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Brain Freeze -321° F (Saving “Reggie” Sanford)

Fact or fiction, cryonics controversy involving Ted Williams is revived

By Phil Riske

Disciples of cryonics — freezing human remains in liquid nitrogen in hopes a scientific miracle is down the road that can “reanimate” a corpse as a healthy human being — do not suffer critics well. Just ask Arizona State Rep. Bob Stump.

He received threatening messages last year because he sponsored a bill that would have established state regulatory authority over Alcor Life Extension Foundation, the Scottsdale facility that is the cold graveyard of baseball immortal Ted Williams.

In *Brain Freeze -321° F*, author Jack Polidoro, a close friend of Ted’s daughter, employs “faction” — fiction based on fact — to convey what he and other scientific critics say is the absurdity of cryonics and that which others aver are the sins committed on one of America’s greatest sports performers after his death.

A living Ted Williams is skillfully woven into plots and subplots throughout the book.

His son, John Henry Williams (who also was frozen at Alcor after his death last year), had his father placed in cryonic suspension in 2002 after, some allege, he forged a note from Ted indicating his wish to be frozen. Bobby-Jo Ferrell, Ted’s disinherited daughter, fought to have her father removed from Alcor and cremated, but gave up when she could no longer afford an attorney.

With information and photographs from Larry Johnson (“Jonathan Bishop” in the book), a former Alcor official, *Sports Illustrated* reported a giant screw-up at Alcor led to Williams’s decapitation and subsequent multiple fractures of his skull.

Polidoro takes readers, unfamiliar and familiar with the Williams-Alcor case, through and beyond that real life saga, beginning with the freezing of a Negro League baseball icon named Reggie “Lefty” Sanford against his will at Mizaronics, a fictional cryonics facility near Falcon Field in Mesa. (Mizar, a star,

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parallels the astronomical origin of the star Alcor.)

With the help of Johnson, who has been in hiding since he left Alcor, and his medical background, Polidoro, who has a doctorate in animal science, lets the reader witness a beheaded Reggie Sanford.

“The neuro-prep was placed in a square Plexiglas tank, and the severed head suspended in midair by a stereotactic device. The mouth was open, revealing teeth, in what appeared to be a macabre scene from a Spielberg or Lucas film,” Polidoro writes. “The objective of the head-only maintenance was the cryonics advocates’ belief that the head would someday be reattached to another body or a cloned torso of the same DNA donor.”

In one scene, Bishop talks to Sanford.

“The Cubs are going to have a great year, Reggie,” Bishop says to the small container with Sanford’s head inside. “No one but Bishop was present to hear his ‘one day’ conversation with the shiny Mizaronics tank of bodies,” Polidoro writes. “Reggie’s head... was stored separately in a smaller unit — a ‘lobster pot’-type device a few feet from where Sanford’s headless torso was hung encapsulated in a protective sheath within the confines of the -321° F casket.”

Searching for credibility

Later, Mizaronics CEO Dr. Justin Clement tells Bishop, “We need famous people here to convince others of our credibility.”

In technical descriptions, the author, chiefly through a newspaper reporter who begins research on cryonics for the *Arizona Chronicle* after the Reggie Sanford story breaks, debunks futurists’ theories about the possibility of reanimation of diseased or injured bodies that have been frozen for years. Simply put, the cryogenic process damages organs beyond repair, and preservatives used in the process could be more of a challenge to reanimation than the diseases that caused the death in the first place.

With the necessary background on cryonics, Alcor and Ted Williams and other players in the story now established in the first half of the book, things are ready to explode, and they do.

The second half of the book is pregnant with suspense, and *Arizona Chronicle* reporter Rachael Geary is pregnant as well, having fallen in love with her source, whistleblower Jonathan Bishop (for which Polidoro is apt to take some barbs from journalist-ethicists). As she digs up more and more dirt on Mizaronics, the newspaper becomes the target of Mizaronics attorneys.

And Reggie’s head becomes the target of thieves, who not only steal it, they kidnap Rachael and her unborn child and hole up near Tucson.

Meanwhile, a distraught and inebriated Bishop is convinced Rachael has been slain: A tress of her hair, still with her scent, is delivered to the newspaper. In the end, he avenges what he thought was the death of his lover.

The last chapter will warm the organs of baseball historians and Ted Williams fans.

Polidoro and others continue their national appeal to have Williams’s remains removed from Alcor, cremated and placed with the ashes of his favorite dog, “Slugger,” in Florida.

Available at any bookstore.

FYI

Other books by Jack Polidoro:

- *Rapid Descent— Disaster in Boston Harbor*

- *Project Samuel—The Quest for the Centennial Nobel Prize*
- *Return to Raby — A New England Novel*
- *Sniff — A Novel*
- *Laboratory 101 — A Bathroom Book of Knowledge*



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