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Interview: Richard C. Fuisz

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Richard C. Fuisz is a physician, inventor and entrepreneur. He is the founder of Fuisz Pharma LLC, along with his son Joseph Fuisz, a company that specializes in drug delivery systems and opioid abuse resistance. He also founded Kosmos Pharma, a thin film delivery company, Medcom, a medical training company as well as numerous others. Early in his career Fuisz served as a doctor in public health firms, hosted a television talk show and ran for Congress in Pennsylvania. As a Lt. Commander in the United States Navy his work included a White House posting. Fuisz also founded the Seline Modeling Agency that brought the first Miss USSR to the United States. He is an avid motorcyclist and a pilot.

Your resume is so rich and diverse that it is almost impossible to describe you in just a few sentences. Which of your past activities do you think identifies you?

Well, I am first and foremost a father. I have five wonderful children. Next, I am a physician and an inventor primarily in the drug and medical fields.

I share my own observation with you that if you understand yourself and can define yourself in a simple and positive way, then the complexities of life and business become much easier to deal with.

You hold over 200 patents worldwide, including more than 90 U.S. patents in technology. Although most of your inventions are related to drug delivery methods, they also include software patents related to e-commerce, e-mail and diagnostics. Which of your inventions do you consider most important?

I have been blessed to see many of my drug delivery inventions used by, and benefit the public. But to speak candidly, it is the process and work – can I say the struggle – of invention that gives me the greatest pleasure. Picking up ones own invention years later on the shelf never feels as poignant as that initial struggle. I hope I am not discouraging future inventors with this statement!

You remain active in your companies that originate patent pending products and systems for sale and licensing. What are you working on now?

We are presently very much involved in a grouping of patents for Fuisz Interactive Media. This technology allows the viewer to watch television and if they see an article they might want to purchase, to simply click on it on the screen and immediately find out the nature of the object and buy it if they would like to. It will be very exciting to see this concept grow.

You were born in Bethlehem, PA to Slovenian immigrants. Your father Anton Fujs was from the village of Krog near Murska Sobota and your mother Margaret Matuš, born in Bethlehem, PA, had parents from the village of Dolenci in Prekmurje. How often do you visit Slovenia and have you ever considered living there?

My father came to this country at the age of 17 and ultimately married a girl whose parents came from a village perhaps ten miles from his own. That tells you a lot about South Bethlehem, Pennsylvania, in the 1920s and 30s.

This suggests a tender connection to roots, which was true. At the same time, there was a very strong sentiment against the inclusion of the Prekmurje region into Yugoslavia in Bethlehem

based on good part on the use of what is now called the Prekmurje dialect of the Slovenian language as distinct from standard Slovenian and the cultural divisions thereby implied. This sentiment was only exacerbated by the divisions of the cold war.

So, for reasons I would rather not dwell on, when I took my parents back to Murska Sobota in the late 1960s, it was a short-lived and painful visit.

But, now, we come full circle. Because culture and political identity – just like science and technology – is constantly evolving and changing.

Today, our Prekmurje region is this wonderful, enthusiastic and proud member of this wonderful newly independent country that is Slovenia.

I am so very proud to be Slovenian. In my family, four of us have already naturalized as dual citizens of the United States and Slovenia. Another two of my children are in the process of seeking their Citizenship.

Another great development is e-mail coupled with the fact that the younger generations in our family in Prekmurje speak wonderful English – ironically it is the younger generations in our family across the sea that are really in close contact and that is very gratifying to me.

As one gets older one is drawn to ones origin in a strong way. I am American, and I am proud of that, but my blood also flows from Slovenia. It causes a longing as one becomes older.

During the 1980s you traveled extensively in the Middle East and are fluent in Arabic language. Have you ever envisioned the Arab Spring and how long do you think it will take to see democracy in most of the Middle East countries?

My Arabic is no longer what it was. I believe a Democracy is very difficult in these countries. They have a very rich history and cultural patrimony. However, one must keep in mind the evolution from the bedu as well as the psychological interactions with Islam. In the full picture these may well mitigate against Western style democracy.

I do not think the U.S. was wise in so rapidly becoming involved in internal events in the Middle East. I believe that the rule of law and individual rights – together with the ballot box – form the basis for democratic government. Merely allowing a vote – absent these other protections – may well be a recipe for a “democratic” radicalism.

Your grandparents and father immigrated in search of a better life for their children. Do you still view the U.S. as the land of opportunity?

There is still a lot of opportunity in the United States, particularly for the driven and the well educated. I fear the opportunities for the working class have been allowed to dwindle through the erosion of our manufacturing base.

When the Prekmurje migration occurred to Bethlehem, steel manufacturing offered good paying jobs for reliable and good workers. Prekmurje Slovenians were able to use those jobs to build their own churches, schools and social halls. Such jobs are too few today.

You are also a very active philanthropist. Together with your brother Robert you established the first endowed professorship at the Georgetown School of Medicine and together with your wife Lorraine you endowed the Richard and Lorraine Fuisz Library as well as the Zoltan Fuisz Scholarship Fund, both at the at Moravian Academy. Tell us about the programs that are related to Slovene heritage.

Oh, these are not big things. I am proud of what we have done for children descended from Slovenian ancestry at Moravian Academy. However, I am very proud also of the Zoltan Fuisz scholarship at Georgetown University School of Medicine. This honors my dear brother Zoltan, who passed from this life before I was born. It is granted each year to a Medical student who requires some financial assistance at Georgetown Medical School.

Thank you!

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