

## Volunteer Book Review

### Book Review: **The Splendid Solution, Jonas Salk and the Conquest of Polio**

*About the book:* Written by Jeffrey Kluger, co-author of **Apollo 13**.

373 pages, includes photographs, source notes and index. Copyright 2004.

*Synopsis:* The book is the story of the path to a vaccine for polio starting with the tragic outbreak of 1916 when Jonas Salk was 2 years old. Salk was living in New York City, hit very hard by polio that summer with 9,300 children contracting the disease and 3,500 deaths.

*Why did I want to read this book?* I remember polio outbreaks during the summer months as a child in the 1950s. As a nurse, I have cared for adults who had post-polio paralysis and heard their stories. Although I believe I know a lot about polio, I am always interested to learn more from another view point. As a docent at the Public Health Museum one can never know enough about any of the exhibits we talk about.

*What did you like about this book?* The author speaks about science, particularly virology, in simple language, rendering it easily understood by readers from all walks of life. He delves into the personalities of the people involved and how that shaped what happened, particularly in 1950s America, bringing the era to life. For example, readers learn about Dr. Salk's early life and education, how he came to be a virologist and how it affected his family as told to the author by his son.

*What did you learn from this book?* I was curious about the role antisemitism may have played in the development of the vaccine and the author did address this, though not a major issue. I believe I have a better understanding of how difficult it is to research and make vaccines. I learned that Dr. Salk developed the first influenza vaccine used during WWII at the request of the US Army.

*Would you recommend this book?* I enjoyed this book. I am going to keep it in my library so that I can read it again and use it as a reference. This book would be of interest to scientists, historians, those that practice medicine, public health workers; anyone who wants to learn about polio or virology.

*What is the best take away for you from this book?* The incredible power of people to change the world. It gave me hope during these terrible times. I am referring not only to Dr. Salk and his team, but to the National Foundation for Infantile Paralysis that knew the time was right and provided the opportunity and money for the project, and all the donors, rich and poor that made it a success.

### About the Reviewer

Mary Ferguson, RN, and museum volunteer, lives in Hollis, NH with her spouse, a cat and a dog. In addition to a nursing diploma, she earned a Bachelor of Science degree from the University of New Hampshire in 1990. Mary worked at Lowell General Hospital for 18 years as a nurse case manager, retiring in 2015. Some of her other passions are hiking, sewing face masks, reading and visiting with my grandchildren on Zoom. She also loves music and is studying the ukulele.

*\*The opinions expressed in volunteer book reviews are that of the reviewer. The appearance of this review in the Public Health Museum newsletter in no way reflects an endorsement of the book nor the opinion.*

