

Compassion

Nicholas Green

It was the evening of September 29, 1994. Having spent a wonderful day exploring the ruins at Paestum in southern Italy, Reg and Maggie Green were driving south in the region of Italy known as the boot, their children Nicholas and Eleanor sleeping peacefully in the back seat. Suddenly an old, decrepit car pulled up alongside them. An Italian with a bandanna over his face yelled at them while motioning for them to stop. Not knowing what to do, Reg quickly considered the options. If they stopped, they risked a potentially deadly confrontation with criminals; if they sped away, they might escape. Guessing that their newer-model car could probably elude the old car the criminals were driving, Reg stepped on the gas. Shots rang out, shattering both windows on the driver's side of the car. The Greens' car took off, easily outdistancing the bandits' car. On checking the children, Reg and Maggie found them still sleeping peacefully in the back seat.



A bit farther down the road, Reg saw a police car parked on the shoulder and pulled over to alert the authorities. Upon opening the door, he saw blood oozing from the back of Nicholas's head. After being rushed to a hospital, Nicholas remained in a coma for two days, his status not changing. Then doctors declared him brain-dead. This was not the end of the story, however. As Nicholas lay on his deathbed, Reg and Maggie decided that something good should come out of the situation. Realizing that it would be far better to return good for evil than to seek revenge, they offered Nicholas's organs for transplant. "Someone should have the future he lost," Reg said. Profoundly moved by the gesture, Italians poured out their emotions. Maurizio Costanzo, the host of a talk show, summed up the common feeling by saying, "You have given us a lesson in civility . . . shown us how to react in the face of pain and sorrow."

The great irony of this tragedy was that it was a mistake. According to investigators' later determinations, Nicholas was killed by two petty¹ criminals who thought the Greens were jewelers carrying precious gems. The criminals were placed on trial after being turned over to the police.

People all over Europe and North America reacted in sorrow. Headlines in the Italian media spoke of *La Nostra Vergogna* ("Our Shame"). Wherever the Greens went, they met Italians who asked for their forgiveness. The Greens were given a medal, Italy's highest honor, by the prime minister.

Some good has indeed come out of Nicholas's death. Seven Italians received Nicholas's heart, liver, kidneys, islet cells, and corneas.² Perhaps more importantly, a blow was struck³ for organ donation. Having heard Reg and Maggie speak on TV, 40,000 French people pledged to donate their organs when they died. On returning to the United States, the Greens began to receive requests to tell their son's story and speak about organ donation. "It gradually dawned on us," said Reg, "that we'd been given a life's work."

Nicholas Green is gone, but others live on because of his parents' compassionate act. How many of us would do the same thing, given the opportunity?

1 petty: small, unimportant

2 corneas: protective coverings on the outer surface of eyes

3 a blow was struck: progress was made

AFTER YOU READ

A VOCABULARY Match the words in **bold** with their meanings.

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|--|-----------------------------|
| _____ 1. Suddenly an old, decrepit car pulled up. | a. flowing slowly |
| _____ 2. They risked a deadly confrontation with criminals. | b. became apparent to |
| _____ 3. Reg's vehicle could probably elude the criminals' car. | c. news sources |
| _____ 4. He saw blood oozing from Nicholas's head. | d. in bad condition |
| _____ 5. Nicholas lay in a coma, his status not changing. | e. politeness, courtesy |
| _____ 6. You have given us a lesson in civility . | f. condition, position |
| _____ 7. Headlines in the media spoke of "Our Shame." | g. angry or tense encounter |
| _____ 8. It dawned on us that we'd been given a life's work. | h. escape from |

B COMPREHENSION Complete the sentences based on the reading.

1. The Greens were traveling in the region of Italy known as the _____.
2. The Greens' car was newer than the _____ car.
3. The shots _____ the windows on the driver's side of the car.
4. After the shooting, Nicholas lay in a _____ for two days.
5. The Greens thought it was better to return good for evil than to seek _____.
6. Italians were profoundly _____ by the Greens' donation of Nicholas's organs.
7. The ironic aspect of the Greens' tragedy was that it was a _____.
8. The criminals were placed on _____ after being turned over to the police.

C DISCUSSION Work with a partner. Compare and justify your answers in B. Then discuss this question: Do you feel it was the right thing for the Greens to offer Nicholas's organs for transplant? Give reasons for your answer.