

RITA LEVI-MONTALCINI

Italian-American neurologist

Rita Levi Montalcini was born in 1909 in Torino, Italy. She was the fourth woman to be awarded the Nobel prize for medicine or physiology. As a Jew, she was forced into hiding in Italy where she continued to conduct experiments on chicken embryos in a homemade lab all through World War II. She had dual citizenship in Italy and the United States and spent 30 years working at the Washington University, St. Louis. She also won the 1986 Lasker Basic Medical Research Award. Because she was a dual citizen of Italy and the United States, Levi-Montalcini did her most important work at Washington Univ. with Stanley Cohen. Studying mouse tumors implanted in chicken embryos, the pair isolated a nerve-growth factor, the first of many cell-growth factors found in animals. She made ground breaking discoveries in the early 1950's of the Nerve Growth Factor.



That helps understanding of such disorders as cancer, birth defects, and Alzheimer's. For this discovery Levi-Montalcini and Cohen were awarded the 1986 Nobel Prize in Physiology or Medicine. From 1969 to 1978 she served as director of the Institute of Cell Biology in Rome. You can read her biography named "In Praise of Imperfection" (1988).

Interview with Rita Levi Montalcini

Why did you feel it was your duty to sign the appeal for ceasefire?

"Well, I think it's clear. Because without peace, the human species ends. As Kennedy said, either mankind will put an end to war, or war will put an end to mankind".

Do you think that laying down arms is enough to reach peace?

"Absolutely not. Laying down arms doesn't always mean being at peace. Peace is not absence of war. Peace is something that goes further, peace must be worked out and built. I said many times that war has been a monopoly of the male sex. Therefore, women have the most difficult task: to be builders of peace".

What is peace for you?

"It's equality and fraternity. It's really an extremely difficult process, which is in the hands of a small group made up of, at the moment, people of high capacities and ethic level. This is a constructive fact, not a negative one. Actually it's very positive".

Is it important to educate the young to peace?

"Everybody should be educated to peace, from newborns to adults, everybody should be educated to a world of fraternity. This is important: to create a culture of peace in the new generations. I wrote about this in the first chapter of my last book".