First Female Winner of the Nobel Prize for Medicine

Gerty Theresa Cori

[ 15 August 1896 - 26 October 1957 ]

1896 Gerty Theresa Radnitz is born in Prague on August 15. Due to her affluent home, she receives her primary education at home before entering a Lyceum for girls. She graduates from high school.

1914 - 1920 She enters the Medical School of the German University of Prague. During her studies she meets Carl Ferdinand Cori, and marries him in 1920, the same year she receives the doctorate in medicine.

1920 - 1922 She works two years at a Children’s Hospital. Gerty and Carl Cori decide to pursue careers in medical research, rather than medical practice. The desolate economic situation in Europe after World War I though does not offer many possibilities.

1922 They emigrate to the United States, where Carl becomes assistant pathologist in Buffalo at the New York State Institute for the Study of Malignant Diseases. Gerty Cori is appointed as biochemist at the same institute, analyzing routine tests, such as urine samples.

1931 The Coris move to St. Louis, Missouri, where Carl is appointed Professor of Pharmacology at the Washington University Medical School. Gerty takes a research position at a token salary, while her husband’s career advances. The Coris shift to the Department of Biochemistry and work together on carbohydrate metabolism.

1936 Although pregnant, Gerty works hard in the laboratory in temperatures around 30 degree centigrade, until the birth of her son.

1947 Gerty and Carl Cori are awarded the Nobel Prize in Medicine and Physiology, which they share with the Argentine Bernardo Alberto Houssay. Gerty Cori is the third woman to receive a Nobel Prize in science worldwide, and the first female U.S.-American.

1947 On the peak of her career she is diagnosed with myelosclerosis, an incurable bone marrow disease, leading to leukemia. Throughout her illness she continues doing research unperturbed at the Washington University, St. Louis.

1957 Gerty Theresa Cori dies at the age of 61 from her disease, honored and well regarded.

Special Scientific Achievements

The research area of Gerty Theresa Cori was biochemistry. Together with her husband, she discovered the enzyme phosphorylase.

1947 Gerty Theresa Cori and her husband won the Nobel Prize for medicine for their findings about the carbohydrate metabolism, the function of enzymes and the course of the catalytic conversion of glycogen.