

Iowa Polio Stories Oral History Project Instructions for Volunteers

About Our Oral History Project

Volunteers are needed to collect oral histories and transcribe interviews for the Iowa Polio Stories Oral History Project. The goal of this project is to document the history of polio in Iowa and collect memories of how polio affected the lives of people across Iowa. In order to preserve this history, we are collecting the voices polio survivors, the medical/scientific community, and others impacted by the frightening and deadly virus. By collecting the oral histories of these groups, we aim to reconstruct the historical moments when polio touched the lives of nearly all Americans. The collection will be housed at the State Historical Society of Iowa in Iowa City. The Iowa Polio Stories will be made available to the public for scholarly and educational purposes.

The Iowa Polio Stories Oral History Project, funded by the State Library and the Roy J. Carver Charitable Trust, is administered through the Iowa Center for the Book. The Oral History Project compliments one of the most widely known efforts of the Iowa Center for the Book. The All Iowa Reads program is a "one community, one book" initiative with a statewide focus. In 2007, the fifth year for this program, the title is *Splendid Solution: Jonas Salk and the Conquest of Polio* by Jeffrey Kluger. This book tells the story of the polio epidemic and the development of the polio vaccine.

Some Practical Tips

Collecting oral history is a rewarding volunteer opportunity. This collection will serve as an valuable primary resource for scholars, journalists, educators, and historians. All you need is time, paperwork, basic recording equipment, and the ability to listen. Oral histories are most effective in a one-on-one situation. If possible, do not conduct an interview in the presence of an audience. Here are some other practical tips to help you get started:

Before the Interview

- Make an effort to build trust and establish rapport with your subject. Learn as much about the person as you can in order to better prepare your interview questions. See also "Sample Interview Questions" for guidance on building your set of interview questions.
- Label the tape before you begin. Name – Date – Location – Interviewer. When the interview concludes, indicate the "run time" of the interview on the label.
- Give the subject time to review and sign oral history release form before you begin. Complete biographical data form.
- Test your recording equipment and microphone before you begin the interview. Make sure you are comfortable with your equipment. Double check your power source. Do not use batteries. Use a power cord.
- Record an introduction on the cassette. Introduce yourself. Announce the date and location of the interview.

During the Interview

- Be a patient, courteous, and active listener. Use encouraging non-verbal gestures such as eye contact, smiles, nodding.
- Do not ask simple "yes" or "no" questions. Rather, probe for descriptions or sensory experiences through sound, sight, and smell. Ask "What do you remember about the iron lung?" For example, "Please describe the sound of the iron lung."
- Take notes or keep an interview log.

- Listen with intention and patience. Do not interrupt a good story. Ask follow up questions.
- The length of the interview depends upon your subject. Generally, interviews last approximately 45 minutes. If your interview lasts more than 60 minutes your subject may get fatigued. In this case, reschedule a follow-up interview.

After the Interview

- Summarize your notes or organize your interview log.
- Discuss photographs, scrapbooks, and news-clippings. Inquire about donations to the Iowa Polio Stories Collection. Encourage your subject to consider donating their materials to this collection.
- Please ask your subject if he or she can recommend other oral history candidates for this project. What we don't record, we will lose.
- Write a thank you note.
- Please encourage your subject to visit and add their stories to our website:
<http://www.iowapoliostories.org>
- Keep recordings out of extreme temperatures.

Submitting Your Oral History Interview

We accept oral history donations in all media formats. Interviews must include an oral history release and a biographical data form. Please contact Kate Scott, Project Manager, to acquire the paperwork and equipment lending information at 571-243-5475. Mail or deliver the original recording and signed paperwork to the State Library of Iowa. Interviews may be submitted to:

Iowa Polio Stories Oral History Project
Iowa Center for the Book
The State Library of Iowa
1112 East Grand Avenue
Des Moines, Iowa 50319

Additional Resources

Kehret, Peg. *Small Steps: The Year I Got Polio*. Morton Grove, IL: Albert Whitman and Company, 1996.

Kluger, Jeffrey. *Splendid Solution: Jonas Salk and the Conquest of Polio*. New York: Berkley Books, 2005.

Ritchie, Donald A. *Doing Oral History: A Practical Guide*. New York: Oxford University Press, 2003.