

92 and Not Dead Yet:

Ageing Gracelessly

by [Reg Green](#) (April 2021)



The Departure of the Joads, Thomas Hart Benton, 1939

Once, when I was in my early twenties and out walking with a friend, Bernard Fox, a convertible passed with a ravishing girl in it (most girls were ravishing then—though, if truth be told, rarely ravished) and driven by an incredibly aged man.

“Isn’t that disgusting?” I asked.

“You’ll have to ask me that again when I’m an incredibly aged man,” Bernard replied. It was a useful lesson.

Convertibles are part of the scene in Southern

California, where I live now, though I have never owned one. Remembering the series of tin cans I used to drive in my youth I feel much more in sympathy with the clanking, overheated, bare-tired wrecks that the impoverished farmers from the Dust Bowl drove through these parts in the 1930s on their way to California's Central Valley.

Although I was infatuated by John Steinbeck's *Grapes of Wrath*, the book that memorialized this ragged army, I could never picture myself as the hero, Tom Joad, shouldering aside the obstacles of getting the family safely through to the land of milk and honey and grapes. Like many readers, I found him a little too good for the part. After all, he had killed a man *with a shovel* in a fight although he said it was in self-defense. (They all say that.)

Recently, at a filling station in the Central Valley, however, I caught sight of myself in a full-length mirror and what I did look like was not Tom but the grotesque Grampa Joad. Not exactly like the stereotypical old man of those days, I'll concede. Not with tobacco juice dribbling out of my mouth and down my filthy vest, nor with the flaps of my pants open, nor even living out Grampa's dream of scrunching down in a washtub full of grapes.

But the lined old face and the stick-like figure of an incredibly aged man were there alright. And though it wasn't visible in the mirror, I knew the cantankerousness was there too, ready to burst out at any moment.

Bernard departed these shores some years ago and, I hope, somewhere up there he has a red convertible not with a ravishing girl at his side but, much better, his generous-hearted and devoted wife, Audrey.

Keep driving with your usual flare, old friend.

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Reg Green is an economics journalist who was born in England and worked for the *Daily Telegraph*, *The Guardian* and *The Times of London*. In his spare time he wrote about jazz for the *Telegraph*, sharing the paper's coverage with Philip Larkin, wrote a column on soccer and reviewed books on European history. He emigrated to the US in 1970 and in time started an investment newsletter.

His life changed course in 1994 when his seven-year old son, Nicholas, was shot in an attempted robbery while on a family vacation in Italy. He and his wife, Maggie, donated Nicholas' organs and corneas to seven Italians, a decision that stimulated organ donation around the world and is known as "[the Nicholas Effect](#)." Reg wrote a book, also called [The Nicholas Effect](#), which was the basis of the television movie, "Nicholas' Gift," starring Alan Bates and Jamie Lee Curtis.

He has five other children varying in age from 24 to 59. At 91, he continues to work full-time to bring attention to the hundreds of thousands of lives that have been lost because of the shortage of donated organs and, when not traveling, hikes every day in the Southern California mountains. His most recent book is [90 and Not Dead Yet](#).

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