


REMEMBERING THE POLIO PIONEERS

Hope lies in dreams, in imagination, and in the courage of those who dare to make dreams into reality.

Jonas Salk



Dr. Jonas Salk vaccinating his family during the trial stage.

 The March of Dimes Foundation

When I was in elementary school, poliomyelitis—polio for short—was a scourge. The photos of large numbers of children trapped in “iron lungs” in order to stay alive were terrifying. Healthy children lived in fear of contracting infantile paralysis, as it was generally known then because the disease mostly attacked infants. Serious infections could lead to paralysis and even death by paralyzing the muscles that help a person to breathe. We learned in school that President Franklin D. Roosevelt had been a victim of polio and created the March of Dimes, a charity to collect dimes to support research that might someday lead to a cure for this dreaded disease.



 Bill Curtis


One man who was determined to find a cure was Jonas Salk. A graduate of the City College of New York, Salk went on to study medicine at the New York University School of Medicine and received a research fellowship to work under his mentor, Thomas Francis Jr., who

was developing a vaccine for influenza. At the time, the accepted process for developing a vaccine was to inject patients with a weakened form of a “live” virus in to create an immune response. Salk believed that a “killed” virus vaccine would confer protective immunity with less risk. He turned his attention to employing this method to create a safe and effective vaccine for polio. Salk first tested the trial vaccine on himself and his three sons.

In 1954 with financial support from the March of Dimes, Salk embarked on a national study to test the vaccine on a large group, the largest in U.S. history at the time.



President Franklin Roosevelt and Basil O'Connor founded the March of Dimes in 1938.

 The March of Dimes Foundation



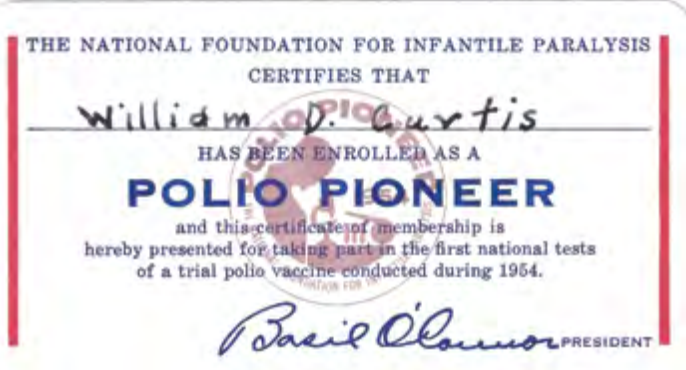
Two patients are treated in full-body respirators called iron lung.

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(see photo) and button pins. In April 1955, Dr. Thomas Francis delivered the good news that there were significantly fewer cases of polio among the group that received the vaccine. Dr. Jonas Salk became a hero to millions but never received the Nobel Prize for his work.

Today, polio has been eliminated from the United

POLIO PIONEER MEMBERSHIP CARD



States thanks to widespread vaccination, and global eradication of the poliovirus remains a goal. Albert Sabin's oral vaccine, introduced in 1962, eventually supplanted the Salk vaccine because it was cheaper to manufacture and easier to administer. Jonas Salk went on to establish the Salk Institute for Biological Studies in La Jolla, California where today's leading scientists perform research to find cures for diseases not yet conquered. April 26th marks 68 years since the first child in the trial received his shot. By the way, this writer was a Polio Pioneer and later learned that he had been given the "real" vaccine.

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