Her name was Henrietta Lacks, but scientists know her as HeLa. She was a poor southern tobacco farmer who worked the same land as her slave ancestors, yet her cells (taken without her knowledge) became one of the most important tools in medicine.

The first "immortal" human cells grown in culture, they are still alive today. HeLa cells were vital for developing the polio vaccine; uncovered secrets of cancer, viruses, and the effects of the atom bomb. They have helped lead to important advances like in vitro fertilization, cloning, and gene mapping.