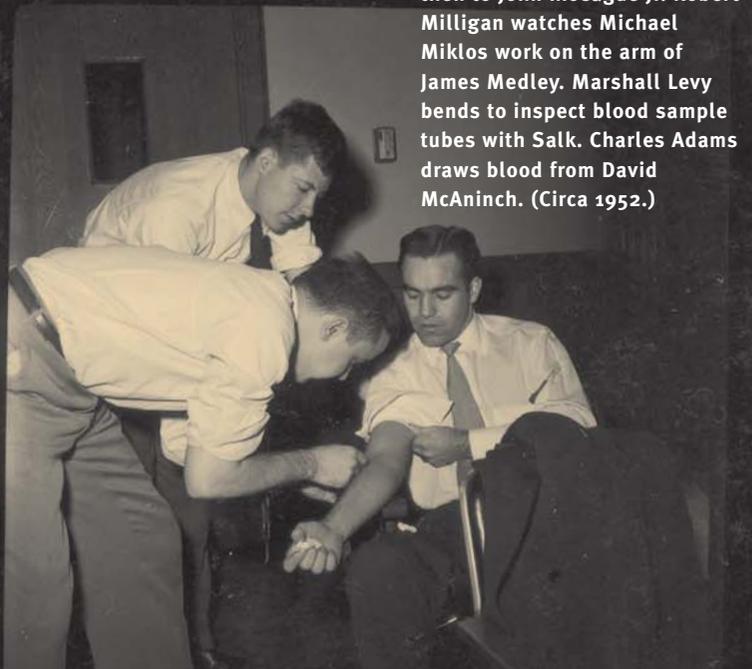




In addition to many community members who were "polio pioneers," the Class of '53 took part in tests of the vaccine. Clockwise from top: Jonas Salk draws blood from Marie Adele Reagan. Melvin Cohen applies the needle to Henry Mankin, then to John McCague Jr. Robert Milligan watches Michael Miklos work on the arm of James Medley. Marshall Levy bends to inspect blood sample tubes with Salk. Charles Adams draws blood from David McAninch. (Circa 1952.)



THIS PAGE: MERVIN STEWART (MD '53); PAGE 33 LETTER: EDWARD J. SMITH

KODAK SAFETY FILM

KODAK SAFETY FILM

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AMONG MY SOUVENIRS

A POLIO SCRAPBOOK | BY ELAINE VITONE

As the heat set in, parents told their children to avoid crowds in the summer of 1954. No trips to Kennywood. No afternoons at the pool. *Wash the fruit good*, they said. *It's polio season.*

Newscasts and March of Dimes telethons brought images of children with crutches, canes, braces, or wheelchairs or encased from the neck down in monstrous, negative-pressure ventilators known as iron lungs.

When letters and permission slips from Jonas Salk arrived in the mail during the school year, parents worried; they argued at the dinner table. This new vaccine, this clinical trial, was it safe enough for *their* children? The Sunday before the testing began, nationally syndicated gossip columnist Walter Winchell reported that the Salk

vaccine might actually kill them, and fear tightened its grip. Perhaps it was the thought of another generation in this stranglehold that convinced parents to sign those permission slips.

As part of this year's 50th-anniversary celebration of the Salk vaccine developed at the University of Pittsburgh, Pitt invited those who had participated in the clinical trials or wrestled with the disease firsthand to share their memories. Hundreds responded. Soon to become part of the University's archives, their accounts tell the story of how ordinary people helped win the struggle against one of the most crippling diseases in history.

Even today, if I were to hear the gentle swishing of the ventilators, I would recognize the sound immediately.

— Diana Ney, Pittsburgh

In 1946, Diana Ney started her first job out of school as a nurse at Municipal Hospital in Oakland. She worked to the mechanized rhythms of ventilators in the otherwise quiet of night. She could hear them all the way down at the nurses' station.

Nurses at Municipal were required to wear short sleeves, short hair, and short, unpolished nails. In this place where Ney's lifetime devotion to cleanliness began, she was unnerved to see the occasional mouse near the autopsy room, which Salk's team used as an animal lab. Tiny, white-furred mounds scooted along the halls dragging paralyzed hind limbs behind.

Ney learned to handle polio patients by their joints, mindful of the tender muscle bellies, and to watch patients closely through their acute phases, knowing the quicker the progression of symptoms, the bleaker the prognosis. Patients arrived with fevers and stiff necks, their hamstring muscles tightening as the disease began to take its toll. Children cried for their families, and young adults who'd been in their prime just months before struggled for the strength to clench their fists in frustration. Some patients depended on the staff for everything, right down to scratching their noses. Ney and her team brought the outside world to those confined to the hospital walls, reading newspapers and playing *Oklahoma!* and *South Pacific* records to pass the time.

Some patients are as vivid to her now as they were 50 years ago: Patients like the schoolteacher who used to summon Ney down the hall over and over through the night shift—a ploy to keep herself awake. The teacher feared that she would stop breathing if she fell asleep in bed. She'd only let herself sleep in the iron lung. And patients like the G.I. who survived a war only to fall as a casualty of polio. That soldier's favorite record still turns in Ney's mind:

My encounter with Dr. Jonas Salk occurred while I was a student at Colfax Elementary School, in the Squirrel Hill neighborhood of the City of Pittsburgh. While in the third or fourth grade, I was dispatched along with my classmates to the basement of the school where

"There's nothing left for me of days that used to be. I live in memory among my souvenirs."

They took my little brother away somewhere, and I didn't know why.

—John Brown
Harrington Park, N.J.

John Brown was 6 years old when the red-and-white quarantine sign was nailed to his front door in the summer of 1952. He still remembers crying on the front lawn of their Penn Hills home as his parents took 1-year-old brother Jimmy to Municipal. Two weeks later they took John, too, but at first, the boys were not allowed to see each other. For months, they couldn't see their parents, either, as clergy were the only visitors permitted in the wards. In a room full of other sick children, John felt alone.

Today, if you mention Mrs. Moore—the sweet lady who snuck in popsicles for the children, called them her precious babies, and told them that their parents loved them all very much—John Brown's voice trembles. "She is still the nearest thing to an angel I'll ever know," he says.

One day, people dressed in white put John in a bathtub full of water so hot that it hurt. When they dried him off, they dressed him in flannel pajamas to move him to a new room. They wheeled John's bed down the hall and parked him next his brother. "Bubba,

Bubba," Jimmy said, over and over, and the two stretched their arms out toward each other, reaching, reaching, reaching. Even now, the feel of flannel is still a warm, visceral comfort to John.

Summer passed, fall came, and the boys remained together in that room. Through the window they could see the massive wall of Pitt Stadium outside. On game days, they heard the bands play and could even see the blue-and-gold uniformed football players pass on the sidewalk below. Years later, they learned that their father stood on that same sidewalk for hours looking up at their room. With Dad on the street below, John in his bed, and Jimmy in his crib, they were a family again.

I thought it was part of elementary school. I remember telling my friends that I liked school "except when they took blood from me."

—Evelyn Levine, Pittsburgh

In designated schools across the nation, children lined up in alphabetical order, rolled up their sleeves, and waited. It was hardest on the kids at the end of the alphabet; fears mounted as they watched Salk's team administer vaccines and draw blood at the front of the line. The needles, sterilized in flames and used again and again, became dull and weak, sometimes breaking in the children's arms. Crying was contagious. Some trial participants still

wince at the smell of rubbing alcohol.

A man on the television announced that the vaccine worked. Mom came over, held me tight, and wept. The battle had been won. That we had taken part made the victory that much sweeter.

—Mike Silverstein
Washington, D.C.

The April 12, 1955 announcement of the Salk vaccine's success ended polio's reign of terror in the United States. In the years that followed, the iron lung faded from public attention. The primary manufacturer of the machines ceased production in 1970, and last year, the company that maintained the few remaining iron lungs in the United States announced that it would no longer provide spare parts for repairs. Once so precious in medical wards that patients were triaged for their use, iron lungs now number fewer than 40 across the country. Iron-lung users have been forced to transition to positive-pressure ventilators, which some find far less comfortable. Others have stayed with the old standby because of emotional attachment. Perhaps after 50 years with one machine, it would be difficult to fall asleep with another and learn to trust that you won't stop breathing. ■

BEING A POLIO PIONEER

My name is Linda Emanuel, and I am a polio pioneer.

In 1955, I was 9 years old, and in third grade at St. Joseph's School in Sharon, Pa. I remember the day we became a polio pioneer.

I always remember. I even remember wearing a black one with pink trim and I loved it and wore it.

We were always put in the back of the school hall to the cafeteria when we had to go.

In 1954 before I made a girlfriend of mine that I had to push her up to the commode. When we were told about becoming a polio pioneer that I never wanted to wear a wheelchair.

When we got to the cafeteria I was terrified of a needle. He put me in a chair. A nurse came over and put a nurse cap and tried to comfort me. When the doctor approached him, I could see the doctor stuck the needle in my arm. I was scared to death as I did not like pain. In my yearbook I had a Pioneer pin and I knew I would

*My recollection of Polio Shots:
I was attending St. Bernard's School in Mt. Lebanon. I think it was 1953 when the Polio study started. I remember the long lines waiting to get shots. We also had the booster and bloodwork. I was petrified everytime we had to line up. I used to cry & pass out the minute I saw that big old scary needle. I used to ask why they didn't give me shot or do bloodwork when I was passed out. They just said they couldn't do shots then.*

For some reason or other, I was always sick when I was young. For years my one leg would give me trouble a couple of times a