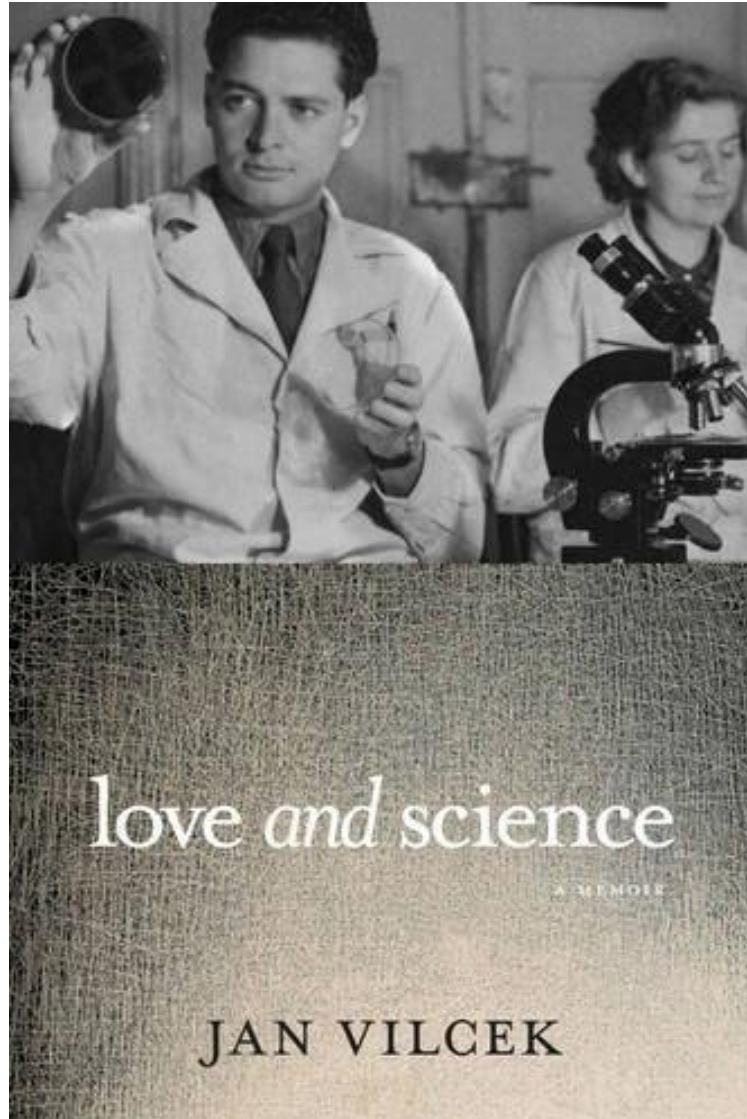


(Ebook free) Love and Science: A Memoir

## Love and Science: A Memoir

*Jan Vilcek*

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**Jan Vilcek : Love and Science: A Memoir** before purchasing it in order to gage whether or not it would be worth my time, and all praised Love and Science: A Memoir:

0 of 0 people found the following review helpful. Five StarsBy Pamela KatzA fabulous life story, beguiling in its combination of professional achievement and personal modesty. A true inspiration!1 of 1 people found the following review helpful. The formidable fate of Jan Vilcek: From WWII survivor, Communist Defector, Scientist Inventor to Philanthropist/Art CollectorBy ChifanA quote at the end of the book caught my attention "The title of this book might have been Life is wonderful and unpredictable, but who would read a book with so banal a title?" yet as I ponder in

awe at the life of Jan Vilcek after I finished reading "Love and Science"... Little of Jan Vilcek's extraordinary life seemed planned and pre-ordained. So indeed Jan Vilcek's life as related in this inspiring memoir has been wonderfully unpredictable, fraught with amazing circuitous twists and serendipitous turns of fate which led him to survive the fury of the Third Reich under the protection of a Catholic orphanage run by nuns and the bravery of a Slovak family in a remote village as a young secular Jewish boy, to overcome the oppressive Eastern European Communist regime of the cold war as a young scientist dreaming of breaking through the secret codes behind virology immunology, before defecting to Western Europe aboard a Skoda car through Austria and the German borders with the help of colleagues in the Medical field, and finally embarking on a larger than life journey in America with his wife Marica and becoming the inventor of a blockbuster drug called Remicade which would save countless lives, while always remembering those who allowed him to attain such success in life and giving back to science and the arts through his philanthropic undertakings. This book is above all a story about a man's love for Medicine and the power of friendship and love, the powers of those who believe in one another's potentials, transcending ideologies, national borders, and purely business driven strategies in a bygone era - the era of the 1950s thru the 1980s scientific community. It is almost a guidebook for Medical research students who long for breakthrough research and the joys of inventing and discovering new elements, proteins through the candid testimonial of one of America's most prominent researchers in the exciting field of Immunology, which I knew very little about before reading the book. As I read it, I couldn't be more amazed at how scientific medical discovery worked in mysterious ways (despite my having a degree in Electrical Engineering and having been a developer/researcher) at how chance encounters and the courage to ask willingly helpful elders mentors in one's field can lead to breakthroughs with the most implausible outcomes in very improbable settings. One such account in Dr. Vilcek's book was his encounter with Albert Sabin, the famed American scientist, NYU Alumn at the origin of the oral Polio vaccine, during the Cold war years in 1959, when Vilcek spent 30-minutes with Sabin and asked for Sabin's advice on how to overcome his unsuccessful 2-year research on the development of a cell for tick-borne encephalitis virus. Long behold Sabin's suggestion derived from his research on Polio allowed Vilcek to break past his dead-end and write a major paper at the forefront of a new and exciting field in Medicine, the field of Interferon, a field which was thought at the time to be a promising cure for Cancer, which turned out not to be one, but allowed many other discoveries related to the treatment of diseases such as chronic infections in Hepatitis B C, and Multiple Sclerosis. This fortuitous discovery led Vilcek's subsequent papers to be published in many other prominent journals, and allowed him to partake in various conferences and study tips across Western Europe while conducting his research in Bratislava during the repressive Communist era of the early 60s, which allowed Vilcek to befriend with sympathetic like-minded prominent scientists of his era. These academic personal friendships would ultimately be Jan and his wife Marica's saving grace when they defected from their positions in the Eastern bloc, outsmarting the Czech KGB (called StB) to pursue a better life in America along with the help of Marica's brother who had defected early on to New York, where they would all settle as immigrants. Upon arrival to the new world in the mid-60s, Jan was offered a position at NYU by the inventor of Interferon himself, in a cold war era where academics were very generous and empathetic to the cause of Eastern European refugees. One final and most formidably thrilling account relates to Jan Vilcek's greatest discovery "Remicade" (the first drug of its kind successfully used in patients) which starts the book but I'll let you find out how it all was discovered back in the 1980s. It all started as a failed experiment and business venture for a near decade before becoming one of the biggest drugs in the market, unexpectedly treating chronic diseases as various as Rheumatoid Arthritis, Crohn's disease, Ulcerative Colitis and psoriasis. The book ends with Jan Vilcek's philosophy on life, and his take on financial success as a man of great humility and generosity, which is so rare today among people who have attained such status in life, as he ponders over his larger-than-his-own-wealth 100-plus-million dollar donations to the NYU School of Medicine towards scientific research... as we discover the philanthropic adventures of his foundation, The Vilcek Foundation promoting science and arts for American Immigrants, and his growing passion for collecting Pre-Columbian sculptures or 20th century American Modernist Art such as Stuart Davis or Georgia O'Keefe with the help of his beloved wife, a distinguished art historian curator at the Met. The Vilceks never aspired to become rich, nor famous at a later stage in their lives. Remicade only became financially fruitful at the start of the 2000s, when Jan Vilcek was already in his late 60s, and brought him fortune when he was in his early 70s - Before then, Jan lived a modest middle class researcher life with his wife, and never compromised for larger financial security as a practitioner of Medicine despite the advantages that could be had as a practicing doctor - research was always his passion first and foremost. A lot of his successes were the byproducts of long years of labor - love and dedication to his scientific discipline and the specialized fields of Virology Immunology as well as luck and chance encounters, meeting the right people at the right places, and taking the necessary yet unpredictable steps in making the right decisions at the opportune moment, without strategizing too much on the outcome. This book is one of the most rewarding memoirs I've read in recent memory. It is a migratory tale of survival triumph from Europe to America, a story of passion and serendipity when it comes to scientific discovery, and above all it is a testimony to the power of friendships and love in life. It is an iconoclastic tale that has become too seldom these days in our purely profit-driven mindset based era, and so it is a story all the more worth reading and deserving to be passed on.

1 of 1 people found the following review helpful. Love and Science  
By Customer  
Love and Science, a

Memoir by Jan Vilcek is a rewarding read for a much wider audience than its title might at first glance suggest. If you are interested in Crohns disease and related autoimmune conditions, or in the translation of arcane science into medical therapies, or in the experiences of Jewish refugees from central European Nazism and Communism, or in philanthropy in behalf of highly accomplished immigrants to America in the sciences and the arts, you will find it engrossing. It is also an adventure story of a modest, unprepossessing and quite admirable scientist and his art historian wife. Vilcek was a key figure in the development of Remicade, a critical drug for the treatment of Crohns disease, rheumatoid arthritis, and related autoimmune conditions. Though such a renowned scientist might have been excused for writing a dense, jargon-filled, and self-important account of this achievement, Vilcek writes about the causes of these diseases and the process by which his lab was able to develop Remicade in simple and clear prose that can be understood by the intelligent layperson. Anyone who is afflicted with -- or is concerned about someone so afflicted -- will find the first fifty pages of this book to be very rewarding. These pages also illuminate the sociology and economics of scientific discovery. Vilcek leads the reader through the sequence of scientific breakthroughs that lay the groundwork for the discovery of Remicade and helps us understand the relationships between scientific labs, university bureaucracies, and private sector entrepreneurs that were involved. He describes his insights and decisions that were part of this process, but is also clear that luck was very instrumental in his success. And he is clear that his good fortune results in part from the costs paid by patients who are helped by Remicade: it does not cure the conditions it treats and so must be acquired over many years, and, as marketed by Johnson and Johnson, it is very expensive. Vilcek is also remarkably candid in writing about the challenges of adjusting to the extraordinary wealth that accrued to him and his wife as a result of the flow of royalties from the sales -- over \$10 billion per year recently -- of Remicade. Rather than figuring out -- as many would have done -- how they could elevate their standard of living to spend most of this unexpected wealth, they reflected on how they could use it primarily to benefit others. Their decision to dedicate a substantial share of their flow of royalties to the NYU School of Medicine, when combined with the royalties that the school received from Vilceks development of Remicade, may well have kept that institution afloat. Their decision to commit another share to a program of awards for immigrants to the United States who have made highly significant contributions to the fields of biomedicine and the arts makes sense only in light of the second major section of the book. We learn that Vilcek came of age as a Jewish boy in a non-religious family in Bratislava, the capital of the Slovak region (and now country) of the then-Czechoslovakia. He describes the perils of growing up under Nazi regimes and the means whereby he and his nuclear family avoided getting caught up in the net that led so many Jews to extermination. He shares with us the path that took him to medical school and to research on viruses rather than clinical practice. We learn about the cross-pressures that led him and his wife Marica (pronounced Mar IT za) to forego the very constrained but reasonably comfortable life of a scientist in communist Czechoslovakia for the high risk challenges of defection and the uncertainties of how he would be able to make a living as a practicing scientist in the United States. The striking feature of this narrative is how Jan and Marica shifted their identities from refugee defectors from Communism to Americans who decided to speak to each other only in English. Vilcek writes that they did so because -- unlike many of their Czech and Slovak-speaking friends who were living in the Czechoslovakian past -- we did not want to feel like perpetual strangers in our new home. Stanley J. Heginbotham Bronx, NY

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 mothers 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.

"Jan Vilceks book tells an astonishing story of two intertwined journeys one scientific, the other personal. The arc of

the personal journey is remarkable: a childhood in Bratislava torn apart by Nazism and then overshadowed by Communism and an escape to a new continent. The scientific journey is just as vast from explorations in immunology and microbiology to the discovery of some of the most remarkable medicines of our times. In both journeys, we encounter the essential ingredients of adventure: the urgency of exploration, flashes of inspiration, false leads, sudden successes, the importance of serendipity, the tortuous ups-and-downs of failures and struggles but above all, that powerful animus to explore and discover new worlds. I could not put it down." Siddhartha Mukherjee, MD, author of *The Emperor of All Maladies* "Jan Vilcek does not make himself the center of a heroic narrative but gives space to colleagues, friends, and family, yet emerging from this narrative is the unmistakably wise, warm, optimistic, and modest soul of a great man." Yiyun Li, author of *Kinder than Solitude and Gold Boy, Emerald Girl* "This is a memoir to be cherished. Dr. Jan Vilcek's remarkable life bears witness to the totalitarian evils of Nazism and Communism that shaped his native Czechoslovakia, and to the life-saving miracles he produced in the laboratories of his adopted homeland, the United States. It's a story of courage and freedom, of discovery and philanthropy told with the elegant modesty of a man who devoted his life to easing the world's pain. Put simply, it demands to be read." David Oshinsky, winner of the Pulitzer Prize in History for *Polio: An American Story* "Jan Vilcek tells a gripping story of a childhood on the run, escape from tyranny, and the building of a career and a discovery that benefits millions. A tale of both remarkable humanity and science, and hard to put down..." Martin Blaser, MD, author of *Missing Microbes* "It's a marvelous book, as interesting about science as it is about the adventures of this extraordinary man. I couldn't put it down." Charles Simic, poet, essayist, and translator, past Pulitzer Prize winner and Poet Laureate of the United States "Jan Vilcek's extraordinary book sets a new standard in science writing and will inspire generations to come. It tells us what America is all about and shows that success can lead to generosity and visionary philanthropy." Eric R. Kandel, MD, Nobel Laureate, author of *In Search of Memory and The Age of Insight* "In this compelling memoir, a modest giant in medical research survives the Nazis, escapes the Communists, thrives as an immigrant scientist, and turns unexpected wealth into prizes that remind us of the value of immigration. A great story appearing at a hazardous time in our nation's history!" Harold Varmus, MD, Nobel Laureate in Physiology or Medicine

About the Author: JAN T. VILCEK is professor of Microbiology at NYU Langone Medical Center. Born in Bratislava, Slovakia (then Czechoslovakia), where he also earned his MD and PhD degrees, Vilcek together with his wife, Marica Vilcek, an art historian, immigrated to the US in 1965 where he joined the faculty of NYU School of Medicine. He is among the earliest researchers of interferon, an important immune system protein. 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, psoriasis and other chronic inflammatory disorders. Dr. Vilcek has published more than 350 scholarly papers, and written or edited several professional books. He is also named as co-inventor on 38 U.S. patents. For his discoveries and his philanthropy, Vilcek received a 2013 National Medal of Technology and Innovation from President Obama.