

## A NEW SPIRIT OF PRESERVATION

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### *Cryonics movement, alive and well, shifts into second gear in Clinton Township, Michigan*

*Or is it third gear? Cryonicists are not yet great in numbers, but a lot of Baby Boomers are starting to look for truly innovative life insurance.*

Back in May ironically a day or two after I had lost my dear brother Forrest at the age of 56 to a heart ailment—and, no, dammit, he was not one of our early cryonics adopters—Mr. Ben Best, president of the Cryonics Institute (CI), called me.

*Seeds of CI were planted back in the days of the Cryonics Society of Michigan in the 1960s, based on the 1962 radical life-extension masterpiece *The Prospect of Immortality* by Robert Ettinger, a college physics and mathematics teacher in SE Michigan. In 1976, CI was founded for the express purpose of providing "cryostasis services: careful preparation, cooling, and long term patient care in liquid nitrogen." Basically, the cryonics concept is the process of preserving one's body at extremely low temperatures to enable, when the time is right, eventual reinvigoration, healing, and rejuvenation.*

Ben wanted to get my paperwork accomplished, to execute a proper contract to assure that upon clinical death I would have such long-term, cold-storage care available to me through the Institute. As with making any preparations for dying, many of us put it off and put it off and put it off... and I had been a master of procrastination on taking this simple step to be "frozen." (As a radical life-extensionist from 1970s, I had enthusiastically enrolled into the CI program in my 20s, making CI the beneficiary of my life insurance policy.) Ben had caught me at the right time, and finally through the summer we worked out the arrangements. Thanks, Ben.

In the same timeframe this work was being completed, CI was holding its annual meeting, which I had never attended. Since I was on extended leave from the Free State (New Hampshire) and back in the VAT (vast authoritarian wasteland) region of Michigan, I thought might be a good time to catch up, to get more involved in what could become a vital bridge to an effectively immortal future. What I'm thinking is "These wonderful people here and this hugely important grass-roots-oriented business[1] deserve way more attention than I've been giving them."

What follows are my impressions of the people and organization, accompanied by a wee bit of advocacy.

The CI facility is located in Macomb County in Southeast Michigan, where currently 85 patients have been carefully prepared in accordance with the best available techniques and placed in liquid nitrogen chambers for cryostasis. CI has ~700 members, with roughly half of them funded for preservation. On a beautiful Sunday afternoon in late September, I point my ride toward the east side of the Detroit metro region then wander around a bit before finally locating the CI building in an isolated industrial park.

Because of a misunderstanding of the schedule, I'm late, but it's cool, the meeting is in session and most of the 60-odd—or is it 60 odd? yuk yuk—participants give me a warm enough reception as I head toward a chair in the back. Good deal, I've missed most of the boring stuff about bylaws and who's in charge when. Scanning the audience I can tell you we're beginning to broaden our appeal beyond the customary kernel of wide-eyed whiz kids. For the most part, these people seem, you know, standard issue; maybe half of them are younger than 45 and I'm even seeing somewhat of a babe factor developing. Yes!

I'm glad I came over to mix in. From my early libertarian days in Michigan, I know one of the principal players in the group, Patrick Heller. Proprietor of Liberty Coin Service, he currently serves as CI treasurer and has been integral to the development of CI since its inception. Unfortunately, he's not able to attend this particular gathering, but recently I received an email from Pat describing his role in hooking up K. Eric Drexler (author of *Engines of Creation*) with Ettinger and the cryonics folks:

*"In the later 1970s, Drexler was on a team of graduate students of Gerard O'Neill at MIT that O'Neill put together to work on the mass driver concept as a space launch option. They had significant success with test models. Drexler was also one of the main people who put together "Ergo" which was an Objectivist/libertarian publication distributed at Harvard/MIT and other Boston area colleges. I cannot remember how, but Drexler was on the mailing list for the newsletter "live and let live" that I wrote for The Church of Eternal Life & Liberty.*

*"About 1980, I got a call at home one night from Drexler. We talked for about an hour about cryonics and related areas. I gave him the names and phone numbers of several people who he obviously contacted as at least two of them (Ettinger and Mike Darwin/Federowicz) are listed in the acknowledgements in*

*Engines as being major contributors. About 18 months after our phone call, Drexler published a major paper in a journal of the American Academy for the Advancement of Science (AAAS) on the subject of molecular biology, which he cites in the book. About a year later, I heard that Drexler was working on this book."*

So there you go; you never realize how an idea germinates or works its way through a society of open minds tuned into channels of discovery. Cryonics is one such idea that's catching on and moving beyond the early adopter stage; people who have read the foundation books—e.g. *The Prospect of Immortality*, *Engines of Creation*, *The Singularity is Near*, and a handful of others—realize we are on the threshold of effective rejuvenation technology (probably by 2025 ±5). Cryonics represents an insurance policy, something to have in place in case you go terminal before then.

I'm listening to a couple of the presentations, especially to a woman from Suspended Animation, Inc. who makes the case for using their services to expedite preparation and delivery to the facility upon "deanimating." It dawns on me this is for real. I mean, the idea of being successfully suspended is no longer a novelty or some scientist's quixotic literary dream. These people mean business, and they're taking care of business, making it happen, seeing that the patient's wishes are carried out, performing the painstaking work quickly and efficiently on flesh and blood humans, getting the job done. There are people here in this group, not to mention Ettinger himself, who are closing in on the natural end point of life. And they enthusiastically expect a trouble-free biostasis.

Behind the competence of this blossoming movement lies the creative spirit of Mr. Ettinger and a host of the early adopters who "were cryonicists when cryonicists weren't cool." These are my living and/or suspended heroes; I'll be helping out and staying close for a long time.

And I'd like to finish by recommending CI to my readers, whether liberty-inclined or simply life-inclined. Basically, my friends, we have the technology. Check out the sites, read the books; I think you will readily determine you and your loved ones are no longer fated to degenerate and deanimate. Cryonics provides insurance into a future in which neither taxes nor death are inevitable; immortalism is near, it's practical, and you can take part in making it happen. See you at the next meeting.

*A long habit of not thinking a thing wrong, gives it a superficial appearance of being right, and raises at first a formidable outcry in defense of custom.  
But the tumult soon subsides.  
Time makes more converts than reason.  
— Thomas Paine*

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[1] To this date, only a few cryonics suspension organizations exist worldwide. Two of the other leading facilities in the US are the for profit Trans Time in California and non-profit Alcor in Arizona. People being people, controversies have arisen over the best way to assure the success of an organization devoted to cryogenic preservation; CI has the well-deserved reputation for being the most cost-effective solution available with a stable control structure in which clients have the greatest possible confidence that their wishes will be fulfilled.

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