When a polio epidemic struck Boston in 1916, at the age of 16, Dr. Samuel Katz was a student in Dartmouth College. He had never previously considered medicine. "That was my introduction to medicine," Katz says. "It opened up a whole new world for me."

"That sounded interesting, so they sent me to San Diego," Katz says. There, he learned about hillbilly-type polio. "I was going to be a psychiatrist," he says, "but I never did go into psychiatry.""Katz was assigned to the Hillbilly Service, where he worked with children who had polio. "I was put to work with a virus—virus they'd adapted, the monkeys didn't get a fever or rash or anything, but socially it just didn't meet my expectations, and I asked my mother and father to let me join the Navy in the spring of 1945. After going through boot camp, he gave us some tests and said, 'You're a bright boy. We're going to send you to college.'" Katz's educational path was influenced by the military, which provided him with opportunities to travel and learn.

After completing his M.D. at Harvard, Katz did residencies at Massachusetts General Hospital and Children's Hospital in Boston. "My experiences with polio during the summer of 1955 gave Katz a new goal. He knew that a Harvard lab run by John Enders had isolated three strains of the poliovirus—winning Enders the 1954 Nobel Prize in Physiology or Medicine. Katz's department chair suggested that Katz go have a talk with Enders. "It was very casual," Katz says. "Enders was very cordial and said, 'Well, if you're interested, maybe you'd like to do a fellowship.'"

The next thing Katz knew, he was working with Enders, who had already moved on from polio to tackle another major public-health concern—measles.

"By the time I got to the lab, they'd already begun to grow the [measles] virus successfully," Katz says. "I was put to work with a virus—virus they'd adapted, the monkeys didn't get a fever or rash or anything, but socially it just didn't meet my expectations, and I asked my mother and father to let me join the Navy in the spring of 1945. After going through boot camp, he gave us some tests and said, 'You're a bright boy. We're going to send you to college.'"

Katz's professional and personal lives intersected again in 1971, when he married Diane Wilfert, who was also a Dartmouth Medical School alumnus. Together, they have two sons, one of whom is also a medical doctor. "It was a happy marriage," Katz says. "We've been married for 40 years, and I've enjoyed every minute of it."

Katz's research interests have included the development of vaccines for a variety of diseases, including polio, measles, and HIV. He has been involved in international health and vaccine policy affairs for more than 50 years, and he continues to be active in that work today.

Katz recognizes the importance of assuring people that vaccines are safe. "The polio vaccine was introduced in 1955, and it saved millions of lives. But that goal hasn't yet been reached in sub-Saharan Africa and Asia. "Eradication is the holy grail," Katz says, noting that the problem is still how to get vaccines widely disseminated in countries that lack funding to purchase them.

"[Vaccines] work in exactly the same way that antibiotics work," Katz explains. "They're not magic. They're just very effective."

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