

Rita Levi-Montalcini



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Rita Levi-Montalcini (Torin, 22 april 1909 – Roma, 30 dicembre 2012) was an Italian neurology, academic and life senator, awarded the Nobel Prize for medicine in 1986. In the fifties with her research she discovered and illustrated the growth factor of the nerve fiber (in this case of the axonal structure), known as NGF, and for this discovery she was awarded the Nobel Prize for medicine in 1986. Also awarded with other prizes, she was the first woman to be admitted to the Pontifical Academy of Sciences. On 1 August 2001 she was appointed senator for life by the President of the Republic Carlo Azeglio Ciampi "for having illustrated the homeland with outstanding merits in the scientific and social field." She was a national member of the Accademia dei Lincei for the physical sciences class and member - founder of the Idis-City of Science Foundation.



Rita Levi-Montalcini Following the racial laws of 1938 Rita, as a Jew, was forced to emigrate in March 1939 to Belgium, where her teacher Giuseppe Levi was already and where her sister Anna was also with her family, although he was still finishing his specialist studies in psychiatry and neurology. He was a guest of the neurology institute of the University of Brussels where he continued his studies on the differentiation of the nervous system.



The Levi-Montalcinis survived the Holocaust by remaining hidden in Florence, divided into various lodgings, until the liberation of the city, often changing homes to avoid being deported. Once they were rescued by a maid, who made them escape just in time. During the period of the Nazi occupation, in Florence, Rita came into contact with the partisan forces of the Action Party.

In August 1944 the Allies forced the Germans to leave Florence. Montalcini then became a doctor at the Anglo-American Headquarters. As such she was assigned to the war refugee camp from Northern Italy, dealing with epidemics of infectious diseases and dtyphoid fever.



We note Rita's tolerance especially in the religious sphere

For Rita, in fact, being a victim of deportations, the theme of religion was a fundamental factor in her life

In the book Encounters with extraordinary minds, a collection of interviews between the author Piergiorgio Odifreddi and important scientists, there is the one with Rita Levi-Montalcini, who when asked by the professor "Do you believe in God?" he declared: "I am an atheist. I don't know what is meant by believing in God. "

However, the scientist donated part of the proceeds of the Nobel Prize to the Jewish community of Rome for the construction of a new synagogue.

