiring how to deal with fate and how to do good to others at the same time. Chaim does everything with love and joy, no matter how hard it might be. We can learn from him what it means to give. People are good in taking but not in giving. And Chaim lets people get close to him – that is something you have to be able to do, while staying true to yourself at the same time.

In Germany there is little talk about the repercussions of the Holocaust upon contemporary Jewish life, why is that?

Well, my film isn't apprehensive of this. It more than clearly emphasizes the position of Chaim's mother, who couldn't forgive those who were responsible for the Holocaust. But on the same time she is able to laugh, to sing songs from the concentration camp and to tell jokes about that time. The fact that we barely ever talk about Jewish life has something to do with the inhibitions and the tabooing of the subject on both sides. Many don't want to be reminded of Judaism during the Third Reich or talk about it, and so many people fear that if they talk about it today that you will inevitably end up talking about the Holocaust. It is only a popular subject when the tenor is; that it is all over, now everything is fine again, all forgotten and all "love, peace and harmony". My film is different. Chaim's mother says that the Germans who murdered her parents should burn in hell. And what the horrors of war, that of the Third Reich means for the second generation, doesn't interest most people. And besides that, the film shows what Chaim does for other people and for his parents. These are many mirrors that people don't like to look into, because they would make them look pretty bad.

You first shot a short film about Chaim, which was presented at a number of film festivals, such as the Berlinale. How was the feedback?

The feedback was very good. I originally made the short film MAMA, L'CHAIM! for a competition of the Holocaust Museum in Los Angeles. After that it was presented at roughly 50 film festivals. Even though the film is only five minutes long, the audience felt that Chaim is someone special. That there is more to this story. That is also what the audience found most touching about the short film.

Many came up to me after they saw the film and told me that the film showed and inspired them how to deal with the subject and one's own fate.

When you decided to use the existing material for a feature length film you could only finance the project through a Kickstarter campaign. Was there no other way, such as a TV channel?

The project was interesting to some TV-channels since Chaim and his mother are such strong and interesting characters. So the project made it often quite far in editorial meetings. It eventually failed because it was seen as a Holocaust film. And they did not want to make another one. To call L'CHAIM! – TO LIFE! a Holocaust film is pigeon-holing. It is about the story of a special person and how post-war generation children in general still have to deal with their legacy. Chaim is symbolic for all of these children, including the Germans.

I was completely on my own in search of support, because if you are without a financing TV-Channel you will not find a producer, and without it's very difficult to find federal film funding. But I still believed that I could find a rich Jewish investor, but they didn't want to deal with the problems of the second generation either, despite the fact that most of them are part of it. They want to assimilate and not attract attention.

What were your experiences with Kickstarter?

Essentially I would not have been able to make the film without Kickstarter, because it raised money that I needed for the post-production. I also received subsidies for the short film, because it was screened at festivals and won prizes. It was the fifth most successful German short film in this category in 2010. The rest of the money I had to borrow. At least this way I could finish the film. I unavoidably had to produce the film completely by myself, which was demanding both physically and emotionally since it was my first time. But it was simply a matter close to my heart to make this film and when I saw the first reactions of the audience to the film and how touched people were by Chaim and his story, then I knew that all the efforts were worthwhile.



World Distributor

JMT Films Distribution & world sales

Michael Treves

9 Haavoda St Apt 33

Tel Aviv 6382110 - Israel

Tel: +972- 52- 36 333 98

michael@JMTFilms.com

Production Company

Elkan Spiller Filmproduktion

Aachener Str. 26

50674 Cologne - Germany

Elkan Spiller

Tel: +49-(0) 172-939 5148

Tel: +31-(0) 6-3446 1149 (Amsterdam)

elkanspiller@gmail.com

Festival Requests

aug&ohr medien

M. Kaatsch, J. Hardt & Co. GbR

Platz der Vereinten Nationen 28

10249 Berlin - Germany

Markus Kaatsch

Tel: +49-(0)176-62965299

markus@augohr.de

www.lechaim-film.com

<https://www.facebook.com/lechaimfilm>

Trailer:

<https://vimeo.com/96740486>