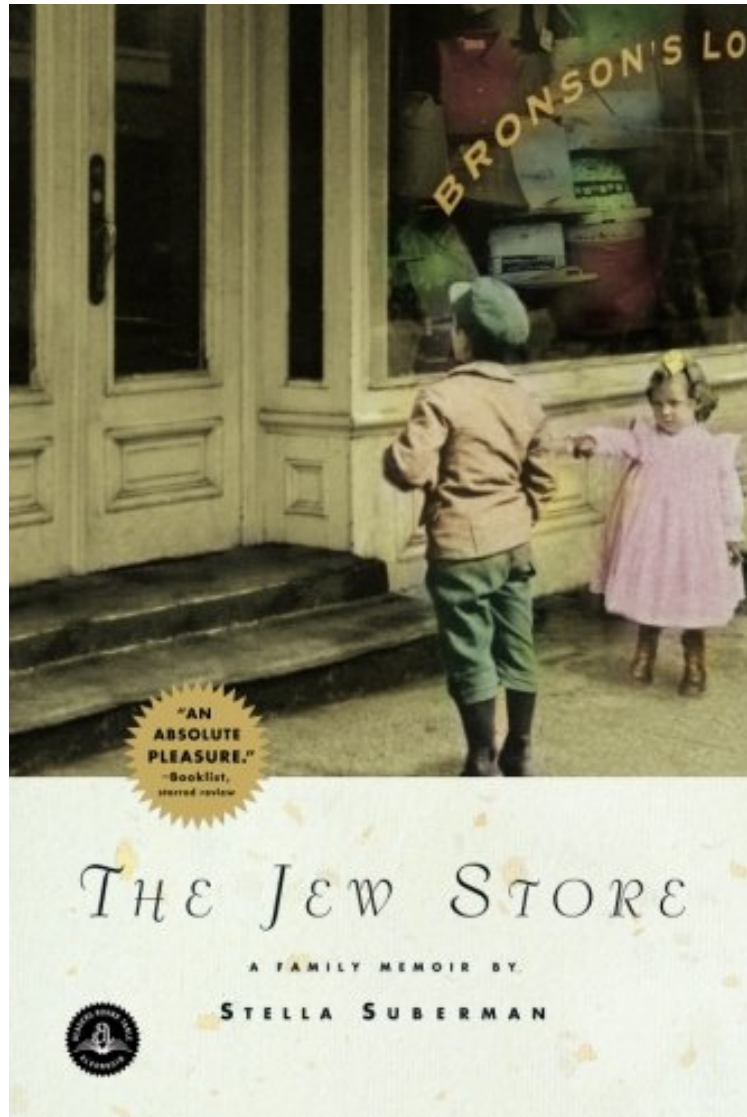


(Library ebook) The Jew Store

## The Jew Store

*Stella Suberman*

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**Stella Suberman : The Jew Store** before purchasing it in order to gage whether or not it would be worth my time, and all praised The Jew Store:

1 of 1 people found the following review helpful. A Good Narrative Family HistoryBy patrick e bates"The Jew Store" by Stella SubermanI love a good story! This narrative history of the author's family was interesting and fun to read right from the start and all the way to the end. I thought she handled the narrative well even if she hadn't yet been born. She skirted that issue easily using an oral family history, just stories that had been passed down in the family over the years.I wish she had included more of the early years of developing the little store, but it's entirely possible that there

wasn't much to tell. And if that was the case, the narrative might have been boring. But regardless, the author told a great story and an enjoyable read even while telling a bit of history about her family. Well worth reading. I think this narrative might be a good snapshot of the people, the towns, the attitudes and the development of early small-town America. Most of history is written in terms of the big cities and big developments. But a very large part of developing early America came about because of the many small towns, villages and small cities that few historians ever even mention.

Patrick O of 0 people found the following review helpful. A stunner  
By gi  
This book is a stunner. More than anything I've read before, "The Jew Store: A Family Memoir" affords a vivid sense of the lives of those Jews who, seeing economic opportunity in the rural South of the early 20th century, left their extended families in eastern cities and sought their fortunes in small rural towns of the American South, a world of WASPs. How such people lived has always intrigued me, and I've read many memoirs that chronicle their experience. Most have been stories either of successful accommodation or even integration into a new culture. Some have been stories of an alienation even in the face of economic success.

In "The Jew Store" Suderman does a remarkable job of showing the clash of these two views within a family and the effects they have on children, thereby providing a vibrant, complex view seldom developed. Born in the South after her parents moved to West Tennessee to open a low-price dry goods store, Suderman sees and describes in rich detail the views both of her ambitious, optimistic Russian-born father, thrilled at the opportunity to advance economically, and her anxious, fearful Russian Jewish mother, burdened with the sense of her Jewishness and the virtual impossibility of preserving her heritage in a land peopled only by gentiles. This battle that lies at the heart of her memoir gives it the shape and tension of a novel---a novel that is almost impossible to put down. The Bronson's story is told with humor and wit and a decided attention to revealing details. Suderman gets the language down perfectly (What Southerner ever said "Ku Klux Klan," for instance? It's always "Klu Klux Klan"). She also gets the mannerisms and customs. What she tells, one senses, is the distillation of a family's stories told and retold, each time with a pleasure that recreates a past.

In one sense, the drama played out in the Bronson household is not substantially different from that played out in America in its early years and thereafter. In the 1830's and 1840's, for instance, both Virginia and South Carolina lost population as members of the rising generation struck out for the newly opened lands of the Old Southwest. Diaries and letters show the grief and bitter loneliness the women experienced in leaving their homes, where they had been surrounded and supported in their roles by local custom and family, and moving to a hard life their grandparents had known. The men, however, expressed no yearning for home. In letters, they repeatedly made clear they wanted to be free of family and custom and the obligations those imposed on their behaviors. They were exhilarated by the chance to establish themselves as individuals, something the constraint of family custom and mores made difficult. The same pattern was seen further north, for instance, as Connecticut emptied itself into the Western Reserve. It's an American pattern. Led by the desire for economic improvement and independence, men are invigorated by such moves. Women, on whom the burden of transmitting the family culture falls, yearn for the support of their mothers and grandmothers. Yet the Bronsons' experience also differs from the average American transplant's experience. For the Bronsons are Jewish, and the place to which they move, solidly Christian and Protestant, run by a clutch of petty men united by prejudice and property and an interest in the status quo. And the family's internal drama is matched by their outside maneuverings within that place. Whether Aaron Bronson would even be permitted to rent a store space had nothing to do with his ability to pay rent, everything to do with one of the town bullies and bigots. And then, the store stocked and ready for its first day's opening, the question of whether the KKK would permit townspeople to buy there remained in doubt until mid-morning. Without the guidance and affection of the woman to whose house they were directed for shelter when they arrived in town and with whom they lived for several years, Miss Brookie, they might not have made it. While a native and member of an old family, Miss Brookie had studied at the University of Chicago, where she had a Jewish roommate, known a world bigger than the town limits. Miss Brookie was a woman, however, and thus her power was limited. And Miss Brookie was sui generis in Concordia, TN.

A WASP myself, though from a place and time in the South very different from the world of rural west Tennessee, I confess I was surprised by Reba Bronson's view of Gentiles, which was only scarcely less bigoted than the town's view of its black citizens or of Jews. It was virtually intransigent. In time she made friends in the neighborhood and town, but always uppermost in her mind was the worry that her children were not getting the proper Jewish upbringing, that they must not take up the ways of their gentile friends, that everybody in the family kept in mind that Concordia, TN, was only a temporary arrangement. Home was New York City and the Bronx and a world of first-generation Jewish mothers and grandmothers---and a Rabbi's wife to serve tea and advice to them. Everything from sweet pickles to iced tea struck her not merely as differences in regional tastes, but as a major violation of ethics and decency. In her mind, Jewish meant civilized. Her provincialism contrasted sharply with the broader and more benevolent views of her husband, but he had business: she had the family.

As a Southerner, I was also interested in aspects of this book only tangentially related to the story. In my lifetime and where I've lived, the KKK has always been a joke. In the seventies and eighties and perhaps even now, a group gathered every now and again on the city hall square of a nearby city to protest something, but nobody paid any attention to what, and I don't think many remembered a time when the group had held the power they held in 1920s Concordia, TN. The very title, "The Jew Store," shocked my sensibilities. And I still find it hard to imagine that little children were told Jewish people had

horns. Growing up in an area whose major city was a river city, I'd known people from all sorts of ethnic groups, all of them proud of their heritage. So the world this book opened was novel. I'd read of it in history books, but that was bloodless knowledge. In this book that world pulsed. I finished "The Jew Store" five days ago, but it lives in my head and, I think, will continue to live there, shaping my view and understanding of the world. That's what really fine books do. Suderman vividly portrays the viewpoints of both her mother and her father, and so of 0 people found the following review helpful. A "Feel Good" Book By Cam42150I had been feeling a little depressed before reading this book, but this little gem of a book took the place of any pill I could take to feel better. Ms. Suberman has told her story, and it never fails to amaze me as to what our memories mean to others, and the impact they may have. This story about a Jewish family of immigrants in the early 19th century, and their journey from NYC to Tennessee, in search of a better life for all of them is the real deal. It shows what determination, a sense of humor, and love for each other, will accomplish. Aaron and his family had to overcome prejudice, poverty, and uncertainty in a strange place, and thanks to a Dad and Husband like him, with a will to succeed, they did. A "Jew Store" is what all the southern towns and cities were seeking out, due to the variety of very cheap goods that could be found, compared to the other higher priced shops in town. Since Aaron thought of himself as a natural born sal-es-man, as he pronounced it, and he was not getting anywhere in New York, off the family went on their southern journey, and ultimately opened his very successful "Jew Store". It must be noted that during this time in American History, it was not anti-semitic to call a store a "Jew Store". The best parts of this book are how the family, especially Mrs. Bronson, Aaron's wife, uses humor and patience to deal with the stresses and uncertainty in their lives, and how they grow to love their little town, Concordia, Tennessee, and in return how the town's people begin to accept and love them. Like I said, it's a feel good book, and I defy anyone not to feel better after reading it.

For a real bargain, while you're making a living, you should make also a life.--Aaron Bronson. In 1920, in small town America, the ubiquitous dry goods store--suits and coats, shoes and hats, work clothes and school clothes, yard goods and notions--was usually owned by Jews and often referred to as "the Jew store." That's how Stella Suberman's father's store, Bronson's Low-Priced Store, in Concordia, Tennessee, was known locally. The Bronsons were the first Jews to ever live in that tiny town (1920 population: 5,318) of one main street, one bank, one drugstore, one picture show, one feed and seed, one hardware, one barber shop, one beauty parlor, one blacksmith, and many Christian churches. Aaron Bronson moved his family all the way from New York City to that remote corner of northwest Tennessee to prove himself a born salesman--and much more. Told by Aaron's youngest child, THE JEW STORE is that rare thing--an intimate family story that sheds new light on a piece of American history. Here is ONE MAN'S FAMILY with a twist--a Jew, born into poverty in prerevolutionary Russia and orphaned from birth, finds his way to America, finds a trade, finds a wife, and sets out to find his fortune in a place where Jews are unwelcome. With a novelist's sense of scene, suspense, and above all, characterization, Stella Suberman turns the clock back to a time when rural America was more peaceful but no less prejudiced, when educated liberals were suspect, and when the Klan was threatening to outsiders. In that setting, she brings to life her remarkable father, a man whose own brand of success proves that intelligence, empathy, liberality, and decency can build a home anywhere. THE JEW STORE is a heartwarming--even inspiring--story.

From Publishers Weekly In 1920, two years before the author was born, her family became the first Jews to live in the small town of Concordia, Tenn. Against the objections of his wife, Aaron Bronson, a Russian Jewish immigrant who had worked in dry goods stores in Savannah, Ga., and Nashville, started his own business by opening Bronson's Low-Priced Store in Concordia, which the locals called "the Jew store." In this richly detailed memoir, in which her father's optimism contrasts sharply with her mother's anxiety about their ability to provide their children with a Jewish education in their new surroundings, Suberman evokes early-20th-century life in the rural South and depicts her family's struggles to find a place in a town where African Americans suffered discrimination and poverty, the Ku Klux Klan was on the march and townspeople viewed Jews with suspicion. Suberman provides vivid characterizations of Concordia's residents, especially Brookie Simmons, who not only gave the Bronsons a home but fought to end child labor in the town's factory. In 1933, Aaron finally yielded to his wife's entreaties and moved with her and their three children back to New York City, even though they had come to regard Concordia as home. Author tour. Copyright 1998 Reed Business Information, Inc. From School Library Journal YA-Russian immigrant Aaron Bronson took his wife and children from their enclave of New York Jews to a tiny Tennessee town where he set himself up as a successful storekeeper in the 1920s. The social, economic, and even spiritual experiences of the Bronson family are recounted by its youngest member, who evidently was a keen listener to family tales as well as an observer of events around her in early childhood. Nearly half of this autobiographical work predates Stella Ruth's birth and even when she appears on the stage, she is no scene-stealer. Her mother had to hide her ethnicity on her jobs in New York, and took years to assimilate to life in Tennessee. Joey and Miriam, the older children, dealt with the blunt questions asked by local children about their Jewishness with aplomb and made good friends. Mr. Bronson had to sell the insular town of Concordia on the idea that a "Jew store," a low-priced dry-goods store, was even needed and, being a "born sal-es-

man," he succeeded in selling the idea and the goods as well. Suberman's fine writing and her ability to record tones and scents as well as images make this a lively and engaging story. Anti-Semitism is presented factually, as are the limitations of various townsfolk's penchant for doing good or evil. This will attract casual readers and serve as a useful auxiliary text in classrooms. Francisca Goldsmith, Berkeley Public Library, CA Copyright 1998 Reed Business Information, Inc. From Library Journal After retiring in 1995 as a publicist, Suberman returned for the first time to her birthplace, a small town in northwestern Tennessee. She decided to recount, using fictionalized names and places, her Jewish family's 11 years in that small town, from 1922 to 1933. The author's father, Aaron Bronson, a Jew orphaned from birth in pre-revolutionary Russia, immigrated to New York City. Eventually, he moved his family to rural Tennessee, where he opened up Bronson's Low-Priced Store. Since the Bronsons were the first Jews in town, residents referred to their business as the "Jew Store." Writing with a personal passion (with chapters on "The Bar Mitzvah Question" and "New York Aunts"), Suberman captures the trials her family faced and positive human relationships they formed while trying to adapt to an alien, closed, Southern Christian society. Her interesting, undocumented personal narrative puts a personal face on Ewa Morawska's scholarly social history, *Insecure Prosperity: Small Town Jews in Industrial America, 1890-1940* (Princeton Univ., 1996). Recommended for public and academic libraries. Charles C. Hay, Eastern Kentucky Univ. Archives, Richmond Copyright 1998 Reed Business Information, Inc.