

# In Memory of Christopher Reeve

Christopher Reeve, Chair of the Christopher Reeve Paralysis Foundation, biomedical research activist and actor, died on October 10 at the age of 52. He received the ASCB Public Service Award in 2001 and was named one of the first two ASCB Citizen Members, in recognition of extraordinary commitment to the advancement of cell biology, in 2003.

Throughout his life, Reeve was a tireless advocate for important social causes, serving as spokesman for the arts, campaign finance reform and the environment. He was the founder and co-president of the Creative Coalition and was actively involved with Save the Children, Amnesty International and The National Resources Defense Council.

The world first became aware of Christopher Reeve as an actor. After studying at Julliard, he made his Broadway debut opposite the late Katharine Hepburn. Reeve's break-out role was as Superman, in four successful movies.

Reeve's involvement with biomedical research advocacy followed a life-threatening spinal cord injury in May 1995 which he sustained while competing in a horse show in Virginia. The accident left him instantly paralyzed and unable to breathe on his own.

While still recovering from the accident, Reeve started applying his activist instincts to changing the dismal prognosis of people with spinal cord injury. He founded the Christopher Reeve Paralysis Foundation and served as its Chair until his death. Since its founding, the Foundation has awarded \$46.5 million to biomedical researchers around the world. With his friends and fellow actors, Michael J. Fox and Mary Tyler Moore, who also suffer from life-threatening conditions, he used his star power to collaborate with scientists, to advocate to Congress, and to convince the American people to support biomedical research for the common good.

In the years since his accident, Reeve became one of the most outspoken patient-advocates on behalf of biomedical research, particularly embryonic stem cell research and nuclear transplantation. He joined ASCB members Larry Goldstein and Paul Berg in testifying before committees of the House of Representatives and the Senate and in briefings for Members of Congress and staff. To Americans and people around the world, he represented the face of stem cell research.

Many Society members remember the 2001 ASCB Annual Meeting in Washington, DC, when Reeve was presented with the eighth annual Public Service Award before thousands of scientists who attended the event. Goldstein recognized Reeve as "a potent voice in collaborative ef-

forts ... to double the budget of the National Institutes of Health and ensure that these Federal funds can be used for embryonic stem cell research."

In accepting the ASCB award, Reeve challenged scientists to visit hospitals or rehabilitation centers once a week. "Go and see the human beings who are suffering," Reeve admonished, "and then ask yourself, is the work I did today in my laboratory relevant to human suffering? Did I do something that's going to help to change somebody's life, maybe not today but sometime soon?"

Reeve took personal involvement in his own recovery to new heights, by educating himself in the latest research therapies, and undergoing rigorous physical therapy. He determined to keep his muscles tone and stay in excellent physical health despite his paralysis, reasoning that if science were to enable a return of some motor function, his body would be able to support movement, avoiding the muscle atrophy that is typical of people with paralysis.

At the time of Reeve's death, the CRPF, under Reeve's leadership, was pushing for Congressional passage of legislation to enhance research into paralysis, to improve rehabilitation and the quality of life for persons living with paralysis. Regrettably, the politics associated with stem cell research interfered with passage of the bill, despite wide, bipartisan support in Congress and from the Bush Administration. In both the House and the Senate, opponents of stem cell research prevented the bill from even being debated.

Presenting Chris Reeve with the ASCB award, Larry Goldstein called Reeve, "someone who has transcended celebrity and met the definition of a hero – someone who has not only overcome adversity through perseverance and effort, but who has had a profound and positive impact on our society. Mr. Reeve has been instrumental in inspiring the public and the Congress to support many critical areas of biomedical research, and has reminded those of us who are privileged to work as scientists, not only of the value of what we do, but of our responsibility to those who need us."

Reeve is survived by his mother, Barbara Johnson, and his father, Franklin Reeve; his brother, Benjamin Reeve; his wife, Dana Reeve, and three children: Matthew Reeve, 25, Alexandra Reeve, 21 and Will Reeve, 12. ■



*Christopher Reeve*

*—Paul Berg, Larry Goldstein, Elizabeth Marincola, Mary Tyler Moore and Kevin Wilson*