Memoirs about VLADIMIR NEGOVSKY of Moscow Professor and Academician

(PROFESSOR NEGOVSKY’S 90th BIRTHDAY, MARCH 19, 1999)

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Dear Vladimir Negovsky – happy 90th birthday! Your colleagues around the world are celebrating with you the first half century of "reanimatology," the field you initiated. You invented this term to label scientific inquiries into acute dying processes and their reversal. What you and I have called reanimatology, the West has later labeled critical care medicine (CCM). You initiated the first reanimatology research laboratory just before World War II. We thank you for that and what followed under your inspiration. Your professional children and grandchildren will uphold your place in medical history.

During the 1950s, when I began resuscitation research in Baltimore, I did not know about Negovsky’s work. After I moved to Pittsburgh in 1961, I discovered the English version of his book “Resuscitation and Artificial Hypothermia,” published in 1962.

Professor Vladimir Negovsky and I met for the first time during the first week of September 1962 in Vienna, Austria. It was at the first European Congress of Anesthesiology, organized by Professor Otto Mayrhofer, then founding Chairman of the Department of Anesthesiology and Intensive Therapy at the University of Vienna. Professor Mayrhofer’s co-organizer, Professor Karl Steinbereithner, and I, communicated and agreed to invite Professor Negovsky to a panel on "Controversial Aspects of Resuscitation," which I was invited to moderate. We Westerners were thrilled by the idea to pierce the iron curtain with scientific communication and collegiality. Professor Negovsky and I, by having initiated a private form of glasnost in 1962 for acute medicine, we were perhaps more successful than Presidents Kennedy and Kruschev, who met in Vienna around the same time, without bringing an end to the ideological and geopolitical confrontation between our countries’ governments.

In Vienna, our stimulating panel of three hours’ duration occurred in the afternoon of September 5, 1962. The topics ranged from the steps of cardiopulmonary-cerebral resuscitation (CPCR basic-advanced-prolonged life support), to Negovsky’s post-resuscitation disease, and even to oxygen breathing in space capsules. (We met 4 years after Sputnik). Czech colleagues Hugo Kessler and Jiri Pokorny participated in the discussion and did not hesitate to disagree with Negovsky on a scientific topic. This Vladimir handled with grace and collegiality. Our panel discussion became a landmark publication in 1963, as the first monograph of the Anesthesiology and Resuscitation series by Springer-Verlag.

At that meeting in 1962, my Viennese father Karl Safar, Professor of ophthalmology, and my wife Eva, also met Vladimir Negovsky and invited him and others to a luncheon at my parents’ home. I sympathized with Vladimir who appeared “chaperoned by other Russians.” In spite of this, Vladimir and I communicated immediately quite openly and became lifelong friends. Vladimir invited me to Moscow. I was able to accept his kind invitation a year later.

On September 16-25, 1963, I visited Moscow for the first time, accompanied by my friend and colleague Professor Hugh Rosomoff, then neurosurgeon at our University of Pittsburgh and a hypothermia pioneer. Although in the 1960s and 70s the Soviet Union was for most Western visitors a closed society, we were made to feel at home. Our trip to Moscow was funded by my US Army resuscitation research grant. In Moscow, we met Guy Knickerbocker of Baltimore who spent several months with Naum L. Gurvich in Negovsky’s laboratory to study defibrillation; Gurvich had developed external DC defibrillation. The hospitality of Negovsky, Alexander M. Gurvitch, Vladimir Kassil, Elena Damir,
Victor Tabak, Eugenia Zolotokrylina, and others was overwhelming. Tigran Darbinyan, Armen Bunayan, and later also George Andrejiev of Riga also became our fine colleagues. The friendly, humorous, unusual and instructive features of that visit have been written up by me and Rosomoff in a 90 page document "Visit to Prague and Moscow in September 1963."

"Papa Negovsky" was the obvious father of a history-making team. Pathophysiologist Negovsky was ahead of us in reanimation. Around 1940 he had developed an exsanguination cardiac arrest model in dogs with intra-arterial resuscitation, which his team demonstrated to us in 1963. We learned then about the winter of 1941-42 when Hitler's armies were stopped for the first time - in Moscow's suburbs. Negovsky's team successfully employed then intra-arterial resuscitation and mechanical ventilation to wounded exsanguinated soldiers. Negovsky's influence on me stimulated us in Pittsburgh to increase pathophysiologic animal research. The group in Moscow may have been influenced by our greater focus on resuscitation techniques.

Our trip to Moscow was via Prague, where we established relationships with Hugo Keszler, Jiri Pokorny, Miroslav Klain, and others. Keszler and Klain later joined our department in Pittsburgh. In Prague and Moscow, both cities with well developed prehospital systems, we saw the first physician-staffed mobile ICU ambulances in action.

After that visit, President Kennedy was murdered and my father died - both on November 22/23, 1963. I received warm condolences from Vladimir about both losses. Also after my first visit to Moscow, I learned that US Senator Hubert Humphrey, who had visited Moscow at about the same time as we did, reported to our congress his positive impressions about the USSR leading (under Negovsky) studies of dying and its reversibility.

Vladimir and I communicated over the years in English, mostly at first via interpreters. I tried briefly to learn Russian without success and gave up. Vladimir, however, became more and more knowledgeable about English. He could soon understand English quite well and years later presented lectures in English. Some of our professional interactions have been documented in my professional memoirs, which are now in press by the American Society of Anesthesiologists.

For 30 years Negovsky and I exchanged abstracts and reprints, Negovsky conceived and described the "post-resuscitation disease" of the organism - which others later called "reoxygenation injury" or "secondary post-ischemic, post-traumatic derangement." I recommended the publication by Elsevier (in 1983) of Negovsky's classical book on this subject, co-authored by A. Gurvitch and E. Zolotokrylina. I cherish the opportunity I had to help also with other publications by Negovsky in the West.

There has been continuous scientific cross-fertilization, fueled by yearly meetings at medical congresses in neutral countries and my return visits to the USSR in 1973, 1983, 1986, and 1990 (and of my associates in addition in 1978 and 1989). Negovsky visited Pittsburgh in 1976 (for the tenth and last of our annual International Emergency and Critical Care Medicine Symposia), in 1981 (for the Second World Congress of Emergency and Disaster Medicine, the Club of Mainz), and in 1987. The University of Pittsburgh presented Negovsky with a "Special Certificate of Recognition." When in the winter of 1983 I visited Moscow, Negovsky, his team, and I went by train to Riga, Latvia, to attend the huge USSR-wide Anesthesiology Congress there, hosted by Andrejiev. Vladimir proved that he is indestructible; when he broke his leg, he limped along while suppressing his pain and soon thereafter he was back on cross-country skies.

In 1986, at the 50th anniversary of the Laboratory of General Reanimatology of the USSR Academy of Medical Sciences, which I have always called "the Negovsky Institute," Victor Semenov took over the leadership. In 1990, with the USSR still under Gorbachev, Eva accompanied me to Leningrad and Moscow and greatly appreciated the hospitality of our hosts as well as the sightseeing they provided. Soviet society had become open and fearless. In 1993, Negovsky and I helped Professor Novelli of Florence with a history-making cerebral resuscitation researchers' meeting in Erice (Sicily, Italy). Our last meeting with Vladimir was in the late part of 1994 at the European Resuscitation Council meeting in Mainz, Germany, where we both received honorary memberships. In 1995, Victor Moroz became director of the Institute. We are looking forward to continued communication and perhaps collaboration between the younger colleagues of our teams.

During the cold war, it was much easier for Westerners to visit communist countries than vice versa. We Westerners were convinced that our Moscow hotel rooms were bugged by the authorities. Some of my visits had romantic moments, like walking on the snow covered empty streets of downtown Moscow at night, talking unchaperoned, the only way to do so more glasnost became official. Vladimir and his associates, however, made us appreciate the honesty and integrity of our Soviet colleagues, irrespective of the authorities.

Vladimir and I have in common not only a commitment to the study of dying processes and their reversibility, but also an appreciation of the beauties of life - in nature, music, art, ballet, and humanity in general. We communicated on philosophical and ethical issues as well. We joined efforts to promote not only reanimatology, but also disaster medicine and "peace medicine," the latter in support of the International Physicians for the Prevention of Nuclear War (IPPNW). In support of that movement we visited Professor Chazov in the 1980s. In May 1981, at the second Club of Mainz disaster medicine congress in Pittsburgh (at the time the IPPNW was founded in Washington by Drs. Lown and Chazov), Negovsky and Safar moderated a unique discussion on the prevention of nuclear war, between leaders of disaster medicine, "peace medicine" (Physicians for Social Responsibility, IPPNW), and military medicine. In 1983 in Rome and Moscow, Negovsky and Safar drafted antinuclear war preparedness resolutions, which were adopted. All this is documented in the first issue of the journal Prehospital and Disaster Medicine, 1985. In 1988, our Pittsburgh team, headed by Drs. Miroslav Kusan and Ernesto Pretto, was enabled to study the Armenia earthquake, facilitated by joining forces with Semenov's group and colleagues in Armenia.

Several times I came to Moscow with other
Americans, such as professor Robert White, neurosurgeon from Cleveland, Ohio; professor Hugh Stevenson, surgeon from Columbia, Missouri; and professor Miroslav Khein, anesthesiologist from Pittsburgh, Pennsylvania. We all appreciated the gracious invitations to Vladimir’s home, which in recent years has been in the home of the family of his daughter. I had the privilege of listening to the piano playing of Vladimir’s grandson, Vladimir Jr.; he played Debussy with much feeling. I was told that he also became a fine physician, and I am looking forward to meeting him again.

My Russian-friendly emotions may have subconsciously started in World War II. On April 12, 1945, on my 21st birthday, toward the end of the battle of Vienna, I was an Austrian medical student in semi-hiding from the German authorities, working in the surgical department No 1 of the University Hospital of Vienna. There, on that day, I shook hands with the first liberating soldier of the Red Army. On the same day president Roosevelt died. Viennese people had variable experiences and mixed memories of those days, often having been caught between retreating German SS troops (committed to destroy our city) and the advancing Red Army (which tried to preserve it). Soviet soldiers brought us peace and American soldiers brought us freedom. My link with Prague is easily explained by Czech-Viennese family roots of Eva and myself.

Looking back, Vladimir and I enjoyed over 3 decades of mutual collaboration and stimulation. This was recognized by others. In 1994 in Pittsburgh, Professor Peter Winter, my successor as Chairman of the Department of Anesthesiology and Critical Care Medicine at the University of Pittsburgh, announced at one of his faculty meetings, that “Vladimir Negovsky of Moscow and Peter Safar of Pittsburgh were officially nominated three times for the Nobel Prize in medicine— in 1990 by the USSR Academy of Medical Sciences, in 1992 by Scandinavian professors of anesthesiology, and in 1994 by the University of Pittsburgh.”

Dear Vladimir, I salute you. Thank you for having pioneered reanimation. Thanks to your family and associates for having helped you succeed. Since the start of our friendship, I have been impressed by your knowledge, your innovative ideas, your directness, and the warmth of your personality. My wife Eva, my sons Philip and Paul, and my associates congratulate you on your 90th birthday. We wish you many sunny days to come.

Cordially
Peter Safar