

CHASING INFLUENCE

PURPOSE: A CURE FOR EVERYONE

"Day after day, ordinary people become heroes through extraordinary and selfless actions to help their neighbors."

-Sylvia Mathews Burwell

In the 1940s and 1950s, polio was a disease that struck fear into the hearts of Americans. It was second only to nuclear war in terms of fear. In 1952, there were nearly 60,000 reported polio cases in the United States alone, resulting in over 3,000 deaths and 21,000 cases of paralysis. Even President Franklin D. Roosevelt fell victim to the disease, suffering from paralysis in his legs. At its peak, polio paralyzed or killed over half a million people world wide each year. The fear and devastation caused by polio prompted a massive effort to find a cure. The March of Dimes was founded to fund research into a polio vaccine, and people worked tirelessly to find a solution. Finally, in 1955, a breakthrough was made when Jonas Salk developed the first effective polio vaccine. Author Jane Smith explained, "People worked on the polio vaccine like it was the Normandy invasion." Salk became a household name and one of the most heralded scientists of the time. He could have patented the vaccine and made a fortune, but he believed that the vaccine should belong to the people. He recognized that the greater good was more important than personal gain. On April 12, 1955, the day Salk's vaccine was declared "safe, effective, and potent," legendary CBS newsman Edward R. Morrow interviewed Salk and asked who owned the patent. "Well, the people, I would say," said Salk. The March of Dimes raised millions of dollars to fund the vaccine's research and field testing - Salk believed the human race should own the patent. "There is no patent. Could you patent the sun?" Salk asked. Salk's selflessness made him a hero, and his legacy lives on today. Salk's example shows us the importance of recognizing our purpose in life and using our skills and abilities to benefit others. We must ask ourselves, What is my job on the planet? What is it that needs doing, that I know something about, that probably won't happen unless I take responsibility for it? Whether big or small, what impact will our life have on the lives of others? Focusing on our character, values, and purpose can positively impact the world and leave a lasting social footprint.

Connecting this quote to the story

The quote reminds us that while we may not be able to change the entire world, we can make a difference in the lives of those around us. Salk's contribution to society was indeed monumental, however, to those directly impacted by his work, he was their hero. Even small acts of kindness and compassion can significantly impact the lives of those we encounter!

Reflection Questions

1. What role do values play in shaping our actions and decisions? How can we ensure that our values align with our goals and aspirations?

2. How can we balance personal gain with the greater good in our own lives? What are some examples of individuals who have successfully balanced these priorities?

3. In what ways does this story highlight the importance of purpose and social responsibility? How can we find our own purpose and contribute to the greater good?

4. Muhammad Ali once said, "Service to others is the rent you pay for your room here on earth." What great examples of service, selflessness, and care for the greater good can you think of - in sports, school, or society in general?