



## Miles Croatiae

Žarko Dolinar, 1920-2003

I knew a mighty lion who insisted that all Croats should unite because together they would be stronger (*"Viribus unitis!"*). His name was Žarko Dolinar – a triple PhD, lecturing Professor at five universities, and world champion in table tennis double in 1954, who meekly called himself a Croatian soldier (*miles Croatiae*).

A lion always seems so strong and beautiful that, when you look at it, it never occurs to you that some day it will die. Yet, it does, but we rarely see it die, which is good, because the image of its strength and beauty that holds in our minds gives us strength for our own strivings and, maybe, guards us from the thoughts of our own death. I saw the Old Croatian Lion, Žarko Dolinar, from a close distance many times, and on each occasion I admired his lionlike beauty and strength. Now he is gone and I am glad that I can retain the undisturbed image of his strength, beauty, and pride.

It was more than thirty years ago when my first boss, Professor Nikša Allegretti, a really great scientist, opened up the fascinating world of science to me, a young and insecure assistant at the time. Allegretti told me of his work and publications, and often mentioned an article that was especially dear to him – it was on the anatomy of rat pancreas. He had done that study with a man of whom I had never heard before – Žarko Dolinar. They published it in a prestigious scientific journal. It was then when I first learned about prestigious journals and yearned ever since to publish in such journals. Allegretti vividly described his handsome collaborator, who was not only able to cannulate rat pancreatic duct, but was also the world champion in table tennis (doubles). "A champion", Allegretti exclaimed, "Dolinar is not the second-best in the world, he is the first. The winner. The difference between the first and the second is much greater than the difference between the second and the third."

So, in addition to the cannulation of rat pancreas and great medical journals, I learned something about

being the best in the whole world as well as about Dolinar.

Exactly thirty years later, ten after my teacher and boss died, I met Dr Žarko Dolinar for the first time in my life.

It was at the meeting of the World Association of Croatian Physicians (WACP), where Croatian physicians, mostly living abroad, finally came together to help their homeland. The atmosphere was overwhelming not only because of joy of seeing long-missed friends, but also because of the opportunity to show freely love for our country that had just gained freedom and independence (1).

Žarko Dolinar really added zest to the meeting. Others knew him better and respected him more than we who lived in Croatia, myself included. But I was saved by my good memory, remembering all about the cannulation of the rat pancreas, top scientific journals, and table tennis. I made my way through the crowd surrounding him, listened to him respectfully, and laughed to his uproarious jokes. At one moment, I bowed and smiled, trying to ask about his sports achievements in table tennis and cannulation of the rat pancreatic duct. All my efforts in vain: Dolinar was obsessed with Croatia, its freedom, science that will help us make up for what we have missed during the 888-year-long dependence. I loved to talk about that and appreciated it more than any possible conversation about table tennis and publications, so I stuck to him. But I was not of the lion breed: he could speak and laugh and stay awake and drink much more than I could. I gave up and went to sleep but nevertheless felt sleepy the next morning when I attended the first lecture, which was, of course, held by Dolinar, looking fresh and sounding as brilliant as ever (1).

So I just watched and admired him: his wit, his knowledge, his handsome manly looks, his lionlike appearance, and his significance. He did not care about the pancreatic duct cannulation or table tennis

anymore. He insisted on talking about Croatia and Croatian *viribus unitis* (1).

*Viribus unitis* were the two words that a man, who was supposed to be a lonely lion, kept repeating. He adapted his lectures on genetics and medical education to convey that message, he wished us good nights with "*Viribus unitis!*", as well as good mornings. We drank for *Viribus unitis*, we embraced *Viribus unitis*, and, indeed, for the first time we felt stronger together and more united.

When we talked politics, he asked us to mind the *Viribus unitis*; when we asked about his life, he summarized it by declaring himself *miles Croatiae* (2).

Never in my life have I enjoyed learning more.

Years have passed and I got older. However, Žarko Dolinar, whom I met at every WACP meeting, was not getting older at all. After the end of war in

Croatia, I have not seen him anymore. And now, *miles Croatiae* – handsome, strong, and undefeated – has passed away.

Lions die, but *Viribus unitis* should live. Žarko Dolinar contributed immensely to that cause.

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1 Marušić M. *Viribus unitis*. Report from the Third Meeting of the World Association of Croatian Physicians, Pula, Croatia, May 19-21, 1994. *Croat Med J* 1994;35: 188-92.

2 Marušić M. While our hearts beat, Croatia will live, but what about the city of Osijek? Report from the Fourth Meeting of the World Association of Croatian Physicians, Osijek, June 1-3, 1995. *Croat Med J* 1995;36: 215-8.