

BioGENEius Awards: In Sohan Shah's Words

Committed to presenting ideas and projects that address global healthcare, sustainability and environmental issues, the Champions of Science Storytelling Challenge—BioGENEius Edition invited alumni of the Biotechnology Institute's BioGENEius Challenge to share stories of their innovative and impactful work. Recognized in this year's contest, read the essays of these runner-ups.

When I was a sophomore in high school, I woke up one morning to some terrible news. A classmate of mine, who I had known for over ten years, had just lost his father. He was a volunteer firefighter who had lived his life trying to make the world a safer and better place for others and suddenly nature took him away far too soon. I decided that I would honor him and try to continue his passion of making the world a better place and the best way for me to accomplish that was through science.

I am passionate about science because without it we would not be alive. Without science, we would not have air to breathe or water to drink. Without it, smallpox and polio would still be wreaking havoc and humans would still succumb to a common cold. Science has made mankind what it is today.

Currently, I conduct clinical research at the Helen F. Graham Cancer Center while attending Johns Hopkins University and my work is on determining the success rate of a novel fractionated radiation regimen on trigeminal neuralgia patients. Trigeminal neuralgia is a debilitating disease which occurs when something, typically a blood vessel, puts pressure on the trigeminal nerve in the face. It causes spasms of pain constantly and the pain can, in extreme cases, lead a patient to suicide. I hope that through my research, I can improve the treatment and prognosis of such patients.

Telling stories about science is, in my opinion, one of the most valuable things you can do because it tells people about the effect your research has on society. I may not understand the significance of someone's research but hearing about all of the people who are able to benefit from it puts the research in a whole new light.

Every day I see a new article about how children are being pushed into STEM fields and should instead be allowed to pursue the humanities and other fields. While I agree that STEM fields should not be someone's sole focus, I believe that STEM provides the backbone to society and is a very rewarding field to go in.

When your research succeeds, you feel great, but even if the fruits of your labor are not what you were hoping for, you still have furthered the level of human knowledge and that is something to be proud of.

The BioGENEius competition made me more confident in myself as a budding scientist. It gave me a place to be questioned and critiqued by already established scientists, leaders in their perspective fields. It gave me the confidence to continue research even though I was only a 17-year-old kid. During my year's intro video, we said something along the lines of "shattering society's expectations of what a scientist should look like," and that is what BioGENEius taught me. For every professor or PhD student, there is an unassuming teenager who has the ability to change the world.

The content and views presented here are those of the individual Challenge participant.