

A blue-tinted photograph of a man in a lab coat, likely a scientist, holding a petri dish in his right hand and a test tube in his left hand. He is looking intently at the petri dish. The background shows a laboratory setting with various pieces of equipment and papers.

love and science
a memoir

JAN VILCEK

narrated by Daniel K. Isaac



Jan Vilcek

ABOUT THE AUTHOR

Dr. Jan T. Vilcek, professor emeritus and research professor of microbiology at New York University School of Medicine, was born in Bratislava, Czechoslovakia (now Slovakia), where he also received his MD and PhD degrees. In 1964 he and his wife, Marica Vilcek, an art historian, defected from what was then Communist Czechoslovakia. Upon immigrating to the United States in 1965, Dr. Vilcek joined the faculty of NYU School of Medicine.

Dr. Vilcek has devoted his scientific career to the study of cytokines—hormone-like proteins produced in the body that control the immune system and host defenses. He was among the first scientists to investigate interferon, an important immune system protein. Subsequently, Dr. Vilcek focused his studies on another cytokine, called tumor necrosis factor (TNF). Dr. Vilcek's contributions to the understanding of proteins that control the body's defenses were instrumental in the development of the anti-inflammatory drug Remicade[®], the first member of a new class of therapeutics called TNF blockers that are now widely used for the treatment of Crohn's disease, ulcerative colitis, rheumatoid arthritis, ankylosing spondylitis, psoriasis, and other chronic inflammatory disorders.

Dr. Vilcek has published more than 350 papers in scholarly journals and he holds 46 U.S. patents. His honors include the Albert Gallatin Medal from NYU, and honorary degrees from Comenius University in Bratislava, the CUNY Graduate Center in New York City, and NYU. He received the J. E. Purkyně Honorary Medal from the Czech Academy of Sciences and the Outstanding American by Choice Award from the U.S. Citizenship and Immigration Services. In 2013, President Barack Obama named Dr. Vilcek a recipient of the National Medal of Technology and Innovation. In 2000 Dr. Vilcek and his wife established the Vilcek Foundation, whose mission is to raise awareness of immigrant contributions in the United States and foster appreciation of the arts and sciences.

Dr. Vilcek's memoir *Love and Science* was published by Seven Stories Press in 2016. In it, Dr. Vilcek tells the story of his two intertwined journeys—one personal, the other scientific. The personal story is about his and his parents' survival during the Second World War, growing up in Communist Czechoslovakia, and arriving as a penniless immigrant in the U.S. The scientific story recounts how the vaunted cures for cancer that many saw in interferon and TNF never materialized, and how out of the ashes of that hope emerged treatments that revolutionized medicine and alleviated much suffering.



Jan's mother
Friderika Fischer, c. 1930



Jan's father
Július Vilcek, c. 1930



Jan's poodle Kalos (age 2) being pampered by Jan (age 1).



Jan with his mother c. 1935.



First communion at the Catholic orphanage where Jan was hidden c. 1942.
Jan is in the center of the last row.



Robert (Bobby) Lamberg c. 1948.



Jan with his mother c. 1946.



Former manor house in the village of Nitrianske Rudno where Jan and his mother lived during the final months of the Second World War.



Marica Gerháth, Jan's wife-to-be, in the Tatra mountains c. 1962.



Alex (Šaci) Vietor (in the driver's seat of his motorcycle) and Jan c. 1958.



Jan's Škoda-Spartak automobile c. 1962.
This was the car in which Marica and Jan defected from Czechoslovakia in the fall of 1964.



Jan examining bacterial cultures as a budding scientist at the Department of Microbiology and Immunology in Bratislava c. 1955.



At the Institute of Virology c. 1958.
Seated: Helena Libíková, department head, and Dionýz Blaškovič, director.
Second row L. to R.: Jan Závada, Josef Řeháček, and Jan.



Jan (left) with Jaqueline and Edward DeMaeyer at the first international conference on interferon which Jan organized in Smolenice near Bratislava in 1964.



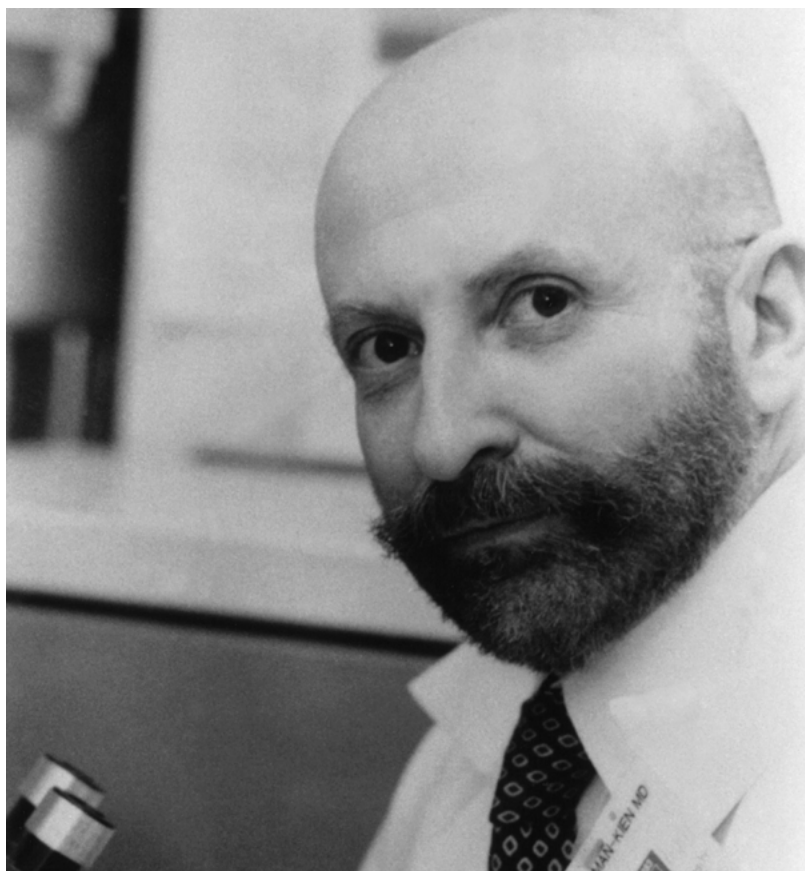
Marica and Jan c. 1965.



Marica and Jan overlooking the Statue of Liberty c. 1965.



Marica c. 1966 at the Metropolitan Museum of Art, her workplace for thirty-two years.



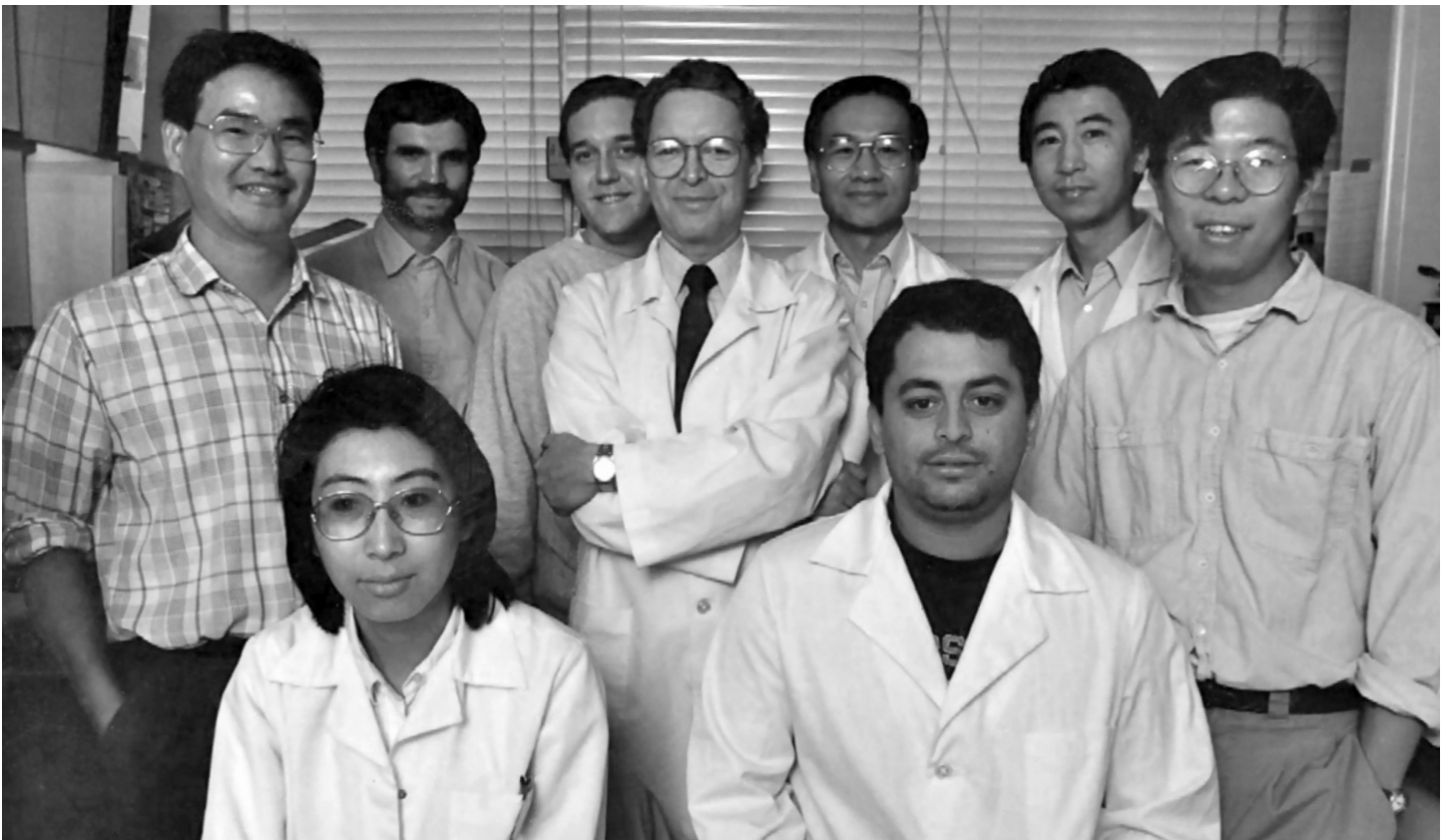
Alvin Friedman-Kien, AIDS researcher, art collector, and friend c. 1985.



Marica and Jan c. 1980.



Jan and his coworkers c. 1987.



With colleagues in Jan's laboratory at NYU c. 1988.

L. to R., seated: Yihong Zhang, Luiz Reis. Standing: Tae Ho Lee, Hans-Georg Wisniewski, Jedd Wolchok, Jan Vilcek, Jumning (Jimmy) Le, Jian-Xin Lin, Gene Lee.



Jan and his former student Douglas Lowy
(acting director of the National Cancer Institute from April 2015 to October 2017)



Jan and Marica flanked by Kenneth Langone (left), chairman of the board of the
NYU Langone Medical Center, and Robert Grossman, dean and CEO of the
NYU Langone Medical Center c. 2015.



Marica and Jan Vilcek c. 2013.



Jan and Marica at the Vilcek Foundation headquarters c. 2013.



President Obama awarding Jan the National Medal of Technology and Innovation at the White House on February 1, 2013.



Jan Vilcek in his office c. 2013.

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