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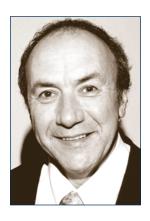
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Biophysicist in Profile



Antonio Scarpa

Artist, architect, gourmet cook, wine collector, biophysicist, hiker.....no one word describes *Toni Scarpa*. Born Antonio Scarpa in 1942 in Padua, Italy,

to a family where becoming a surgeon was not a vocation, but a tradition, Scarpa chose to live life on his own terms early. In what he calls his "declaration"

of independence," he broke the "glass bubble" at the age of seventeen.

early.

Together with a friend, he bought a secondhand Lambretta scooter and for four months drove from Venice to India. Upon arriving in India, he bargained with the proceedings of

the sale of the scooter for a passage back to Venice on a ship, and only then began studying medicine at the University of Padova.

Although he received both his MD and PhD from the University of Padova, Scarpa's education and training were not restricted to Italy. As part of his training, Scarpa traveled to Africa to practice medicine in the Sahara desert at the age of 23. Numerous postgraduate fellow-

ships also expanded his research—and his world experience. Never satisfied with choosing the road most traveled, Scarpa decided during the late 1960s and early 1970s that he would seek out the best institution for each topic that was of interest to him. This led him to the Weizmann Institute of Science in Israel to study thermodynamics. A year later he went to the University of Utrecht in The Netherlands to study lipid chemistry in what he calls the "best lab in the world" at that time for lipids, working with *L. Van Deenen*.

As his fellowship at Utrecht drew to a close, Scarpa waited to receive offers from the next lab. "There was no Federal Express or fax back then," he recalls fondly, "so when one offer finally came before the response deadline I

accepted right away." The offer, in 1971, was from The University of Pennsylvania, where Scarpa became their NATO post-doctoral fellow. There, Scarpa worked under *Britton Chance*, a world famous professor who, according to Scarpa was a

"monument to the University." "The University of Pennsylvania," Scarpa

recalls, "was the best environment in the world at that time..... it was incredible, vibrant, and it had high expectations for its students."

His experience with Chance taught Scarpa to always strive for excellence and that you can be anything you want to be. To this day, Scarpa's work ethic reflects that of the Chance lab.

Scarpa remained at the University of Pennsylvania until 1987 but continued taking courses throughout that time. "Before becoming a professor," he says he "needed to be a student." Fascinated with the American labor movement and inter-

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ested in comparing the economies of America and Italy, Scarpa took M.B.A. courses at the Wharton School. There he studied under future Nobel Prize winners such as Lawrence R. Klein, as well as the "junk bond king" Michael Milken.

During those years, Scarpa also began painting, although he had already become acquainted with the "artist" scene. While working in Africa, he had sold some of his photographs to regional nature magazines and, while living in Haiti, Scarpa had painted and had run several art galleries. Scarpa enjoyed spending time in Haiti, where he visited four to five times a year from 1971 to 1980. "The first time I went was because I had never been there before," he recalls, "the other times because it was the closest (and cheapest) place that looks completely different from Philly. It was also warmer in the winter, and,

although generally poor, people had art, taste, culture and insuppressible joie de vivre."

In fact, in 1978, Scarpa had his own gallery show in Washington, D.C.,

where all his works were purchased. His multi-faceted character did not go unnoticed in the lab. Sally Carty, a former student of Scarpa's and now in the faculty of surgery at the University of Pittsburgh, describes him as the personification of the "multi-talented, creative Philosophical Renaissance Man.....but in a very modern and American way." Carty adds that "He's

also funny and kind," and she credits him with her decision to go into medi-

"...never marry a protein."

cine. "If it wasn't for Toni's free and egalitarian mentorship, "Carty explains, "I never would have gone on in the practice of medicine at all."

Scarpa describes his life as a macrocosm of the way he achieved success in his career. "You are very limited if science is all you have in life," he states, "and in science, never marry a protein." Scarpa advocates a career where you learn as much as you can, and move on. "Don't beat a topic to death, " he suggests, "but be more diffused in your

research."

And he has always followed his own advice. In 1987, after building his career at the University Pennsylvania, Scarpa was offered.

accepted, the position at Case Western Reserve University (CWRU) as chair of Physiology and **Biophysics** Department. At the time, the department was "essentially dead" according to Scarpa. And he saw it as "a great

opportunity to start from scratch." on NIH funding, Based Department then ranked 93rd out of 118 departments in the country.

> Starting with only five faculty members, Scarpa recruited forty-five more and built four strong and interactive areas: structural biology, cell biology,

membrane physiology, and integrated biology. One of those recruited, Richard Eckert, recalls Scarpa's enthusiasm and determination to get the department up and running. "From the very beginning he has had a working vision of what the department should become and that has always guided his thinking." This vision, according to Eckert, "included a diverse department that could bring varied expertise to bear on specific problems, housed in an interactive physical environment." Not only did Scarpa bring in the people, but he also helped orchestrate the building plan and space design. He had already dabbled in architecture by designing his house as well as those of some of his friends, so designing the department renovations was a natural extension.

Scarpa's passion to try new things and his penchant to upset the applecart, which he had since his youth, continue to this day. Eckert sees this in the way Scarpa thinks about education and career mentoring. "I think he enjoys throwing a wrench into the machine," Eckert reflects, "to see whether rattling the gears can make it run better-a useful approach that keeps the faculty continually evaluating the value of the status quo." In the last five years, the Physiology and Biophysics Department at Case Western has ranked between fifth and seventh in the nation. Eckert believes that the department is now the strongest it has ever been, and he attributes much of its success to Scarpa. "Scarpa has earned the respect of his department because he deals fairly,



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(Continued from page 3.)

objectively, and frankly with people and issues." Scarpa's style is grounded in integrity, and as Eckert points out, "His leadership has resulted in a cohesive faculty that pulls together and works effectively on issues. He is also innovative and encourages his faculty to innovate with him." Through the praise and recognition, Scarpa remains grounded and self-effacing. Upon a visit to the department several years ago, Stuart McLaughlin from the State University of New York, Stony Brook recalls, "He bragged neither about his science nor his accomplishments in building the department, but about being able to sneak off to Italy on short trips to visit his mother without anyone realizing it."

In addition to his responsibilities at CWRU, Scarpa has been involved in many scientific societies, including Biophysical Society where he has served as editor, Council and Executive Board member, and most recently, Treasurer of the Society. McLaughlin reflects that Scarpa was "one of the first associate editors of the Biophysical Journal... which was a true labor of love in the 1970s." According to McLaughlin,

Scarpa's hard work helped make BJ into a top-ranking publication, and he recalls Scarpa's help when he was an editor on the Editorial Board. "I was really grateful for his generosity in helping me maintain the journal's high standards."

McLaughlin, who was on the Finance Committee until 2002, also praises Scarpa for his work as Treasurer. McLaughlin explains that when Scarpa took office in the spring of 1999, after the Society had "reaped the benefits of the bull market of the 90s," he managed the Society's money in "this turbulent time with a profit in its investments." Through Scarpa's principled leadership as Treasurer, the Society for the first time established fiscal policies and sound budgeting processes. deserves our particular thanks for getting the Society through a rough patch in astonishingly good shape... and somehow found time to be a good chairman and excellent scientist."

Scarpa was first attracted to the Society because of its 'breathing space'. "A strength of the Society," Scarpa states, "is that it allows anyone to contribute, including the younger talent." Another strength is the short-term length of the offices as compared to

other societies. This allows continuous new talent and ideas, which is what the Society needs to flourish. Since joining the Society in 1972, he has seen the financial market and Society demographics change dramatically. The Society, he says, "needs to keep reinventing itself" in order to promote biophysics into the next decade, and Scarpa is eager to remain involved. As Carty notes, "To this day that (Toni) is my picture of a successful scientist: handson, absorbed, and delighted."

Scarpa's been too busy to continue painting, though he does put his artistic talent to use through computer graphic design. He helps design all the department publications and even manages to create personal items like Christmas cards (see photo, page 3). Scarpa is married to fellow biophysicist and Society member Meredith Bond, who shares his passion for life.....every year they set off on hiking adventures ranging from simple Alpine treks to fighting chest-deep snows and storms in the New Zealand highlands. And as his peers and students all point out, Scarpa always tackles a challenge head on and enjoys every minute of it, just as he does with life.

Do You Wish to Run for Council?

Ballot nomination forms can be found online at http://www.biophysics.org/ballot_nomination.pdf. Completed forms must be sent to the address below and received prior to October 3, 2003 to be considered for the 2004 slate of candidates.

Mail completed form to:

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