Robert C. W. Ettinger, who thinks death is for chumps, drives a rusty white Chevy Lumina with a bumper sticker on the rear that reads, "Choose Life!" Ettinger is ninety-one years old, bent and crooked. His face is splotched, his goatee grizzled, his gray hair wispy and unkempt. He leans on a worn wooden cane and wears a thick orthopedic shoe on his left foot. His legs were smashed when he was hit by a German mortar fire in November, 1944, just before the Battle of the Bulge. He spent four years in an Army hospital, where he had bone grafts and skin grafts; antibiotics saved his life. More recently, he has undergone angioplasty, cataract surgery, a hemorrhoidectomy, and prostate surgery, twice. That Ettinger endures is a miracle of science. Actuarially, chances are good that he'll be dying soon, and, if the going gets much tougher, he'll kill himself. He has planned that down to the last detail. He has one concern. "The problem, of course, with suicide is that if you don't do it right you face autopsy," he told me. "And then you're no good for freezing."

Ettinger is a founder of the cryonics movement. When he dies, the blood will be drained from his body, antifreeze will be pumped into his arteries, and holes will be drilled into his skull, after which he will be stored in a vat of liquid nitrogen at minus three hundred and twenty degrees Fahrenheit. He expects to be defrosted, sometime between fifty and two hundred years from now, by scientists who will make him young and strong and tireless. Ettinger has already frozen his mother and his two wives, along with ninety-two other people who await resurrection inside giant freezers in a building five minutes away from his house, in Clinton Township, Michigan.

I went out to Michigan to meet Ettinger last May. Clinton Township—population 95,648 at the last census, 95,743 if you count the corpses at the Cryonics Institute ("Our patients are not truly dead in any fundamental sense," Ettinger says)—lies twenty miles northeast of Detroit. The township is named for New York's Erie Canal-building governor, DeWitt Clinton; Easterners began arriving in droves soon after the canal was completed, in 1825. Ground was broken for a canal to Kalamazoo in 1838, a year after Michigan joined the Union, but then the railroad came. At the Clinton Township Historic Village, which consists of a log cabin, an old meetinghouse, and a wishing well, the grass was squishy, as if someone had left the sprinklers on too long; actually, it was the old, abandoned Clinton-Kalamazoo Canal, oozing up. The past has a way of doing that.

There are only three ways to go when you die. You can be buried, burned, or frozen. If there is no God, Ettinger says, your only chance at an afterlife is Option 3. I decided to take a closer look at Options 1 and 2. Driving along Cass Avenue, I passed the First Presbyterian Church, where a sign out front reads: "LIFE IS SHORT SO PRAY HARD."

Down the road, I stopped at Clinton Grove Memorial Park, which was established in 1855 and is the oldest burial ground around. A canopy of oaks and elms shelters six thousand nineteenth-century dead. Vacancies remain. A flashing sign cycled through three messages: "Cremation Space $395...Monuments Sold Here...Think Spring!"

Across the street are two tombstone firms: "Lincoln Granite, family owned and operated since 1903"; and "Clinton Grove Granite Works, est. 1929." Both offices were closed, so I browsed through the outdoor displays, gravestones of pink and gray granite, their borders engraved with stock sentiments: "Forever in our hearts," inside two valentines; "In God's Care," on a banner beneath a cross. In the middle of each stone, a polished C. R. Andrews McMeel Publishing

To order, call 877-408-4269, or shop online for special offers. newyorkerstore.com
ished, empty space awaits only a pair of dates and someone's name. I tried to think spring.

The Cryonics Institute occupies a seven-thousand-square-foot brick-fronted warehouse in an industrial park behind the township's water and sewerage building. Past a shabby waiting room is the silver, like the inside of a refrigerator just off the truck from Sears. It sounded like a refrigerator, too, a faintly throbbing brrrrmm. There were fourteen cylindrical freezers. They looked like propane tanks, the kind you attach to your gas grill, except that they were about ten feet tall and six feet wide. Each held six patients. All but four were filled. There were also three explained, "We put them in horizontally. Everyone else—in the cylinders—is upside down."

"And, in... cannisters or something, within the cylinders?"

"No." He shook his head. "In sleeping bags. Just regular sleeping bags? Like, from Kmart?"

"Robert Ettinger expects to be unfrozen, in a century or two, and made young again. Photograph by Reinhard Hunger."

small office of Andy Zawacki. Andy constitutes half of C.I.’s full-time staff. He is also one of C.I.’s more than eight hundred members, which means that he plans to be frozen when he dies. ("Lifetime members" pay twelve hundred and fifty dollars to join and twenty-eight thousand upon "death"; they are encouraged to pay by making the institute the beneficiary of their life-insurance policies.) On C.I.’s Web site, Andy wears a lab coat, as if he were a scientist or a doctor, but, mostly, he’s a handyman. He has been working for C.I. since he graduated from high school. He’s lumpy and balding and soft-spoken, but, other than that, not a bit like Peter Lorre.

He answered the door and took me into the office, where Robert Ettinger was waiting. I started to say hello. "You want to see it?" Ettinger asked.

Andy led us down the hall and through a door into a storage area with fluorescent lights and sixteen-foot-high ceilings. Almost everything in the room was white or older, rectangular freezers, and then there was a stainless-steel thermos about the size of a rain barrel, and that's where Ettinger was headed. He lifted the lid. Liquid nitrogen wafted out.

"Cats," he said. He blew into the container and waved his hand, trying to clear the vapor. "Can't see much, I guess."

I peered in. I blew. We blew together. I couldn't see a thing.

"Cats in there?" I asked, peering, blowing.

"Yup."

"How many?"

"Don't know."

Andy interjected, "We've got about sixty pets. Mostly dogs and cats."

"A few birds," Ettinger added. He closed the lid.

I stared at the giant freezers. "Are they upside down?" Better for the brain on thawing, I guess. I pictured hibernating bats.

"Well, not the first ones," Ettinger ex-

"No," Andy said. "Wal-Mart."

Ettinger, leaning on his cane, surveyed the room.

"Your mother, and your two wives," I began hesitantly. "Are they all in this room?"

"Yes."

"And... where?"

"No idea." He shrugged. "My mother and my first wife used to be over there," he said, pointing to one corner of the room. "But we moved them over there"—he pointed to the cylinders. "Andy, do you know where they are?"

"That one." Andy indicated one of the cylinders with his chin. "Or maybe that one. One of those two. I can check."

Ettinger, slightly sheepish: "We have a chart."

Robert Ettinger was born in Atlantic City in December of 1918. His mother's family came from Odessa; his father was born in Germany. In about 1922, the Ettingers moved to Detroit. Ettinger's
father ran a furniture store, and the family lived in a house on Calvert Street, where, in 1927, when he was eight years old, Ettinger started reading Amazing Stories, the first magazine of what its editor, Hugo Gernsback, called "science-fiction": "Extravagant Fiction Today . . . Cold Fact Tomorrow." Much in Gernsback's stories has come true: rockets, television, computers, cell phones. Gernsback's stories also revisited a literary perennial: immortality.

Stories about immortality are ancient; they are part of every religion; they riddle myths and legends. And they always contain an argument with history, because to live forever is to conquer time as much as it is to conquer death. About a century and a half ago, stories about immortality got mixed up with stories about scientists. In 1845, Edgar Allan Poe wrote: "The Facts in the Case of M. Valdemar," about a mesmerist who hypnotizes a dying man in a trance for seven months. When he tries to lift the trance, the poor man cries, "For God's sake!—quick!—quick!—put me to sleep—or, quick!—waken me!—quick!—I say to you that I am dead!" and promptly melts into a pool of putrescence. In "A Thousand Deaths," an early Jack London short story, from 1899, the narrator's mad-scientist father repeatedly kills and revives him, leaving him dead for longer and longer stretches: "Another time, after being suffocated, he kept me in cold storage for three months, not permitting me to freeze or decay."

Rot is always a problem for the living dead, which is why resurrectionists borrow a good deal from methods used in preserving food. In 1766, the Scottish surgeon John Hunter tried to animate frozen fish. Benjamin Franklin thought that if he could be preserved in a vat of Madeira wine he would have liked very much to see what the world was like in a century or two. People used to eat their food fresh, canned, or salted, until someone got the idea to sell pond ice, and then those who could afford it paid to have ice delivered by the iceman. Starting in the eighteen-nineties, housewives could rent lockers in cold-storage warehouses. All this made for some fantastic science-fiction. In January, 1930, Gernsback published "The Corpse That Lived: a man who dies in a plane crash in the year 2025 is immersed in a bathtub of ice cubes and brought back to life by an electric pulse. The next month's issue included "The Ice Man": Marcus Publius, frozen in Rome in 59 B.C., is defrosted in 1928 by a professor who's remarkably handy with an electric blanket.

Ettinger dates his interest in immortality to 1931, when, at the age of twelve, he read "The Jameson Satellite," in which a dying professor has himself entombed in a rocket and launched into the cold storage of space. Forty million years pass, whereupon a race of mechanical men transplant Jameson's brain into a body like theirs—steel head, probing tentacles—so that he, too, can be an everlasting Zorome.

"Let go."

"I grew up with the expectation that one day we would learn how to reverse aging," Ettinger has said. Immortality is no good if you're doomed to decrepitude. When Ettinger was shot, in the Second World War, he thought, naturally, about death. In the hospital, he wrote the kind of fiction that he had read as a boy. "The Penultimate Trump" was published in 1948, in a Gernsback knockoff called Startling Stories, and tells of H. D. Haworth, who is ninety-two years old and survives only because his doctors have managed to cobble him together. "They gave him gland extracts, they gave him vitamins, they gave him blood transfusions. They gave him false teeth, eye-glasses, arch-supports. They cut out his varicose veins, his appendix, one of his kidneys." Haworth, pursuing immortality with the same ruthlessness with which he had pursued an ill-gotten fortune, pays a brilliant young scientist to put him "to sleep in a nice refrigerator until people really know something about the body." The scientist says, "We'd better put the vault in Michigan—very safe country, geologically."

Michigan is also where freezers come from. In 1923, the year after the Ettingers moved to Detroit, a company called Frigidaire, owned by General Motors and based in Detroit, began selling refrigerators in cabinets for home use. A chemist hired by General Motors developed Freon-12. In the nineteen-thirties, General Foods launched Birds Eye frozen foods. By 1945, more than eighty-five per cent of American homes had refrigerators; when the war ended, Americans had babies and built suburbs and bought appliances. Two hundred thousand freezers were manufactured in 1946, and twice that many the following year.

H. D. Haworth makes his arrangements in secret, convinced that if anyone found out what he was doing "everyone would demand a frigidaire instead of a coffin." He dies; the scientist puts him in a freezer. Three centuries later, he awakens, naked, in a room with a beautiful woman doctor, and observes that he is young, strong, and, to his astonished delight, ready: "A long-forgotten stimulus performed its ancient function." Unfortunately, things don't turn out as well as he had hoped. Word had got out, and everybody had started going into the "freezatorium." In the absence of any expectation of Heaven, people had begun behaving very
badly. Scientists had therefore invented the Farberstein Probe, to find out if a Sleeper had ever sinned; after scanning Ilaworth's brain, the Probe sentences him to a penal colony on a planet that used to be called Mars. What do they call it now? he asks. "Now they call it Hell."

Inside the Cryonics Institute, I stood with Ettinger, contemplating Ilaworth and finding it hard not to think about "The Cerebral Library," which appeared in Amazing Stories two months before "The Jameson Satellite," and which involves a mad scientist who hires a Chinese surgeon to help him collect five hundred brains in glass jars. This place reminded me of a library, too, or, more, of an archive, a place where people deposit their papers—the contents of their heads—when they're dead, so that someone, some future historian, can find them and bring them back to life.

"I have you got any neuros?" I asked.

A neuro is a severed head; the theory is that scientists in the future, like the Zoromes, will give you a new body, so why bother saving the old one if your brain is all you'll need? In 2002, when Red Sox baseball great Ted Williams died, his head was sawed off and frozen. It is now stored at the Alcor Life Extension Foundation, in Scottsdale, Arizona. Alcor, with some nine hundred members and eighty-nine patients, is C.I.'s chief rival, although it claims a great deal more for itself. Ettinger has two master's degrees, one in physics and the other in mathematics, with Ettling's "Michigan physics professor." Ettinger has appeared on "ABC World News Tonight," and has been interviewed by the New York Times, where he was referred to as "Dr. Ettinger"; elsewhere, reporters have called him "a Michigan physics professor." Ettinger has two master's degrees, one in physics and the other in mathematics, both from Wayne State University, which he attended on the G.I. Bill after the war. Many decades ago, he taught at Highland Park Community College, a school that no longer exists. He doesn't call himself doctor or professor, but he does consider himself a scientist, insofar as he has "a scientific attitude."

"Neuropreservation" has a scientific attitude, too, but that doesn't make it a science; it's more like extremely optimistic cosmetic surgery. It promises to cure hair loss, wrinkles, senescence, impotence, and death, all at once. Ah, yes, but will it work? If it were going too far to say that stranger things have happened, because they haven't. Reanimating and rejuvenating the dead would be several orders of magnitude stranger than, say, landing on the moon. But it does boast a handful of somewhat prominent promoters and a much larger group of defenders, whose position amounts to: What the hell, it's worth a try. Ralph Merkle, a former professor of computer science at Georgia Tech who now teaches at a place called Singularity University, serves on Alcor's board of directors. (Merkle happens to be the grandnephew of Fred Merkle, whose base-running error—he failed to touch second—cost the New York Giants the National League pennant in 1908, an error known forever after as Merkle's Boner.) The M.I.T. professor Marvin Minsky, who will await resurrection at Alcor, e-mailed me, in lieu of an explanation, this helpful chart:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Cryopreservation</th>
<th>It works</th>
<th>It doesn't work</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Sign up Light</td>
<td>Live</td>
<td>Die, lose life insurance</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Do nothing</td>
<td>Die</td>
<td>Die</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Which looks a lot like this chart—

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Goal</th>
<th>Exists</th>
<th>Doesn't exist</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Pray hard</td>
<td>Live</td>
<td>Die</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Do nothing</td>
<td>Die</td>
<td>Die</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

—and which, while altogether different from faith, is another way of trying to cover all the bases. As for its scientific plausibility: credentialed laboratory scientists who conduct peer-reviewed experiments having to do with the storage of organic tissue at very low temperatures (embryos, for instance, or organs for transplant) don't generally think the dead will one day awaken. The consensus appears to be that when you try to defrost a frozen corpse you get mush. And even if, in the future, scientists could repair the damage done to cells by freezing and thawing, what they would have, at best, is a cadaver. Merkle believes that nanotechnology will solve this problem—microscopic robots will repair the cells, one by one—but, as Ettinger himself points out, anyone wanting to resurrect and rejuvenate the dead must complete four tasks: cure the person of what killed her, reverse the decay that set in between death and freezing, repair the damage done by the freezing itself, and make her young again. Even Orpheus would be daunted.

And, of course, success would also seem to depend on whether the people doing the freezing are doing it well. On August 18, 2003, Sports Illustrated published an investigative report by Tom Verducci. Using tapes, photographs, and documents provided by Larry Johnson, Alcor's chief operating officer at the time, Verducci described how Williams's head had been "shaved, drilled with holes, accidentally cracked as many as 10 times and moved among three recipients," until it was finally put in "a liquid-nitrogen-filled steel can that resembles a lobster pot." (Alcor denies that the head was mishandled.)

"No," Ettinger declared. "We don't do neuros."

"But—" Andy began.

"Oh, right." In 1999, a cryonics firm called CryoCare went under.

"We do have heads," Ettinger said.

"Transfers."

Robert Ettinger announced the dawn of what he called the Freezer Era at the height of the Cold War. In 1949, he met his first wife, Elaine, at a Zionist meeting. In the nineteen-fifties, they moved to the suburbs and had two children. In the basement of their house in Oak Park, Michigan, Ettinger built a fallout shelter and waited for a scientist to read "Penultimate Trump" and turn today's extravagant fiction into tomorrow's cold fact. Finally, he decided to do it himself. In 1962, he wrote a sixty-page manifesto and sent a copy to Frederik Pohl, the editor of the science-fiction magazine Worlds of Tomorrow. Pohl, who was a regular guest on an all-night New York AM-radio broadcast, "The Long John Nebel Show," arranged for Ettinger to be invited. One thing led to another and, eventually, Thomas McCormack, a junior editor at Doubleday,
agreed to publish Ettinger's manifesto.

"The Prospect of Immortality" appeared in 1964, the year "Dr. Strangelove" hit theatres. Through that lens, mortality begins to look rather a lot like mutual assured destruction and immortality, at three-twenty below, like nothing so much as a fabulously air-conditioned fallout shelter. In "Strangelove," the world faces nuclear Armageddon. On orders from a U.S. Air Force general who is convinced of a Communist conspiracy to "sap and impurify all of our precious bodily fluids," American airmen have dropped a bomb on Russia, thereby triggering the Soviets' Doomsday Machine. Everyone on the planet is about to die. From the war room in Washington, the U.S. President (played by Peter Sellers) entertains proposals made by his scientific adviser, Dr. Strangelove (also Sellers):

**STRANGELOVE:** Mister President, I would not rule out the chance to preserve a nucleus of human specimens. It would be quite easy, at the bottom of some of our deeper mineshafts....

**PRESIDENT:** How long would you have to stay down there?

**STRANGELOVE** (pulls out a circular slide rule): Well, let's see now.... Hmm. I would think possibly, uh, one hundred years.

After the Manhattan Project, after Sputnik, after dishwashers and electric mixers, either scientists and engineers were on the verge of solving everything (in which case, go into the freezer, because the world will be even better when you wake up) or someone was about to launch an atomic bomb (in which case, go into the freezer, because maybe you'll survive). "Before long," Ettinger predicted, "the objectors will include only a handful of eccentrics."

Ettinger conceded that the logistics of freezing the dead might prove difficult at first, especially in the "retarded nations," where "makeshifts may be necessary to stretch the rupes, pesos, etc." In poor, hot countries, "bodies will be stored in pits insulated with straw and cooled with dry ice"—where, in all likelihood, they will simply rot. No worries. "It will not at first greatly matter how skillfully the bodies are preserved, so long as hope is preserved."

But if no one ever dies, won't there be too many people on the planet?

"The people could simply agree to share the available space in shifts," Ettinger suggested, "going into suspended animation from time to time to make room for others." There will be no childbirth. Fetuses will be incubated in jars. "Essentially, motherhood will be abolished." Then, too, eugenics will help keep the birthrate down, and deformed babies could be frozen against the day that someone might actually want them, or figure out how to fix them. "Cretins," for instance, or babies born with cerebral palsy: "Would not early freezing be a true mercy?" For the weak-minded, who might find making such a decision difficult, Ettinger offered a philosophical rule of thumb: Ask yourself, "If the child were already frozen, and it were within my power to return him to deformed life, would I do so? If the answer is negative, then probably the freezer is where he belongs."

On the floor in front of the freezers at the Cryonics Institute are four slotted boxes painted white, with a black number in each slot, like the slots in a company mailroom.

"What's this?"

Ettinger looked away. Andy explained that the numbers refer to the patients, most of whom choose to remain anonymous, and the box is for their families. Over the years, a half dozen have sent flowers, mostly roses, long dead. Attached to one bouquet was a card in an unopened envelope. It turns out that staring at an unopened envelope inside a frezatorium is substantially more depressing than looking at the blank space on a tombstone. Thoughts of spring eluded me.

"Do patients' families ever visit?"

I asked.

"Not many," Andy said. Ettinger had wandered off toward the office, passing a half-open door that I hadn't noticed before.

"What's in there?"

"A storeroom," Ettinger called over his shoulder. "Used to be a library."

We sat down in the conference room. Along the wall hung twenty-eight eight-by-ten-inch photographs of patients, beginning with Ettinger's mother. His father, who died in 1984 at the age of eighty-nine, was not among them. "If I'm in a mausoleum," Ettinger said, shaking his head, "I tried very hard to get him to be frozen, but his second wife was against it. He was too wimpy to stand up to her." Ettinger's brother, who died ten years ago, proved to be as weak as his father. "In his last illness, he became depressed and told his children that he didn't want to be frozen. I told them they should freeze him anyway, but I couldn't get them to and he was lost." This was how Ettinger always spoke of the unfrozen dead. His uncle Herman died in a car accident: "That was a shame. He was lost."

When "Prospect of Immortality" was published, Ettinger became something of a star. He claims, plausibly, that nearly everyone now active in cryonics first heard about it, directly or indirectly, from him. Ben Best, C.I.'s current president, picked up a copy at a health-food store. Stanley Kubrick read it, Ettinger says, and then arranged to meet with him. But when Kubrick died, in 1999, he was lost. He is buried in Herfordshire.

Ettinger said that he was interviewed by David Frost, Steve Allen, Merv Griffin, and Johnny Carson.

"Did these people take you seriously?" I asked.

"Talk-show hosts don't take anything seriously. They're idiots." I le told me that he was once on a show with William F. Buckley, Jr.

"What did Buckley make of you?"

"He was aghast at everything I said." This was the first time I'd seen Ettinger smile. "He thought it was immoral, unethical, unsanitary, against the will of God!" He laughed. "Buckley understood nothing."

The first human being was frozen in 1966; it went badly, and, a few months later, the body had to be buried. The following year, Ettinger held a press conference when a man named James Bedford was frozen by an organization that later became the Cryonics Society of California. (What with one snafu and another, most of the people who were frozen in California rotted.) Alcor was founded in 1972. The same year, St. Martin's Press, where Thomas McCormack had moved, published Ettinger's second book, "Man Into Superman: The Startling Potential of Human Evolution—And I lose to Be a Part of It." It begins, "By working hard and sav-
ing my money, I intend to become an immortal superman." The following year, "Sleeper" came out. Miles Monroe (Woody Allen), who runs a health-food restaurant in Greenwich Village, goes into the hospital for an ulcer, but when the surgery goes awry he is covered in "Birds-Eye wrapper" and stuck in a freezer for two hundred years. When he wakes up, he's peevish, especially after his doctor tells him that his resurrection is a miracle of science:

Mutter (pacing): To me, a miracle of science is, like, going to the hospital for a minor operation, I come out the next day, my rent isn't two thousand months overdue: That's a miracle of science. This is what I call a cosmic screwing. And then: where am I anyhow? I mean, what happened to everybody? Where are all my friends?

Doctor: You must understand that everyone you knew in the past has been dead nearly two hundred years.

Mutter: But they all are organic rice!

In "Man Into Superman," Ettinger throws around a lot of Nietzsche and George Bernard Shaw, but shows more evidence of having whiled away the hours reading Penthouse, which began publication in 1965. The world of tomorrow will be unimaginably better than the world of today. How? There will be transsex and supersex! Scientists will invent a "sexual superwoman . . . with cleverly designed orifices of various kinds, something like a wiggly Swiss cheese, but shapelier and more fragrant." Animals will be bred as sex slaves; even incest might be allowed. Also, scientists will likely equip men with wings, built-in biological weapons, body armor made of hair, and "telescopically, fully adjustable" sexual organs. (I hold on. That last one. Doesn't the existing model already come with that?)

Ettinger saw Allen's film when it came out. "He has a lot of good things to say about death, but, as far as I know, he's never done anything about it," he said.

"Like what?"
"Like sign up."
For a very long time, no one signed up.

Ettinger's first patient was his mother, Rhea. He froze her in 1977.

"Did she want to be frozen?"
"I don't know if she was really enthusiastic about it, but she was willing."

His second patient was his first wife, who died in November, 1987. What did she think about the prospect of being frozen?

"She never talked much about it. It was just taken for granted."

He remarried the following year. One month after Ettinger froze his wife, Saul Kent froze the head of his mother, Dora, at the Alcor facility. Kent, the author of "Future Sex" (1974) and "The Life-Extension Revolution" (1980), had become a convert to cryonics after reading "Prospect of Immortality" on the beach. He had also founded the vitamin-peddling Life Extension Foundation, in Hollywood, Florida, which was raided by the Food and Drug Administration in 1987. (The F.D.A. later dropped all charges.)

For a time, there was some question whether Dora Kent was actually dead when her head was cut off.

Ettinger's second wife, Mae, suffered a stroke in Scottsdale, Arizona, in 2000. Ettinger was with her. It was horrible. She was helpless; he was helpless. "All she was able to do was move one arm," he said, his voice quavering. Mae knew that she would be frozen; Ettinger had paid a local funeral home a retainer to "practice once a year." She died the day after the stroke. Ettinger takes comfort in what happened next. He acted fast. "I pronounced death—anyone can do that in Arizona—and the funeral people were there in a few minutes. We had already started packing her in ice, and the funeral people started right away." She was flown to Detroit. She is Patient No. 34. She was not lost.

Ettinger finds nothing so uninteresting as history. "When the future expands," he wrote, "the past shrinks." In the Golden Age, no one will read Shakespeare: "Not only will his work be far too weak in intellect, and written in too vague and puny a language, but the problems which concerned him will be, in the main, no more than historical curiosities." Still, Ettinger told me, when I asked, that his mother and both his wives kept photo albums and that they're at the institute, in that storeroom that was once a library, somewhere. He promised that we could look for them on the second day of my visit, even though he was baffled by my interest. The future, so gleamy and white. I wore anyone possibly care about the dusty, past past?

The storeroom was a mess. There was an old StairMaster and some folding tables. The bookshelves housed a set of the Encyclopedia Britannica, someone's college textbooks—"Organic Chemistry," and a T-shirt with the periodic table. Along one wall stood a bank of file drawers.

"What's in there?"
"Any patient who wants to can buy
a drawer, to put things in," Andy said.

"Really?"

"But not many of them ask."

Mae Ettinger did. She kept a diary and requested that it be stored here, marked "Not to be read until and unless it is deemed useful for the revival." It won't survive, though. Paper turns to dust.

Andy riffled through drawer after drawer. At last, he found them: ten bulky albums with flesh-toned covers, pink, brown, and beige. He and I logged them back to the table in the conference room. And then Ettinger and I sat, for a good hour, maybe more, and turned pages. The albums were mostly photographs, but there were old documents in there, too: a military I.D., a college transcript, newspaper clippings. Ettinger hadn't wanted to drag these albums out, but now that he had decided to indulge me he was determined to be thorough. He didn't skip a single photograph, even prying apart pages that had got stuck. He was bored before we began; I could have looked at that stuff forever.

The earliest albums belonged to his mother: sepia pictures of his babyhood. He offered names: "That's Leo... That's Pee Wee Russell. He married my mother's sister, Mary." He remembered people from his early years best. He was very sharp on the names of his cousins, growing up, and he never missed the name of a dog. He plans to freeze the one he has now, Mugsy. Mac will like that. His father appeared in a picture or two, then disappeared. There followed photographs of Ettinger in uniform (handsome, smiling, promising) and, on the next pages, in casts, sepia pictures of his babyhood.

That's one of Pat's kids," he'd say. Or, more often than not, "Who the hell is that? I don't know who the hell that is." "When you wake up, nearly everyone in these albums will be gone," I said. "Won't you miss them?"

"I hope to see the people I knew before, and that I loved before," Ettinger sighed. "Most of the people I grew up with are already gone. That's been true for a long time. Most of the people that anybody grows up with they lose track of. We lose them."

Unless we save them, in the freezer, in an archive, in our children, forever in our hearts, in God's care. We had gone through one of the albums, two, five, eight. I asked why cryonics is, by my objective measure, a failure. Ettinger talked about something that he calls the "legacy effect," the crippling hold of the past. If not for that, the Freezer Era would have dawned in 1964, when it was supposed to.

And then, as abruptly as we began, we were done. He pulled himself up to standing, grabbed his cane, and tapped the last page of the final photo album. "Someone should have put labels on these things," he muttered.

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