

The Polio Crusade

Program Transcript

Narrator: The summer of 1950 started like most summers in the small town of Wytheville, Virginia. School let out, the town pools opened, and kids flocked to the soda fountain on Main Street. Almost 40 percent of the town's 5,500 residents were under the age of 18.

John Johnson: Wytheville was more or less a lazy type, laid back town. Everyone knew everyone. It got really hot in the summertime. And we would go swimming. We were happy go lucky kids.

Eleanor Sage: I had a pair of my grandfather's rubber boots on and I was wadin' in the creek. And when I went to get out I felt like something pulled in my leg. I went home and hadn't been home too long till I started runnin' a temperature and was real nauseous and just kept goin' higher and higher.

Betty Cook Brown: I was outside playing, I just didn't feel right. By the time I got inside the house to my mother, I told her I was sick. I had a headache. I was so dizzy. And after that, I just passed out.

Anne B. Crockett-Stark: The doctor came to do a spinal tap on my brother, and he screamed. And my mother ran downstairs with a bed pillow, went out in the back yard and covered her head with a pillow, and laid there and screamed.

Eugene Warren: We only had two ambulance services in Wytheville. One would come in to the clinic with a suspected case while the other one would be coming out of the clinic and leaving for either Roanoke or Richmond in, out, in, out, in, out, in, out. Mr. Williams' tote board was right across the street from where I worked and it was always visible, and every

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once in a while we'd go to the front door and look out and then every time another one came in with diagnosis, well, they changed the count.

Anne B. Crockett-Stark: Daddy and Mama took everything Sonny owned, all of his clothes, his bed, his chest of drawers, and he had a fabulous comic book collection. And they took everything out to the middle of the garden, and they just made a pile and burned everything he owned. They were told to do that, so that we would not get it.

Narrator: Polio was hitting Wytheville harder that year than any place in the country.

Eugene Warren: It became more and more evident that we were really in trouble, and without knowing what to do — or how to stop it, or how to get away from it — we were just stuck with it. You-you just couldn't pick up everybody and leave and you couldn't set the whole town on fire. So it was a, it was almost, not hopeless, but it was gettin' pretty close that way.

Narrator: Since the turn of the 20th century polio, also known as infantile paralysis, had become an increasingly menacing fact of American life. Highly contagious, the polio virus tended to strike during the summer.

Samuel L. Katz, scientist: It was very reliable. Come June, July you began to see cases of polio and they continued on through September.

Narrator: The symptoms ranged from a mild headache and nausea, to muscle weakness, paralysis or death.

Kathryn Black, writer: One never knew, how it would go. Would it pass through the body and the person would get up out of bed, few days later, just fine? Would there be one leg damaged? Would both arms?

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Julius Youngner, scientist in Salk's lab: The paralytic effects would last for life. And you didn't have to look very far, to see people who had been crippled with polio, and crippled in terrible ways.

Narrator: In 1921, the disease struck an especially prominent citizen just as his political star was on the rise. Polio usually targeted children, but Franklin Delano Roosevelt was 39. After contracting a sudden fever and chills, he lost the use of both of his legs.

Kathryn Black, writer: FDR was an enormous landmark in the whole history of polio. The fact that he came down with polio changed the course of the disease in this country.

Narrator: Roosevelt worked to restore both his body and his career. He bought a remote Georgia resort whose spring-fed baths were reputed to have healing powers, and turned it into the Georgia Warm Springs Foundation, committed to rehabilitating polio patients from around the country. In 1928 a still paralyzed but vital FDR fought his way back onto the national political stage. To keep the fight against polio alive Roosevelt turned to his law partner, Basil O'Connor – a man who knew little about polio, but a great deal about power and persuasion. “I was never a public do-gooder,” O'Connor declared, “and had no aspirations of that kind.” Short tempered and relentless, he was a working class Irishman who had to dig and fight for everything he had achieved.

David M. Oshinsky, author, Polio: Basil O'Connor has no interest in being the head of the Warm Springs Foundation. But he is so loyal to Franklin Roosevelt, and he really believes the only way to ensure FDR's political career, is to take over this institution that is so close to FDR's heart.

Narrator: With Roosevelt now in the White House, O'Connor worked tirelessly to keep the organization afloat. America was experiencing the worst economic depression in its history,

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and charities' traditional source of funding — donations from the rich — had completely dried up. Worse still, the number of cases of polio continued to rise.

David M. Oshinsky, author, Polio: What made polio so questionable, what made it so hard for people to get a grip on, was that at the very time America was becoming a cleaner, more antiseptic society, the polio rates were going up dramatically.

Narrator: In time, scientists would unlock some of polio's mysteries: they would learn the virus entered the body through the mouth; that it passed from person to person through contaminated water, food or physical contact. They would come to understand that modern sanitation actually helped explain the prevalence of the disease — infants in clean environments were less likely to be exposed to the virus and develop life-long immunity.

Paul A. Offit, scientist: Before improvements in sanitation, all children were born with antibodies against polio. When we had improved sanitation, children started to become exposed to polio later and later in life, at a time when those antibodies they had received from their mother had already disappeared. And that's why you saw an emergence of the disease.

Narrator: In 1938, O'Connor didn't know much about the science of polio. What he did know was that polio patients depended on private charities like his, not the government, for help. Without a new way to raise money, his foundation could offer little more than hope. It was time, he decided, to try something bold.

Eddie Cantor (archival): The only way to fight infantile paralysis is with money. And so I'm asking you tonight to send a dime to President Roosevelt at the White House.

Narrator: Enlisting celebrities to the cause, O'Connor made an unprecedented appeal to the American public.

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Mickey Rooney (archival): Judy when I spend a dime on myself for some little luxury like this, I always think about those unfortunate kids and how far just a dime will go towards helping.

Judy Garland (archival): Gee Mickey, we don't know how lucky we are and how much we have to be thankful for with our health and our happiness....

Narrator: The campaign was dubbed the March of Dimes.

Judy Garland (archival): Can I put a dime in your envelope?

Mickey Rooney (archival): Oh, you know that you can. And that's what every good American should do - join the March of Dimes, send yours to president Franklin Roosevelt in the White House.

Judy Garland (archival): Washington, DC.

Narrator: O'Connor waited anxiously to see if his gamble would pay off. The March of Dimes campaign exceeded all expectations, raising 1.8 million dollars, a staggering sum.

David M. Oshinsky, author, Polio: What O'Connor realized was that this was a fundraising gold mine. This turns the fundraising on its head. You no longer want big donations from the few. You want small donations from the millions. No one is too poor to give a dime to help a kid walk again.

Narrator: O'Connor pledged to provide care for every polio patient in America - to pay for doctors, nurses and the most up to date rehabilitation. He would even invest in scientific research aimed at stopping polio forever.

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David M. Oshinsky, author, Polio: Basil O'Connor was no scientist, but he was a great administrator. He knew how to organize, he knew how to centralize, he knew how to focus.

Narrator: Every summer more and more children were infected with polio. O'Connor understood that he was in a race against time.

Larry Becker: I was very active and outgoing, and grew up in a time and a place when kids had lots of independence and minimal supervision. Just a few inflexible rules, like “be home for dinner.” I was 13. I was just starting to lean out and get kind of fast on the tennis court, and I was pretty happy with the way things were going.

Narrator: Larry Becker grew up in Hastings, Nebraska. He was a boy scout, delivered newspapers and played trumpet in the school band.

Larry Becker: My legs gave out as I was pedaling my ice cream cart home for lunch.

Narrator: Larry became delirious with fever as the polio virus penetrated his central nervous system, infecting and destroying the nerve fibers that controlled his muscles.

Larry Becker: It's like every muscle in your body is extremely sore. It's very sensitive to the touch, and just aches. I lost not only my leg muscles, but I lost also neck muscles and, most importantly, the diaphragm. I began to have trouble breathing, and I remember the last straw for me was when I lost the use of my biceps. I was afraid of not so much of pain, but of loss of control. My parents were in and out of the room. They were being given very bad news. There wasn't much hope that I was going to survive.

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Film narrator (archival): You've never seen me but I'm sure you've seen my shadow. I'm never invited but I've been an invisible guest in practically every kind of home. This is what I've been looking for....

Narrator: To keep up the fundraising momentum, O'Connor shifted tactics.

Film narrator (archival): As you probably know, I'm very fond of children, especially little children. I have no prejudices. I'm quite impartial.

Narrator: The March of Dimes' new message was a frightening one: polio could strike anyone, anytime.

Julius Youngner, scientist in Salk's lab: You went to a movie and there was a little short subject about polio.

Doctor (archival film): Memorial Hospital please, Infantile Paralysis.

Julius Youngner, scientist in Salk's lab: They would pass a cup row by row something to put whatever change you had in it. Polio was brought home every day to families all over the United States.

Newsreel narrator (archival): In New York the March of Dimes campaign is inspired by Basil O'Connor, Jimmy Durante, Larry and Barry Pelliteri... during the past few years the polio epidemic has been on the increase... fight polio tonight with your porch lights at seven.

Narrator: The campaign worked. The March of Dimes grew to 3,000 local chapters, creating a network that reached millions, and raised millions - by the late 1940's as much as 22 million dollars per year. But O'Connor's campaign told only part of the story. While polio could be devastating, the chances of contracting an acute case were quite small; of being paralyzed,

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smaller still... of dying from polio, extremely remote. Many more Americans died from car accidents, or tuberculosis.

David M. Oshinsky, author, Polio: What the March of Dimes did was to turn an awful but relatively uncommon disease into our national disease and our national crusade. Basil O'Connor's feeling was: We've got to raise money for this. The best way you raise money was basically to scare the hell out of the American public.

Kathryn Black, writer: It's hard to imagine today I think how pervasive the fear was, and how embedded in the American psyche.

Narrator: The fear overwhelmed common sense. Every summer, in Wytheville and hundreds of towns across the country, people took extraordinary measures to avoid polio. They even sprayed the pesticide DDT despite the fact scientists had proved flies did not spread the virus.

Eugene Warren: Not knowing which way to turn, what's causing it, people looked for all sorts of places to put the blame. Some of 'em were ludicrous and some of 'em weren't.

Anne B. Crockett-Stark: Daddy said people just rolled up their car windows and put bandanas around their faces and zoomed through our town.

John Johnson: We didn't go on Main Street. We didn't go anywhere near town during the polio epidemic.

Betty Cook Brown: For the longest time, no one would bother to call, come, or get anywhere near our house. They were afraid. They didn't want to catch polio.

Eleanor Sage: They didn't want my mother and daddy to come in some of the stores. They just didn't want 'em around.

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Anne B. Crockett-Stark: People did as little as possible, isolated themselves, and just prayed they wouldn't get it.

Narrator: In 1949, O'Connor took the campaign against polio to a new level. For more than a decade scientists funded by the March of Dimes had focused on developing the only viable solution to stop polio - a vaccine. Now, O'Connor declared, the long-awaited miracle was "in sight." His message raised hopes, and dimes, from an anxious public. But within the scientific community there was a very different reaction: a vaccine, most researchers believed, was still years away - if it worked at all.

Kathryn Black, writer: We lived in this little housing development in Phoenix. It was young families everywhere, and the population was just booming. Couples just like my family - father back from the war, mother had had a career and let it go to have children. I was four years old, my brother was six, my parents were 28. Life was pretty simple, pretty happy. One day my mother came down with a backache. And the doctor examined her, and my father remembers the doctor saying, "I think she has polio, but don't worry. It doesn't look like a serious case, but we have to put her in the contagious ward, where she'll be isolated." And things only got much, much worse from there. She survived that night, but she was paralyzed from the neck down. I have no memory of her going away. She disappeared overnight. We went to bed one night and our mother was in the next room. We woke up the next morning and she was gone.

Narrator: In 1951, two years after his promise of an imminent polio vaccine, O'Connor had little to show. Then, in September, traveling home from a conference in Europe, he met a scientist as driven and impatient as O'Connor himself. Jonas Salk was a 36-year-old researcher at the University of Pittsburgh.

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Julius Youngner, scientist in Salk's lab: He was somebody who had great confidence in himself. "Ambitious" is too mild a word. He was super-ambitious.

John Troan, journalist: He was very aggressive on what he was doing. When I first met him, he looked very intense and he remained that way. I mean, never changed. Real intensive personality.

Narrator: O'Connor and Salk hit it off right away.

Peter Salk: Their personalities just meshed. Both shared big dreams, they shared big goals, and they saw in each other someone who was complementary

Narrator: Salk's big goals included plans for an unorthodox polio vaccine. Up until now, leading edge polio researchers had focused on making a vaccine from a live virus, like the vaccines for yellow fever and smallpox – a complex and time consuming process.

Julius Youngner, scientist in Salk's lab: Live virus vaccines were the gold standard of virus vaccine. The whole scientific community of experts said that the only vaccine that would work for polio would be a live vaccine.

Narrator: Jonas Salk disagreed. His experience developing a flu vaccine told him that a killed virus vaccine was both possible, and faster to produce.

David M. Oshinsky, author, Polio: Salk had been trained to believe with influenza and other viruses that if you took the virus and you killed it and injected it into someone's arm, you could, trick the body's immune system into believing that an invader had come, and the body would produce strong and lasting antibody protection.

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Narrator: Proponents of the live virus vaccine dismissed Salk's ideas as ill-conceived scientific heresy. Most notably, Albert Sabin.

Samuel L. Katz, scientist: Dr. Sabin had already established a reputation as a sound and imaginative innovative investigator. He was a little bit bombastic. He was a little bit intolerant of other people's ideas. He was always convinced that his own were correct and most of the time he was right.

David M. Oshinsky, author, Polio: Albert Sabin had been working for a number of years on his live-virus vaccine. Sabin believed that his vaccine was the perfect polio vaccine. He also knew that it would take longer to develop, and the constant conflict he had with Basil O'Connor was over time. "I need the time to perfect my vaccine." Basil O'Connor wanted everything done now. Albert Sabin simply believed that science went by its own clock. And that the March of Dimes should wait until his vaccine was ready.

Narrator: Salk was a mere "kitchen chemist," Sabin would say, whose hasty work posed a lurking danger to human health. But Basil O'Connor didn't listen. Salk's lab would become a leading recipient of March of Dimes support.

David M. Oshinsky, author, Polio: What made Basil O'Connor so strong about Jonas Salk, was that O'Connor finally believed he had met a scientist who understood that kids were dying every day, and that speed was important.

Julius Youngner, scientist in Salk's lab: Jonas was swimming against the current. He was a young whippersnapper who came out of nowhere, and suddenly is taking on this responsibility, and not only that, but getting the support of Basil O'Connor, because Jonas convinced Basil O'Connor that we were going to do it.

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Narrator: At his lab at the University of Pittsburgh, Salk's race to find a polio vaccine took off.

Samuel L. Katz, scientist: Dr. Salk's laboratory was like a factory in that he had a large number of people. They were all doing what he dictated they do. In contrast, many laboratories were more interested in expanding scientific perspective and not necessarily as goal driven.

Narrator: The pressure he put on his staff was unrelenting. "Salk thought big," one colleague observed. "He wanted to leap, not crawl."

Julius Youngner, scientist in Salk's lab: This was a heavily, heavily financed, expensive project. We used thousands of monkeys. We had resources beyond, those that, any of the other researchers had.

David M. Oshinsky, author, Polio: He almost immediately could see that his killed-virus vaccine, at least in animals, was very, very successful. His tests with monkeys were extraordinary. They had high antibody levels. None of them seemed to get polio. He knew he was on the track of something very important.

Narrator: With the success of his trials on monkeys, Salk pressed for the next necessary, but risky step — to test his vaccine in humans. O'Connor eagerly agreed. But Sabin issued a warning: Salk was moving too quickly; his plan posed a serious threat to innocent lives. O'Connor ignored Sabin's objections. Salk's human trials would proceed as planned. On July 2, 1952 assisted by the staff at the D.T. Watson Home for Crippled Children Jonas Salk injected 43 children with his killed virus vaccine.

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Samuel L. Katz, scientist: The idea of going into institutions where there were children who were damaged by various diseases and using or exploiting them as subjects for these studies was not regarded in the same way it is today.

David M. Oshinsky, author, Polio: There was no real sense of what we would call informed consent. If you wanted to test, as Jonas Salk did, you went to the director of an orphanage, or what was called a home for the feeble minded, and you tested.

Narrator: A few weeks after the Watson tests, Salk injected children at the Polk State School for the retarded and feeble minded. Then he administered the vaccine to his family and received a shot himself. No one got polio. Blood tests showed that, like his lab monkeys, his human subjects had elevated levels of polio fighting antibodies. A vaccine, Salk believed, was within reach. 1952 saw the outbreak of America's worst polio epidemic. More and more older children and adults were contracting the disease. The older you were, the greater the risk of paralysis or death. Hospital wards were crowded with machines that helped paralyzed patients breathe. They were called iron lungs.

Larry Becker: My father came in to explain to me that they wanted to put me in the iron lung and simultaneously one was moved into my room. It's a huge piece of equipment, and looked scary, and I didn't know what it meant. Your head is disconnected from your body. You can't see your body. And in my case, I couldn't move anything at first. And I was very uncomfortable because of the pain in my muscles. You have to get used to the fact that you don't control your respiration rate. And when you're first put in, at least it was the case for me, since I was struggling so much to breathe, I just relaxed right into it.

Kathryn Black, writer: The development of the iron lung was a great scientific advancement in medical care. It saved plenty of lives. It certainly saved my mother's life, but it also was its own terrible existence. My mother was flat on her back, being breathed by a machine, tended by people through little portholes on the side of the machine, seeing nothing of the world

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except what she could see through a mirror above her face. What happens to your mind, day after day, night after night?

Narrator: For most the iron lung was a temporary measure to help them survive during the most acute phase of the disease. For others, it was permanent.

Woman in iron lung (archival): Hello there. This is a wonderful day for me. Five minutes out of my iron lung. Five minutes out of my little prison. My kind and friendly prison.

Larry Becker: The first time I got out of the iron lung I saw the doctor cry because of the difficulties I was having on the bed. That was a shock, and that soon turned into a kind of a self-disgust, I think, or shame which I didn't articulate, but I just wanted to hide. I was 13 years old. I thought I was immortal. I don't ever remember being afraid that I would die. I was afraid I wouldn't get better.

Narrator: Surveys showed that, apart from the atomic bomb, Americans' greatest fear was polio.

Kathryn Black, writer: People had put up with polio for a really long time, and they wanted it over. They wanted it done with. The American public wanted that vaccine.

Narrator: On November 16, 1953 Basil O'Connor made a stunning announcement; The March of Dimes would finance, plan and coordinate an unprecedented human experiment, testing Salk's vaccine on hundreds of thousands of school children. Reaction from within the scientific community was scathing. Injecting Salk's vaccine, Albert Sabin warned, might cause polio, not prevent it.

John Troan, journalist: Sabin was very aggressive. And he could be very abrasive. He was trying everything to postpone the field trial, to downgrade the Salk vaccine. He said, "This

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vaccine isn't ready to be tested. We should wait five more years. We should wait 10 more years."

Narrator: O'Connor refused to wait. With another polio season looming, he would let nothing stop the trials. "This is one of the most important projects in medical history," he wrote to parents across the country. "We feel sure you'll want your child to take part."

Kathryn Black, writer: As a parent today, it's unimaginable that I would be one of those people pushing my child to the front of the line, saying, you know, "Put the polio vaccine in my child first, and let's see if it works."

David M. Oshinsky, author, Polio: You are asking the parents of American to line up their kids for a vaccine that no one is sure how well it works, and no one is certain that it is perfectly safe. It has really not been tested that much on humans. This is an enormous leap of faith.

Narrator: On April 26th, 1954, The March of Dimes began field trials. Randy Kerr, a six-year-old in McLean, Virginia was the first to receive Salk's vaccine. By June nearly two million children had taken part. It was the largest human experiment in American history. Parents would have to wait for nearly a year to learn the results. On the morning of April 12th, 1955, the March of Dimes made their announcement.

John Troan, journalist: There was a build-up to the report on the field trial. Everybody was interested. Everybody was waiting, waiting, waiting. Does it work? Does it work?

Kathryn Black, writer: There was no bigger story at that time. It was held in secrecy like no state secret ever could be. This news was awaited around the world.

Narrator: A press release would reveal the findings everyone was waiting for.

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John Troan, journalist: They were going to bring it up on an elevator. The press room was over crowded. We were elbow to elbow. The public relations man steps off the elevator with the dolly, and he can't move into the press room. Everybody ganging around him, guys were jumping over desks. The fellow climbed up on the dolly and he began flinging these things out left and right. It was bedlam.

Announcer (archival): CBS News presents a Special Report.

Winston Burdett (archival): The Salk polio vaccine is a success. The vaccine works.

Narrator: Factory whistles blew, school children cheered, parents wept.

John Troan, journalist: Everybody was so happy. It was the most satisfying story I would cover in 44 years in journalism.

Peter Salk: The relief that was brought about by all of a sudden having something that could be done to stop this, it was- I think that was just overwhelming.

Paul A. Offit, scientist: Jonas Salk was viewed as an American hero. This awful disease had now been conquered by this man who we had funded, this scientist who was us.

David M. Oshinsky, author, Polio: This vaccine vindicated 20 years of giving dimes, 20 years of volunteering. It was a victory for millions of faceless people who had done what they could to end the scourge of polio.

Narrator: Five years before the disease had raged through Wytheville. Now, the community, like thousands of others across the country, would finally receive the vaccine.

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Anne B. Crockett-Stark: I remember hearing about Dr. Salk, Dr. Salk, and how exciting it was. That man saved the world from polio.

Narrator: Less than a month after vaccinations began, the nation's triumphant polio crusade was brought to a screeching halt.

Leonard Scheele (archival): As surgeon general of the public health service, I recommended the day before yesterday that vaccination programs against poliomyelitis be temporarily postponed....

Narrator: Thousands of children vaccinated with the new Salk vaccine had become sick. Hundreds would be permanently paralyzed. A handful would even die.

David M. Oshinsky, author, Polio: We have gone from this amazing situation of euphoria, a disease on the run, to the vaccine itself producing additional cases of polio. All polio vaccine is taken off the market until the government can pinpoint exactly what has gone wrong.

Narrator: Investigators soon learned that all the sick children had been injected with a bad batch of vaccine, made in Berkeley, California. After a hasty and poorly staffed government screening process the vaccine had been deemed safe. In fact it had contained virulent live polio virus. Cutter Laboratories wasn't alone — all the pharmaceutical companies were having difficulties mass-producing Salk's formula. One scientist especially, felt vindicated — Albert Sabin.

David M. Oshinsky, author, Polio: Sabin had always been of the mind that not only was the Salk vaccine not effective but potentially was unsafe. After Cutter, Albert Sabin simply went around to anyone who would ask — and many people did — saying, "I told you so."

Narrator: Despite the crisis, O'Connor's confidence in Salk's vaccine never faltered.

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Reporter (archival): What do you see for its future?

Basil O'Connor (archival): Well I can only say to you that I see that its future is still a good sound, safe vaccine, that will protect the people....

Paul A. Offit, scientist: The Salk vaccine was licensed at a time when we basically didn't have vaccine regulation in this country. The government learned that having 10 people oversee vaccines, and frankly doing it on a part-time basis, was not good enough. The Cutter incident was a painful lesson about the fact that we needed much better oversight.

Narrator: In the wake of the tragedy, manufacturing standards would be tightened, and government regulation increased. But, only eight days after the surgeon general announced a halt, the nation's polio vaccination program resumed. Americans continued to vaccinate their children. They had waited years for the polio vaccine. They were not about to wait any longer. The nation's polio vaccination program, lead by the March of Dimes – now supported by the United States Government – proved safe and overwhelmingly effective. Within just a few seasons the number of polio cases in the United States decreased by 50 percent. Memories of summers filled with fear began to fade. By 1962 Albert Sabin's live virus vaccine was finally ready. An oral vaccine, it was easier to administer and cheaper to produce than Salk's. The years to come would see the scientific efforts of both Salk and Sabin pay off dramatically. Polio, once one of America's most feared diseases, became largely a thing of the past.

Kathryn Black, writer: Nobody cared about polio anymore. It was over. My mother, coming home from the rehab center, it is not the story of triumph and conquering. It is the story of defeat. After a year of treatment, it didn't fix her. It didn't fix our family. Our family had disintegrated around her.

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Narrator: When Kathryn Black was six years old, her mother died. Larry Becker spent two and a half years in the hospital. He learned to breathe on his own by using the muscles in his neck. His arms remained paralyzed but after slowly regaining the use of his legs, he was finally ready to move home.

Larry Becker: There were three steps up to the house, and then my bedroom would be upstairs. This is the 50's, if your bedroom was going to be upstairs, then you had to learn to climb the steps. When I graduated from college and when I got my Ph.D., local newspapers published a picture of me writing with my feet, I don't know what the headline is exactly. I always think of it as Polio Boy Makes Good, you know that kind of... and I thought, "Whoa, this is going to follow me for the rest of my life." So... but you know. Here I am whining. It's not—It's no big deal.

Narrator: In 1994, 44 years after the epidemic hit Wytheville, Virginia and nearly 60 years after Basil O'Connor first called upon Americans to send their dimes to the White House, polio was declared eradicated in the United States.

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