*Dr. James E. Crowe Jr. directs the Vanderbilt Vaccine Center. This lab wages war on infectious diseases with antibodies as their weapons. They look at molecules and see millions saved. I spent time with Dr. Crowe understanding his vision and ambitions.*

**Dr. Crowe, you’re the director of the Vanderbilt Vaccine Center. What does this mean to you as a scientist and a person?**

I think in the lay appreciation of what a scientist means [are] models in which a single individual is brilliant, at a laboratory late, and discoveries are made all of a sudden. And that’s not how it works anymore. Science is a team career, and many of the things we have are interdisciplinary. That’s what’s needed, so good science is team science these days. In my title of director of Vaccine Center it’s just a group of people, and as director I’m just sort of the cheerleader or whatever. Most of the brilliant insights are happening by other people, not from me, and it’s more like being a symphony director.

**In the same vein, if there was one thing that you could change about your field, what would it be and why?**

I think science is an exciting discipline for creative people. And the things one can learn are bottomless. On the other hand, modern science has some business aspects to it. That leads to less information sharing, more paperwork, and more lawyers. It’s completely unrelated to the science you are training in. It seems like there’s an obstacle between two scientific groups sharing. But you can’t have unlimited credit going in every direction. So if I could change it, I would magically make it so that people got the credit they deserved, but there weren’t limitations.

**Something that I've always heard [about] the STEM field is that it's not very applicable to the outside world. How do you think [the] lab is able to make an impact on what happens on a societal level?**

Well, there's different types of science actually. And even within medical research, there [is] more basic science and things that are closer to being put in a person. So, I think you have to decide, where are you best suited to work? Do you want to fix someone immediately, [for] which you have immediate gratification, or are you [on] a team of people that figures out how the nucleus works, and 30 years from now… billions of people are impacted by what they did. To me, that's a personal decision where you fit on a spectrum.

**Last, but not least… what is your dream, Dr. Crowe? Where do you envision this lab and your work ascending to one day?**

We want to discover how antibodies work in the body, because it's beautiful and pleasurable to learn about. And we would like antibodies we make to be put out into the world. My reach fantasy is we would revolutionize how… public health management of infectious diseases is done. Currently, we're either using drugs not very well, or we're using vaccines, which are great, but take 50 years to make. I think that antibodies could replace drugs and vaccines as the main tool we have for preventing or treating these things. It would change the lives of billions of people. That's my secret fantasy.

*Some of the questions and answers have been edited for brevity and clarity.*