

Antonio Zanella
1931 - 2020



Prepared by: Antonio Zanella
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The Life of Antonio Zanella

A person's career is often determined by environmental events. Ever since I was a child, I have had an opportunity to come in contact with animals; as my father was an expert farmer in the fertile Po valley. Thus I was inclined to take care of the animals, particularly with regard of revenue animals. So it was my plan to follow father's occupation. Soon events changed the situation. After attending Scientific Lyceum in Mantova, the town of arts, at first I thought I would study engineering, but instead I entered the School of Veterinary Medicine of Parma in 1950. During the course of studies I frequented the Institute of Pathology directed by Professor Amaldo Marcato, and took particular interest in histopathology and developed a keen interest in scientific research. I obtained the degree of DVM "*summa cum laude*" after four years of intensive study.

After obtaining my degree and since a position at the University appeared unlikely, I applied for a job at the Institute Zooprofilattico of Lombardy, one of the major European Institutes for diagnostic, research and vaccine production. It was directed by an excellent internationally recognized scientist, Prof. Bruno Ubertyni, internationally recognized, who greatly influenced my professional development. I began there with a scholarship and then received a position as assistant in the diagnostic department in

Mantova before moving to the central facility in Brescia. Due to the large number of pathological samples that I reviewed I was able to study the main infectious diseases of domestic animals, especially of avian, in that time at the beginning of development. In particular, I studied trichomoniasis of some domestic animal species (in which I formulated on original specific medium), brucellosis, swine pest, avian infectious bronchitis and encephalomyelitis. The latter diseases had just appeared in Italy. As a result I was able to develop a great deal of technical experience.

In 1951, I reluctantly left the Istituto Zooprofilattico, since it was not possible for me to advance my career; then I worked at the Farmitalia, a pharmaceutical factory in Milano, where I spent one year in the laboratories for antiviral chemotherapeutic research on influenza virus and one year in the laboratory for vaccine production. Unfortunately there was not enough time available to follow the research carefully and obstacles to career, so I decided to move again.

In 1963 I had the fortunate opportunity to be chosen to be in charge of the diagnostic laboratory of Cipzoo S.p.A. in Brescia, one of the major factories for avian and pig production in Europe. So I had the opportunity to work quite independently, and this was more in accordance with my character rather than to continually battle administrative obstacles. I set up an advanced diagnostic laboratory for the study of the main poultry and pig diseases, with considerable appreciation of the general management. I focused at the beginning in particular on inactivated vaccines in oil emulsion, for which I was the one of the originators.

I next became interested in Marek's disease. The considerable losses caused by Marek's disease in poultry rearing and the acquaintance with Prof. P.M. Biggs and Coworkers and Prof. B. Burmester and Coworkers induced me to take a great interest in this disease. With regard to this problem I had the opportunity to work for a month at Houghton Poultry Research Station in United Kingdom, under the supervision of Prof. P.M. Biggs and to visit other prestigious research institutes in USA and in Europe. At this time my thinking was in contrast to that of my colleagues and advisors of the Company. In fact, they asserted that the losses were not due to Marek's disease but to Lymphoid Leucosis and that I wouldn't be able to solve the problem. In a relatively short time (about one year) I isolated and attenuated a herpesvirus and developed an efficacious vaccine (strain LCBS 216/68), proving in this way that the cause of mortality was really Marek's disease. It was a great satisfaction for both, me and my Company. Using this vaccine instead of buying the commercial ones the company was able to save a considerable amount of money.

In the meantime, I contacted the Veterinary Disease Institute of the University of Milano, becoming a non-resident assistant; so I had the opportunity to study other animal diseases and their pathologies and to publish quite a few papers.

In 1968 I received the PhD in Infectious Diseases, Prophylaxis and Veterinary Policy. I continued to share my time between the Company and the University, with interesting

exchange of experiences. I kept touch with many Italian and foreign research Institutes, and attended numerous international congresses.

In 1972, Cipzoo S.p.A., following my suggestion, built a new laboratory, Eurobio S.p.A., for research, development and commercialization of vaccines, where I was in director charge for more then ten years. Besides the above mentioned research on Marek's disease, I studied Infectious Bronchitis (isolating many different serotypes, respiratory and nephropatogenic). I was able to attenuate a strain (AZ23/74) with total loss of pathogenicity, while maintaining immunogenicity.

After a period when I divided my activity between industry and University, I decided to devote myself to the teaching without stopping my interest in research. In 1979 I obtained the charge of Professor of Virology at the Veterinary Faculty of the University of Milano. For me it was a great satisfaction. It was the time of the student protest and "red brigades"; so, it was necessary to be careful as there was physical danger. The combination of my character and my experience in field, led me to contrast the student's ideas, especially during the finals; I was appreciated by a part of students but not by the majority. This difficult situation went on for 2-3 years and then stopped, with annihilation of "red brigades".

In 1984, I won the academic competition for teaching Veterinary Microbiology and Immunology at the same Veterinary Faculty. By teaching, I had the opportunity to combine theoretical and practical knowledge, resulting in an improvement of the students. I was still keeping in touch with Eurobio, that I always considered my "creation", and with the field of research in order to be up-to-date in a very dynamic branch of zootechnics such as those of avian and swine. In these years I attended many Symposia, presented papers and published many other papers. Five more years are left before my retirement. Even if I would like to continue forever, I have.

Biography solicited by the Committee on the History of Avian Medicine, American Association of Avian Pathologists.

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*Special Collections Dept. & University Archives
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