Cold War Triangle

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It was in a small town in the Czech Republic that I first met the scientists who moved the fight against viral disease a giant leap forward. As Ambassador of Belgium, I was invited to attend the ceremony at the University of South Bohemia conferring honorary doctorates to the late Antonín Holý and Erik De Clercq. Their cooperation with scientists of an American company, Gilead Sciences, was at the origin of a series of miracle drugs which are the most widely used drugs today, not only to combat AIDS but, to actually prevent HIV infection. It struck me how little the general public knows about the scientists who saved millions of lives and will safeguard millions more in the future. Although I am not a scientist but a retired diplomat, I felt compelled to tell their story.

In my former life, I was better skilled at observing the corridors of political power and organizing cocktail parties than probing the exact methodical world of science. Embarking on this venture, I felt I needed to bridge a gap between two totally different cultures, one way of thinking a mile wide but an inch deep, the other an inch wide but a mile deep.

How to overcome these obstacles in communication? Some of my previous encounters with scientists during my diplomatic career gave me confidence.¹ My meeting in Philadelphia with Renée Fox, Professor at the University of Pennsylvania emboldened me most. She had observed the many talented young European physicians at Harvard Medical School just after World War II preparing for research careers in academic medicine, and wondered what sort of conditions and problems they encountered in their home settings. Belgian medical research fascinated her, it became her favorite subject of study for over thirty years.² The fact that so many cultural influences were concentrated in a country no larger than the state of New Jersey had piqued her curiosity. Her writings and her words have inspired me throughout this journey.

_Cold War Triangle_ looks beyond Belgian medical research, and covers academic institutions in other countries, particularly in former Czechoslovakia, and how their research was combined with the genius of
American science and entrepreneurship. It not only straddles the work-
ings of scientists across oceans and continents but also across deep polit-
ical and ideological divides.

My main source of encouragement in the writing of this book was un-
doubtedly my American husband, William (Bill) Drozdiak. As a foreign
 correspondent and later as editor of The Washington Post, he taught me
all along our parallel careers to look out for the so-called “nugget,” what
people are really trying to say. The all-important story they bury under
hints and insinuations or in messages that people cry out at the top of
their lungs but that nobody hears. This book is dedicated to him.
Acknowledgements

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His once closest collaborators, Professor Piet Herdewijn, Professor Johan Neyts, Professor Dominique Schols, Dr. Rudi Pauwels founder and CEO of Biocartis, and Professor Emeritus Jan Desmyter helped me understand the scope of the accomplishments they achieved as a team. Professor Emeritus Alfons Billiau imparted precious background knowledge on the origins and workings of the Rega Institute of Medical Research. My special thanks and warm appreciation also to Christiane Callebaut, she was my tireless go-between and precious contact at the Institute.

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