

Krishna Yeshwant, a Harvard- and Stanford-trained doctor, still works in a clinic twice a week in Boston, where he is based.

Last year, he led the firm's biggest bet in life sciences, an investment in Flatiron Health, which is building a cloud platform to analyze cancer data.

This is just the beginning. "In 20 years," Maris says, "chemo will seem so primitive it will be like using a telegraph."

At the age of 22, just out of college, Maris met the friend who would lead him to Google. It was 1997: Yahoo was search, AOL was e-mail, Google was called BackRub. Maris was in New York, working at Investor AB, a Swedish investing firm. He didn't care for Wall Street, but he did like the smart Yale grad sitting next to him. She told him about a company that was going to change the world. "I remember telling him about this new search engine my sister was working on, and he said, 'Oh, Yahoo is good enough,'" recalls Anne Wojcicki, who would become the wife of Sergey Brin. Her sister Susan, one of Google's earliest employees, is now CEO of YouTube. Anne Wojcicki went on to co-found 23andMe, a genetics testing company that is part of Google Ventures' portfolio.

Maris quit Investor AB after six months and went to Burlington, Vermont, to start a Web-hosting company. He was so green that he read Netscape and the World Wide Web for Dummies. He funded his company, Burlee, with his credit cards and by convincing the operators of the Lake Champlain ferry to invest.

Maris sold Burlee to a company that became Web.com for an undisclosed sum in 2002. It wasn't Google-level money, but it was enough for him to live on in Vermont with no job.

He would have stayed there except that his old friend, Wojcicki, kept calling him West. Maris started visiting her and Brin, staying at their home in California. He increasingly became drawn into their sphere. "He and Larry and Sergey would be at dinner and start talking about, I don't know, flying cars," recalls Wojcicki.

In 2008, Google's chiefs tapped Maris to start a venture fund, an idea they'd been kicking around for a while. They gave him a desk at Google and instructions to figure out how he would invest Google's money. In an only-at-Google twist, his neighbor was Kevin Systrom, who was working on a photo app called Burbn, later Instagram. ("Everyone I sit next to ends up becoming a billionaire," Maris jokes.)

Maris spent six months researching venture capital around Silicon Valley. He traveled up and down Sand Hill Road, home to many of the Valley's most prestigious VC firms, asking top investors for advice. At first, he had a hard time getting anyone to take him seriously. During one meeting, a VC started laughing at his idea for Google Ventures.

Maris was told his fund would never work: VCs wouldn't want Google looking over their shoulders. "There were some in the venture world who weren't particularly welcoming to Bill or Google Ventures," recalls John Doerr, a legendary partner at Kleiner Perkins Caufield & Byers, one of the most important first-generation California VC firms. Doerr, who sits on Google's corporate board, advised Maris on setting up the venture fund.

Around Silicon Valley, corporate venture funds have a bad reputation. "There is an inherent paradox to the notion of corporate venture," says Bill Gurley, a general partner at the VC firm Benchmark Capital. The conflict is, do the fund's loyalties lie with the startup or with the parent? Just about every independent venture capitalist in tech has stories of being burned by corporate funds. Either the company uses its venture investments to gather intelligence and ends up competing with the companies it funds or company management loses interest at some point and pulls out.

Entrepreneurs were skeptical, too. "I told him, this is never going to work," says Joe Kraus, who, in addition to co-founding Excite, co-founded a wiki software company called JotSpot, which was sold to Google. Maris asked him early on to join as a partner in Google Ventures. "From the entrepreneur's perspective, the idea of tying myself to Google would have been scary," Kraus says. "The fear would be, if you raised money from Google, would Apple hate you?"

Entrepreneurs who can get comfortable with Google Ventures gain access to resources no amount of money can buy.

To win over other VCs and entrepreneurs, Maris and his bosses at Google established the terms under which the fund still operates. Google has no access to details about the startups' strategy or technology. That way, entrepreneurs can pitch without worrying about