

92 and Not Dead Yet:

Waiting for Writer

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



Wine Bar, Karl Schmidt-Rottluff, 1913

One evening, a long time ago, I had the humiliating experience of going to a reception in Washington with a young man who worked in the public information department that I

headed then and finding that, while he was besieged by questions about what he did there, no one asked me anything. Me! Me—I—who set the policy for the department that he carried out. I was baffled until I happened to see that the list of attendees gave me my correct title—Vice President of Information—and his (which should have been something like Assistant to the Assistant of the Vice President) described himself as a ‘writer.’

In Washington—where everybody you talk to is part of a hierarchy of government employees almost as rigid the Table of Notables in 18th century Russia, where you moved up only when someone ahead of you died—meeting someone outside the box conjures up visions of a spirit moving freely and perhaps privy to secrets you and I would never be told and would be too shocked to believe if we had been told. Even if your imagination didn’t fly so high, it would be refreshing to meet someone whose exact pay scale and months to retirement you didn’t know instantly.

This tale carries a warning, however. It came to mind recently when I read a memoir by one of the stable of *New Yorker* writers of the 1940s, I forget which one, that describes how, flushed with pride at landing his first job in journalism, he listed himself on his passport as a ‘writer.’ On his first trip abroad he carried it lovingly through customs, conscious of his superiority over the works managers and minor civil servants all around him. It was a glow that lasted all day.

That night, however, when required to hand it over when he checked into a modest hotel in France, he was disconcerted by the coldness of the proprietress as she examined it. “Ah, Mr. Smith,” she said, “I see you are a waiter.”

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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*. He emigrated to the US in 1970 .

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*](#)", which was the basis of the television movie, "Nicholas' Gift," starring Alan Bates and Jamie Lee Curtis. At 92, 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.

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