

From: [David Kraemer](#)
To: [Covid Affiliate Archives](#)
Subject: FW: One Person's Response to Communal Fear 5.11.20
Date: Wednesday, July 15, 2020 9:46:33 AM

From: Morris Allen <mojo210al@icloud.com>
Sent: Monday, May 11, 2020 9:27 AM
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Subject: One Person's Response to Communal Fear 5.11.20

WAGON WHEEL CENSUS 6 cars 3 Trucks 2 Runners 2 ISD#197 School Busses #1916 and #1914 and three Wild Turkeys

When I think of rivalries—my mind immediately goes to Yankees-Red Sox, Celtics-Lakers, Nebraska-Oklahoma, Palmer-Nicklaus. But those rivalries were nothing compared to the rivalry between the Albert Sabin and Jonas Salk. In the race to find a vaccine against Polio, these two giants of science and research would not even be found exchanging formal pleasantries if they happen to pass one another at a conference. So strong was their rivalry, that it is often cited as the reason that neither won a Nobel Prize—you couldn't award one without the other and you couldn't award both together.

I spent the summer of 1962, together with my sister, in Omaha, Nebraska. We stayed with our baubie and spent it playing with our cousins a few blocks away at their new home on Western Avenue. One morning, my aunt took all of us to Western Hills elementary school to line up to receive the Sabin oral vaccine against polio. I think it was a second or third dose that we still had to get, and the excitement of its release was such that photographers from the World-Herald were there to capture it on film. I seem to remember that my cousins, Marl and Ron (formerly known as Ronnie) and I were in the paper the following day swallowing the vaccine from the little cup. In the fight against polio, we were all doing our part in a massive public health project to protect and eliminate the scourge of polio from our midst. In truth, the Sabin Oral vaccine and the Salk injected vaccines each looked at the world quite differently. The science behind the two is itself fascinating and engaging—and well-beyond my understanding in its intricacies. However, it was in layperson's terms—the difference between the use of a live vaccine and a dead vaccine. Sabin worked on the former and Salk on the latter. If there was ever a good reason for a rivalry, this was it. Salk, in the mid-1950's was able to demonstrate that his killed vaccine could protect one against polio. It would be half a decade later until tests showed that Sabin's live vaccine might be more effective in the long-term and easier to administer. Even children that had previously received the Salk vaccine were told that the Sabin vaccine was now necessary. Over time, I believe that the Sabin vaccine became the vaccine of choice in developing countries and the Salk vaccine in more developed countries with greater access to individual physicians. (I could be overstating this fact and I should have asked the pediatrician with over 35 years of experience which if that was true—but she left before I returned from my walk. So, a potential incorrect statement above).

I can only imagine the sense of pride in the Jewish consciousness in those years. Still living in the

shadow of the Shoa, the unspeakable destruction of European Jewry fueled by hate and genocidal fervor, here were two Jewish scientists working feverishly to save the world from a horrible disease. And on top of that, the early years of the emerging state of Israel must have added a sense that not only was Hitler defeated on the battlefield, but his ideology was defeated forever. Two Jewish immigrants (one was the son of immigrants, the other an immigrant himself) defeating disease, and a restored Jewish state must have created a sense of real hope and optimism for a world that only too recently had been dark and hateful. That moment of respite from hate and anti-Semitism was only too short and probably illusory at best. What wasn't illusory was the robust commitment of a country to support public health initiatives that would benefit not only our country but the world over. If it wasn't really the heyday of Jewish optimism and that was only a figment of how I would have imagined it, it was truly the heyday of the Public Health moment in American life. Fighting disease was a cause for the common good, eradicating it from our midst was seen as a responsibility to share with the world. And it emanated from the experiences of an American leader.

Polio's most famous victim—or at least the one who could use his fame to address it—was FDR. In the mid-1930's, he proclaimed a desire to eradicate the disease and committed funds towards it. He made work on the common good a cause for the American people to embrace. Clearly, he had his own reasons to do so. Paralyzed as a result of the disease, he knew first-hand how it spared no one regardless of standing or class. Indeed, and here I am pretty sure that this is true, Salk announced his findings regarding his vaccine on the 10th or 11th anniversary of FDR's death. How different our world has become? This past weekend I read a fascinating article in the Review section of the WSJ on the difference between “precision medicine” and “one-size-fits all” health planning. It is the difference between focus on the individual and understanding their particular genetic make-up and developing their treatment as a result and the importance of promoting public health approaches that address health concerns that impact all of us. One needn't check NIH funding to discover that there is much more interest in the former these days than the latter. This ignoring of public health concerns can be seen in many ways during this current pandemic. Absent an FDR in the White House encouraging our best scientific minds forward with funding and moral encouragement, we witnessed a “public service message” about ingesting disinfectant. It is not accidental, that a person with little or no concern for the public good will dismiss the importance of public health by fiendishly trivializing their work. If we have learned anything from this pandemic, it is that we owe it to the world to create a new rivalry—one which probably the daughters of immigrants or immigrants themselves are engaged in laboratories right now in discovering. Fighting for the common good might not be as glamorous as the development of a niche drug that cures a person with a particular genetic code—but at the end of the day it might allow us to save many more who would otherwise die. Rallying for a renewed commitment to public health and public health initiatives seems to me to be an important issue in the unfolding political campaign this year. Morris

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