The Rosenzweig Letters: A Short Biography of Luzie (Lucy) Reizenstein

Luzie (Lucie, later in English Lucy) Reizenstein was born on July 1, 1897, the only child of Ernst Reizenstein and his wife Grete, née Hesselberger; Ernst was the managing director of the Behringersdorf Brewery near Nuremberg for many years. The Reizensteins lived in a comfortable Victorian house with a small turret surrounded by a large garden in Behringersdorf. Luzie and my mother, Fanny Rosenzweig Jondorf, were born only a few months apart and became best friends during their school years. Both married within a year of each other, but Luzie was divorced after only a few months. She returned to live with her parents where she enjoyed tending the large garden and being an attentive hostess to invited friends and relatives. The younger generation knew her as “Tante Luzie” (Aunt Luzie).

Although far from beautiful, Luzie was a very warm person. She had a ready twinkle in her eyes, and was easily accessible to youngsters. Being very skillful at arts and crafts, she could readily turn out perfect free-hand cut-outs of horses with tiny scissors, to the delight of her young admirers. At least once each summer, Luzie invited us children to her house for hot chocolate and cake and for a hunt to find the chocolate tree in the garden. Sure enough, somewhere in the extensive greenery there would be a small tree or a bush festooned with chocolates and candies for the youngsters to pick. On rare occasions, Luzie sent her father’s chauffeur driven car to pick up her guests at home. Nirvana!

As her parents were aging and ailing, Luzie had really become chief housekeeper and caretaker. Luzie’s mother died in 1938 (?). Little seemed to have changed in Luzie’s and Ernst’s lives with the onset of World War II until the Nazi regime began to enforce its “Final Solution to the Jewish Question”. Ernst and Luzie were ordered to report to Nuremberg by July 7, 1942, where Luzie was to work as a caretaker in one of the Jewish old age homes, and Ernest to be quartered in another. Presumably to forestall this, Ernst took poison, and died on July 6, 1942 at the Jewish Hospital in Fürth. Luzie was deported to Theresienstadt with the remaining tenants of her old age home on September 10, 1942. Miraculously, she survived in Theresienstadt until a small number of inmates, including Luzie, were released to Switzerland on February 5, 1945, probably under pressure from the International Red Cross.

Eventually, Luzie was admitted to the United States as a displaced person. She decided to settle in Chicago, where my mother Fanny, and her mother Mathilde Rosenzweig formed a friendly welcoming committee. Luzie - now Lucy - was able to find work as a practical nurse at Michael Reese Hospital. After a few years, she switched to the staff of the Drexel Home for Aged Jews where she also resided. Lucy never complained about the terrible years in Theresienstadt and was as enjoyable to be with as ever. Unfortunately she was diagnosed with breast cancer in 1953, which led to her death at 59 on July 9, 1956.

Eric G. Yondorf
December 2002