

Infuriating Poet Right Again

by Reg Green



Nicholas, 27 years ago, on the lower slopes of the Matterhorn in Switzerland, a few days before he was shot by two minor Mafia figures on the Naples to Sicily autostrada who mistook our car for one delivering jewelry.

Like many other high school kids I writhed my way through a few of John Keats' Best-Loved Poems, though Best-Hated would be more accurate. In my class of thirty boys in England every one of us boiled with rage at language that was deliberately perplexing, needlessly archaic and (the last and unforgivable straw) soppy.

One poem in the syllabus was *Ode on a Grecian Urn* whose main phrases I tried to commit to memory without the slightest desire to understand a word. It opens:

'Thou still unravish'd bride of quietness,
Thou foster-child of silence and slow time,
Sylvan historian, who canst thus express
A flowery tale more sweetly than our rhyme.'

Only a committee of sado-masochistic pedophiles could have made a school-leaving certificate dependent on such stuff. The main theme is that the lovers on a classical piece of art have never aged, never lost their innocence, though they are thousands of years old. It's a lovely idea. If only he had written it more simply!

One day, having magnified the photo above, however – the last one we took before the boy in it, my seven-year old son, Nicholas, was shot in a botched robbery while we were on a

vacation in Italy – I saw with a shock that we weren't alone. On the trail below us were two other hikers.

We never met them, they may never have seen us but, like the lovers in the poem, they live on, youthful, jaunty and unaware to this day of being on the edge of a tragedy that caused a tectonic shift in tens of millions of hearts. I mean it literally. A book I wrote, *The Nicholas Effect*, was the basis for a made-for-television movie, starring Jamie Lee Curtis, called "Nicholas' Gift," about how we donated his organs and corneas to seven very sick Italians, four of them teenagers, that has been seen by 100 million people world-wide. Everywhere – Russia, Venezuela, Taiwan etc. – awareness of the power of organ donation to save multiple families from devastation spread rapidly. In Italy alone thousands of people are alive who would have died (