

“My Aunt Rita”

Giulia Madron (February 05, 2014)



Rita Levi Montalcini's niece remembers her aunt Rita, Italian neurologist and Nobel Prize in Physiology or Medicine, during a special event at the Centro Primo Levi

The Italian Cultural Institute and the Centro Primo Levi of New York celebrated, on February 4th, “Il Giorno della Memoria” at the Centro Primo Levi of New York, remembering, one of the greatest Jewish Italian scientists, the Nobel Prize Rita Levi Montalcini, who passed away in December of 2012.

The event, Liberty of knowledge: Remembering Rita Levi Montalcini, started at 5pm with some very interesting opening remarks by some representatives of many important cultural and academic institutions: Natalia Indrimi, Director of the Centro Primo Levi, Riccardo Viale, Director of the Italian Cultural Institute, Alain Elkann (writer and scholar), Annalisa Capristo (Center for American Studies, Rome) and Antonino Cattaneo (Fondazione Ebraica).

Above all, a special guest, and one of the closest persons to Rita, attended the event: her niece Piera



Montalcini. Her speech was really touching and funny at the same time. She spoke not only about her aunt's career and success within the scientific sphere but she also talked about how great was this woman within the familiar sphere, that is, in her private life.

Graduated in Electronic Engineering, since 1976 Piera Levi Montalcini manages her own company that produces numerical controls for machine tools and robots. During her career she had the opportunity to work side by side with her aunt Rita, attending meetings and shaking hands with many important figures of the cultural, political, academic and social scene. In 1996 she became President of the Levi-Montalcini Foundation and after six years she founded the Association Levi-Montalcini a.p.s of which she is President and that deals with young Italians, orientation, scientific divulgation and research.

“Being in the US, which was my aunt second home, is very important. It means remembering her both in Italy, where she was born and raised, and in America, where she worked and had the opportunity to focus on her research that allowed her to win the Nobel Prize.”

Piera Levi Montalcini was very attached to her aunt Rita and during the speech she said she was fascinated by her work, her willpower, her great insights and her ability to remember many things at the same time.

“I had the opportunity to live and work with her and through my experience with her I want to keep alive her memory and bring her message to the young generations, who she cared a lot about” said Montalcini. “Her message included the words: effort and commitment, willpower, optimism, look at the future and never give up.”

Rita Levi Montalcini was first of all a woman who was able to achieve her goals with great dedication even though she lived the brutal reality of fascism and Jewish persecution. “Aunt Rita,” concluded Piera Levi Montalcini, “represented the emblem of a woman, who, without rejecting her identity as a woman trying to emulate men, continued to follow her path and fight for her rights, her intellectual abilities and her will to demonstrate that women are physically different from men but intellectually speaking they are all the same.”

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