

“Who is that?”

“Czeslaw Milosz”

“Oh really,” he says, more animated than I’ve ever seen him. “Do you read him in French or in English?”

“Mostly in English. French translations of my favourites poems are hard to find.”

“Then you must learn Polish.”

“Maybe I will,” I laugh, a bit uncomfortable.

He carries on, telling me about his guard duties during the uprising, of his friends who had been killed or betrayed, of his fears and doubts, of how hindsight has 20/20 vision. At the end of the interview, once again, I go over his medications and the importance of using them. Then I wish him a safe journey.

Fourth visit

It is December. I go to the waiting room to get my patient, who is wear-

ing a red waistcoat and green jacket. He walks briskly into my office, sits down, and starts telling me how nice it felt to be back in Warsaw, to see his old friends, to at last be recognized by his people. “They treated me like a hero,” he says. “You are a hero,” I think. He is sitting straighter, looking healthier. His blood pressure is within limit. I ask to see his medication bottles; for the first time, he has them. The dosette has almost the right amount of empty squares. He looks well. He wishes me Merry Christmas. I encourage him to continue his medications, and we book an appointment for three to four months’ time.

After my patient leaves I see a folded sheet of paper on my desk. I open it. It is a poem, written in blue ink in a looped and curving script that looks European to my eyes. “‘Dedication,’ by Czeslaw Milosz, translated

for Dr. Leblanc by ...” this patient with an alphabet soup of a name and a problem list even more challenging to decipher.

The translation is beautiful.

Fifth visit

My patient has come back. He is asking for my blessing for another trip, to Rome this time.

“The priest who celebrated my marriage just passed away in Rome. It was Karol Wotjila. He was from the neighbouring town. I have to go to his funeral.”

Isabelle Leblanc

Second-year Resident
Department of Family Medicine
St. Mary’s Hospital
McGill University
Montréal, Que.

One thousand words



Health Canada

Intelligent design. Health Canada received recognition from an unexpected quarter recently: an exhibition mounted at the Museum of Modern Art in New York City entitled *SAFE: Design Takes on Risk*, an installation of smartly-designed consumer goods, packaging, protective devices and safety messages that reflects our contemporary preoccupation with security and risk attenuation. This anti-smoking message, one of two tobacco-package labels that MoMA selected from Health Canada’s offerings, plays to the same fears as a recent Australian campaign (see pages 309-10); the other selection deals with second-hand smoke. Although the exhibit ended Jan. 2, those with a high-speed Internet connection can enjoy a virtual tour and narrated slide show at the museum’s Web site (www.moma.org/exhibitions/2005/safe/). Health Canada’s anti-smoking warnings keep company with an eclectic mix of artifacts ranging from bulletproof duvets to restaurant chairs designed to avert the theft of diners’ handbags to flat-faced pill bottles that facilitate clear labelling. (Anyone in the field of medical error prevention take note, under the “Instructions” category in the exhibit index.) Ironically, cigarette package slip-covers that prettily hide gruesome health warnings are also included in the show. Many and artful are the ways we soothe our nerves in a scary world. — Anne Marie Todkill, *CMAJ*

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