

IACOVOS VASALOS

He was born on November the 30th of 1938, an important year, in Apollonia of Sifnos. A wonderful place!!!!

He was the eighth child out of ten of Sophia and Antonis. He lived on Sifnos until he was twelve years old, and as soon as he finished his primary education, he moved to Athens for his secondary education. You see, there were no high schools on the island at that time. He was a free spirit and independent from his early youth. Who is to blame? Perhaps the wind of the Aegean sea or the violin of Koutsounas? Who knows ... Up to this day that remains a mystery.

He graduated from the 13th high school of Athens and as expected, he earned a distinction for his excellent performance at school. He also got the first prize in the national competition organized by the Greek Mathematical Society for the senior high school students of Greece. From very young he manifested his charm and his intentions.

During his undergraduate studies in the Department of Chemical Engineering of the National Technical University of Athens, he earned many distinctions for his outstanding performance, and was awarded the prize of Dimitrios Thomaidis in the academic years 1961-1962 for getting the highest score among the students of all years in the Department of Chemical Engineering.

He served in the army for twenty-seven months in the Greek Airforce, making sure that the fighter plains were getting the right fuel. "Flying" was part of his nature and his life, and some stories about this time prefigure his inventiveness and persistence. Being upset by the fact that the airbase was far from Athens and far from his girl friend, he convinced his commander that the pilots during their flight needed oxygen of a certified quality that was available only in Athens, a few kilometers from his girl friend's house. So every weekend, he flew to Athens on an army plane, accompanying the oxygen tank. Monday morning, he picked up the oxygen and returned to the base, happy and proud; he had saved the army!

He went abroad for his post-graduate studies, going first to the McGill University in Montreal, Canada. However, he soon discovered that McGill was not really his place, and one morning he jumped into a Greyhound bus to Boston. He showed up in the Department of Chemical Engineering of the Massachusetts Institute of Technology, asking for a scholarship. Within two weeks he moved to MIT, from which he received his PhD.

Of course, a mature scientist cannot stay still for too long. We already said: he is a free and inquisitive spirit. He constantly sought to advance his education and to broaden his horizons. Thus he also took his Master in Business Administration in the Manager's Program of the Northwestern University in Chicago.

As Researcher, Coordinator of Research and Head of a Department, he worked in the Amoco Research Center in Naperville, Illinois, up to 1979.

It's difficult to live in a foreign country, indeed. Meanwhile he got married to Eva in 1976. They met in Greece, but how this happened I don't know and I cannot say; *kouklos*, as they say in Sifnos to suggest ignorance or unsuccessful efforts. They have three cute and intelligent girls, Mina, Sophia and Christina. He is so proud of them!

In 1979 he landed once again in the Greek reality, being elected as full professor in the Chair of Petrochemical Technology in the Department of Chemical Engineering of the Aristotelian University of Thessaloniki. He did not know what was in store for him.

I met him in the beginning of 1980 and our collaboration dates from April of the same year. (I was a very young girl and now look at me!!!). He hired me because I am tall, in order to reach the upper shelves of the bookcase!!!

From that time on, his adventures as well as mine started in the sanctuaries of research and technology in Greece. That adventure was more than simply successful. The first months he used to make comparisons between me and his former secretary in Amoco. Then all of a sudden, he stopped. I believe I convinced him that I am incomparable!!!

From the end of 1983, discussions for the creation of the Chemical Engineering Research Institute began, and in 1985 these discussions yielded their long-awaited product: the creation of CPERI, which was housed at first in the Department of Chemical Engineering of the Aristotelian University of Thessaloniki.

In 1987, three Institutes, those of Crete, Thessaloniki and Patras, joined to create the Foundation of Research and Technology (ITE), one of the most accomplished and renowned Research Centers on an international level, and whose headquarters are located in Herakleion, Crete.

Meanwhile, new challenges appeared in the horizon: Vasalos' vision, ever growing and expanding, led to the establishment of the Technological Park of Thessaloniki that was followed by the foundation the Company of Management and Growth in 1994 as well as by the operation of the incubator.

In March 2000, CPERI, in a common initiative with the Institute of Telematics and Informatics, the Institute of Transport, and the Institute of Agrobiotechnology and the new Institute of Technology of Solid Fuels, created the Center for Research and Technology, Hellas (CERTH), the unique research center in Northern Greece, the CERTH which, I am sure, you all know.

All those years, Professor Vasalos was supported by his wife Eva and his family. Beautiful years, creative years, long working hours, frequent travels, Brussels being his second home. The research proposals were many, the presentations countless, but there were also moments of relaxation, few

perhaps but precious, that made the work pleasant and never monotonous. It could never be so at any rate. All those years I had to follow his pace. He had the tendency to stress me before every proposal, but at the end I was able to outperform him: my typing was faster than his handwriting. I had my day at last, when I heard him say, "slow down. I cannot catch up with you."

You shouldn't of course imagine that all these years Vasalos' only motto was "work like horses," or "we must prepare for the worst scenario." There were moments that his other side, his personal side, came to the foreground, showing a man who loves nature, excursions, good wine, music, having fun and lamb roasts, his other specialty. Many of his friends have enjoyed watching Iacovos cook a lamb to perfection while drinking ouzo and telling tales of Greece--both modern and ancient.

But let's hear what two of his American friends and colleagues have to say about him:

"My first job assignment at Amoco was in the Catalytic Cracking Group under Doug Ford, our boss. Because our division was busting at the seams for office space, they put me, the new rookie, in an office with a seasoned, cat cracking expert, Dr. Iacovos Vasalos. After Doug introduced me to Iacovos, I settled in at my new desk in his office. Iacovos was pleasant but not thrilled that he now had to share his office with some rookie from Purdue. We seemed to get along fine as the day went on, until Iacovos answered his phone. That's when the booming Vasalos voice interrupted my thoughts and almost blew all the papers off of our desks. He had to spell his name to the caller V-A-S-A-L-O-S, he said as my ears rang! I never suspected such a loud voice could come from this mild-mannered Greek! The next thing I knew after only a few short weeks, was that I was asked to work strike duty from January until May 1980 at Texas City Refinery. I always wonder if my Greek roommate arranged this with Doug to get his office back!

Jim Simnick"

"When Iacovos first came to Amoco to work after his PhD, he worked with me in a lab measuring catalyst activities..1972? We have been close friends and working partners since. I cannot begin to tell you all the funny stories but I suggest you ask Iacovos to relate one or two from this list: His first car, a red Camaro. Iacovos had received numerous traffic tickets for speeding but had hired a very clever lawyer that got all of these accusations denied. Quickly all of us started to use the same lawyer..details for Iacovos.

Gerry D'Souza"

With the expiration of his term as Chairman of CERTH, new horizons have been opened up for the "young" Vasalos, and new fascinating turns for the continuing journey to Ithaca.

The last two years, as a consultant to Mr. Sioufas, the Minister of Development, and to Professor Tsoukalas, the General Secretary of Research and Development, Vasalos has been instrumental for the creation of three new Research Centers in Thessaly, Western Greece and Epeiros. As

a member of the National Research Council, he has played a key role in reforming the Greek law that governs Research, Technology and Innovation. And we, his friends and collaborators, will keep on walking the paths he taught us, with the same patience, insistence, constancy and reliability.

Ladies and Gentlemen, this is Iacovos Vasalos, the man, the friend, the researcher, the manager, our teacher, and for me the brother.

Anastasia Hatzidimou
Sifnos, June 29th, 2007