2 THE NAKED FACE OF HATE

The "Three Amys": Amy DuRoss, Amy Daly, Amy Lewis, with Christina Olson, friendly security guard, and Kirk Kleinschmidt.

Autographed posters of Pixar's *Toy Story* beamed down from the walls of the office hallway. The unmistakable smell of pizza wafted from a closed door, as did a hum of conversation.

We stepped into cheerful chaos, like lunchtime at a college cafeteria. Everybody seemed young, and there were open pizza boxes on one counter top.

A giant cardboard thermometer towered over a lady with a telephone snugged to one ear. Her fingers were typing madly, but she smiled like Popeye's girlfriend, a beaming Olive Oyl.

"Amy Lewis," said Bob, as if those two words took care of everything, then added, "She is in charge of fundraising for the campaign." She smiled again and kept on with the call.

Amy DuRoss worked side by side with Bob in formation of Prop 71.

The ten-foot thermometer had markers on the side — 5, 10, 15, 20 — marking points for *millions of dollars*. At the top was $30 million, the amount needed for a successful campaign. But the thermometer was blank: empty, except for a little green smear at the bottom of the bulb — $100,000, a donation from Bob. Where would all the millions come from?

"We don't take money from biomedical corporations or Big Pharma, the drug outfits," said Bob, "People need to know this is a patient advocate community effort."

Heads turned, as when the lion shows up at the water hole. People remembered things they wanted Bob's opinion on; a queue began to form.

"I'm Amy Daly," said a strongly built woman, turning to me after showing Bob a sample flier, "But since there are three Amys, we just go by our last names. Call me Daly," she said, "I work with patient advocate groups. That was Lewis you just met."

"Bob, your ten o'clock!" snapped a woman with green eyes. Bob said, "Ah!" and was gone.

"That was DuRoss, the third Amy," said Daly, "Want some pizza?"

I had never been on a campaign with an actual budget before. Everything before had been on the Zero Budget Option: be creative as you wished, as long as you paid for it yourself. This was different: one campaign to raise the money — before we could win the main campaign.

"Just to get on the ballot," said Daly, "we need five hundred and fifty thousand signatures, plus maybe another hundred thousand extra, to make sure there are enough valid addresses."

Two-thirds of a million signatures? And after that we had to persuade California (in the midst of a recession) to risk six billion dollars (three for the cost, three for interest) on medical research?

Jaclyn Hantgan, Christina Olson, Lorraine Stiehl — volunteers extraordinaire.

Each signature sheet held a brief description of the program, plus space for names and addresses.

"Take some with you when you go," said Daly. A pause.

"Is there anything we can do — right now?"

"Well…." She pointed to a pile of empty cardboard boxes, "The clipboards for the signature gatherers did not arrive. But we have these boxes. If somebody could take a razor blade and cut them up into squares, we could use them for backing..."

I went home with a blood blister on my thumb. The pile of boxes was gone. So was the pizza.

When Gloria told me she was going to help me gather signatures, I did not really think she would be too helpful. I had studied the information sheet back and forth, and Gloria is more of a get-up-and-do-it kind of person. But I do not argue with my wife a whole lot. It is not safe.

Let's see, did we have everything? Two folding chairs, blank petitions, a sheet of message points[1], ballpoint pens, and a card table with a sign that read "STEM CELLS ON THE BALLOT?" We were ready!

Several managers shooed us away when we tried to set up shop in front of their stores. "Too controversial," one said. But another had a sister with diabetes, and he said, "Absolutely!"

[1] Key talking points about Proposition 71: the California stem cell research and cures initiative [Internet] [cited 2015 Feb 2]. Available from: http://digital.library.ucla.edu/websites/2004_996_027/documents/KeyTalkingPoints.pdf

Amy Lewis with Amy Daly and friend Erin Robbins of JDRF.

Seated comfortably, I glanced over my message points, waiting for someone to stop by and visit. I envisioned a leisurely conversation, sharing thoughts on the possibilities of stem cells.

A stream of people passed. One or two looked our way. But nobody stopped, and nobody signed.

"This is not working," said Gloria, and jumped off her chair. She did not actually tackle the nearest passerby, but she had him by the sleeve, and his face went through several changes of expression before she maneuvered him to the table.

"This gentleman wants to help get stem cells on the ballot," she said.

I went into my memorized lecture from the message point sheet.

"Stem cells are 'unspecialized' cells that can generate healthy new tissues and organs," I told him, "Possible treatments and cures for many diseases and injuries include…"

Gloria had sent two more people over. A line was forming. The first man shifted foot to foot.

"… cancer, heart disease, diabetes, Alzheimer's, Parkinson's, HIV and AIDS, multiple sclerosis, Lou Gehrig's disease, spinal cord — "

"He just wants to sign the petition, Hon!" called Gloria.

"Yes, dear," I sighed, and handed the man a pen.

We watched a professional signature gatherer once and it was a revelation. He had the "ask" down to four words — "Support stem cell research?" — and offered them the clipboard. If they said no, he just moved on.

In terms of signature gathering, it seemed, there were four kinds of people.

Category one: YES — put your name here, please.

Category two: MAYBE — give a brief run-down (2–3 short sentences), but not much more; no sense lecturing a "maybe" while two or three "yes" voters walk by.

Category Three: NO — if someone was against the research, we did not waste their time or ours.

And the fourth category?

I was "tabling" alone at the corner of University and Telegraph Avenues, in front of the Sather Gate entrance to University of California Berkeley. If there was ever a safe place to gather signatures for a progressive initiative, this had to be it, I thought: perhaps the most liberal spot on the planet, and Berkeley was the town where I was born.

I was working with one man who had a couple of questions when the flint-eyed elderly woman approached, she and a little bald man. They read my stem cell sign, looked at each other, then stood by, listening intently. The woman's lips were compressed to a thin line. She must be irritated by having to wait, I thought, and I hurried the gentleman to sign his name.

I got to her fast as I could. "Support stem cell research?" I asked cheerfully.

She *spat* on me. I heard the noise, saw the twist of white foam, and watched it land on the toe of my shoe.

I had wondered what it would be like to see the naked face of hate. Would it be terrifying, a person devoid of reason, or infuriating, someone who would deny my son his chance to walk?

What I felt, but did not say, was: "Lady, you are a little bit crazy."

The bald man guided her away. She went calmly now, apparently having delivered her message. The spittle dried on my shoe. I went on gathering signatures.

But I was glad she was not carrying a gun.

A couple weeks later, when I showed up at the campaign office, a security guard was blocking the door. What was this about, I asked as the guard looked me up on a list.

"Didn't you hear?" he said, "They blew up a stem cell lab."

"Police Confirm Pipe Bomb Blast at Stem Cell Lab[2]

"BOSTON (Reuters) — An explosion that blew out a number of windows at a Boston-area laboratory specializing in stem cell research was caused by a pipe bomb, local police said.

"[…] No one was wounded in [the] blast at Watertown, Massachusetts-based Amaranth Bio, which is working on cures for diabetes and liver disorders."

The opponents of research disclaimed responsibility. Nothing to do with them, they said, probably just some disgruntled former employee.

I was not so sure, because where do people like my little old lady friend get their information? They were being pumped full of poisonous misinformation.

[2]Police confirm pipe bomb blast at (Boston) stem cell lab. *Yahoo News* [Internet]. 2004 Aug 28 [cited 2015 Feb 2]. Available from: http://www.freerepublic.com/focus/f-news/1201313/posts

Imagine someone emotionally on the edge, who goes around mumbling to themselves. Now think how they feel when someone tells them stem cell research is… *murder*?

One lady, a friend of the family, asked, "Where do you keep the babies?"

"What babies?"

"The ones you get the spare parts from, like they told us about in church," she said.

She had been hearing statements like the following:

"It's indisputably killing," says Douglas Johnson, legislative director for the National Right to Life Committee in Washington. "Living human beings should not be used for harmful research without their consent."[3]

That is close to an allegation of murder and it must have an effect on impressionable minds, even though it is utter nonsense. For how can there be "killing" when there is no "living human being" involved? Living *tissue*, yes; like a growing hair or a microscopic heart cell, each of which contains the full DNA makeup of a person — but living tissue is not a life.

Embryonic stem cells for research come from materials left over from the In Vitro Fertilization (IVF) process. Consider how the stem cells are really gathered in the actual process. A childless couple goes to the IVF clinic to try to make a baby. This has been done successfully by more than five million families using the standard IVF treatment.[4]

The man's part is easy; he goes into a room by himself and donates his biological materials. That's it, he's done.

The woman's part is far more serious. She first takes hormones to increase her egg production, and later has the eggs removed by a surgery called oocyte removal.[5]

As with any medicine, there can be side effects. While millions of women have done the procedure safely, a small percentage do have reactions to the hormones involved, and some have actually died.[6] The donor deserves full information, including every negative possibility.

The gathered eggs and sperm are then mixed in a dish, making 15 to 20 fertilized eggs, called blastocysts. The healthiest one or two are put inside the woman's womb. Hopefully, this implants in the wall of the uterus, becomes an embryo, and a baby begins. We wish them well.

But what happens to the other fertilized eggs, which are NOT placed in the womb? If not implanted, it is biologically impossible for any of these to become a child. These "leftover" blastocysts can be frozen and stored (for a monthly fee), or given to another

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[3] Belsie L. Should U.S. fund embryonic-cell research? *The Christian Science Monitor* [Internet]. 2001 Mar 13 [cited 2015 Feb 2]. Available from: http://www.csmonitor.com/2001/0313/p2s1.html/(page)/3

[4] Bryner J. Five million babies born from IVF, other reproductive technologies. *NBC News* [Internet]. 2012 Jul 3 [cited 2015 Feb 2]. Available from: http://www.nbcnews.com/id/48060498/ns/technology_and_science-science/t/million-babies-born-ivf-other-reproductive-technologies/

[5] In vitro fertilization for infertility [Internet]. 2013 Nov 14 [cited 2015 Feb 2]. Available from: http://www.webmd.com/infertility-and-reproduction/in-vitro-fertilization-for-infertility

[6] Ovarian hyperstimulation syndrome. *Wikipedia* [Internet] [updated 2014 Nov 22; cited 2015 Feb 2]. Available from: http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Ovarian_hyperstimulation_syndrome

couple. Embryo donation can be done through a company for five or ten thousand dollars. Not many IVF donors choose this option, apparently fearing that the potential child may be adopted by a bad family.[7] Or, as typically happens, the fertilized eggs are simply discarded.

How many blastocysts are frozen and stored? Roughly half a million of such fertilized eggs are "cryo-preserved" right now — test tubes in tanks of nitrogen at minus 190°C. No one knows for sure how many millions are flushed away, incinerated, or tossed in the landfill.

If something is going to be discarded, might it not be better to use it to try and help people?

When the decision to donate has been made, the blastocyst (so small it could literally rest on the point of a pin) is taken apart under a microscope. It feels no pain; it cannot, having no nerves.

The stem cells are extracted and put in a dish of feeder gel.[8]

I have seen the petri dish, the orange gel, and the infinitesimal tiny specks; the stem cells.

That's it, the whole process. Where is the "killing" of the "living human being"? There is none. But wait; the argument is made, if one of those blastocysts was implanted in a woman's uterus, a baby could begin. The blastocyst has the potential for life.

That is perfectly true. But are potential and reality the same?

Consider a drop of semen. Inside it are multitudes of wriggling spermatozoa, each of which (if put inside a woman's uterus) could potentially join an egg, implant in the wall of the womb, become an embryo, and maybe a baby. If a male produces 250,000,000 sperm in a single ejaculation,[9] must every sperm be preserved? Each one has the potential for life. One ejaculation, if every sperm was preserved, could almost equal the population of America!

Remember the silly song in the Monty Python movie, *The Meaning of Life*? "Every sperm is sacred…" If every sperm must be regarded as an infant, a teenage male's wet dream would be accidental manslaughter of cataclysmic proportions, and masturbation would be mass murder.

As the name implies, stem cell research is microscopic cells, cells, nothing but cells — and then the possibilities of eventual cures. Such possibilities! There seems almost no limits to what might be achieved.

Need a new liver? Maybe we can grow one.[10]

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[7] Kapralos K. Evangelicals embryo adoption: devout Christians seek a future for thousands of frozen embryos. *Huffington Post* [Internet]. 2012 Sep 10 [updated 2012 Sep 13; cited 2015 Feb 2]. Available from: http://www.huffingtonpost.com/2012/09/10/evangelicals-embryo-adopt_n_1871832.html

[8] Myths and misconceptions about stem cell research [Internet] [cited 2015 Feb 2]. Available from: http://www.cirm.ca.gov/our-progress/myths-and-misconceptions-about-stem-cell-research

[9] Olson ER. Why are 250 million sperm cells released during sex? *LiveScience* [internet]. 2013 Jan 24 [cited 2015 Feb 2]. Available from: http://www.livescience.com/32437-why-are-250-million-sperm-cells-released-during-sex.html

[10] Scientists create human liver from stem cells. *NBC News Chicago* [Internet]. 2013 Jul 3 [cited 2015 Feb 2]. Available from: http://www.nbcchicago.com/news/national-international/214206791.html

Heart attack scars? Stem cells might turn these into functioning cardiac muscle.[11]

Lose your sight? Perhaps we can regrow your retina.[12]

Paralyzed? Growing nerves may reconnect body and brain — and eliminate the need for a wheelchair.[13]

"False hope!" the opposition cries, "Peddling empty dreams!"

But does not everything great begin with a dream? What improvements could there ever be, if we did not dare to dream? "Without a vision, the people perish," the Bible says, Proverbs 29:18.

Across the state, excitement grew. People gave up weekends and evenings to gather signatures and help their friends and family members who were suffering.

How many times had well-meaning friends said, "I want to help, is there anything I can do?" Now there was something they could do. Fill a signature sheet, turn it in, and get another.

If Roman in his wheelchair could harass passersby for signatures, what able-bodied person could refuse to help — for what might be the greatest advance in medical history?

Our friends, the Kaplan family, showed what could be done. Young Ben had cerebral palsy; his twin brother Oliver did not. It must have been terribly frustrating sometimes for Ben to see his brother with all the physical abilities and freedoms that were denied him. But the Kaplans did not sit around groaning. They unified in effort, battling for every signature, giving signature sheets to friends, family, and neighbors — going door to door, asking, asking, and asking. Gloria, Roman, and I collected around 2,000 signatures. The Kaplans organized their extended family and brought in five times that much. (To see the Kaplan twins, visit https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=uzpEccZP6JM)

We had memorable moments. Once, our chartered bus lost power going up a steep San Francisco hill and started rolling backwards. I was sitting behind the driver. As we careened out of control, it occurred to me to whisper, "We have confidence in you." He just laughed and said, "Happens all the time," and steered the bus onto somebody's lawn.

Sometimes there was beauty, as when we gathered in thousands and walked across the Golden Gate Bridge. Behind us was the sweep of green hills, and on both sides the blue of San Francisco Bay; ahead of us the Embarcadero awaited, a signature-gathering heaven with thousands of passersby, great food from Fisherman's Wharf, and sea lions barking from the piers nearby.

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[11] Malliaras K, Zhang Y, Seinfeld J, *et al*. (2013). Cardiomyocyte proliferation and progenitor cell recruitment underlie therapeutic regeneration after myocardial infarction in the adult mouse heart. *EMBO Mol Med* **5** (2): 191–209.

[12] Stem cells and the future of eye treatment. *AOA News* [internet]. 2013 Nov 4 [cited 2015 Feb 2]. Available from: http://www.aoa.org/news/clinical-eye-care/stem-cells-and-the-future-of-eye-treatment?sso=y

[13] Woodbury MA. Hans Keirstead can make mice walk again (and humans, too?). *Esquire* [Internet]. 2009 Nov 17 [cited 2015 Feb 2]. Available from: http://www.esquire.com/features/best-and-brightest-2009/human-embryonic-stem-cell-research-1209

Sometimes it was surprising. Gathering signatures in something called a Pride Parade, I turned around to see a naked man about six feet away; somehow I forgot to ask for a signature from the person with the all-over tan.

But mostly it was just work: like the caregiving chores for a loved one, and done for the very same reason. And when the goal seemed far away, it helped to remember Bob Klein's words:

"Let's send a message," he said, cheerful and confident, "We need 550,000 signatures to get on the ballot, 650,000 to be on the safe side. But if we can get a million…"

It was impossible, of course. But we did it anyway.

We turned in 1.1 million verified signatures, twice as many as required. We had passed the first hurdle. We had a number, Proposition 71, and a name, the California Stem Cells for Research and Cures Initiative, and we were on the ballot.

Now we would be judged by the voters.