

Stem Cell, a memoir
by Timothy X. Troy



A radio memoir.

SCRIPT SAMPLE

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Synopsis:

On March 27, 2015, an admired brother hits send on an email asking six siblings to offer tissue samples for medical testing. Less than a week later, while lying in a hospital bed at Walter Reed Medical Center, recently retired U.S. Army Lieutenant General William J. Troy calls his youngest brother to ask, "Are you willing to save my life?"

In an instant, the urgency of life and death, the confusion of unfamiliar science, the mysteries of chance and fate, and the impulse to probe the events of an extraordinary life, unfold in the heart and mind of a younger brother 1000 miles away.

Stem Cell - a memoir for radio, seeks to shape the author's powerful experiences as a bone marrow stem cell donor between March and November of 2015. The narrative emerged from the actual emails, texts, journal notes, voice mail messages, and medical reports that serve as touch stones for a complex, evolving relationship between two siblings. Separated by ten years in birth order and having pursued very different professional and personal lives the brothers struggle to navigate the complexity of an unimagined intimacy.

The recipient (Bill) had just begun civilian life after a very successful 37-year army career. Choosing where to live, how to rearrange domestic life, and how to translate professional expertise from a military to a civilian context were his concerns of the moment. The donor (Tim) expresses his life as a theatre maker and college professor. Around them swirl the health care professionals, colleagues, wives, siblings and sons who teeter between calculated optimism and blind hope.

Stem Cell - a memoir, explores the anxiety, conflict, and vulnerability of two brothers as they plunge unwillingly into the complex and sometimes comical realities of cutting-edge medical science and recognize the vivid everyday blessings that forge the story of their lives.

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SFX: EMAIL ALERT. KEY STROKES UNDER.

Bill (email voice)

Brothers and sisters. First, please know how I treasure your love and support. I do need your help, and I know each of you would do anything to help me through this. An essential part of dealing with this kind of very aggressive leukemia will be a stem cell transplant. Still down the road a bit. But it's my best possible chance and siblings are the best possible source for a donor. I know my brothers will be skeptical that a match is even possible, because each of you secretly considers yourself smarter, stronger, sexier, more capable, and better looking. That may be true, but right know all I care about is: if the genes fit, wear them. It will be enormously helpful if each of you can do the mouth swab and return it to Walter Reed as soon as possible so the analysis can begin.

I haven't forgotten about you, Kathie. Since today is April 4th of 2015 it means we're all getting ready to wish you a happy – drumroll - 65th birthday!

INT. MUNICIPAL AUDITORIUM. 1970 PUBLIC ADDRESS SYSTEM.

Voice of Mayor Kenneth Huck

On behalf of the City of Racine, we present this plaque in recognition of your uncommon bravery. We declare this day May 17th, 1970 – William J. Troy day. (He reads.) “Seldom have we seen, in the form of a 17-year-old, such unselfishness, such grace under fire. We are proud, William, that you are a son of our city. You are a sure sign that our youth can still show valor in the face of danger, and humility in the face of praise.

Tim

Can I see the plaque? x This is for saving that lady from the fire at the apartment building, right? I bet you'll be in the paper like Joey did for being so good in baseball.

SFX. VIETNAM ERA MEDIA REPORTAGE ABOUT THE MAI LY “INCIDENT,” THE “SECRET” BOMBING OF CAMBODIA, KENT STATE SHOOTING, LT. CALLEY COURT MARSHALL WITH BRIEF SUMMARY OF “WE HAD TO BURN THE VILLAGE TO SAVE IT.”

Tim

Someone told Joey that you're not going West Point because of Vietnam and shooting those college kids.

Bill

Timmy, if those are our leaders, then they need people to fix it. I want to help fix it.

Dad

Billy's going away to college, just like your sister Kathie did. He's going to the US Military Academy and we're all very proud.

Tim

Is this what happens when you grow up? So, we'll see you again at Thanksgiving?

SFX. 1973. VOICE OF WALTER CRONKITE ANNOUNCING THE MIDDLE EAST OIL EMBARGO.

Tim

Dad, does the Embargo thing mean Billy will go to war in the Middle East after he graduates?

Dad

No, Timmy. I don't think we're going to war. Do you worry about Billy going to war?

Tim

Yes.

Dad

I'll let you know if looks like something like that might happen. Try not to worry.

EXT. STADIUM. COMMENCEMENT CEREMONIES. 1975. US MILITARY ACADEMY.

Voice of Pres. Ford (through PA system)

As you take your new commissions and begin your service to our country, feel the pride of your accomplishments here, and lead and serve this great nation.

Dad

Watch, Timmy! They'll all throw their hats in the air.

SFX. ERUPTION OF 300 MEN'S VOICES CHEERING. FADE TO IGNITION, IDLE, AND CAR DOOR OPEN & CLOSE. 1975 PONTIAC FIREBIRD.

INT. SMALL INDY CAFÉ. LIGHT AMBIENT SOUND OF A FEW PEOPLE TALKING, ESPRESSO MACHINE, FRONT DOOR WITH BELL AS IT OPENS AND CLOSES.

Tim

Thanks for taking the time to meet us. It's a fun little place. This is cinnamon and here's an almond biscotti. Help yourselves.

Cory

I hear people talk about Sven's. This is great neighborhood.

Tim

Thanks. We wanted to be sure you knew we were ready for the Trustees next week. We know the Q & A session will be informal, but we tried to anticipate questions we were most likely to field. We'll appreciate any feedback you can give us as we prepare.

CELL PHONE RINGS. RUFFLES THROUGH A CASE TO RETRIEVE IT. AS IS CONTINUES.

Tim

I'm so sorry, Cory. I ... Adam will explain. I have a family thing, I ... I need to take this call.

INT TO EXT. PASSES THE SHORT DISTANCE THROUGH THE DOOR, BELL RINGS, LIGHT TRAFFIC NOISE AS HE PROCEEDS TO A TABLE NEAR THE ENTRANCE. PHONE RINGS STOPS.

Tim

This is Tim. Billy?

Bill (through phone)

Tim, yeah, it's Billy. I'm at Walter Reed with Paula.

Tim

Billy! Wow. Is this? How are you – today? – It is so great to hear your voice.

Bill

Timmy, ... I'm calling to find out ... if you'd be willing to save my life.

Tim

Yes! Hell, yes! Cha-ching! Of, course. Oh, my good God. Devoutly to be wished.

Bill

They tell me you're a perfect match. You're the only match.

Tim

It will be my honor. I'm so happy to help. Anything. What wonderful news.

Paula on phone:

Thank you, Timmy. I knew it would be you! (cheers, exclamations)

Tim

The only match! Really? There are six of us.

Bill

The only match. A perfect match. We knew it would be you! We hoped – You are the first ray of lightness we've had since –

SFX. A CITY BUS STOPS, RELEASES AIR PRESSURE AS IT 'KNEELS', DOORS SLIDE OPEN.

Tim

I'm so – I – Billy, anything. Anything. I'm there. Know that. I have absolutely no fear. Oh, my God.

Bill

Thank you, Timmy. The docs, the nurses, receptionists, everyone is stopping in to congratulate us. I guess this is a big deal.

PAULA on phone:

Perfect HLA match! 10-point match. Thanks, Timmy!

Bill

You're perfect. I don't know what to tell you. Something will happen soon. We'll need to talk again.

Tim

I'm all there, bro. I dearly hoped for this phone call.

Bill

I need you, Timmy. Stay safe. If you rode a motorcycle, I'd ask you to withhold that impulse 'til this was over, but you know, I guess, I just need you to stay safe.

Tim

Stop bungee jumping?

Bill

Yeah, no bungee for now.

Tim

Extreme moto-cross? Swimming with sharks? Defer my plans to scale El Capitan?

Bill

Right! Later, Timmy.

Tim

I love you, Billy.

SFX. FLIP PHONE CLOSSES. CLOSE-UP ON OPENING AND STRIKING A ZIPPO. LIGHTS A CIGARETTE. TAKES A DEEP DRAG, EXHALES AS THE INNER VOICE EXCLAIMS:

Tim (inner voice)

Oh, my God. Oh, my God. Oh, my God. Do I need to stop smoking for this? Anything. Does it matter? Not today. The guys are waiting.

BACK THROUGH THE CAFÉ DOOR. THROUGH THE SMALL CROWD.

Tim

Sorry. I needed to take that. Did Adam explain what was going on?

Cory

Yes. Good luck. Was that?

Tim

I'm the match! That was ... my brother Bill ... asking me to save his life. Who gets that call? This doesn't happen to people. Wow. OK, let's talk ...

CORY and ADAM:

Such great news. Congratulations. I'm so happy for you.

Tim

Thanks. You're very kind. Wow. Right now, I'm really grateful the for The Enlightenment.

Adam and Cory

(laughter) So am I. I've always been a fan of John Locke. There's a thought.

Tim

The scientific method – van Leeuwenhoek, Gregor Mendel, Darwin. Mme. Curie all glowing in the dark. I'd like to slap a few of those idiots in Madison who tried to stop this research. Show them this. The center holds, man.

Cory

I want to look at your bookshelf.

Tim

OK. I got that out. Let's talk about external funding.

INT TO EXT TO INT: GRADUAL CROSS-FADE CAFÉ THROUGH THE DOOR, OUTSIDE, ANOTHER CIGARETTE, CAR DOORS OPENS & CLOSES, ENGINE REVS, A SHORT DRIVE, AUTOMATIC GARAGE DOOR OPENS, CAR PARKS, ENGINE OFF, CAR DOORS OPEN & SHUT, GARAGE DOOR CLOSES WHILE...

Tim (inner voice)

What's the difference between leukemia and lymphoma? OK, Mom's lymphoma was from her rheumatoid meds, but Billy's? This is: Shit just happens, right? Genetic mutation? Now we know for certain Billy and I are from the same parents. No milkman in our history. We look the most alike. Same hair and build. Temperament alike. Does that matter? 25% chance. A 25% chance repeated six times and it happened once.

Some families must get multiple hits. I'm sure many families get no hits. Ah, Mother of God, what if the only hit is someone who can't do it? That would suck so bad. Ten years apart and four pregnancies between us before the genetic roulette wheel made a match. Thank God, Mom and Dad made me during the Cuban Missile Crisis, during that moment. That hol-y- hapla -type combination thing. Dude – you can't die between now and when this thing is over! If you die, he'll die. Don't die, man. If you die, you'll take Billy with you. What the hell!

Is this what this is like? I feel totally feminine. My body can do this thing. My body can do this thing that gives life to another person. What the Hell!

I'm like a mom. I'm a mom. Oh, my God, this is what expectant Mom's know. This is what I know now.

INT: OFFICE PHONE RINGS. HANDSET PICK UP.

Tim

Hi, this is Tim.

Julie

Good afternoon Mr. Troy. This is Julie Draper from the National Institutes of Health in Maryland.

Tim

Hi, Julie. It's very nice to meet you. When do I start?

Julie

We saw your brother, ah, Bill, today. We understand that you've agreed to be you brother's stem cell donor, here in Bethesda.

Tim

Whatever you need.

Julie

We need to make a date for you have full health screening here at NIH to confirm your HLA typing and rule out any health complications that may interfere with your brother's recovery.

Tim

OK. We just got very formal, didn't we?

SFX: CELL PHONE TEXT ALERT.

BILL (via text)

Looks like we'll see you next week here in DC. Thanks for everything you're doing. Love you, Billy.

INT. SFX. VERY DOMESTIC. WASHING DISHES IN THE SINK. GENTLE CLINK OF PANS. RINSING.

Tim

Thanks for helping me with the hotel. It's so great that it's such an easy flight. I think I should have asked your input or permission or something before I said "Yes" to Billy.

Jackie

It's your body.

Tim

Thanks, but you know, it's not just my body, is it? Clearly.

Jackie

You couldn't refuse. You wouldn't. Why would you? He'd be the first to do it for you.

Tim

True 'dat. So, here's the latest mind-blower.

Jackie

The latest in a long string...

Tim

So he gets my stem cells, right? It's not that he builds his immune system from my stem cells. He actually builds my immune system. In him. They're my cells. And it's not just white cells. It's my whole blood system – red cells, white cells, platelets. I'm in him. He'll have all my immunities, all my vaccinations, my illnesses, whatever I fought-off after my surgery. My *imuno-memory*. Everything. If we have different blood types, his blood type will change to mine.

Jackie

So, you could plot the perfect murder where he left blood traces at a crime scene and you were prosecuted beyond any doubt because your exact DNA was at the crime scene, but you were never actually there.

Tim

How cool is that! Transplant humor. Who knew there was even such a thing?

SFX: CELL PHONE TEXT ALERT.

Bill (text voice)

Paula and I both agreed your joyous reaction only created more joy for us. It is the happiest we have been in a long time. You will be the perfect partner, Tim, and we'll have a bond for the rest of our lives.