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*Paolo Procacci
as we knew him*



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“understanding and curing pain”

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Contents

<i>One of the most brilliant, delightful people I have known</i> Ronald Melzack	5
<i>A warm, friendly man who loved sharing his knowledge</i> John D. Loeser	6
<i>What a researcher!</i> Giancarlo Carli	9
<i>Advancement of sciences and ethical duty</i> Marco Maresca	12
<i>A lot of words</i> Alberto Panerai	17



*Paolo Procacci at John Bonica's home, Seattle, 1973
Photo: courtesy of John D. Loeser*

One of the most brilliant, delightful people I have known

Ronald Melzack

Paolo Procacci is firmly implanted in my mind as one of the most brilliant, delightful people I have known. In addition to his impressive knowledge of the medical sciences, he had a remarkable understanding of the arts.

He had in his mind a vivid recollection of paintings and sculptures, and he was able to use his knowledge to illuminate problems in the history of medicine. His knowledge of philosophy was also remarkable. I remember our discussion on Descartes' famous illustration of a little boy with his foot in a fire, showing the spinal pathway from the foot to the brain. I knew of only one figure, but Paolo told me

that there were others. He later sent a scholarly letter to me with the Figures and their text, and he subsequently published an article on the topic in the journal *Pain*.

Paolo had a delightful sense of humour and it was always a pleasure to be with him. After a meeting of the IASP Executives in Firenze, Paolo invited the foreign visitors to his mother's home where she made what Paolo called "the most delicious pasta in all of Italy." We all enjoyed the pleasures of the food and good wine as well as Paolo's marvelous conversation about his family's history.

We will all remember Paolo as a

person in medicine and the arts. He enriched both fields as well as the memories of the people who knew him.

A warm friendly man who loved sharing his knowledge

John D. Loeser

I first met Paolo Procacci in 1973 at the famous International Pain Congress organized by John J. Bonica and held in Issaquah, Washington. He gave a talk on determining pain thresholds in human subjects and participated in many of the informal discussions that went on that week. We next met at the IASP First World Congress on Pain in Firenze, in 1975. Paolo was actually the Scientific Program Committee chairperson for this meeting and was subsequently elected to the IASP Council as a regional vice-president for Europe. Paolo was kind enough to take a few of us to his home and to explain to us about the time-piece collection that had been started by

his grandfather and passed down to him. Paolo was an encyclopedia of clocks! He also taught us much about Firenze, its art, the River Arno and its flooding and we saw the wonderful history museum with Galileo's telescope, DaVinci's inclined plane and Torricelli's barometer.

Paolo loved to share his knowled-

ge, of which there seemed no limits.

I again met Paolo at several meetings in Italy and at the IASP Council meeting in Igls, Switzerland. We went for a walk around the village during the lunch break one day; Paolo scrutinized the shutters on the windows of each house and told us the decade in which the house was





*IASP Council Meeting, 1977
Meeting of the IASP Scientific Committee in Paris 1974
(on the left)
Photo: courtesy of John D. Loeser*

constructed. His accuracy was attested to by the plaque along side each front door that told us the construction date: the rest of us were intrigued by his knowledge of shutter construction styles! My son spent six months of his college career in Firenze, living in a walk-up apartment that overlooked the Duomo. Paolo invited

him to dinner several times and was a delightful host. He then sent me a letter that Tom spoke superb Florentine Italian almost like a native, which made me very proud of my son.

Paolo was a warm, friendly man who loved sharing his erudition. He had a deep feeling for art, for histo-

ry and for the issues surrounding pain, its treatment and its measurement. He was one of the pioneers in the international movement to make pain research and management a high-priority item for physicians and governments. We all stand on the shoulders of those who have gone before us.

“ He was one of the pioneers in the international movement to make pain research and management a high-priority item for physicians and governments. We all stand on the shoulders of those who have gone before us ”

J.D. Loeser

What a researcher!

Giancarlo Carli

Paolo Procacci was quite a character, eclectic and often unpredictable. He lived in an extremely stimulating family background, as his father was Director of the Uffizi Museum and one of his uncles a well known professor of Italian history. As a medical student in the University of Florence, he accumulated experience in physiology working on Pacini's receptors and had the opportunity to attend the lectures and the clinical Departments chaired by Enrico Greppi and Antonio Lunedei, who had a national reputation in internal medicine with particular focus on pain therapy.

After his medical degree he was

greatly fascinated by the "Florence School" and joined the field of pain having very clear in mind that a good background on pain physiology could improve his clinical approach to research. Indeed, he spent one year in Stockholm working with Yngve Zotterman, a pioneer of peripheral nociceptors studies. Then, he came back to Florence University and set up a psychophysical laboratory for the study of pain thresholds in humans while attending to pain patients. In the late sixties his multidisciplinary group included two medical doctors expert in internal medicine (Massimo Zoppi and Marco Maresca), a professor in Medical Physics (Michele Della Corte) and a

neurophysiologist (Fabio Francini). While they organized an Algology Center, other clinicians such as Ugo Teodori, Federigo Sicuteri, Marcello Fanciullacci, Renato Galletti, Paolo Arcangeli and Leonardo Vecchiet and the pharmacologist Giancarlo Pepeu contributed to build up an exceptional concentration of pain scientists in Florence.

In the early seventies, Procacci's reputation in the international arena was well established and supported by his clinical and physiological approach to pain mechanisms and by his deep knowledge of old and modern references on pain. He became a living archive

of pain literature and his historical approach was much appreciated in all international meetings and as a referee of *Pain*, the journal of the International Association for Study of Pain (IASP). This position allowed him to emphasize and to recall the contribution of the Italian School of Medicine to the establishment of the modern approach to the study of pain. His educational role has been fundamental: not only he was a founder of the Italian Chapter of the IASP, the Italian Association for the Study of Pain, but he represented a rigorous guarantee of the quality of any Congress, if he was allowed contributing to the selection of the speakers and to the following discussions.

He was a challenge for young investigators who had to accurately prepare their talks and to discuss all the references appropriately. Since the time he received the gold medal by the President of the Republic for the maximal scores received for his state examination in the Classic Lyceum in Florence,

Paolo Procacci was fully aware of his extraordinary education and ability to discuss and to remember. However, he never used his dialectic talent to overwhelm or humiliate anybody during a meeting or a conversation: his attitude was always to listen to speakers, to encourage them and possibly to learn from them.

His daily life was rigorously organized: in the morning an intensive activity in the clinic attending to pain patients and teaching, a traditional lunch at home, and in the afternoon, after a short nap, a rewarding reading of pain literature and of original texts in Greek and Latin languages.

Paolo Procacci was much more similar to a protagonist of the Italian Renaissance than to modern scientists. He was perhaps the most informed tourist guide of his town Florence and many visitors of his lab could enjoy his fine education. He was also greatly interested in the so called "minor arts". He knew

many artisans in Tuscany with whom he had inspired conversations about artefacts, materials used, the period of manufacture, the real price in the market. He was also a collector of antiques and was owner of a variety of old clocks and watches of different sizes build with different metals.

Curious episodes of his life are related to his interest for clocks, compasses and cuisine. Carlo Alberto Pagni, a neurosurgeon expert on pain, was invited by his friend Procacci, after a sophisticated dinner, to sleep in his apartment in Florence, in the room containing the clocks collection. He could not sleep... tic-tac...tic tac.. and, in the middle of the night, awoke the whole Procacci' family and asked to stop the clocks or to change his room.

A colleague anaesthesiologist expert in boats, hoping that at least this subject could embarrass Paolo a bit, during a long car trip through Italy decided to start the conversa-

Giancarlo Carli, Manfred Zimmerman, Paolo Procacci

Photo: courtesy of Giancarlo Carli



tion on this topic...but Paolo understood the trap, moved the conversation to boat equipment and, for the whole trip, masterly spoke about old and new compasses and boat interior design.

On another occasion, although Paolo appreciated Italian and French cuisines and could recognize all the ingredients and appropriately discuss about them with the cooks, at the IASP meeting in Paris

he expressed the wish to dinner, for the first time (!), at a Mc Donald restaurant and eat the famous hamburger. *What a researcher!*

“ He became a living archive of pain literature and his historical approach was much appreciated in all international meetings ”

G. Carli

Advancements of sciences and ethical duty

Marco Maresca

I first met Professor Paolo Procacci when I was a student at the School of Medicine of the University of Florence. Professor Procacci was a young professor of the Institute of Medical Pathology well known for his research activity and he was the director of a clinical unit for inpatients. I and other students greatly admired his scientific knowledge and his general culture; our interest was especially excited by the modern concepts of pathophysiology of pain that he explained and by his research work, which in that period was mainly devoted to the methods for measuring pain threshold and to the study of pain threshold changes in different physiologic and pathophysiological conditions.

For this reason, when he invited us to work with him in research activity, we were happy to accept. Perhaps above all we wished to prepare an interesting MD thesis with the help of Professor Procacci; for me that moment was the beginning of a long period of work, of a long way in which I followed Professor Procacci with an interest that never finished.

Many moments of my activity with Professor Procacci are still very clear in my memory: the experimental sessions; the activity of collecting and discussing experimental findings and clinical observations; the teaching activities; the clinical activities for outpatients and for

inpatients; the congresses we attended presenting the results of our investigations and discussing pain problems.

I especially remember some moments in which the activity of Professor Procacci was greatly appreciated: the visit of Professor Bonica to our laboratory in 1972, when Professor Bonica considered our experimental results with great interest and gave us suggestions for the development of our investigations; the opening ceremony of the First World Congress of the International Association for the Study of Pain in the *Palazzo Vecchio* of Florence, at the end of a period of intense work for the organization of the congress; the

foundation of the Italian Association for the Study of Pain; the international congresses in which the lectures presented by Professor Procacci excited the interest of scientists coming from every part of the world. Working with him, I could admire not only his knowledge of medical sciences, but also his knowledge of literature, history and art: in many congresses his lectures on the history of the concept of pain or on the representation of pain in art were greatly appreciated. His knowledge of art was also evident in the 'social events' of some congresses: I still remember the great interest of those who were following Professor Procacci while he was showing the pictures of the Uffizi Gallery or the statues of the Museum of the Cathedral of Florence. I also remember his kindness in inviting friends and coworkers in his house, where it was possi-

ble to admire many beautiful things he had collected and, above all, the clocks and watches he had collected with scientific interest for mechanics and keen aesthetic sense.

Some aspects of the research activity of Professor Procacci seem to me especially important. First of all, the physiologic fundaments: he worked in the Institute of Physiology of the University of Florence and in the Institute directed by Professor Yngve Zotterman in Stockholm; physiologic concepts on the normal functions of

the nervous system were always the basis of his investigations on pathophysiology and clinics of pain. Professor Procacci always paid attention to new concepts deriving from investigations performed in every part of the world and was especially able to analyse new findings and to use them to plan further investigations.

Above all, he considered pain



1975 Florence, Salone dei Cinquecento - Opening Ceremony of the First World Congress on Pain: John Bonica, the Mayor of Florence, Denise Albe-Fessard and Paolo Procacci (Photo: courtesy of John D. Loeser)

“ To visit patients is for me an ethical duty ”

research as an example of multidisciplinary work; a multidisciplinary approach was for him the best way to obtain results which could be true advances in the knowledge of pain mechanisms and in the treatment of pain syndromes. The concept of the importance of a multidisciplinary work was applied by him in research activity and in clinical practice; he worked together with basic and clinical scientists of many disciplines: Physics, Physiology, Pharmacology, Anaesthesiology, Orthopaedics, Neurology, Neurosurgery, Dentistry.

In 1973 he joined Professor Bonica and other scientists in founding a multidisciplinary association: the International Association for the Study of Pain; the main purpose of the association was to foster research on pain by bringing together basic scientists, physicians

and other health professionals. The First World Congress of the association was organized in Florence by Professor Procacci in 1975.

During the congress, Professor Bonica asked Professor Procacci to organize the Italian chapter of the association. A few months later, Professor Procacci, together with other Italian members of the international association, founded the Italian Association for the Study of Pain, which maintained a multidisciplinary character. He was the first president of the Italian association and during many years gave his contribution to the development of the association, always promoting the collaboration of scientists of different disciplines.

In his long activity he met many scientists working in every part of the world: he often could present to

them his research activity and always paid attention to their suggestions which could help him to develop his investigations.

In clinical practice, Professor Procacci especially considered the importance of a correct evaluation of the patients, including a careful exam of the sensory function. In 1970 he founded a Pain Center in the Medical Clinic of the University of Florence: in the following years, many physicians came to Florence from every part of Italy, to see the organization of a clinical center devoted to pain patients and above all to learn the method of performing a complete clinical evaluation.

Among many episodes of my activity with Professor Procacci, I remember one episode, which does not seem very important, but remains in

“ He considered pain research as an example of multidisciplinary work; a multidisciplinary approach was for him the best way to obtain results which could be true advances in the knowledge of pain mechanisms and in the treatment of pain syndromes. ”

M. Maresca

my memory for its significance. In a winter afternoon of many years ago we were preparing a lecture for a congress in a room of the Medical Clinic of the University of Florence; a table was covered with records of experimental sessions and with books in which we were controlling references. Every afternoon Professor Procacci used to see inpatients to control the course of clinical manifestations and to see the results of analyses which arrived after the visit of the morning. This afternoon visit was not prescribed by any rule but was surely very useful for a good care of patients. Also that afternoon he stopped our activity of analysing experimental data and invited me to accompany him to see the patients. While we were walking in a corridor, he said to me: 'To visit patients is for me an ethical duty'. I was surprised by this phrase and asked to myself why he had said it: perhaps he supposed that I did not like to stop the interesting activity of analysing experimental data, or perhaps he also did not like to stop that activity and

wanted to explain to me, but perhaps also to himself, the prominent importance of clinical activity, deriving from an ethical duty, in comparison with every other activity. After that afternoon, I have considered again those words many times and I have realised that in those simple words there is a very important concept for all those who devoted themselves to the study of pain.

All the advances of science, which allow us to understand better the pathogenic mechanisms of pain and give us new tools for modifying pain mechanisms, become really important only when they are applied in clinical practice to relieve human suffering and our efforts in research work must derive from an ethical duty: to help men suffering from pain, from this dreadful phenomenon which may provoke dramatic changes in the life of men.

The words of Professor Procacci surely derived from his sense of

ethics, which was evident in many circumstances, even in his comments on what happened in our University or in our Country. For this reason I believe that those words must be proposed as a fundamental concept to basic and clinical scientists and that those words must be especially proposed to young investigators.

I believe that those words, said in a corridor of the Medical Clinic of the University of Florence in a winter afternoon of many years ago, are an important message left by Professor Procacci to us and to all those who will study pain problems in the future.

A lot of words

Alberto Panerai

I met Paolo Procacci in 1980 in Milano; as a matter of facts I did not meet him in that occasion, I heard him.

I was just back from Canada, where I had been working since 1977 on, at that time, a new and for pain experts very important peptide: beta-endorphin. I had been invited to give a lecture at the Carlo Erba Foundation, the venue of prestigious series of conferences in Milano. The Carlo Erba foundation was at that time located in an ancient red brick building in downtown Milano, in a room decorated with frescos, but with a terrible set of chairs, known by the whole scientific community in Milano as the

most uncomfortable place where to stay and listen to a conference.

The program was to begin at 9.00 pm and I was supposed to be the second speaker out of three. Just to say how it finished, I spoke 15 minutes and the last speaker did not speak. What happened, was that Paolo Procacci spoke for one and a half hours instead of the supposed thirty minutes. At that time I was convinced that one of the specific duties of scientific communication and communicators was to stay in the time alleged and allow the other speakers to have their time and expose their thoughts. I came out from that evening almost

hating that Professor Paolo Procacci who came from Florence and kept the evening for himself. Since that time I was always disturbed and worried when I was supposed to speak in a meeting where Paolo Procacci was speaking in my same session. As a matter of fact I went on a long time without personally meeting Paolo Procacci.

I had also another problem with him. I was the perfect example of the new generation of neurotransmitter oriented neuroscientists, while he was one of the highest expressions of the electrical generation of neuroscientists. I was 'neurotransmitters, receptors, signal transduc-

“ I was ‘neurotransmitters, receptors, signal transduction’ and he was potentials’. I was ‘drugs’, he was ‘electrical stimulation’.”

A. Panerai

tion’ and he was ‘potentials’. I was ‘drugs’, he was ‘electrical stimulation’.

Finally, Paolo Procacci was highly speculative, I was all but speculative. He was reconnecting old and new data, personal or reported observations making up a new building of knowledge, I was just reporting my data almost without any comment.

As a matter of facts we were almost opposite.

This condition went on for several years.

We than met, probably at dinner. Both of us remained the same on our well established scientific positions, but we begun to explore other ways of relation.

I had a friend in Florence: Varo Cioli, who succeeded to Paolo Procacci’s father as director of the Uffizi Galleries in Florence. Varo spoke to me about Paolo Procacci from a point of view obviously different from the one I had been knowing till then. It was from Varo’s stories that I begun to understand Paolo Procacci. I begun to imagine him as the son of a very important and probably very much admired and overwhelming father, grown up in a high level humanistic milieau. His approach to medicine was therefore humanistically scientific, i.e. his humanistic culture probably led Paolo Procacci to his tendency to over-explain simple observations, make hazardous although logic

connections, but at the same time was the reason for his rigid scientific standards.

As I was saying we met, but instead of confronting our views on specific research problems, we began to speak of more general problems related to pain, behavior and art. As a matter of facts, I cannot remember any scientific discussion with Paolo Procacci, but a lot of discussions on paintings, watches, books.

To say the truth, even in these discussions Paolo Procacci was exposing his thoughts with an unbelievable number of words, concepts and images that were leading to the fact that also these dinners

could be envisaged as a monologue. However, at this time I was not disturbed all, but I was, if ever, willing of hearing more and more of his fascinating tales.

Yes, tales is the best definition: I like thinking of Paolo Procacci as a man who explained situations, experiments, observations using tales. He had met and known the most important people in pain clinic and neurophysiology, the founders of pain research, and he used to illustrate and explain their achievements speaking about their lives, using scientific anecdotes, reporting his conversations with them. In conclusion, he was putting everything in a more general context centered on the human side of the story.

I think I got to conclude that he could not have used less words or less time both speaking at a

*1975, Florence,
5-8 September*



meeting or in a more informal context: he knew too much and had too many things to say, in several languages, on different fields, from science to art to philosophy.

Now, I miss Paolo Procacci's unstoppable flow of words and concepts, his loud voice, his imposing tone and his red sweater.





Projects and goals

TO PROMOTE clinical studies and basic research into pain and related symptoms

TO PROMOTE scientific research of particular social interest, even those with the intent to contain and better organise public health-care spending

TO FINANCE scholarships and research grants for young researchers

TO CONTRIBUTE the training of medical professionals through classes, events, and national information campaigns tailored to general practitioners and specialist doctors

TO RE-EXAMINE the primary training and continuous education curriculum for doctors

TO DEFINE protocols for managing chronic pain in practice, that help general practitioners clearly understand who to send to pain medicine specialist and when

TO SUPPORT the creation of a pain medicine specialisation

TO MANAGE a correct campaign to spread knowledge and understanding to scientists and specialists as well as to the general public

TO IMPROVE the quality of treatment and the quality of life of people suffering from pain pathologies

TO BE an authoritative voice based on scientific findings for the political and policy issues associated with pain and its management.

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