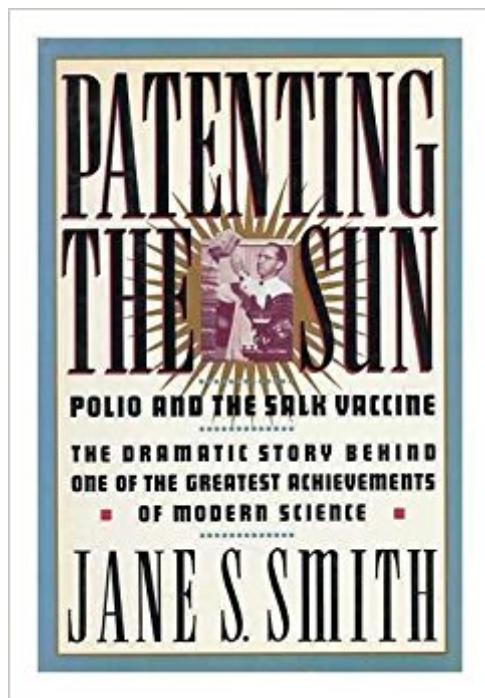


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Patenting The Sun: Polio And The Salk Vaccine



Synopsis

In 1905, few Americans had ever heard of polio, the mysterious new disease that seemed to arrive so suddenly at the beginning of the century, but for the next 50 years it stalked the nightmares of every parent. Then, in the spring of 1954, several million people eagerly volunteered their children as test subjects for a new vaccine developed by Dr. Jonas Salk. PATENTING THE SUN makes real to us the people & events behind the development of Salk's vaccine. Beginning with Franklin Roosevelt's private battle against paralysis, PATENTING THE SUN describes how a small lab experiment became a huge national event. The testing of the vaccine was the largest field trial ever held, the greatest peacetime mobilization of civilians in American history, & the most eagerly observed & heavily promoted scientific program until the space launches a decade later. The announcement in 1955 that the vaccine worked became a landmark in 20th century history, one of the few public events that burned itself into the consciousness of the world because the news was good. Based on over 100 hours of interviews & 5 years of research into scientific & historical sources (including Salk's unpublished papers), PATENTING THE SUN is a chronicle of people--of the shifting alliances of scientists, politicians, businessmen, and volunteers who took the campaign against polio from Warm Springs Georgia, to the White House & on to the living rooms & classrooms of America. It tells the stories of Jonas Salk, a promising young scientist who became an overnight international hero, Dr. Albert Sabin, the senior researcher at work on a competing vaccine, and Basil O'Connor, president of the National Foundation for Infantile Paralysis. The result is the suspenseful, supremely readable human drama that lay behind what many saw as the greatest medical triumph of their age, & a richly detailed narrative that communicates the immediacy & spirit of science as no formal account has done since the Double Helix.

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Customer Reviews

Paralytic polio went from epidemic outbreak to near-extinction in 50 years. This medical triumph involved more than the daring of Jonas Salk, who developed a killer-virus vaccine against the advice of his colleagues, and of his rival Albert Sabin, whose oral live-virus vaccine is now widely used. The war on polio is also the story of the March of Dimes, mass field-testing of the vaccine on schoolchildren, accidental deaths, scientists jockeying for prestige and power, and the importation of large numbers of monkeys. A Northwestern University visiting scholar, Smith unconvincingly links FDR's struggle with crippling polio to the nation's turning "to the language of polio" in the 1930s ("Business was 'paralyzed,' the economy was 'crippled' "). Her contention that the 1950s vaccination program drew popular support from the Cold War's "atmosphere of mass vulnerability" seems dubious, as do some of her sociological interpretations. Even so, this exciting, dramatic narrative tells a comprehensive story of the conquest of polio and sheds fresh light on the politics of medicine. Photos. Author tour. Copyright 1990 Reed Business Information, Inc.

One of the finest books on Polio. The author tells a riveting, blow-by-blow, account of how Salk and others defeated this frightening, and deadly disease. I was unaware of how the WWII generation and their parents reacted to the news of a polio-stricken child (or adult), and how much terror was evident during that period. There has been nothing like this since. The March of Dimes and millions of Americans paid for the non-living virus that Salk and others provided to the population (today the March of Dimes is raising money to help Premature Babies live and thrive. Having been born in the worse summer of Polio, 1952, I had to ask my Mother (1932) how people reacted. My cousin got a slight dose of polio which paralyzed one side of his mouth, but I didn't know it was polio until I became a teenager. The work by Smith is far and above every biography around, including the new one just printed in May, on Jonas Salk: a Life, which is rife with sexual scandals, which have nothing to do with the science involved in stopping Polio.

Jonas Salk happened to be the man who as a research scientist made the Polio vaccine a reality. He did not work alone, but was hailed a hero for all his efforts. Jane Smith writes a wonderfully inclusive book about the Polio epidemics which includes great pictures of some of the Poster

Children, FDR who founded the National Foundation for Infantile Paralysis, the Polio Pioneers (1954), and even a picture of Elvis getting his Polio shot. With children dying and being crippled by Polio each summer, there was a great desire to develop a safe and effective vaccine. Dr. Salk was so confident in his vaccine that he vaccinated himself, his wife, and his 3 boys. When the newspaper headlines declared "VICTORY OVER POLIO" it was as if we had won a war. And, we felt as if we had! This good news replaced news of hydrogen bomb tests and Supreme Court hearings on school desegregation for a while. But, in the last chapter of her book Smith reminds us that there are over 300,000 polio survivors in the USA today and many of them are now suffering from new symptoms, the late effects of Polio, commonly called Post Polio Syndrome (PPS). It reminds us that the final chapters on Polio are not yet written...

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