

Paul (Paolo) Calabresi

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When the renowned oncologist Paul Calabresi first arrived in the United States his name was still Paolo and he was just 9 years old.

First and second generation

Born to Massimo and Bianca Maria Finzi Contini in Milan in 1930, Paolo also had a brother who was 2 years younger. Following the promulgation of the racial laws and his father's expulsion from his teaching post at the University of Milan, Paolo, Guido and their parents boarded the Rex in Genoa and, after a long ocean crossing, arrived in New York.

They stayed at a hotel in Manhattan until December when, finally, Massimo Calabresi was awarded a research contract lasting several months at the Medical School of Yale University. As a consequence, the family moved to New Haven, in Connecticut, where Paul's father was given several fixed term contracts, before managing to find a stable job in 1952 as a cardiologist at the Veterans' Administration Hospital. Even Paul's mother found work in the area, teaching French and Italian in various women-only colleges. The two children naturally went to school, also going to YMCA camps in the summer until they were old enough to go to Boy Scout camps. The environment in New Haven was rather closed-minded, even towards Jews and Italians, amongst whom there were some antifascists and anarchists, although most sympathised with Mussolini. Paolo and Guido grew up with antifascist principles; and when, in August 1940, the Rosselli widows arrived in the United States with their seven children, Paolo and Guido were both taken by their parents and aunt Renata to Larchmont to pay homage to Signora Amelia.

The population of Italian origin in New Haven at the time was the most

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populous from it had been since the turn of the century, however few Italians attended college and even fewer ended up going to Yale. Unfortunately, those Italian students who did get into Yale still had to deal with significant prejudice. According to Guido's recollections, Paolo was the keenest on fitting in: he was lively, curious and smart¹. In 1947, the Calabresi family became officially naturalised Americans. Paul obtained a Lineaweaver fellowship which allowed him to take up a place at Hopkins School in New Haven; he then went onto Yale University. On April 3rd 1954 he married Celia Treadway Gow, born in New Haven (1923-2018). In 1955 he graduated in medicine.

An impressive career

He completed his residency at the Harvard Medical Service of Boston City Hospital. For the next 4 years he worked as a researcher at the National Cancer Institute. After another year at Boston City Hospital, he was employed by Yale as a researcher. In 1967 he became Associate professor of Medicine and Pharmacology. He spent a sabbatical year at the University of Lausanne in Switzerland as a Visiting Scientist. He left Yale in 1968 to move to Brown University as professor of Medical Science and as physician-in-chief of Roger Williams General Hospital. He was the founding director of the Brown University Cancer Center and was chair of Brown's Department of Medicine from 1974 to 1993, although in 1991 he transferred his research base, to Rhode Island Hospital (Providence, RI). That same year he was appointed Chair of the National Cancer Advisory Board by the U.S. president George H.W. Bush; he was subsequently put in charge of the president's Cancer Panel by Bill Clinton.

Three children were born during his marriage to Celia, a graduate of Tufts University (Boston) and occupational therapist²: Steven, who became a Law professor at Northwestern University, a visiting professor of Law at Yale

¹ For their childhood memories, see Guido Calabresi, *A Foreigner in New Haven 1940-1945 (An Oral History Memoir)*, ed. by Norman I. Silber, New Haven, Yale Law School, 2016.

² See <<https://www.legacy.com>> (access January 5th 2019).

University, and the cofounder and president of the Board of Directors of the Federalist Society; Janice, who graduated from the University of Chicago Law School; Peter, who became a professor of Neurology and director of the Multiple Sclerosis Center at Johns Hopkins University School of Medicine in Baltimore.

Paolo Calabresi dedicated his entire medical and scientific activity career to fighting cancer and, was especially notable for promoting interest in geriatric oncology; ironically, he died of cancer on October 25th 2003, in Providence. He published more than 200 scientific papers and was presented with the Oscar B. Hunter Memorial Award in Therapeutics and the St. George Medal of the American Cancer Society. President of the American Society of Clinical Oncology, he was also a member of the National Cancer Legislation Advisory Committee. The PhRMA Foundation created the Paul Calabresi Medical Student Fellowship in his honour.

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Cite as:

Patrizia Guarnieri, *Paul (Paolo) Calabresi*, in
Ead., *Intellectuals Displaced from Fascist Italy*, Firenze University Press, 2019.
<<http://intellettualinfuga.fupress.com/en>>
ISBN: 978-88-6453-872-3

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Publication date: 18 December 2019.