

Rosa Meissinger biography – by Joyce Arnon

Rosa Meissinger, nee Oppenheimer was born on August 13, 1885 in Nieder-Mockstadt, Germany, the daughter of Seligman Oppenheimer and Fanny Oppenheimer, nee Bergen. She had 2 brothers and 2 younger sisters. The family was orthodox Jewish. Rosa wanted to break free from her strict orthodox upbringing and went to Frankfurt where she studied nursing. She married Karl August Meissinger in 1909. Her parents disowned her for marrying a non-Jew. Karl August had a doctorate in theology and was a Luther scholar. They had 4 children. After about 20 years, the marriage broke up and Karl August left his wife and children in 1929. He wanted a divorce, but Rosa wouldn't grant him a divorce, since she had 4 children to support. He was finally able to get the divorce in 1938 after the Nürnberg laws were passed. After 1933, Karl August was dismissed from his teaching job because he had written an anti-Nazi article in the 1920s. He supported himself by writing novels.

Rosa, moved to Berlin with Lilli, Hans, and Marlies in 1938. Ernst had been teaching at the Goldschmidt Schule in Berlin since 1937, and he assisted the family financially.

After the Goldschmidt Schule was forced to close in 1939, Rosa and family gave room and board to up to 17 former students, whose families lived far away. Most of the students and their families were able to emigrate before 1942, but two of them ended up being deported.

After Ernst was killed in June 1940, Karl August became more concerned about the safety of his ex-wife and children and was able to find hiding places for Rosa in southern Germany in 1942 and 1944.

Rosa, Lilli and Marlies also had a great deal of help from friends and neighbors. Rosa was informed about the impending deportation in Berlin in 1942. Lilli and Rosa went to Stuttgart and Munich in 1942 and Rosa was in hiding for about 4 weeks. Rosa was able to travel by train using a Post Ausweis (postal ID), that didn't have a "J" on it. She did not have to wear a yellow star because she had been in a so-called privileged mixed marriage.

After their apartment was bombed and made unlivable, the family moved around a lot in Berlin to various hiding places.

In late 1944 Marlies and Rosa left Berlin to go to Bad Saulgau, where Hans was working. Marlies had a full cast on her leg because of a knee injury. Rosa accompanied her as her "caretaker", again traveling with a so-called Post Ausweis.

They went into hiding at the Castle in Altshausen and were given protection by the Duke of Württemberg, who also hid other Jews.

They were liberated by the French on April 22, 1945. They made their way to Stuttgart and found housing at the UNRRA Displaced Persons camp in Degerloch. The family emigrated to the US in February 1947.

Rosa lived for a while with her sister, Lily Oppenheimer Pick, who had left Frankfurt in the 1930s, in Milwaukee, Wisconsin. She later moved back to New York and died on October 6, 1954.

The Meissingers felt extremely lucky to have survived the war in Germany. There were many situations where they were given protection, early warning about deportations, and hiding places by anti-Nazi friends and neighbors. Sadly, Rosa lost one sister, a niece and her husband and their 3 children, in the Holocaust.