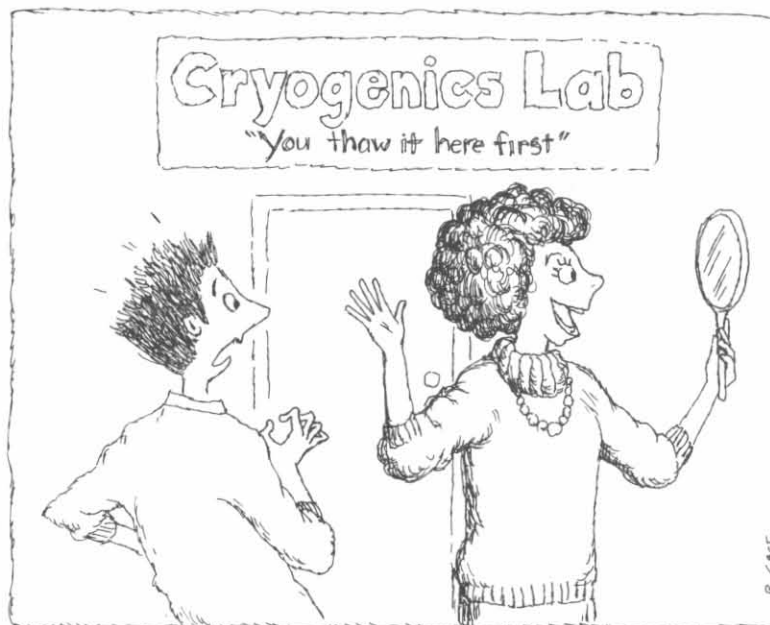


Issue 49

Cryogenics

Many lower animals can be quick-frozen into a solid block and maintained alive at very low temperatures until they are restored to good health by thawing (e.g., goldfish dropped into liquid air, about -195°C). Suppose it becomes possible to freeze and thaw humans. If you have an incurable disease, might you have yourself frozen until a cure has been found? Should public funding be made available for this procedure, as it is for other medical procedures?



"They say I have my grandmother's eyes, my grandfather's nose, and my great-great-Auntie's chin!"

Already, such human tissues as blood, corneas, bone marrow, sperm, and even embryos can be frozen and then thawed later. So far, however, transplant surgeons have been unable to make use of such frozen organs as kidneys, the pancreas, or the heart, which therefore makes it impractical to freeze and then thaw entire people. (At least five people, though, were known to have been frozen in liquid nitrogen in 1988, and possibly as many as twelve or more.) They face an uncertain future, for when they are thoroughly frozen their heartbeat and their brainwaves stop. By definition they are legally dead for as long as they remain frozen. That could be for years or centuries!

If you have been frozen and it takes 100 years for a treatment for your disease to be found, should your great-great-great grandchildren have to be responsible for you when you are thawed out? If you left a will disposing of your worldly possessions, could you reclaim them? Would this practice be ethical to perform on (a) astronauts making years-long space flights, (b) depressed people as an alternative to suicide, (c) the curious who simply want to see what the future will be like without growing old while waiting?

If people who had been frozen in 1800 were revived successfully today, what problems would they face? What would their age be when they are thawed out? For that matter, how old is the thawed-out goldfish? Consult an English teacher on the fate of Rip Van Winkel.

Think about this . . . Would two-way television threaten your Constitutional right to privacy?

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