


[Subscribe Now](#)
[Contact](#)
[Welcome](#)

Magazine Information:

[What is Wellington](#)

[Publishers Letter](#)

[Our Media Kit](#)

[Subscribe Now](#)

In This Issue:

Features

- **COVER STORY:**
[The Changing Face Of Fitness](#)
- [These Five Surgeons Make Wishes Come True](#)
- [Row, Row, Row Your Boat...](#)
- [Bariatric Surgery Transforms One Life At A Time](#)
- [1986-2006: Palms West Hospital Then & Now](#)

Wellington Celebrity Shopper

- [Kevin DiLallo, CEO of Wellington Regional Medical Center](#)

Wellington This Month

- [‘The World We Create’ At S.F. Science Museum](#)

Wellington At Home

- [For Lisa And Raymond Cruz, Timing Was Critical When They Moved Into Their Meadowland Cove Home](#)

Wellington Business

IN THIS ISSUE...

July 2006 - Features

Bernard Siegel & The Genetics Policy Institute

Wellington Attorney A Leader In Worldwide Policy Debate Over Stem-Cell Research

Byline: Matthew Auerbach

Finding one's true calling in life is arguably the most important discovery any person can make. Some know why they've been put on the planet from an early age. Some stumble into the realization. Some people never know.

Then there's Wellington resident Bernard Siegel. Siegel was quite comfortable as a Miami attorney, practicing family law for almost 30 years. Until the night in 2000 when his daughter asked him for help writing a school paper.

“She was writing a paper on Dolly, the sheep that had been cloned from an adult stem cell in Scotland in 1996,” Siegel said. “I helped her do some research and worked on the paper with her. I found the subject incredibly interesting. I kept reading up on cloning and stem-cell research. Then came the night of Dec. 31, 2002, a night that changed my life forever.”

Siegel was watching TV and saw Dr. Brigitte Boisselier on CNN claiming that her company, Clonaid, had cloned the first human baby, whom they named Eve. “By that point, I knew enough to know that the odds of safely cloning a human



[Subscribe now](#)

- [Keeping Cool During The Hot Summer Months](#)

Wellington Watch

- [Investors Unveil Big Plans For Equestrian Center](#)

Wellington Calendar

- [Events In July 2006](#)

Wellington Dining

- [Restaurant Listings](#)
- [Lunch At The Wellington Golf & Country Club](#)

Wellington Spa Experience

- [Judy Ferguson Enjoys A Day At Eclipse Salon & Day Spa](#)
-

baby were incredibly slim,” Siegel said.

Siegel was skeptical for another reason. Clonaid was set up by French journalist Claude Vorhilon, who had founded the Raelian religious sect. Raelians believe that humans were created by extra-terrestrial beings that had mastered genetic engineering.

“The whole thing just didn’t feel right,” Siegel said. “They wouldn’t produce proof of the successfully cloned baby. They wouldn’t produce the parents who supposedly lived in Florida. So I filed a lawsuit demanding that the state authorities appoint a guardian for the child. Overnight, this case became a media sensation around the world.”

Siegel’s doubts were borne out after receiving a sworn deposition from Thomas Kaenzig, Clonaid’s marketing director. “Kaenzig admitted that Clonaid had no street address and no board of directors,” he said. “I felt that they were a sham organization who preyed on people desperate to have children.”

By this point, Siegel had become a proponent of stem-cell research, believing it to be a viable research tool that could possibly lead to breakthroughs in the treatment of Alzheimer’s disease, diabetes, Parkinson’s disease, cancer, AIDS, spinal cord injuries and ALS, commonly known as Lou Gehrig’s disease. He saw the Clonaid case as a lightning rod for people on both sides of that issue.

“I found out that Boisselier and Vorhilon, who is now known as Rael, had testified before Congress and the National Academy of Science,” he said. “I felt that Clonaid was influencing the debate on stem-cell research, because many people hear the words ‘stem-cell research’ and immediately think cloning. I was against cloning back then, and I’m still against it.

It's also important to remember that by this time, President Bush had announced his policy on stem-cell research, limiting federal research to stem cell lines that had already been produced."

That announcement occurred on Aug. 9, 2001.

Siegel's involvement in the Clonaid case not only exposed the organization as a sham but brought him to the attention of the scientific community. They reached out to Siegel in hopes he would become the public face and voice of the stem-cell research movement. He accepted the offer.

"I took a leave of absence from my law practice on Jan. 30, 2003 and created the Genetics Policy Institute," he said. "I'm proud to say it has become the leading nonprofit organization dedicated to preventing human reproductive cloning and advocating the responsible use of therapeutic cloning research. I recruited 25 leading stem-cell scientists from around the world to be part of the advisory board. It seemed like things were coming together for me. I really felt like the cosmic tumblers had fallen into place."

Siegel had found his purpose in life, but he hadn't exactly been wandering aimlessly, waiting. Siegel attended the University of Miami and graduated with a law degree in 1972. He began practicing in Miami in 1975. On the side, he founded the Miami Tropics of the now defunct United States Basketball League and served as commissioner and co-owner of Florida Championship Wrestling from 1994 to 2000, for which he also acted as promoter. Siegel calls these money-making ventures "the candy store of life."

In 1997, Siegel found out he had colon cancer. Luckily, doctors caught the

disease in its early stages and he has been cancer-free for nine years. Still, as it does with many people, cancer had a way of putting things into perspective. “I’m not saying my having cancer and surviving it is what led me to become a stem-cell research advocate, but I certainly didn’t look at life the same way,” Siegel said.

Siegel has been married to his wife Sheryl for 34 years. They have two grown children. The couple moved to Wellington in October 2004. “We moved here when we heard Scripps was coming to Palm Beach County,” he said.

“Wellington offers a great location for the emerging biotech industry. There are lots of scientists moving here. The biotech industry is a key stakeholder in the stem cell debate, and I felt this was where I had to be. Don’t get me wrong. Wellington is a fantastic, dynamic community. I’ve made some great friends here. I love horses, too; to look at, not ride. And Greenberry’s in the Pointe at Wellington Green is my favorite coffee shop.”

When asked what he does when he has to get away from his cause célèbre, Siegel smiled. “I’m a 24-7 person when it comes to stem-cell research,” he said. “Before you ask me, I’ll tell you — Sheryl is all for it.”

Siegel isn’t kidding about his commitment level. He has traveled around the world debating scientists, clergymen and politicians who oppose stem-cell research. The issue arouses strong feelings because it involves religion, politics, history, law and health concerns. Siegel has learned a valuable lesson participating in these debates.

“Most of the representatives on the other side of the issue are educated, concerned individuals with a clear point of view,” he said. “Sometimes though, I’ll come up against someone with an obvious agenda who will twist facts and misrepresent

things. Instead of getting angry and letting my emotions take over, I've learned to fight that approach with facts and logic."

Siegel has argued his case in front of the World Court at the United Nations. In October 2004, Siegel scored what he considers the Genetics Policy Institute's greatest accomplishment to date.

"I filed a case for the World Court to declare reproductive cloning a violation of international law," he said. "We had found out about a Costa Rican proposal that would ban therapeutic cloning, a form of stem-cell research, worldwide. GPI ended up leading a world grassroots movement that generated 35,000 faxes to the U.N., and the proposal was defeated by a single vote."

Five months before the victory at the U.N., Siegel contacted paralyzed actor Christopher Reeve, who was also an outspoken proponent of stem-cell research. Siegel traveled to Reeve's home in upstate New York and arranged for the actor to videotape a message that played twice at the U.N., the second time a week after Reeve passed away. Siegel remains impressed and humbled by the strength and conviction of the actor best known for his role in four Superman movies.

"When we got to Chris's home to tape the message, he was not in good shape," Siegel said. "But as soon as we turned the cameras on, he summoned up the energy and delivered an eloquent, heartfelt message about the importance of stem-cell research. To me, on that day, he really was Superman."

In May of this year, Siegel was voted one of the "dLife Top 10" individuals who made the greatest contribution to the lives of people with diabetes in 2005. Members of the public chose the honorees by casting votes at the web site of dLife, a

multimedia company which specializes in diabetes information.

Siegel's current goal is to get a constitutional amendment on the 2008 Florida ballot that would permit taxpayer money to be used for stem-cell research. He needs more than 611,000 signatures to get the amendment on the ballot.

When Siegel considers all the twists and turns his life has taken over the past few years, he's profoundly grateful and slightly bemused. "I'm doing something that is constantly fulfilling," he said. "I'm not surprised someone is doing this. I'm just surprised it's me."

For more information on the Genetics Policy Institute and Bernard Siegel, visit www.genpol.org.

More in this issue! [Subscribe Now!](#)

12230 Forest Hill Blvd. Suite 114, Wellington, FL 33414
office: 561.515.0850 • fax: 561.515.0840 • www.wellingtonthemagazine.com