



Love and Science: A Memoir

Jan Vilcek

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Long before he became one of the world's most celebrated immunologists, Jan Vilcek began life in Slovakia as the child of Jewish parents at a time when Jews were being exterminated all across Europe. He owes his and his mother's survival to the courage of brave people and good luck. As a young man growing up in Czechoslovakia in the aftermath of the Second World War, Vilcek went to medical school and chose a career in virology and immunology at a time when these fields were still in their infancy. While still in his twenties he published a paper in the prestigious journal *Nature*, and he hosted the first international conference on interferon. Fleeing Communist Czechoslovakia with his wife Marica, Vilcek continued his research at NYU School of Medicine, going on to establish a highly successful career in biomedical research, and creating one of the most important and trailblazing medicines of our age.

After his arrival in the US in 1965 as a penniless refugee, he soon went on to spearhead some of the key advances in the research of interferon that enabled its therapeutic application, and through his research into tumor necrosis factor (TNF) made advances that led to the discovery of new genes and proteins and signaling pathways, opening up previously uncharted areas of medical innovation that have led to important new treatments for a wide range of autoimmune and inflammatory diseases. Along the way Vilcek acquired material wealth he had never aspired to, catapulting him into the world of philanthropy.

Love and Science shows how advances in science sometimes result from the greatest disappointments, and how achievement in medical research is usually a team effort, where ideas are shared, where friendship and love sometimes matter most and serendipity is as important as a will to succeed—and where, over time, the least expected thing sometimes becomes the most important. In Vilcek's case the vaunted cure for cancer that many saw in TNF never materialized. However, out of the ashes of that hope came many related treatments that have changed countless lives and alleviated much suffering.

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