

# VILCEK FOUNDATION

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Contact:  
Joyce Li  
The Vilcek Foundation  
[(212) 472-2500] or [joyce@vilcek.org](mailto:joyce@vilcek.org)

## **From Refugee to Philanthropist, New Memoir Chronicles Journey of Jan Vilcek**

*“Love and Science” shares a remarkably American story, from escaping communism to changing millions of lives with a blockbuster drug*

**New York, February 9, 2016** — The life of Dr. Jan Vilcek, celebrated immunologist at NYU Langone Medical Center, has been anything but ordinary. Twists of fate, combined with sheer grit, brought him from the devastation of World War II and the constraints of communist Czechoslovakia to New York City in the 1960s; there, he would go on to make history by playing a key role in the development of one of the three best-selling drugs in the world, Remicade. Dr. Vilcek brings readers along his improbable journey in his new memoir, *Love and Science* (Seven Stories Press; 2/9/16).

Dr. Vilcek’s story begins in the former Czechoslovakia, where, as a Jewish child World War II, he survived the constant, harrowing threat of deportation to an extermination camp, first hiding in a Catholic orphanage before later fleeing to the countryside. Afterward, during the political turmoil caused by communist takeover, he completed medical school in Bratislava and embarked on a career in virology and immunology, two nascent fields whose importance were, at the time, unfathomable.

Frustrated by the lack of personal freedom, Dr. Vilcek and his wife, Marica, defected while on a weekend trip to Vienna and eventually immigrated to the U.S. in 1965. Although the couple arrived as penniless refugees, NYU School of Medicine offered Dr. Vilcek a faculty position, while Marica, an art historian, found a professional home at the Metropolitan Museum of Art. Dr. Vilcek went on to spearhead some of the key advances in the research of interferon and tumor necrosis factor (TNF), eventually leading to the development of Remicade, the first of a groundbreaking new class of medical treatments.

One of the highest-grossing drugs in the world today, Remicade helps millions with crippling autoimmune and inflammatory diseases such as Crohn’s and rheumatoid arthritis. As a result of this success, Dr. Vilcek has become one of the major donors to NYU Langone Medical Center, where he continues to serve as a research professor in the department of microbiology. Separately, the couple founded the Vilcek Foundation, which raises awareness of immigrant contributions to American society and fosters appreciation for the arts and sciences. In 2013, President Obama awarded Dr. Vilcek one of America’s top scientific honors: the National Medal of Technology and Innovation.

*Love and Science* is an inspiring story of hardships and accomplishments, both personal and professional, and proof of the importance of immigrant contributions to the worlds of science and medicine.

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Dr. Vilcek is available for interviews regarding *Love and Science* and the Vilcek Foundation. For further information, or to receive a review copy of the book, please use the following contacts:

To arrange an interview, contact Jade Moore at Peppercomm: (212) 931-6190 or [jmoore@peppercomm.com](mailto:jmoore@peppercomm.com).

For review copies and interviews, contact Ruth Weiner at Seven Stories Press: (212) 226-8760 or [ruth@sevenstories.com](mailto:ruth@sevenstories.com).

For information about the Vilcek Foundation, contact Joyce Li at the Vilcek Foundation: (212) 472-2500 or [joyce@vilcek.org](mailto:joyce@vilcek.org).

## **About Dr. Jan T. Vilcek**

Dr. Vilcek is a research professor in the department of microbiology at NYU Langone Medical Center. Born in Bratislava, Slovakia (then Czechoslovakia), he immigrated, along with his wife, art historian Marica Vilcek, to the U.S. in 1965. 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. Remicade, along with other TNF blockers, is 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 and edited several professional books.

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The Vilcek Foundation was established in 2000 by Jan and Marica Vilcek, immigrants from the former Czechoslovakia. The mission of the foundation, to honor the contributions of immigrants to the United States and to foster appreciation of the arts and sciences, was inspired by the couple's respective careers in biomedical science and art history, as well as their personal experiences and appreciation for the opportunities they received as newcomers to this country. The foundation awards annual prizes to prominent immigrant biomedical scientists and artists, and sponsors cultural programs.

To learn more about the Vilcek Foundation, please visit [Vilcek.org](http://Vilcek.org).