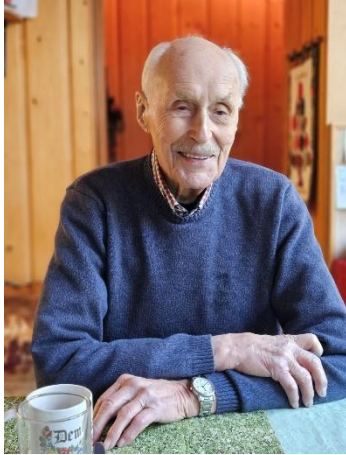


Erhardt Spangehl

INTRODUCTION: 23 May 2024. On this day I met Erhardt Spangehl. Entrepreneurial DNA has percolated through the East Prussian Spangehl family for ten generations to produce this amazing man, with an amazing story.



To listen to Erhardt (Ed) tell his life stories is to contemplate the interplay of hard work, ability and intelligence, entrepreneurial awareness of opportunities, imagination and ingenuity of ways to improve processes, of evaluating and identifying the right people to work with, the determination and drive to succeed, and the sheer force of personality that blends all of the above. No case can be made for luck in Erhardt Spangehl's life. He made his own "luck".

(Photo taken on Ed's 99th birthday in December 2023.)

Erhardt, or Ed as he prefers to be called in Canada, has a keen sense of history and a real desire that his family understands his personal history against the backdrop of German Prussian history. He has written extensively about his life, and these stories have been shared with me. From his youth in an affluent German family in East Prussia, through three years of service with the German Wehrmacht during World War II, through several escapes from captivity in 1945, to his immigration to Saskatchewan and the subsequent successes of his business acumen, Erhardt's story is one definitely worth sharing with SGC Postillion readers. In the following article, I attempt to tell his story, while trying to avoid the injustices inherent in condensing an amazing life story into a few pages. Mervin Weiss

Family legend has it that the Spangehl name has Spanish origins. Be that as it may, it is known that Andreas Spangehl took an oath of Prussian citizenship in Tilsit¹ on 13 July 1621. Generations of the Spangehl family built up a farmstead in the municipality of Lyszeiten, where dairy cows and horses for the military were raised. The milk was shipped to a nearby cheese factory.

Erhardt's direct ancestor, Christian Spangehl, grew up in Lyszeiten, and survived the Seven Years War. He married Elisabeth Schmidt in 1791. They had a son Johann Erdmann Spangehl who claimed to be the fifth generation born in Lyszeiten. Johann was 21 years old when Napoleon advanced on Moscow in 1812. Johann hid from the French army to avoid recruitment, but the troops took all his horses and food supplies. In 1814, Johann married Charlotte Julianna Henig. Their son Adolph Julius Spangehl was born in 1824. Adolph was Erhardt's great-grandfather.

During his compulsory four year military service with the rifle regiment, Adolph and his comrades marched 500 kms west from Lyszeiten to Potsdam. The purpose of the rifle regiment was to protect and accompany Kaiser Frederick Wilhelm, whose home base was in Potsdam. Enroute,

¹ Today known as Sovetsk, Kaliningrad Oblast, Russia. East of Kaliningrad on the border with Lithuania.

the recruits were housed in government owned estates strategically placed every 20 kms. These were model farms with horses, cows and pigs kept for breeding the livestock of the rural community. They also practiced the latest agricultural techniques. This is where Adolph learned his farming skills. On occasion, he was one of the chosen group which accompanied the Kaiser while he inspected these estates. The Kaiser was very comprehensive and even checked the bookkeeping. By the time Adolph returned to Lyszeiten, he had learned a great deal about business.

Adolph married a Lithuanian widow who already had three sons and a daughter. Together, Adolph and Annike had two more children, Andreas Alexander Bruno and his sister Maria. After four years of local schooling, Bruno was sent to grammar school in Tilsit, where his father often conducted business.

Adolph Spangehl was a very successful farmer, profiting from grain, potatoes, pigs and cavalry horses. He eventually sold the farm at Lyszeiten and moved to the village of Neukirch where he purchased 150 hectares of land nearby at Herrendorf, known at that time as Dwarrehlichken². Some years later, Adolph and Annike moved to Tilsit, where they built a large three-family home with a coachman's suite and stables behind the house.

After having served his military duty with the Potsdam Guards (like his father), son Bruno moved onto the Herrendorf farm with his wife Pauline Schulz. With Pauline's dowry, more land was purchased. Two children were born: Hildegard in 1890 and Hellmut in 1891.

After four years of elementary school, Hellmut was sent to grammar school in Tilsit, where he lived with both sets of grandparents and his childless aunt and her husband. All three families spoiled him with his favorite foods and catered to his wishes. But Bruno wanted a more austere lifestyle for his son, and so transferred Hellmut to the agricultural college in Heiligenbeil, known for its military style of discipline.



Photo: Herrendorf Estate, 1947 painting.

After a 1911 fire destroyed all the buildings, Bruno had to re-build his farm. A new barn was built with brick along with a three-storey shelter for grain sheaves. The new two-storey home had 8 rooms on each floor with two staircases. The barns and the home had electricity, running water, and an indoor toilet. The farm at that time owned 200 head of cattle, 20 horses, 100 hogs and 200

chickens.

² The name Herrendorf replaced the Lithuanian name "Dwarrehlichken" in 1938. This municipality is now called Solonzy. The Spangehl estate was the largest in the township of Elchniederung.

Hellmut followed in his father's and grandfather's footsteps and began practical training as an estate manager (administrator or inspector).³ He worked at a variety of licensed apprenticeships until 1914, when the First World War broke out. After basic training in the Prussian Army, his unit was sent to the Russian Front, where he was wounded in a skirmish with Cossacks. After recovery, he fought at Passchendaele in Flanders. Having achieved the rank of lieutenant, Hellmut transferred to the German Luftwaffe (Air Force), and trained to be a pilot. His training was halted when he flew into a tree, and he was sent home to recuperate. And on the train ride home he met Liesbeth (Elisabeth) Charlotte Heisel whom he married in 1919 after the war had finally ended.

Hard times followed the Peace Treaty of Versailles in 1919. Widespread unemployment and famine along with the absence of an organized or civil society, led to strikes and riots in the cities, and thievery in the countryside. Hellmut had to protect the Spangehl farmstead, made somewhat easier because it was surrounded by a high brick wall. Using Lisa's generous dowry, he continued to build up his farming operation. The riding horses were replaced with 100 dairy cows, more pigs and several thousand chickens. Eight families now lived on the estate. Hellmut bought the first diesel-powered portable milking machine. He never went to bed without first checking on his animals. More land was purchased as well as two new tractors and other agricultural equipment. He began to drain 50 hectares of swamp land. This work was subsidized by the state in order to create jobs. Cheese and butter from the farm were marketed as far away as Berlin, 500 kilometers to the west.



Photo: Hellmut, Siegfried, Bruno, Erhardt Spangehl, three generations, 1930

Erhardt Bruno Spangehl was born on December 9, 1924. An older brother, Siegfried, was born in 1919. Erhardt was named in honor of the Brigade of Freedom Fighters, made up of underemployed enthusiastic young students and academics who provided security and hope in East Prussia during the years following the First World War. The new Reichsmark was introduced. One year later, in 1925,

Hindenburg (1847 - 1934) was elected President of Germany. This brought at least temporary stability to the country.

³ The concept of apprenticing as a farm or estate manager is unknown in North America. But in Germany, much of the agricultural land is owned by family trusts where no one in the family actually farms the land. So a professional land manager is hired to manage the property. Family trusts keep the land in the family, rather than letting it be broken up among sons and daughters into separate un-profitable parcels, which has often been the case with family farms in North America.

The year 1933 brought Adolf Hitler to power with his promises of employment and security. His policies soon resulted in improved economic conditions for the country and a rise in nationalistic pride. At first Hellmut Spangehl flew the swastika flag from the roof of his house, but quickly became disillusioned with Hitler and the NSDAP (Nationalsozialistische Deutsche Arbeiterpartei), otherwise known as the Nazi Party.



Erhardt walked the 2 km to elementary school in Wolfsberg. He usually walked with the children of the estate's workers who often bullied him. However, at Christmas time, the tradition was to invite all the children of the estate to the Spangehl house to recite Christmas poems and sing Christmas songs. Each child went home with a plate of sweets and fruits. Erhardt remembers school excursions on a wagon fitted with benches, and decorated with freshly-cut green branches, to a picnic spot located in a forest of tall spruce trees. He has many fond memories of growing up on the estate -- learning to play Skat in his father's office, watching the birth of foals with his Opa, harvesting hay and blowing it into the loft, the traditional celebrations of each season and observing the dynamics of the worker families. He was also keenly observant of the extensive food processing and preservation which was required in those days. During harvest, his mother and two kitchen maids were responsible for feeding 10 workers three times daily, in addition to the usual family table of 10. On weekends Erhardt would travel with his father in one of their two Stoewer cars to the hunting lodge, 70 kms away near the Lithuanian border. Here he learned that Skat was equally as important as the deer hunts.

After milk production became unprofitable, Hellmut switched to 4000 laying hens and began selling eggs. He also kept about 100 pigs. Erhardt soon learned to shoot hawks and foxes who were after the chickens. Later he learned to trap the foxes, because pelts without bullet holes were worth more money.

After finishing 4 years of elementary school, Erhardt started secondary school at Neukirch, a 5 km trip which he usually made with his bicycle. Because his family was anti-fascist, he was constantly teased and bullied. This resulted in poor grades at school, which led to Erhardt being moved to attend school in Tilsit, where he lived in a boarding house (pension). Six long years of homework and memorizing long poems followed.

The majority of farmers were heavily in debt and many businesses were no longer viable. The new government erased their debts and in return the farmers and business owners were expected to join the "Party", or at least to support it. But because he had no debts, Hellmut could afford not to support Hitler. He would later be arrested as an "enemy of the people".

Erhardt remembers big birthday parties for his parents in their home. Many relatives and neighbours would attend. The men drank grog and played Skat in Hellmut's office. The women sat in the large drawing room which had to be heated for the occasion. Hunting season would see as many as 100 people on their estate, who had to be fed and kept in spirits! They only stayed for the day, but it was a very busy time for the workers of the Spangehl Estate. Each invited hunter brought a small entourage. There were also many horses to look after. Rabbits and foxes were the targets of the hunt.

Erhardt also remembers the moose hunts in the moors, with a significant head and antler trophy being the symbol of a good hunt. Hunting played a big role in Hellmut's life.

Only sugar, vinegar, salt and fine white flour were purchased for the kitchen, which was a busy (and warm) place year round. Every day bread and cakes had to be baked for up to 20 people. Berries and vegetables were preserved in the summer and fall months. In the winter, many pigs and calves were transformed into ham, bacon, sausage, canned meat, as well as fat and lard. Poultry was butchered year round. Erhardt's grandmother was an expert sausage maker, and she alone, required up to 30 pigs and 15 calves each year for her sausages, which were sold in the local Coop store, operated entirely by the farm women.

The beginning of World War Two in September 1939 brought all international trade to a halt. Hellmut had previously sold his products on the free market, but now he could only sell his grain and milk to government-controlled entities, at much reduced prices. Hellmut had already planted his cropland into hay, because he could not buy gasoline for his tractors.

22 June 1941 – Germany invaded Russia (Operation Barbarossa). Within months, German troops had advanced as far as St. Petersburg and Moscow. Stalingrad was next.

On Easter Morning of 1942 the Gestapo arrived to arrest Hellmut Spangehl, charged with a number of offences which were summarized as "enemy of the people". A conviction could lead to expropriation of his property and execution at a concentration camp. A lawyer, who happened to be a friend of the Gauleiter (governor) Erich Koch, arranged for Hellmut to be transferred from a concentration camp to a hospital, and later to a prison in Tilsit, where the guards knew him and treated him with respect. The "arrangements" cost more than 10,000 Marks.

After six years of secondary school, Erhardt had graduated. He and his mother now ran the farm. Prior to graduation, Erhardt had been taken to a well-known orthopaedic surgeon in Königsberg to correct his flat feet. Out of gratitude, Erhardt's father provided Dr. Falk with a suitcase of precious smoked meat products.

At 17 years of age, Erhardt was conscripted and assigned to a motorized infantry unit based in Heiligenbeil. The strenuous boot camp training caused a recurrence of foot pain. The local doctor sent him to get an expert opinion in Königsberg where Erhardt was examined by the same Dr. Falk who now assigned him to garrison duty only. Erhardt had also been selected as one of

100 recruits for officer training but luckily his father had disallowed this. (A year later, Erhardt saluted the one surviving officer.) While members of his unit were dying at the Front, Erhardt sat in an office and updated military manuals. Having flat feet proved to be beneficial!

Meanwhile, Hellmut had been released from prison and sent home. The war would soon be right on the Spangehl's doorstep.

The Russians had flown in partisans to provide reconnaissance for the advancing Eastern Front. They hid in the bushes on the edge of the Spangehl estate, and Nazi patrols came looking for them. Hellmut was again in trouble, accused of shooting the postman (who had actually been shot by one of the partisans). The Spangehl Estate was on high alert. Everyone was afraid of the Russians, and everyone also knew, because of Hellmut's arrest, that the Nazis did not trust the Spangehl family.

By Christmas of 1942, many Germans began to suspect that the war was not going according to plan. They dreaded the looming Nazi attack on Stalingrad. It was a disaster. The German army suffered 200,000 fatalities and 91,000 men were taken prisoner, of whom only 6,000 survived. More losses followed in July, 1943 during the Battle of Kursk where Germany lost 2,700 tanks and supply vehicles. The morale of the German troops was shattered.

As the Eastern Front in the fall of 1944 came closer to the Spangehl estate, Erhardt's parents, and all residents of the estate, were ordered to evacuate with the rest of the East Prussian refugees, and move to the Samland Peninsula near Königsberg. Fearing certain capture by the Russians if they went to the peninsula, Hellmut and Lisa opted instead to travel on their own through the "Polish Corridor" which separated East Prussia from Germany. Their destination was Braunschweig, where Siegfried's fiancé lived. Hellmut had already given her 10,000 Marks for safe-keeping and other valuables had been sent ahead by train. However, most were destroyed in transport however by air raids.

While Erhardt was on clerk duty, a senior officer with a limp, Captain Jakobson, made his rounds and struck up a conversation with him. He wondered why Erhardt stayed at his desk instead of partying with the other boys in town. He discreetly found out from Erhardt that his family was anti-fascist. This conversation was critically important in saving Erhardt's life.

A week later, the whole garrison was ordered to the eastern front to defend the retreating German army. Captain Jakobson however, was tasked with leading a new battalion of 600 men to help defend the western front⁴. He specifically asked that Erhardt accompany him as his battle clerk. This transfer avoided certain death. Nevertheless, by the time they arrived in the Pfalz (near Hinterweidenthal), they came under enemy fire.

⁴ This likely occurred after 06 Jun 1944, the day Allied forces stormed the Normandy beaches, and began the liberation of France. - MW

Caught in a tank battle near Karlsruhe, Erhardt and a few others managed to get out on the only vehicle which was able to cross the Rhine River. The rest of the battalion was captured. Later Erhardt and companions headed to the Alps via the bombed and destroyed city of Stuttgart.

With Hitler's suicide in May 1945, the war was finally over. Despite the many checkpoints, where deserters were hung on trees as deterrents, Erhardt and two other soldiers were determined to go home. With courage, self-confidence and a good diesel truck at their disposal, they drove until they encountered American troops. They were taken to a compound surrounded by a 3-meter high barbed wire fence, on the outskirts of Regensburg. After several days out in the open without shelter, without blankets or food, they were loaded onto trucks with the understanding they were being taken to a different camp. Erhardt soon realized the trucks were heading east.⁵ According to the terms of the Yalta Agreement, every German POW who was born east of the Oder-Neisse line was to be handed over to the Russians. At nightfall, the German prisoners were finally unloaded in an open meadow near Budweis, Czechoslovakia. They were surrounded by the Russian trucks and tanks. Towards dawn, Erhardt crawled to the edge of the encampment close to the vehicles. He found a depression in the ground, and covered himself with long grasses. At daybreak, the POWs were loaded up and driven off towards their fate in Siberia, but Erhardt remained hidden. He had to wait all day because he could not risk being seen in the open meadow. The desire for food or voiding was completely suppressed. The darkness of the night allowed him to run. This was his first escape.

He hid under a bridge when he saw a convoy of open horse-drawn wagons of Germans who had been expelled from Czechoslovakia. He jumped onto the last one, where he obtained civilian clothes and a walking stick from a woman who had lost her husband. Erhardt discarded his uniform and adopted the look of a discharged wounded veteran.

Arriving at a school in Budweis, Erhardt saw a poster stating that all Germans being expelled from Czechoslovakia would be protected by the Russian military government. Since the Czechs hated the Germans so much, this poster was meant to provide some level of security for the Germans. However, this was not the case. The German girls were taken by the Czech soldiers. Erhardt tried to prevent this and went to the Russian commander asking for protection for these women. For his efforts, Erhardt was arrested, placed under guard in the attic of the school, and told he would not live to see the sunrise. When the guard could not resist joining the "party" downstairs, Erhardt fled into the night. This was his second escape.

He soon found a railway station. He jumped onto a northbound train and when it slowed down as it approached Prague, Erhardt jumped off, as did about 20 other men. They were immediately apprehended by Czech police and taken to a park to be executed. By an incredible turn of fate, their lives were spared because the authorities did not know what to do with the corpses.

⁵ Hans Fröschel was one of the German POWs in that camp. Erhardt would meet him 40 years later in Regina.

The men were next herded into the nearby Olympic Stadium. The sports field was packed with German prisoners, but Erhardt soon found the opportunity to crawl under the bleachers and covered himself with the garbage that had collected there.

Because of his height, Erhardt could easily have been mistaken for an SS-man, and SS-men were hated most of all by the Czechs. Several suspected SS men were tortured and killed while Erhardt watched from his hiding place. The next morning, names were called for people who were to be taken to the Theresienstadt concentration camp. When no one responded to a name that was called out, Erhardt quickly answered and joined the group. It was the third time that a quick decision saved his life once more.

He found himself packed with the others into 8-foot high rail cars which were soon underway. As night fell, Erhardt climbed up and out of the open coal wagon and jumped into the ditch. This was his fourth escape!

For days Erhardt walked, but only at night, and slept by day in a hiding place. He lived off newly planted potatoes. Occasionally he was helped by sympathetic people in the countryside. He knew he would have to cross the Elbe River to get to the West. He made it to Dresden, gagging at the putrid smell of 200,000 rotting corpses. But the Elbe River was well-guarded by the Russians, and he was apprehended once more by a lone Russian sentry. Erhardt motioned to the sentry to give him something to eat and surprisingly, the soldier gave Erhardt his daily ration which was a kilo of boiled potatoes. Then the sentry wanted Erhardt to follow him. At this point, Erhardt refused to move. To die right there was a better option than being sent to Siberia. However, the sentry took pity on him; he simply turned around and walked away. Erhardt ran into the nearest bushes. Once more, he had literally dodged a bullet.

Erhardt finally arrived near Magdeburg, where he had decided he would cross the Elbe River. He found refuge in a cottage where other soldiers were waiting to cross the river. The cottage belonged to a kind woman who happened to be the mistress of the Russian commander. She warned the soldiers that they could be taken away at any time by Russian soldiers. Erhardt made a decision again which avoided certain death. He went into the forest to cut firewood and sure enough, the woman and the German soldiers were picked up. Later that evening, she returned with food which the Russian commander had given her. Ironically the food was now served to this German soldier. Before he left the cottage, she gave Erhardt a four-gallon paint can with a rubber cover and a rope. In this he placed his shoes, clothes, a towel and his identification.

Despite the machine-gun bunkers on the riverbank, and despite the freezing cold waters, he slipped quietly into the river. The sealed pail now served as a flotation device. A whirlpool pulled him under and he feared he would certainly drown, but he successfully crossed the Elbe River. For the sixth time, his wits and courage saved his life. He hid in a haystack where he soon fell asleep. He later learned from a local couple that he was indeed now in the British zone.

However German soldiers born in the east were still being deported. Erhardt had to remain vigilant. To avoid being taken by the British, he hid in the engine room of a locomotive, rather

than sit in a passenger car. Erhardt finally reached Braunschweig. The family's agreed-upon rendezvous location was the home of Gisela Brandes, Siegfried's fiancée. The home was in ruins. Nevertheless, Erhardt soon found the Brandes family and his parents in the neighbor's cellar. A few weeks later Siegfried joined them, as did Gisella's father and brother. The joyful reunion overshadowed all the wartime tragedies.

The northern part of East Prussia, where Erhardt was born, became part of Russia. Agreement among the Allies also gave up the southern part and all land east of the Oder-Neisse line to Poland. That was about a third of Germany, and 13 million Germans were affected. The lost land belonged entirely to Prussia. Two years later, in 1947, Prussia was officially dissolved, marking the end of 250 years of Prussian history.

Erhardt, his family and relatives were pretty dejected, but their struggle for survival left little time for reflection. In order to obtain food rations, everyone who was able to do so had to report daily to clear the rubble. The women had to remove the mortar from the salvaged bricks. Children went to school only half-days so that they could help with the clean-up.



Photo: Erhardt Spangehl, 12 June 1950, Germany.

Erhardt worked as an apprentice to become a farm administrator, on a sugar-beet farm near Braunschweig. He had to supervise ten discharged German soldiers who did not really want to work. But he endured for two years, until he joined his parents in 1947 on the farm they had acquired from the British occupation authorities as part of the German recovery program. Other members of the extended family soon joined the Spangehls in Schliestedt, where the farm was located.

The Spangehls now owned a small amount of land, but little machinery with which to farm it. There was no cash to purchase inventory. Food was scarce in post-war Germany, and its sale and distribution was carefully monitored. Nevertheless, in order to acquire cash, Erhardt managed to sell sugar beets, meat, seeds for planting, as well as alcohol distilled from sugar beet residues, into the black market. All of this was done very covertly at night. Erhardt had constantly to be on guard against theft of farm products by outsiders, as well as by employees. People did what they could to survive the hard times which followed the war.

Growing sugar beets and vegetables, and managing cows, pigs and chickens was hard physical labour. Working with his father Hellmut, Erhardt realized the farm was too small for the two of them. German newspapers posted immigration advertisements from South Africa, South America, Australia, and Canada. Canada won out because the other countries were too hot! After obtaining the required visa from the Canadian Consulate in Karlsruhe, Erhardt purchased a steamship ticket which took him from Genoa, Italy to Halifax, Canada via Barcelona and Lisbon.

He arrived at Pier 21 on 22 March 1951. He brought with him a new Hohner accordion, a new Leica camera, as well as a few hundred dollars, and he wore a fine set of clothes.

Erhardt arrived in Canada without an immigration sponsor or advocate, and so he was re-directed to the Canadian immigration office in Ottawa. A tobacco farmer near Kitchener agreed to be Erhardt's sponsor. However Erhardt had other ideas. The prospect of the physical labor required on a tobacco farm did not appeal to him. He purchased a train ticket to Winnipeg because he had heard that the landscape there was similar to that of East Prussia.

Erhardt remembers the endless train ride through the rocky Canadian Shield. He also remembers the upholstered railcar seats, the first he had seen in Canada. He was more familiar with the wooden benches in filthy troop transports from Halifax. The employment office in Winnipeg found a farmer in Stonewall who needed a farm labourer. Arriving at his new sponsor's home north of Winnipeg, he found a small house and a farm with old equipment. The farming methods were not as advanced as those of the Germans, but the hospitality of the Houghton family more than compensated. For the first time in his life, Erhardt had to milk cows by hand! The farmer and his family were very good to him, but after 16 months Erhardt could not see his future in farming.

By the spring of 1952, Erhardt, or Ed now in Canada, knew he had to move on. He realized that, despite all he had ever known in East Prussia, Canadian farm life was not for him. Regina, Saskatchewan was experiencing a building boom. Mr. Houghton's nephew managed a construction division of MacCallum Hill Company in Regina, and lined up a job for Ed (Erhardt). Soon, he was working for a construction crew, subcontracted on a Fred Hill housing project. Framing houses earned him 75 cents per hour. A few months later he was a finishing carpenter, building cabinets for the Walter Scott Building at 95 cents per hour. December of 1952 found Ed working again as a framing carpenter for yet a different company at \$1.25 per hour. The foreman at this company was very impressed with his work attitude and his excellent carpentry skills (newly acquired!). Ed was promoted to become the pre-fab foreman. Ed credits another German immigrant, Herbert Gruenhagen, who was a master carpenter, for teaching him what he needed to know. At the same time, Ed also purchased several books which dealt with construction techniques, and from which he learned the proper English terms.

Ed worked long hours, but he managed to attend a dance in May of 1953 sponsored by the Regina German Club. Here he met Karin Schreiber, a pretty nursing student from Gross-Zimmern in Hesse, Germany. That same month, Ed's parents Hellmut and Elisabeth arrived from Germany. The trip was arduous, and by the time they arrived in Regina, they were very disappointed by what they had seen in this "uncivilized" country. They wanted to return to Germany as soon as possible, but Ed and Karin talked them into staying, and a few weeks later, Hellmut and Elisabeth purchased a home at 2164 Hamilton Street.

In June 1953 Ed was promoted as framing foreman for the Gladmer housing project (280 homes) and in the fall, he was promoted again to general foreman for the entire project. Ed marvels yet today that inside of two years, he rose from a day labourer to general foreman of a large

construction project. “That could never happen in Germany.” exclaims Ed. “This country was made for me!” And in that space of two years, Ed’s ingenuity and intelligence were integral to the emerging techniques of pre-fabricated home construction, and particularly of roof systems. “The truth is, that it was very nerve-wracking. So much responsibility was pushed onto me in such a short period of time that it was either sink or swim.”

By 1954, Ed had saved enough money for the down payment on the purchase of four small homes. He soon was able to sell them for a tidy profit, and by financing the sale to the buyers, he was able to generate additional profit from the interest charged. This was the start of Ed’s amazing entrepreneurial journey. In 1954 he continued working for Precision Construction, but this time as a sub-contractor of all the carpentry work on the Gladmer housing project in Saskatoon. He was now his own boss, and all of the carpenters and sub-trades answered to him. While many days consumed up to 18 hours of Ed’s day, Karin worked double shifts at St. Paul’s hospital.



Ed and Karin married in a small ceremony on July 31, 1954 at St. Paul’s Lutheran Church on Elliot Street in Regina. The total wedding party amounted to eight people, with Ed’s mother providing a delicious roast duck for the wedding dinner. After dinner, Ed and Karin went to the Regina Exhibition. They would live on her salary while Ed’s growing business earnings were continually re-invested. They agreed that they would wait four years before having children.

Ed continued working in the housing industry as sub-contractor and supervisor for large construction firms. When one firm became insolvent, Ed struck out on his own and incorporated Quality Construction Ltd. In 1959, Ed purchased 10 lots in the north end of Regina, and made deposits on 20 more, and Quality Construction took off. By 1960, Quality was selling so many homes, that Ed decided to obtain his own real estate broker’s license. After passing the broker’s exam, Quality Real Estate Ltd was incorporated and salesmen were hired to sell the homes which Quality Construction was building.

In 1960, Ed and Karin traveled to Germany with their first born child, daughter Marita; it was Ed’s first time back since he immigrated in 1951. It was also his first opportunity to meet Karin’s parents. Germany was still recovering from the devastating war, and its postwar economy would need a few more years before people would talk about Germany’s economic “miracle”. Tensions with Russia were high. Everything Ed saw convinced him he had made the right decision to emigrate to Canada.

In 1961, Quality Homes Ltd was incorporated to accommodate Ed’s growing business interests. As well as building new homes, Ed also purchased and renovated existing homes as revenue properties. In 1965, the Elgin Apartments had burned and Ed purchased the property at 2048 Rae

Street. A new 18-suite apartment building was soon given the name “The Western Chateau”. Completion of a three-year course in 1967 gave Ed his F.R.I. (Fellow Real Estate Institute) designation.

In 1968, Quality Construction built the new German Club at 1727 St. John Street. Another 18-suite apartment block was built at 55 Angus Road. Ed took his business interests one step further when he passed the Insurance Broker’s Exam for Western Surety. He could now insure his own properties and save brokerage fees. In 1969, a third apartment building, this one with 26 suites, was built at 67 Angus Road. In 1970 the last of Ed’s four apartment buildings was built at 9 Shaw Street, also with 26 suites. The very first tenant of this newest project, Brenda Hennig, became the office manager for Quality Construction and served the business for 44 faithful years. Later Quality Real Estate would sell SGI (Saskatchewan Government Insurance) packages, as well as offering driver’s license and license plate renewals. Quality Real Estate Insurance / SGI Auto Fund was eventually sold in 2001.

Erhardt Spangehl still had more to accomplish. In 1973 he obtained his Accredited Appraisal Canadian Institute (A.A.C.I.) designation, and began appraising properties for the Bank of Montreal, work he enjoyed into his 80s.

Ed’s life revolved around his work certainly, but he and Karin obviously began to think about leisure time and retirement when they purchased an existing cottage on Katepwa Lake in the Qu’Appelle Valley in 1976. A deck and covered swimming pool were soon added, along with solar panels to heat the pool. They developed a large park with two huge gardens, and planned to enjoy their retirement there. An adjacent lakefront property was purchased and developed in 1999. The two lots together are large enough to accommodate all of their children and grandchildren. Many wonderful family memories are now attached to the property on Katepwa Lake.

Life began to change in other ways. Their three children, Marita, Werner and Mark, were now grown adults with families of their own. There would be a total of eight grandchildren. Ed’s mother died in 1978, at age 84 years, following a stroke. Four years later, Hellmut died suddenly on May 04, 1982. He was 90 years old. They are both buried in Regina.

Ed and Karin’s daughter Marita, and her husband Ken returned from Toronto in 1993 and became involved in the property management aspect of the Spangehl businesses. Ed’s faithful office manager retired in 2016. By this time, Quality Construction had slowed down to a few custom-built homes, but yearly improvement projects were always planned for the cottage property. In total, Quality Construction built 670 homes in Regina, as well as 4 apartment blocks, 1 four-plex, 1 school in Regina (Ferguson School), 1 rural school in Tyvan, and a protestant church in Semans. After 64 years, Quality Construction was sold in 2023 to a local Saskatchewan company.

Ed freely admits that he was a workaholic and a perfectionist. He worked tirelessly to make sure his businesses succeeded. He admits that he was a driven man, even ruthless at times. His brother Siegfried came to visit once, and told Ed that he could never live like that. And yet, in

Ed's estimation, German business leaders are even more driven than he was. Ed was conscious of the stress in his life, but every problem was a personal challenge, and every "win" was a motivation to continue. Working with good people allowed him the opportunity and the freedom of running his own business, and he would not have traded that for any job in the world.

In his early years in Regina, Ed was aware of discrimination against German DPs (Displaced Persons). Some local men did not like a DP as a job supervisor. Local firms were shown favoritism in the awarding of sub-contracts. Among Regina's home builders, he was seen for years as the outsider. But Ed did not let this bother him, and he did not dwell on it. There is no doubt he was an aggressive risk-taker, but he was also a clever business thinker and innovator. He will also quickly add that his wife, Karin, never once hesitated to back him up. "Canada," Ed told me, "is the best country in the world. I am probably more Canadian than those who were born here!" The English language was never a problem for him. He had learned both English and French while attending school in Germany.

Karin's English was also very good. She graduated as a Registered Nurse with Honours from the Regina Grey Nuns Hospital nursing program in 1954. Her experiences as a nurse during the war were traumatic. The worst was near the end of the war. The hospital she worked in was bombed and the building collapsed. All patients and staff had been moved to the basement and were now buried. No one thought they would ever see daylight again. After they were dug out, and the patients who were still alive were placed on the lawn, American fighter jets strafed the survivors. This experience scarred Karin for life. Her nursing skills were highly respected in both Regina and Saskatoon hospitals, and they were also very useful when she cared for her in-laws until their deaths.

The energy, imagination, and enthusiasm required to run his businesses in Regina are also evident in the Spangehl property on Katepwa Lake, affectionately known now as Klein Odenwald. Both Ed and Karin were passionate gardeners. And so, two very large gardens were developed, which produce a wide variety of vegetables, along with raspberries, strawberries, rhubarb and black currants. Everything is planted in precise rows, 50 feet in length! The whole family becomes involved at harvest time. One year Ed alone picked 100 gallons of raspberries! An apple and plum orchard was developed. Grapes grew along three sides of the upper garden fence. Wild chokecherries and cranberry bushes are also abundant on the property. Burr oaks were planted along the path to the upper garden to remind Ed of his original home in Herrendorf, East Prussia. Ed also tried for 15 years to raise pheasants, thinking they would be a nice addition to the Qu'Appelle Valley. Sadly there were too many predators. In the first two years Ed planted 250 spruce trees on the property. For years after, he transplanted and nurtured volunteer spruce seedlings and later donated them to the Village of Katepwa.

As life slowed down for Ed and Karin, they began to spend more time at Klein Odenwald. For 12 winters, they spent a few months in Arizona, where son Mark lives. Ed was not fond of traveling, although he did visit his brother and cousins a few times in Germany. Karin however travelled often to Germany and always looked forward to seeing more of Europe. Karin had her first stroke

in 2014, and Marita took over her mother's garden. Ed continued to work his garden alone until a few years ago, and now Marita and Ken look after both.

Ed has slowly lost his vision to macular degeneration. It has not yet stopped him from playing Skat and Bridge. He remains keenly interested in economics and politics, and is very well informed on current global affairs. Because reading has become impossible, he listens to podcasts, news programs, radio talk shows, as well as audio books on a wide variety of topics. This is what is called "life-long learning".



At 99 years of age, Erhardt/Ed Spangehl still has a zest for life, obvious in the enthusiasm with which he tells his stories—stories of his youth, of his war-time experiences, of his businesses in Regina, of Klein Odenwald, and naturally of his wife and children as well. Karin died in Regina in 2021. She was 99 years old. "The credit for raising our three children," Ed admits, "goes entirely to Karin. And for this, I am extremely grateful." Marita and her husband with family have lived the last 31 years in Regina; Werner and his family live in White Rock, BC, where he

practices family medicine; Mark's family lives in Scottsdale, where he is and orthopaedic surgeon. (Family photo from 2017)

Ed still marvels that he survived all that happened during the war years. It wasn't luck, but rather logic, he says, that drove his decisions to escape so many times. Those three years, 1942-1945, shaped much of his life. His survival, he learned, was his responsibility, and his alone. Erhardt's survival in Germany, and Ed's successes in Saskatchewan are a testament to his intelligence, his ingenuity, and his inherited German DNA. He also credits a strict upbringing and a strong belief in treating others as you would have them treat you.



Ed Spangehl, 96 years old, in his beloved garden at Katepwa Lake, in the year 2020.

Erhardt Spangehl passed away on January 28, 2026 at the age of 101.

Photo Gallery:



Left: Helmut with carriage and horses, 1924. Right: Helmut and Lisa Spangehl.



Left: Older brother Siegfried, Erhardt, and their mother Lisa. Right: The Herrendorf house, 1939



Helmut and Lisa Spangehl, 25th wedding anniversary. 10 Feb 1944



Left: first family trip to Germany, 1967. Right: Ed, Karin and 8 grandchildren at Klein Odenwald, Katepwa Lake.