Mario Vassalle

A pictorial overview of different stages of a life journey
This picture of Viareggio, my birthplace, was taken from the jetty of the port for fishing boats and now also for luxurious yachts. On the forefront is the sandy beach with beach umbrellas. About 10 Km from Viareggio, the hills start climbing into mountains (Apuane Alps), the tallest of which is higher than 2000 meters (about 6000 feet).
With my younger brother Massimo on board of the ship “Rubicone”, of which my father was the captain. During the summer, the whole family joined him for voyages, usually to Holland and Germany.
Walking in a park in a pause from study and work
In a restaurant, with one of my teachers, Lidio Baschieri, and a friend. Dr. Baschieri was a prominent cardiologist and the head of one of the wards of the Institute of Medicine at the University of Pisa. He was alert, quick, interested and an excellent clinician and teacher. He inspired my interest in cardiology and in cardiac research, and taught me the basis of medical practice.
In 1958, I came to New York with a Fulbright travel grant. I was acting Chief Resident in Medicine at the French Hospital in New York City for one year. I enjoyed my residency very much, but after one year I moved to full time research in the cardiac field. I was drawn by my interest in understanding the mechanism underlying the normal and abnormal activity of the heart.
From the French Hospital, I moved to the Medical College of Georgia in Augusta. I worked under the guidance of Dr. W.F. Hamilton, Chair of Physiology and distinguished scientist who had developed the dye dilution method for measuring cardiac output. Dr. R.P. Alhquist was the Chair of Pharmacology and was renowned for the discovery of alpha and beta adrenergic receptors. The other people in the picture were the trainees, Smith from Argentina, Polosa from Italy, Shank from Northern Ireland, Guasp from Spain and myself. The picture was used for a brochure about the training program.
In the foreground of the picture are Fred Kao and my wife. At my left are Dr. Gertrude Lange and Chandler McC. Brooks. Next to him was his wife Nelle (not visible like our guests at my right). I worked with Chandler only on a few projects, but he was an exceptional man in many ways and a distinguished scientist. I learned a lot from his endeavors and we developed a lasting friendship based on common intellectual interests.
I learned the microelectrode electrophysiological technique under the guidance of Brian Hoffman. He had himself started that technique on his own and made a vast array of seminal discoveries. Energetic and intelligent, he saw to it that the possibilities discussed were translated into action. He taught me a technique that I used extensively during my research activity with great profit.
Tea time at the Physiologisches Institut in Bern, Switzerland. At the head of the table was Alexander Von Muralt (chairman) and Silvio Weidmann was sitting between him and me. Silvio Weidmann is the founder of cardiac electrophysiology. He had a very sharp intellect and gentle manners. He guided me with kindness and with the greatest expertise. He would come to my lab once in a while, watching me doing procedures and offering suggestions, and I would go to his office to report to him on the result obtained. For his training me in scientific endeavors, I owe him very much.
My laboratory in the Physiologisches Institut in Bern, Switzerland, where I identified the pacemaker current in Purkinje fibers under the guidance of Silvio Weidmann.
After two year stay in Switzerland, I returned to New York in 1964 where Dr. Brooks had offered me a position in the Department of Physiology at SUNY, Downstate Medical Center. I have been at this Institution since then (44 years). The picture below was taken in my office. The work that my lab has been pursuing at Downstate Medical Center is outlined in the attachment “Major contributions”
While I was in Augusta, Georgia, I married my fiancée Anna Maria. This picture of my wife and myself was taken in Tokyo, Japan, on the occasion of a Scientific Meeting. Some of the following pictures show our children at an early age.
The picture shows three of our children, Andrew, Alessandra and Massimo (from left to right) apparently intent in observing some small animal.
With our fourth child Roberto
Feeding Francesca, our fifth child
My wife and myself with our oldest son Andrew
This is perhaps what I should do now: relax and enjoy a good book, even if my dog “Diavolino” (the dark image next to my chair) no longer keeps me company. Or let my philosophical inclination explore with the tiny lantern of my mind the unfathomable shadows of the mystery of life.