

ety more rapidly than their government-sponsored compatriots. Beiser's study revealed otherwise. No difference in well-being was apparent between the two groups of refugees at any time after arrival. Indeed, the prevailing opinion among refugees was that government sponsorship was preferable. Non-Christians sponsored by Christian groups, actually had an *increased* risk of depression. One young woman explained that she became a

Christian to please her church-based sponsors, despite their sincere disavowal of any intention to convert her. Ironically, the very altruism of sponsors became a source of frustration for the refugees, who felt unable to repay a substantial debt.

The encouraging record of Southeast Asian refugees in Canada stands as a dual testimony to those who rebuilt their lives after facing enormous adversity and to the nation that welcomed them.

Strangers at the Gate reassures us that our generosity has been rewarded. Beiser's demonstration that it has cost so little to do so much good should bolster our willingness to welcome more refugees and to make their transition into Canadian society as painless as possible.

Michael Klompas

Class of 2000

Faculty of Medicine

University of Toronto

Room for a view

Going to America

What if one were to raise a child, but conceal from him the fact of his mortality? Would the child, secure in his kinship with eternity and free of the terrible knowledge that shackles the rest of us, become an *Übermensch* of sorts? Or would he, devoid of the discipline imposed by the weighty sands of time, fail to identify the things that really matter, fail to make choices, and ultimately fail to endow life with meaning?

These were the questions that troubled Adolfo de Nocte, an obscure professor of philosophy who, despite the originality of his research, will not be found in the annals of academe. De Nocte had misgivings about the ethics of pursuing his inquiry, but in the end persuaded himself that the benefits outweighed the risks. And so he concealed from his own son, Giovanni, any evidence, mention of, or reference to death.

There were few places so well suited to his experiment as Nocera Terinese, the Calabrian town where de Nocte lived. Nestled in one of the most remote regions of southern Italy, this little town with a population of barely 5000 afforded him uncommon control over the flow of death-related information to his son.

Of course, there were a few close calls over the years, the closest being when the professor lost his beloved wife. She died suddenly, without any anticipatory illness, and Giovanni, then eight years old, was simply told

that his mother had gone to America.

"When will she come back?" he asked.

"Soon," his father answered, not knowing how else to answer without giving up the experiment.

The boy spent long hours on the doorstep of their house, waiting for his mother to return and repeating his question. After two years he stopped asking the question and no longer waited. De Nocte continued the experiment.

And yet, for all the effort he put into it, de Nocte's experiment was something of a disappointment to him. He loved his son and thought him special, but he knew that Giovanni was special

only because he was his son. To the objective observer he was no more special than the boy next door. He was, in short, no *Übermensch*.

Was it possible, de Nocte wondered, that we humans are indifferent to our own mortality? Or perhaps the experiment simply needed more time. Perhaps Giovanni would show signs of greatness once he reached manhood.

Alas, destiny put an end to the experiment in Giovanni's eighteenth year, on a rainy afternoon in Nardotti's hardware store. There, as Giovanni played cards with his father, Nardotti and Dottore Cotrolão, Nardotti dropped his cards, clutched his chest and fell to the floor.

"Come on Nardotti, your hand can't be all that bad," the professor said, convinced they were being treated to slapstick by the practical joker, Nardotti. A trickle of blood appearing from under Nardotti's forehead announced that this was not the case.

Dottore Cotrolão got down on the floor. He checked for evidence of respiration and for a pulse. Finding neither, he struck a match and held it close to Nardotti's right eye, which he held open.

Nothing.

The doctor blew out the match. Aware of the experiment and mindful that Giovanni was present, he simply shook his head.

(Continued on page 678)



Art Explosion

Two thousand words

William James Topley / National Archives of Canada / PA-010451



William James Topley / National Archives of Canada / PA-010282



Women's and men's infirmaries, Hospital and Immigration Detention Centre, Quebec City, c. 1911(details). The child was born aboard ship.

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Giovanni surveyed the scene before him. Professor de Nocte held his breath.

Giovanni looked at his father, then at the body of Nardotti, then back at his father.

"Nardotti's gone to America," he said. "We will never see him again."

De Nocte was flabbergasted. "What would make you say such a thing?"

Not without irritation in his voice, Giovanni replied: "Papa, if it were possible to return from America, wouldn't my mother have done so by now? She would never have left us alone like this." Then, without rancour, he asked, "Will we, too, go to America?"

Giovanni registered a barely discernable affirmative nod on the part of his tearful father.

"Good. I should like to see my mother again."

And in that moment de Nocte realized the futility of attempting his experiment anywhere but in a world without love.

Frederick Paola

Assistant Professor of Medicine
University of South Florida College of
Medicine
Tampa, Fla.

Send us your regrets

"Experience," Oscar Wilde wrote, "is the name everyone gives to their mistakes." So let us have the benefit. Why not write about the things you've learned the hard way in medicine? How would you replay the scenes that weren't in the script? We welcome submissions of unpublished poetry, memoir and fiction for The Left Atrium. The writing should be candid, but patient confidentiality must be respected. A sense of humour never hurts, and anonymity is optional. In general, prose manuscripts should be limited to 1000 words and poems to 75 lines. We won't launder the truth, but neither will we hang you out to dry. Send us your regrets at [todkia@cm.ca](mailto:todka@cm.ca)