

## **Stella Bruchenstein Bengel**

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### **Abstract**

Stella Bruchenstein Bengel was born January 19, 1927 in Vienna, Austria as Stella Bruchenstein and her married name is Bengel. She was an only child. Her father was in the fur business like his family back home in Poland near the Ukraine. In the summer she lived with her maternal grandmother on a farm in the suburbs and once she visited her father's relatives in Poland who were more observant. The children on the street called her "Jew" and her teachers were prejudiced against her even before Hitler's arrival. Her parents never scolded or spanked her. Stella had piano, dance and gymnastic classes and went on cruises on the Danube with her parents. Her mother's brother, Fred, married her father's sister, Chyja, and they immigrated to the US. Her father was arrested on Kristallnacht and taken to Dachau where he soon died from after effects of ear surgery. His business and their apartment were locked up and Stella and her mother moved to a relative. Her father's ticket to Shanghai arrived just a day after he passed. Her mother went to work in a hospital to support them. Stella left with eight other children on November 11, 1940 on a Kindertransport to the US through Berlin, Spain and then a ship from Portugal to NJ. Her Aunt Chyja and Uncle Fred did not meet her at the ship so she was placed in a Home until a stranger found her relatives. She lived with her aunt and uncle for 10 years until she got married in 1950. During those years she worked and tried to stay away as her relatives were unpleasant. Stella has a daughter, two grandsons and four great-granddaughter. She learned the facts of her parents' deaths (mother gassed, probably at Auschwitz) eight years ago.

### **Summary**

- 00:00 Stella Bruchenstein Bengel was born January 19, 1927 in Vienna, Austria as Stella Bruchenstein and her married name is Bengel. She had no siblings. Her mother was Pola Vancinhofer (?) Bruchenstein and she came from Vienna. Her father was Joel Bayer Bruchenstein and he came from Balukoff (?), Poland near the Ukraine. She knew her father's family as once she went with her mother to Poland and met her grandfather and the entire family. They spent six weeks there. It was a beautiful memory as she learned about conventions as they were very religious. Her father was the third of eight children. She spoke Yiddish and German to them. Stella mostly spoke German with her parents but sometimes spoke Yiddish. The entire family was in the fur business. They lived in a village, a small place and the street was paved. There were no modern amenities. They had a kitchen, a bedroom, a living room and the store which was attached to it.
- 05:00 They lived near the center of town. Stella was named after her great-aunt Siguoh, her grandmother's sister who had died. The great-aunt owned two homes and Stella lived in

one of them. There were two baby boy cousins with Polish names on her mother's side. It was a cozy country place and they had a garden. She often thinks of it. She did not meet her grandmother who died at 45. Her grandfather remarried so she had a step grandmother, Golda. Stella's father left Poland as he did not want to go to the Army during the Austrian war so he went to Vienna. The area became Poland after the Second World War and when the Nazis came, it became Ukraine. When Stella went to the Polish Consulate, they said it was not in Poland. Her father's older brother, Locks, immigrated to Germany when her father went to the concentration camp.

10:00 Her Cousins Sonya and Crania are from Hamburg. Her father had six brothers and two sisters. Her grandfather made Straumas (hats) that the orthodox men wore in velvet and fur. He was the only Struma maker in the village. He also made pants and caps. He sent her a beige, felt hat. Her grandparents were orthodox. Her father was conservative. Stella liked being religious. She attended Friday night services with her grandfather and cousins from the West End and was introduced to the Chief Rabbi. Her grandfather's name was Nathan. He was a good person and helpful. Golda was nice and a good cook. Every morning her grandfather gave her a brush and she brushed everyone's hair. She slept in her great-grandfather's house and walked to her grandfather's house.

15:00 In Vienna her father made fur coats. He bought the furs from other people. They had to go outside to the bathroom. It was different from Vienna. There were no Jewish newspapers. Someone would come to the circle to announce news and people came to hear it. There was a German section in town and a Polish section. Customers came to buy hats. They made hats for students. She put in the pins in front. The students had hats and uniforms. Her grandfather was heavy, had a beard and wore a yamaca. They only made the one visit. There was a railroad station but no cars so used a horse and wagon. Her grandfather spoke a good German. Her father always wrote letters there and to Max in Hamburg. Her grandfather died before the war. The family was chased with forks, dug their own graves and were shot.

20:00 The Ukrainians hated the Jews. Stella found out this information from books. The Nazis took the Head Rabbi and shot him after he made a prayer. She found out after the war. She never returned there. Her mother had a brother, Fred and parents. Her grandmother, Adela (Bayla) Haubes (?) was very dear and her grandfather was sick and died in '32. Her given name was Bayla but called her Adela as did not think a Jewish name was safe in Vienna. Her grandmother took care of her in the summertime in her apartment. Her parents would visit them. It was called Baidenfort and was outside the city, about three or four hours away. She lived on a farm with cows chickens, hens and pigs. Stella saw them being born. She had a nice childhood. The farmers were not Jewish and rented apartments for the summer. All Stella's friends were Jewish. Vienna was a beautiful place but the people were Nazis before Hitler as they did not like Jews. She was called, "Jew" in school.

- 25:00 She went to a private kindergarten. It had more Jews than non-Jews. It was beautiful. Her mother took her. She had lots of fun. She lived in the Second and Ninth Districts. The Ninth District was where secular Jews lived. She felt uncomfortable going to school and did not like it. The Second District was where mostly religious Jews lived. Many Catholics lived there as Austria was a Catholic country. There were five or six Jewish children in her class. When Hitler came, her mother said, "Be careful." In the late '30s grandma took her to school and the teacher said, "Jewish children in the back of the room." This was before Hitler. A Catholic child put a book in the waste basket and she was blamed for it so her mother had to come to school. Stella had a gold chain given to her when she was born and the teacher took it away and told her to keep it at home. Her mother came to school and was told she must be protected as poor children attend cannot afford a chain.
- 30:00 The family was middle class. Her father's business was in their apartment building which was made of stone. Stella was there eight years ago and it was still standing. Someone lives in her apartment and she did not go in. The apartment is on the 4<sup>th</sup> floor with no elevator. She lived on Lichtensteinstrasse 103. They had water, electricity and a coal oven for heat. The kitchen had tiles and there was one large room and two small rooms. There was a bedroom, a living room and a foyer. They had nice furniture and a radio. They did not have a car but had a motorcycle and put her on the back. She saw her father in his shop every day. He came home for lunch. Her grandmother lived with them and made a good meal. Sometimes they had a cleaning woman who used the wash kitchen upstairs for two days and Stella brought her lunch.
- 35:00 She also ironed there for one or two days. She used a scrub board to wash clothes. There was a hot tub where she put everything in and turned them around with a stick. Stella would watch the woman work. They hung up the clothes. The woman came about every six weeks to clean the house. Her mother did the bookkeeping for the store. They had help with the coats during the season which was from the end of September to February or March. Her father got fur pieces and put them together. He was a cutter. The clients were mostly Jewish. The entire section had Jewish stores. Her parents were easy going. They never said, "No" so she was free to do as she pleased. They never spanked her but you could tell by her father's expression if something was wrong. Her religion says not to say bad words. She went to shul with her father who explained the Torah to her. Twice a week a teacher came from the Jewish Community to study Torah with her.
- 40:00 He was observant. They did not have a kosher home. Her parents' value was to give her a good life. They took her around in the city and explained the history of Vienna and talked of Emperors. She played the piano and took up dancing. She went ice skating and dancing. Twice a week she went to the Maccabee Gym. She saw a lot of the city and the suburbs. Her grandmother came from Poland her grandfather from Czechoslovakia. They took cruises on the Danube many times and had lunch and dinner on the Danube.

They went to the Prada Amusement Park and the Schoenberg Zoo. Her father was a good business man.

- 45:00 He liked to go places, was religious and gentle. He was quiet at meals and sociable after meals. His heart was the Jewish Community of Vienna where he had lots of friends so everyone knew her. Her mother loved the opera. They took her to an operetta and she saw every fairytale and concerts. Her parents met at a dance. Her mother dressed up with a big hat and stockings and looked elegant. Her father came during World War I and rented a room and washed his clothes in the Danube and laid them on the grass and they were stolen. Her parents got along and were happy and went out New Years. They always went out.
- 50:00 Her father went to the Jewish Theatre but not to the opera so her mother had to go with her girlfriends. They had affidavits for the US for her, her parents and her grandmother as her father's relatives lived in Rhode Island and sent them. After they received the affidavits, the family applied for visas but received high numbers as the father was born in Poland so had to wait for the Polish quota. Her father bought Austrian citizenship. His business was OK until 1938. Economics was in trouble and Hitler promised work as many were unemployed so they welcomed him.
- 55:00 Discrimination went from generation to generation. In the street, people called her, "Jew" before Hitler. She felt it was hard to grow up there but did not talk to her parents about it. She felt that something was going to happen. Her parents spoke of it. Her mother was with her in the park when she was called, "Jew" and her mother said, "You go to church and we are Jewish and go to synagogue." She explained it nicely and the children ran away. Her parents heard the news. As they had a high number for the US, it was hard to find another country to wait until your number was reached. When Hitler came to Austria, her parents got the affidavits. In May after Hitler came, she did not go to school every day as there was only one school for Jewish children so she lost some education. Her father showed Uncle Fred (mother's brother) a picture of his sister and he wanted to marry her.
- 60:00 Fred was a perfectionist, not easy going. He was in the Mother of Pearl business and made horns for shofars. He manufactured the Mother of Pearl into necklaces and bracelets. He was not very religious so had to adapt while in Poland. He brought the father's sister home and they got married in Vienna. Stella was the flower girl. It was in '32. Aunt Chyja and Uncle Fred went to the US in '39. First he went to England and later Aunt Chyja joined him and they both went to the US. When Stella had to sit in the back of the classroom, the entire family decided to leave. The Nazis took her father's business away at Kristallnacht. Stella saw Kristallnacht. Her father took her to school and kissed her. Something was going on in France. A Jew shot a German officer and

that was the excuse for Kristallnacht. In the morning, her father opened his business. Usually he opened it after taking her to school and then her mother came to the business.

65:00 Two policemen came, one a customer and her father asked why he was being taken. They responded, "Because you are a Jew." He was told to pack up. At noon she came out of school. The police station was nearby and she saw police and Jews going there. She thought something bad was going on. Her mother came towards her and said, "They took her father away and she does not know to which police station." They went home for lunch and someone banged on the door and said, "You have to leave your apartment and go next door." The neighbors were related to them. Her mother said she needs time to pack and they helped her pack and move next door. They just took their belongings, no furniture. Later they banged on the neighbor's door for the keys for the apartment and for the business. Her mother said that she cannot give the keys to them. They replied, "You will go to a concentration camp." Her mother gave them the keys and Stella screamed. They were unable to use the special lock. Stella went with her mother downstairs and opened up and they took all the merchandise. There was merchandise from other Jewish stores on the street. Her father's sign, "Bruckenstein Peltz (Furs)" was taken down and a car drove over it and smashed it.

70:00 Her mother said it is a  $\frac{3}{4}$  mile walk to the Gestapo in the First District so they walked there to get information. An SS in a Black uniform stood outside and said he does not know what happened to the men who were taken away. Then they walked back and saw trucks at the police station. This was November 10, 1938. Her mother thought the trucks were to take the men to the railroad station to go to concentration camps. In the morning, they went to the Jewish Community where there was a crowd of people and a loudspeaker announced that all the men taken yesterday are in Dachau Concentration Camp near Munich. They said they would send them food and write letters. They received letters from her father who was worried about his business and told her mother to take care of it. The store was locked and not damaged.

75:00 They lived in the grandmother's brother's apartment next door. Her grandmother owned the apartment. Her grandmother lived in the 16<sup>th</sup> District with another brother. Because she was old, she got her apartment back and it was locked and OK. Fred and his wife lost their apartment so went to live in her apartment. On January 20<sup>th</sup>, they got the urn so learned her father died. During Kristallnacht the graves were destroyed by machine guns. When the urn arrived, they fixed the grave and put it with her maternal grandfather's grave. During Stella's visit eight years ago, they put a beautiful stone on the grave and fixed it up. Her father had an ear infection and had surgery and got an infection. He had a bad heart as well. They received a certificate from the Nazis that her father had died.

80:00 They received the urn the day after her birthday. She had to travel to school on the streetcar. Life got more difficult. Her mother got a job in a Jewish Old Age Home

Hospital and took courses to become a nurse. She could not get their assets. People were being deported to concentration camps. Eleanor Roosevelt created a Children's Transport. Her mother went to the Jewish Community and learned that since they had a high number, Stella could go to the US, England, Sweden or Palestine. They had relatives in the US so decided to go there. Uncle Fred was already there with Chyja and Allen. Her father was popular with the Jewish community so she was placed on the list for the US.

85:00 Her father first got Polish citizenship and then Austrian and Stella left with Deutch Reich passport. Hitler had taken away the Austrian citizenship. Her father was a big Zionist. Thirty-six children were going to the US to be Foster children. There was a nanny, Dr. Margaret Feiler, the Secretary for the Chief Rabbi of Vienna. Those on the list had to see a psychiatrist at the Jewish Community Center who asked many questions. She told him that she was going to her aunt and uncle. He asked what she would do if that was not possible and she replied that she did not want a Foster Home. Then the Chief Rabbi interviewed her. Finally, she saw the doctor at the Embassy. Her mother prepared her as she knew Jewish doctors and he said Stella was OK.

90:00 The doctors were funny as said she should not be sent alone as it would cause psychological problems. Her mother said that won't happen. The doctor said that you should not separate a mother from a child. Stella wanted to leave but was attached to her mother who said that she will come later to the US. Stella was 13. All the children met in a group. Stella still sees some of them. All their fathers died in Kristallnacht. It was hard to say good-bye to her mother. The superintendent from her apartment took her and her two suitcases to the railway. Chief Rabbi Murnelstein's secretary, Margaret Feiler, was their nanny. The Rabbi was very strict. He placed the children on one side and the mothers on the other side so they could not kiss.

95:00 Of the 36 children, only 9 went as the others did not obtain an affidavit. The rejected children waved good-bye. There were seven girls and two boys. The youngest was eight. She saw her recently. Susan and Otto were 15 and took charge of the children. Stella recently saw Herta whose hair she braided on the trip. They could not tell the parents that the children were going to Berlin as England had bombed the city. There they stayed a few days to get papers checked. The Jewish community of Berlin took them to a hostel and the nanny went to a hotel. From the train, they went to a shelter as there was a bombing on the way to the hostel. People gave them food and they slept in a big room. They were called "Galitzianers" as if they were Polish. They had to share the tables with others. In the middle of the night, they had to go to a shelter. Herta slept with her doll and took her to the shelter. There they got food and something to drink and when it was over, they returned to the hostel. They were there for four days. She saw the bombed city.

- 100:00 Their papers were checked by German officials. Once Stella peeked out the window and saw a bomb coming down. They took a train to Spain. It was a beautiful place and they got an injection. They returned to the train and went to occupied Paris. They took their valises to show the SS. She saved her birth certificate and returned to the train and got food. They left Vienna on November 23, 1940 and went to Paris first and then to Spain. When they left Paris, they sang as they were out of danger. From Spain they went to Lisbon where the Jewish community picked them up and took them to a boarding house for ten days while Dr. Feiler was at a hotel.
- 105:00 A man gave them money for breakfast and lunch and they ate dinner at the Jewish Community Center. She used a German/Portuguese dictionary to shop for food. The two older children bought food which they ate at the boarding house. They waited for their ship, the SS Camp where they slept on a mattress in the Boardroom. There were also Transport Children from Paris so French and German was spoken on the ship. Dr. Feiler had a cabin on the ship and they did not see her. She was an attorney and did not take care of them. She wanted to go to the Beauty Parlor on the ship and requested the \$5 each child had received from the Jewish community.
- 110:00 The parents were not allowed to give the children money. Stella had a beautiful pocketbook, a ring and a chain. Dr. Feiler was red-head, single and good looking. They were on the ship for ten days with a stop in Bermuda where they remained on board. The nine children were pleasant to each other, did not cry and got along with each other. They went to a Portuguese/German movie. It was an American ship so that was the first time she met Americans. Her first impression of Americans is that they are self-centered. The Orthodox are not self-centered but the secular are as they were not interested in her.
- 115:00 They did not ask her any questions. She found out the Americans work many hours so were self-centered. There were many groups of children from Paris: boys on one side and girls on the other. There were grownups on the ship. Stella got a little seasick. They arrived in New Jersey as all the ships with Transports dock there. Her relatives did not show up when the other children were picked up by relatives. She was standing there with her two valises when Lottie Marcuza (?) from Berlin came over and told her that her relatives did not reply to her letter. She had to take her to the Amsterdam Avenue Foster Home. The other children either had relatives or foster parents. Stella did not want to go with foster parents and she had her aunt and uncle's address but not their phone number. All the children had to leave the state. Her aunt and uncle lived in the Bronx.
- 120:00 She went to the library and saw a contractor fixing the window. He asked if she speaks English and she did not so asked if he spoke German. They were able to converse in Yiddish. He agreed to contact her relatives and they came the next day. They took her home a few days later. Her uncle could not read so did not answer the letter. He lived with his wife Chyja and son, Allen. She wrote her mother that they were not friendly.

Fred had a non-Jewish partner in Vienna who told her how to talk to her uncle. Cousin Jules said they cannot afford her but she pushed herself in. The mail was slow due to the war.

125:00 Her aunt and uncle were different from their parents. They were very fussy with every move she made. She lived ten years with them. Her mother was in three camps and went to the gas chamber. Her father died just before the ticket for Shanghai, China arrived. They had no money as everything was taken. Fred had money as he still had the business with the Germans. Stella found out this information eight years ago. Her mother died in '44 in either Auschwitz or Thereisenstadt. Her letters stopped except she learned that her mother was deported to Auschwitz from Thereisenstadt. Her Polish relatives were close to each other and helped each other. She did not understand why her aunt was so different.

130:00 She knew to be careful with him as he could hit. He once smashed her mother's ear and her father wanted to call the police but the grandmother stopped him. The grandmother wanted a grave to be fixed and he did not. The inside nerve on her mother's ear was damaged. Stella was short and did not see her uncle at meals. When she was 17, she got working papers and worked in a sweat shop and earned money. At 18 she worked at all kinds of places and got stuck on 48<sup>th</sup> Street in a watch company until she married. When she arrived at 13 she went to school. She walked into Mr. Rosenberg's class who greeted her in German and said to speak English from now on. She had studied a little English when she lived in Germany and had a German/English dictionary. She learned English from the movies, got easy books to read at the library and learned English from speaking to the children on the street. She worked during the day, got a frankfurter on the street and then went to business school twice a week to study bookkeeping with her own money. She did things to make herself happy.

135:00 She did not stay home much as went to the movies on her free evenings. At first she slept in the living room and later had her own room. Later they moved to a bigger apartment. Allen was very nice but was very weak. He had to see a psychiatrist as had a nervous breakdown and never recovered. He did not make himself happy. He did not have the power or the energy but his wife did. He died young at 56 of cancer, brain cancer. Stella got married in 1950. She met her husband at a dance, the Aruf (?) Ball for immigrants. Her husband was from Frankfurt Am Main and had spent two years in a concentration camp. She was six months older than him. He was about 17 when in the camps with his father. They went twice to Vienna—once on vacation and eight years ago to find out about her mother. She told her experiences to her children. She has a daughter, two grandsons and three great-granddaughters.

140:00 They had no money to buy tickets to China and when her father died, her mother pushed her to leave. Her uncle knew someone who brought her jewelry to England and to her so



her daughter, Paula, has it. Stella looked for her mother's bracelet but never found it. She was active in the school's PTA and would spend four hours a day in her daughter's school which was across the street. She joined Hadassah and is still the president but is not so active except money still comes in. She used to run around a lot and got honored by Hadassah. Stella started giving talks when her grandson announced at synagogue that she is from Vienna and has a story from when she was 13. This was about two or three years ago. She spoke in synagogue upon her Rabbi's invitation. She saw Herta couple of weeks ago as she was visiting friends in the other building and visited her. She does not know how Herta found her. Once or twice she met Melanie. The other children went to different states. Susan and Otto, the oldest, died. They were the leaders.

145:00 She feels different people would be affected differently by her story. Some might think things were terrible while others might think little of it. It would depend on their personality. There is a lady here from Germany who was in the Holocaust and talks against her. The public at synagogues understand. Some people blame G-d and are angry like this woman who does not attend synagogue. Stella feels with G-d who took care of her so she attends synagogue weekly and goes on with her life. The German lady and others are mad at G-d for turning his back.

148:00