

(1872) Juliana Walz Eisenbeiß (a:3.1.5.3.7-4.8.6.6)

by Dennis Eisenbeis (a:3.1.5.3.7-4.8.6.6-1.2), January 1988. Based on discussions with his grandfather, Chris Eisenbeis, his Great Uncle Bill Eisenbeis, and his Great Aunt Louise Eisenbeis Weber.

Born Juliana Walz on July 08, 1872 in Neudorf, South Russia, she and her twin brother Karl were the last of 6 children born to Peter and Karolina Börkirchert Walz. Her father, Peter, was a Schloßer (locksmith/goldsmith) and he came to Russia after spending time in Persia. Her mother, Karolina, was a "Brauche", which is a combination of healer, midwife and witch (depending on who you talk to).

At an early age Juliana was not like other girls. She loved the outdoors and was considered somewhat of a gypsy. She was an excellent swimmer, and as a teen, she used to swim out to the anchored ships where sailors would toss coins overboard to watch her dive down to retrieve them. One time, a Russian sailor thought it would be funny to keep her from resurfacing. Each time she tried to surface and catch a breath, he would push her back down under the water with a board. She was pushed under several times and almost drowned before some of the other sailors stopped the guy from holding her under. Some in our family feel it was during her recovery from the near drowning that encouraged her to follow in her mother's art of the Brauche. Others have stated that Juliana showed an interest as a child when she would accompany her mother in the woods and fields around Glückstal collecting plants, roots, and bugs to construct medicines and potions.

Juliana was said to be a very personable person and learned to speak many of the different languages used by different groups in Glückstal area of South Russia including Russian, German, Romanian, and Yiddish, and after moving to America, she quickly learned to speak English. She was a well-liked woman, though she was also known to be "mean as Hell" when she was mad. If you crossed her, you were likely to get a "swat in the ass" if you were young, or cursed if you were old: "Hexe Hexe Hahne Fuß!!". She was known by her kids as being very loving, but also very strict. Once, when a group of her children were being unruly, she was said to have lined up all 11 children and gave them all a whipping. When some of the kids complained that they were not involved and questioned why they too were getting whipped, Juliana responded: "When you have 11 kids, you come talk to me! When one acts up it was easier to just give them all a smack!". She also was known as being a very popular story-teller, and teenagers would come from all over town to hear her ghost and sea stories which she told at Halloween.

Juliana was known as never being a much of a homemaker. Instead of using her oven to cook food, her children remember the oven being used to bake clay to make toy jacks for the kids. The clay was extracted from the ground when they dug an indoor well, and Juliana felt that everything should be used for something, nothing should be wasted. She did not like to stay indoors, keeping a neat house or cooking meals. She preferred to be outside and out with people, doing what she did best: making medicine and performing Rites of Healing. Her children told how the kids where not allowed in the yard during a full moon, because their mother would be busy "doing her cures".

Juliana often spoke of her love for Russia, and unlike many Germans-from-Russia, she proudly claimed to be Russian. Even after the Russian army had made life very hard for the Germans, she was still reluctant to leave. However, her beloved Russia changed and she gave up all hope of staying after the episode affecting her husband, David D. (DD) Eisenbeiß. Soon, her love for the old Russia turned to hate for the new Russia.

On February 1, 1894, Juliana married DD in Glückstal, South Russia. On 20 Dec 1894 they had their first child, Fred. Times were already pretty hard for those of German descent in South Russia, and money was very tight. One day, DD was approached by a Jewish man who was fleeing the area and needed to hire someone to haul his possessions to the port in Odessa. There must have been something about this man that was suspicious since both Juliana and DD's father pleaded with DD not to take the job. But DD said they could really use the money, so he left with the "strange little man". In a town along the way, they boarded the horse and wagon at the stable, and they went for something to eat. The Jewish man offered DD some sugar for his tea. Being quite a luxury, DD gladly accepted the sugar. Before he could finish his tea, DD blacked out and upon waking, DD realized the Jewish man was gone. Feeling quite ill, DD guessed he had been poisoned. DD made his way back to the stable, where he was told his "friend" already picked up the horse and wagon. Afraid to go to the authorities (who were not sympathetic to Germans at this point), DD made his way towards home on foot, eating whatever he could find along the way. The poison left DD noticeably sick, and with all of the epidemics affecting the area, he thought it wise to not be seen by anyone (the Russians were known to kill and burn the bodies of anyone suspected having the plague). He traveled only at night

and he hid during the daytime. This made his trip home take so much longer, supposedly taking him around 3 months to get home.

Since so much time had elapsed, DD's family had all but given him up for dead or thought he had perhaps been forced into the Russian Army. When DD arrived at his home, the effects of the poison and the malnutrition had so ravaged his body that he was described as looking like a "bag of bones", and his wife and father did not recognize him and at first would not let him in the house.

It was at this point in time when the family made the decision that it was time to leave Russia. DD's parents, David Eisenbeiß and Katherina Werre, decided to head to America where Katherina's relatives had already migrated. Unfortunately, Katherina was not allowed to enter the U.S. due to an eye problem, and though she pleaded with David to stay in America, they returned to Russia together. Shortly after returning, Katherina died on Christmas eve, 24 Dec 1896. Knowing his mother was denied entry to the U.S. for health reasons, DD decided they would not attempt to migrate until his health was not obviously compromised. In November of 1900, David again made the voyage to the U.S. and he stayed with the relative of his wife, Jake Werre, in North Dakota.

In 1903, DD, Juliana, and their four young children (Fred, David, Edward, and John) immigrated to the U.S., and settled in the town of Ashley where they had five more children (Mary, Christian, Adolph, Jake, and Rose). Around 1915 they moved to Danzig, ND, and they had two more children born there (Louise and Wilhelm [Bill]).

Juliana maintained her practice as a Brauche in the U.S. just as she had in Russia. It did not take her long to fall in love with her new home in America. Though she talked lovingly of the Old Russia, she was so happy to be an American where she could again travel freely and practice her art. It is said that she was rarely home as she traveled from farm to farm and village to village birthing babies and healing the sick. In fact, of her 11 children, she birthed all but the last two herself. In the Dakotas, she was said to have constructed a rather elaborate still using milk cans, copper tubes and snow for cooling the tubes. She supposedly had a very sought-after "medicine" made from this still. DD made Concord grape wine for the church, beer and choke-cherry brandy for the family and several other concoctions that Juliana distilled to make her medicines.

Through the years, DD had severe stomach problems caused by the poisoning, and on 3 Jan 1926, DD died in Ashley, North Dakota. Around 1928, Juliana married John Esslinger, a reportedly strongly religious man who denounced Juliana's practice as a Brauche as witchcraft. Esslinger forced her to quit all of the practices except the operation of the still, which brought in a reasonable amount of money. Around 1929, they moved to Lodi, California taking along Juliana's two youngest children, Louise and Bill. According to family lore, around 1935 Juliana suspected Esslinger of attempting to poison her two children so he would not have additional mouths to feed, so she divorced him. Around 1936, Juliana married Alex Keller, who has been described as a jovial fiddle-player. Though it is not thought that Alex had a problem with the practice of a Brauche, Juliana did not reinstate the practice. Though some people from the "old country" pleaded for her to help them, Juliana refused, claiming only that she "lost it". It is thought that she feared reprisal from the church elders who dominated the culture in Lodi at that time. She died on 2 Nov 1958 in Lodi never to regain her practice as a Brauche.