

## Comments on an Anti-Cryonics Book by Ben Best

Larry Johnson's recent book *FROZEN* has attracted a great deal of media attention. Johnson was formerly an Alcor employee, and his book is very anti-Alcor. But there is not much positive (and plenty negative) about cryonics and cryonicists in general in Johnson's book.

I am only going to make some comments about Johnson's book rather than write a review. There are many events he covers, such as the Ted Williams case, about which I lack enough information to evaluate his representations (although I definitely have opinions about the veracity of many of his claims). I also want to emphasize that in writing these comments I am speaking for myself and not for the Cryonics Institute.

CI partisans who imagine that Johnson's book is just anti-Alcor are very mistaken. Johnson favorably quotes all the widely-known anti-cryonics statements of cryobiologists, skeptics and others -- including comments about the egotism of cryonicists and concerns about overpopulation. When he approvingly quotes a bioethicist saying that the "Alcor scam" "doesn't even meet the silliness threshold", the reference is more to cryonics than to Alcor. Johnson says that Alcor was formed in the aftermath of Chatsworth, when "cryonicists fled the CSC like rats from a burning building".

Johnson thinks cryonics patients are "dead as a doornail", saying brain cells start dying within minutes of cardiac arrest. He thinks vitrification is hogwash (hence the title *FROZEN*). The closest he comes to a scientific argument is the mistaken claim that cryoprotectants cannot cross the blood-brain barrier. Cryonics patients are reputedly "frozen to the point of shattering", and Alcor monitors the damage with a "Frankensteined contraption" called a Crackphone. Cryonicists reputedly "pump corpses full of hazardous chemicals" that are "terribly toxic" and then cool the body to slow decomposition.

Ethylene glycol is the most toxic substance used in vitrification solutions, and the worst toxicity comes from formation of oxalate crystals in kidney (ethyl alcohol is an antidote). Johnson's exaggerated description makes vitrification solution sound like a combination of acetone and sulfuric acid. Unfortunately, despite hundreds of experiments in which animal brains have been vitrified (some of which are published on Alcor's website <http://bit.ly/2r86cL>), there are cryobiologists who are unfamiliar with vitrification who can be cited as supporting Johnson's claims (<http://bit.ly/3hoBbv>).

Johnson said that he was astounded by some of the medications he saw being stored at Alcor. He asks why Alcor would have a paralytic drug for dead people. Johnson doesn't get the

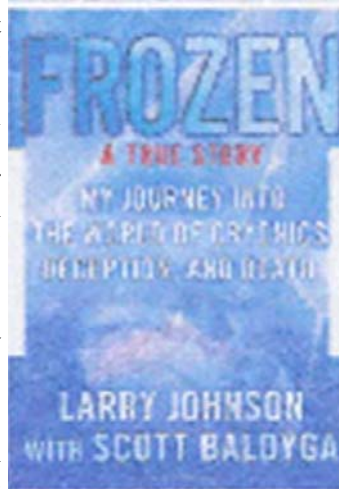
most basic premise of cryonics -- that stoppage of the heart is only legal death, not ultimate death. Cells, tissues, and organs are still very much alive, which is why we need to cool them. I understand that corpses have been known to cough hours after the heart has stopped. Paralytics and muscle relaxants have been used in cryonics to suppress shivering, under the assumption that shivering would increase metabolic rate, generate heat and contribute to ischemia.

The use of propofol (trade name Diprivan) might be a bit more controversial. Johnson implies that its purpose is to kill terminal cryonics patients during a standby. In fact, it is given post-mortem, partly to reduce brain metabolism and partly to prevent a legally dead cryonics patient from recovering consciousness during application of aggressive cardio-pulmonary support. Is it murder to prevent recovery of consciousness in a person who has been pronounced dead and who wants the brain to be preserved in the best possible condition?

Johnson expresses extreme disgust at the fact that an Alcor Member touring the Alcor facility had made cryopreservation arrangements for his small daughter. Johnson compared the child to the children of the Branch Davidians at Waco, Texas. Johnson said that most Alcor Members are desperately sick people, and that Alcor is selling false hope to the hopeless with "scare tactics" and "flowery lures to imagined immortality". He also found the idea of marketing cryonics to those in their teens and twenties to be an unsavory practice.

Johnson knew that as an Alcor staff member who was not sign-up for cryonics his options were limited. So to gain access to the "inner circle" Johnson applied for Alcor Membership. Alcor people were so eager to have Johnson be a signed-up cryonicist that they not only waived all Membership fees, but they paid for his insurance. At the same time, Johnson went to a lawyer, adding a clause to his will leaving his life insurance to his wife and giving her authority over his remains -- urging her not to let Alcor get ahold of him if he was killed. He stated in his will that he wished to be buried or cremated. Johnson said that Alcor Members were expected to wear their Member bracelets 24/7, but he only wore his bracelet when at work. Otherwise, he would stuff the bracelet under the carpet of his car's trunk, hoping that it would not be found if he was involved in an auto accident. Becoming an Alcor Member gave Johnson access to all the private Alcor files, and ultimately allowed him to be promoted to Chief Operating Officer at Alcor.

Johnson boasts that he never cracked a textbook when training to become a paramedic. I believe the book's colorful language comes from his co-author Scott Baldyga. Much of the eloquence is devoted to what I would call "creative disparagement". Virtually every cryonicist in the book is depicted as being a weirdo creep, often with very imaginative imagery. In



describing cryonicists as sexual deviants, Johnson quotes some passages from Chapter 5 of Robert Ettinger's *MAN INTO SUPERMAN*.

Extropians are called a pseudoscientific group, but Venturists are described as the ultimate cryonics fanatics, comparable to Branch Davidians at Waco. In describing Venturists as elitist "chosen people" he presents a picture that is completely opposite to what Mike Perry writes about in *FOREVER FOR ALL*, a book Johnson never mentions. Mike Perry, in fact, is the object of merciless ridicule throughout Johnson's book. Johnson reminds me of a childish bully who finds the sweetest, most mild-mannered nerd in the school to subject to cruel taunts. To Johnson, Mike is such a laughable twerp that all the jokes made at Mike's expense are nothing but entertainment. Johnson relates stories about "Alcorians" going to people's homes to adopt animals which would subsequently be used for "ghastly experiments". He describes Alcorians and Venturists as finding teenage runaways and homeless people "who wouldn't be missed" that were experimented upon until they died.

After Johnson had "blown the whistle on Alcor" he went into hiding, carrying a gun at all times and living in secret "safe houses" all over the country (he had carried a concealed pistol while working at Alcor and secretly tape-recording conversations). Johnson's hiding has also made it difficult for Alcor to serve him with court papers. Johnson's claim that cryonicists are cultish fanatics who are a cross between Nazis and Branch Davidians lends credence to his claim that he is in fear for his life. It also adds to the drama of his story, that Johnson reportedly hopes will be made into a blockbuster movie.

### The Ultimate Privacy Plan

*We were surfing the web the other day and found this on the American Cryonics Society's site. We asked Jim Yount if there had been any interest. He said they had received several calls from lawyers for clients, but nothing came of it.*

ACS also makes provisions for people who wish an even-greater degree of privacy. Some people, in public life for example, may be concerned that the fact that they wish to be frozen will be viewed unfavorably by others. Other people simply wish to guard their privacy and regard cryonic suspension arrangements as a strictly personal matter -- no one else's business.

Under the Ultimate Privacy Plan, you make arrangements to be suspended by ACS without a single person in our organization having any information about your identity, financial particulars, or related personal information. This is done by having your attorney handle all matters pertaining to your suspension. We know the name of your attorney, we don't know your name. Your attorney certifies that he has papers on file in his office that satisfy our legal and financial requirements. At the time of your suspension we will then know your identity, but will still strive to keep this information confidential. To make such arrangements, simply have your attorney contact us.

## CRYONICS INSTITUTE

(CI) is also a non-profit Michigan corporation, but not tax exempt. Headquarters address, phone: and e-mail address are the same as for The Immortalist Society (IS): (586) 791-5961. FAX: (586) 792-7062. The corporations are separate entities. CI members are not automatically members of IS, unless suspension contract is pre-funded.



CI offers cryostasis (cryonic suspension, cryopreservation) services for members on a long-term contractual basis, including storage of pets and tissue/DNA. CI also conducts and supports research in cryogenic storage, cryobiology, and other aspects of life extension.

CI membership requires a one time lifetime membership fee of \$1,250 or \$1,875 for a couple, with no additional membership fee for minor children. Membership allows you to execute a contract for cryonic suspension and long term storage, funded (by life insurance or otherwise) to a maximum of \$28,000. This is a one-time fee, payable upon or before time of death. The bulk of the money is invested to pay for indefinitely long storage.

CI also offers an "Option Two" membership, with a \$75 Initiation fee and dues of \$120 per year or \$35 quarterly. For Option Two Members the minimum suspension fee is \$35,000. (An Option Two member can switch to Option One at any time by paying the membership fee of \$ 1,250.)

For members convenience in making dues payments, or donations, CI now accepts Visa, MasterCard and American Express. No CI officer or director is paid for being an officer or director. Members own and control the corporation, but membership entitles members to no financial remuneration or benefit. CI owns its properties free and clear, has no debt, and a policy of never having any debt. CI has never raised its prices, even in the high inflation years of the late 70s and early 80s.

CI has no landlords, no creditors, and no stockholders. It is run for the benefit of its patients and members (prospective patients).

**BUT DON'T WAIT UNTIL SOMEONE IS DYING.** *We may sometimes accept patients who do not have contracts at time of death, but such cases risk serious delays and adverse conditions. To maximize your chances, and for your own sake and the sake of the people you love, **BECOME A MEMBER NOW.***