

Michael L. Vasil



I am a Professor of Microbiology at the University of Colorado School of Medicine and teach Infectious Diseases to first and second year medical students. I also teach and train Ph.D. graduate students in those areas and I have mentored >15 graduate students for their Ph.D. and as many postdoctoral fellows who are now working in industry (e.g. pharmaceutical companies) or in academics (e.g. universities). I also have a research laboratory that is funded by grants from the National Institutes of Health and from private foundations (e.g. Cystic Fibrosis Foundation). During this time, I have also published >150 scientific papers and several books or book chapters. I have now been at the same institution (i.e. University of Colorado School of Medicine) for the past 35 years. Before that I graduated with my B.S. from UTEP in 1971 and then received my Ph.D. from the University of Texas Southwestern Medical School in Dallas in 1975. I then did post-

doctoral training at the University of Oregon School of Medicine in Portland for two years. After that I became an Assistant Professor of Microbiology and Immunology at the University of California, Los Angeles (UCLA) for almost two years. While we loved UCLA itself, living in Los Angeles was found to be a bit onerous, especially for starting a family. Consequently, I applied for and was given my current position at the University of Colorado School of Medicine in 1978.

I have been married to my wife Adriana for nearly 43 years and we have two children. She has been running my laboratory for the past 25 years, and me for the past 43 or so years. She also graduated from UTEP and even worked for two Nobel Laureates at UT Southwestern while I was in graduate school there. Consequently, she was already well qualified to run my research lab when we got to Colorado. Our son and daughter both have fantastic jobs in science, but alas, or very fortunately, not in Microbiology. My son has his Bachelor's from the Colorado School of Mines and a Ph.D. in Astrophysics from the University of Colorado, Boulder. He then did postdoctoral training at the Canadian Institute for Theoretical Astrophysics at University of Toronto and is now headed, in June, to a faculty position (Assistant Professor) at the University of Sydney, yes, the Sydney down under. Our daughter got married in June 2012 after finishing her B.S. in Geology from the Colorado School of Mines and she now works for the State of Colorado in that field. Her new husband got his M.S. from the Colorado School of Mines in Computer Sciences and has several offers from both industry and government. How did I get to where I am now? While I somewhat liked science even in grade school (I used to tell everyone that I wanted to be a jet pilot or a scientist when I was ~10 yrs), and I did OK in science at Burges, I did not have a very good idea about what I wanted to do when I graduated from Burges. The first thing I tried, and wanted to do after high school, was to join the Navy and go into the submarine service (remember I was only 17 and already 6'2" in height, so I was not too bright to even consider working in a submarine), but they would not let me into the Navy because for some odd reason my blood pressure was too high. A doctor told me a few years later that they were using a cuff that was too small, because my blood pressure was completely normal! In any case, at that point because I did not know what I wanted to do, I took some aptitude tests with the Texas Employment Commission to see what I might be good at. Based on those tests they told me that I could be: (i) a dress designer, (ii) a lathe operator, or (iii) a medical technician! They then told me that there was a small laboratory in the Coronado area of El Paso (Westgate Medical Labs) that would train me as a medical laboratory technician and as an X-ray technician, without pay. Since I was not quite ready for college (note, I was one of the babies of the class) I took their advice.



Mike in the lab

I trained there for a year or so and found out that I really enjoyed the work. I then got a real job as a medical laboratory technician in a small hospital in Canutillo, then in El Paso and then I got a pretty good paying job (\$250/month) at Southwestern General, then Sun Towers and then at Providence on North Mesa. While I was working at Southwestern Hospital I decided that I wanted to know more about the science of what I was doing in the lab (e.g. blood tests etc). That is when I finally got some brains and decided to start at UTEP and get a Bachelor's degree with a major in Biology and a minor in Microbiology. I was able to go to UTEP in the morning and work in the late afternoons and evenings to keep body and soul together and pay for the astronomical tuition (~\$100/semester) at UTEP. At that point my options were to either go to medical school or to graduate school. Since, after working in the several hospitals, as described above, and seeing what physicians were subjected to (e.g. be on call at all hours – I like to sleep through the night), I decided that was not for me, so I went to graduate school at

UT Southwestern Medical school and got a Ph.D. in Microbiology.

What do I (we) do for fun? Working in academics and research is definitely not a 9 to 5 job, but it most assuredly has its own rewards. One of them is the opportunity to travel, such as attending scientific meetings and to participate on scientific review panels. Consequently, over the years we have taken advantage of the need to travel and also use it for fun for all of us. We have been to Hawaii 5 times, including all the major islands (Oahu, Maui, Kauai, Molokai, Lanai, & Hawaii); we have been to Bilbao (where some of my wife's family originated from), Barcelona, England, Scotland, Italy (Rome), Japan (Tokyo & Kyoto) and all over the great USA. The past couple of years we took a 3-4 week driving vacation through the Northwest, from Portland down the coast and to the redwoods in California, and last year we did the same through California, including San Francisco, Napa, Sonoma, Kings Canyon, Sequoia and Yosemite. Emanating from all this travel and from my research, one of my hobbies includes photography, which until digital cameras came along buried us in photos and slides. I also love to play golf, at which I am not very good but I have still tried my luck at places where the pros play, such as Torrey Pines in San Diego. At the present I am not yet retired, but I am getting close (i.e. in the next 12-18 months). That will certainly give me more time to travel and still do a bit of consulting or volunteering to keep myself busy and out of trouble and my wife's hair, except when we are in the car for one of our long excursions through the USA.



Mike with son