

Maria Meissinger biography – by Joyce Arnon

Maria Felicitas “Marlies” Meissinger was born on July 27, 1920, in Frankfurt, Germany.

She attended the Elisabethenschule in Frankfurt. She experienced discrimination there from Nazi teachers and students. Marlies was an active member of the sport club Eintacht in Frankfurt from 1935 to 1938. She had won a junior track medal I 1936, but the Nazi teachers claimed she won it by fraud and refused to award her the medal. She was no longer allowed to do her Abitur in Frankfurt, so she transferred to the Jewish school, the Goldschmidt Schule in Berlin, in 1938 (where her brother Ernst was a teacher) and prepared for the Cambridge Matriculation exam. She passed the exam and applied to the University of Cambridge to study medicine, where she was accepted. Her permit to attend Cambridge arrived on September 1, 1939 but she was no longer able to leave Germany because the war had started.

Marlies was not allowed to do university studies but she able to study nursing at St. Gertrauden Hospital in Berlin in 1939. She was forced to leave the hospital in March 1940 by Nazi authorities. She then lived with her mother to help with the boarding of former Goldschmidt students.

In 1942 she was first assigned to do housework by Nazi authorities but instead was given a job as a chemist in Dr. Emil Lehmann’s Analytical Laboratory in Berlin by Maja Vollard at the Arbeitsamt. In Spring 1944 she was forced to leave the chemistry lab due to health reasons. She was again helped by Maja Vollard to get a tutoring position for the 7 children of Count Gerd Finck von Finckenstein in Trossin. Schloss Trossin was a harbor for hiding non-Aryans. She was discovered by the Gestapo in October 1944 and forced to flee and find hiding places in Berlin.

She was hidden with hepatitis at the St. Gertrauden hospital from October to November 1944 and was protected by the Catholic nurses there.

Marlies converted to Catholicism in 1939. She and the Meissinger family received much practical help from the Catholic Students of Berlin and Konrad Cardinal von Preising from 1940 to 1945. In late 1944, family was hidden on and off in a bombed-out building thanks to the help of anti-Nazi neighbors and the Catholic Student organization. They were warned in the last minute that the Gestapo was coming and left quickly and were able to find another hiding place.

In late 1944 Marlies and Rosa went by train to Bad Saulgau where Hans was working. Marlies was in a full cast due to a knee injury and was given false papers by a doctor saying she needed surgery in Tübingen. The cast gave Marlies some protection, and Rosa, traveling with a Post Ausweis, acted as her caretaker.

Rosa and Marlies found a hiding place at the Castle of Altshausen and were protected by the Duke of Württemberg. They were liberated by the French forces on April 22, 1945.

The Meissingers made their way to Stuttgart where they found refuge at the UNRRA Displaced Persons camp in Degerloch, where they stayed until February 1947 and then emigrated to the US.

Marlies received her bachelor’s degree at Chestnut Hill College, Philadelphia and her master’s degree at Fordham University, New York.

She married Robert Breitingner in 1956 and lived in Lincoln Park, New Jersey. Marlies and Bob had 4 sons: Edmund, John, Ernest, and Mark. Marlies taught foreign languages at Neumann Preparatory School until 1990 and then taught at William Paterson University until her retirement at the age of 80. She passed away on May 10, 2009, at the age of 88.