

Stem Cell Battles: Proposition 71 and Beyond

Don C. Reed

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A father's fight for his son's health becomes a global effort, in this highly recommended book about Proposition 71 and stem-cell research.

Don C. Reed's son, Roman, was paralyzed as a result of a high-school football injury. In fighting back against his son's injury, Reed ended up being instrumental in passing the first US law that provides grants for stem-cell research, the Roman Reed Spinal Cord Injury Research Act of 1999 (AB-714), and the first stem-cell supportive law in the United States (California SB-253, 2002). His efforts led to Proposition 71, a California program to make robust stem-cell research available to scientists via grants and appropriate facilities, which became state law in 2004.

The book's core is the Proposition 71 initiative in California. Reed wisely scatters in stories of people whose lives are affected by chronic illnesses or injuries that stem-cell research could improve—or perhaps cure. The most recognizable of these people is the late actor Christopher Reeve.

Reed's voice is warm, optimistic, and determined while he acknowledges that such political battles are hard on both patients and caregivers. His attitude of calm hope in the face of obstacles both public and personal is admirable and encouraging.

Although the nonsequential organization of the chapters appears confusing at first glance, its purpose becomes clear. While the author moves back and forth along the time line, he is able to not only provide background information about stem-cell research (what it is, the diseases and injuries it may help to cure, and the human stories of those affected by it) but also bring to life the people behind the political and medical scenes in this uphill battle of research and politics. If Reed had used a beginning-to-end structure, perhaps the energy of his and others' efforts would not have been as clear and thus would have lessened the book's sense of urgency.

Stem Cell Battles is a prime example of how a small group of people can bring about significant change for many. It is a valuable book for that reason alone, but the human stories Reed includes make it more so.

J. G. STINSON (Winter 2016)

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