Colin Marshall ~ Roald Dahl, Who Lost His Daughter To Measles, Writes A Heartbreaking Letter About Vaccinations: "It Is Almost A Crime To Allow Your Child To Go Unimmunised"

Generations of us know Roald Dahl as, first and foremost, the author of popular children's novels like *The BFG*, *The Witches*, *Charlie and the Chocolate Factory* (that book of the "subversive" lost chapter), and *James and the Giant Peach*. We remember reading those with great delight, and some of us even made it into the rumored literary territory of his "stories for grown-ups." But few of us, at least if we grew up in the past few decades, will have familiarized ourselves with all the purposes to which Dahl put his pen. Like many fine writers, Dahl always drew something from his personal experience, and few personal experiences could have had as much impact as the sudden death of his measles-stricken seven-year-old daughter Olivia in 1962. A chapter of Donald Sturrock's biography *Storyteller: The Life of Roald Dahl*, excerpted at *The Telegraph*, tells of both the event itself and Dahl's stoic, writerly (according to some, perhaps too stoic and too writerly) way of handling it.

But good did come out of Dahl's response to the tragedy. In 1986, he wrote a leaflet for the Sandwell Health Authority entitled *Measles: A Dangerous Illness*, which tells Olivia's story and provides a swift and well-supported argument for universal vaccination against the disease:

Olivia, my eldest daughter, caught measles when she was seven years old. As the illness took its usual course I can remember reading to her often in bed and not feeling particularly alarmed about it. Then one morning, when she was well on the road to recovery, I was sitting on her bed showing her how to fashion little animals out of coloured pipe-cleaners, and when it came to her turn to make one

herself, I noticed that her fingers and her mind were not working together and she couldn't do anything.

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