



The Polio Vaccine: A Medical and Personal Frontier

A National History Day Documentary

In November, 2022 we received an email from Rachel – a high school Junior from California. She told us that she was creating a paper and project to be entered for [National History Day](#). This historical investigation, which culminates in a national competition in June, asks students to explore a topic aligned with the 2023 year theme *Frontiers in History: People, Places, and Ideas*. “I chose to investigate how the Polio Vaccine has shaped the modern landscape of public health, including how it has changed polio from one of the world’s most feared diseases to one that could be put under control and prevented.” She was optimistic that we could answer questions that surfaced as she researched the personal stories on our website. What were our experiences like? “How do you feel the polio vaccine has changed your life and the lives of the people around you for the better?”

We have helped students in the past and were especially intrigued by Rachel’s questions and enthusiasm towards learning more – not just about the vaccine but about the reality of this terrible virus. We sent her links to multiple articles re:

- The [Late Effects of Polio](#) (PPS)
- The [Polio Vaccine](#).
- [Historical information](#) and
- encouraged her to research stories of interest about the less known "[Unsung heroes](#)" of the polio vaccine.

We also noted how easily she could find the sources for ALL of our articles.

Prior to our first video conference, we sent her the written stories and videos of the three survivors who would be participating: [Carol Ferguson](#), [Joe Randig](#) and [Shirley Smith](#). We “met” with Rachel and her sister Angel in December and again in January. Both calls found us fascinated by how thorough and interested they were. In mid February, they told us they had submitted their final documentary for judging on March 4. We were humbled by the trust they had in the three of us, to confidentially share their film.

Five days later, we got the news from Rachel: “Angel and I made it to the state competition! Our documentary was one of the three winning documentaries, so we were able to advance to the California National History Day, which will be on April 15-16 in Sacramento! Thank you so much for your help!”

After the State competition, we heard the wonderful news from Rachel - “Angel and I were able to make it to the final round, which was the top 15 documentaries in our state! From there, the top two documentaries were selected to go to the national competition, and although we didn’t make nationals, we still had a great experience in Sacramento.”

Working with these two amazing high school juniors intrigued us from the very beginning. Could it be that today’s students WANT to learn about the poliovirus and the miracle of modern vaccines? When we watched the video and saw the level of detail they went to in their research, we were grateful for the opportunity to support them in their effort.

“What a fantastic job they did. Although now retired, as an educator I am always interested in the education of young people. We know now that the general public needs to be informed on the need for vaccines to prevent or minimize the spread of communicable diseases. Vaccines are developed after much research and testing before they are approved for use in the general public.” Shirley Smith

continued . . .

		2023 San Diego County WINNERS REPORT
Senior Group Documentary		
Champion	The Polio Vaccine: A Medical Frontier	
31107	The Cambridge School Independent Teachers: Cherie Redelings	Students: Angel Rachel

When we saw how their documentary began, we knew these young women were focused on their message. The polio vaccine WAS, without question, a medical and personal frontier.

“Remember them. Remember them all. They can and are being helped. But for them, polio may never be over, and polio is not over for you. It will not be over until the Salk polio vaccine is available to all. Then, and then only, can we begin to see clear skies and an end to all scenes like this.”

-Remember Me, 1955 Polio Outbreak Awareness Film



Image Source: The Polio Vaccine: A Medical and Personal Frontier



Dr. David Bodian



Dr. Isabel Morgan



Dr. Julius Youngner

Image Source: The Polio Vaccine: A Medical and Personal Frontier

So often, when people speak about the polio vaccine, they speak only of Jonas Salk and Albert Sabin. Angel and Rachel could see and clearly understood, that those two amazing men didn't do it alone. They highlighted three of the amazing heroes that had a part in this miraculous discovery.

THE FINAL PRODUCT

Congratulations Angel and Rachel on a job well done. We celebrate your work and appreciate your asking us to be a part of it. We know you understand -

No child should suffer from a vaccine preventable disease. The pain and disability CAN last a lifetime.

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Watch the [documentary](#)