

The Bells, the Birds and the Tragic Gifts of Nicholas Green

Joe Culpepper

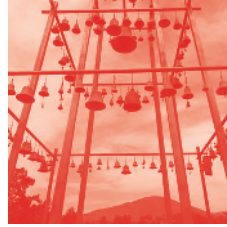
On the night of September 29th, 1994, Nicholas Green, the seven-year-old son of Reg and Maggie Green, was shot by bandits during a family vacation. Two criminals from Italy's Calabria region apparently mistook the Green's rental car for one belonging to a jeweler. In a nightmarish scene closer to the twisted plot of a Hitchcock film than reality, the criminals tried to force the family's vehicle off the road. They opened fire as Reg Green accelerated to escape them. Somehow one of the shots hit Nicholas in the head, who was sleeping in the back seat. He was rushed to a nearby hospital following the attack, but died within 48 hours from a bullet lodged at the base of his brain. Upon receiving the news of his death, Reg and Maggie chose to donate Nicholas' organs. The young boy's heart, corneas, kidneys, liver, and pancreas were given to seven different Italians who desperately needed them. This act struck a chord with the Italian people. At the time, the annual number of such donations in Italy was much lower than other European countries. The Green family's story helped to triple the rate of organ donation in Italy.¹

Two sculptures memorialize Nicholas Green and share his story with the world. "The Children's Bell Tower" in Bodega Bay, California, where he lived most of his short life and "The Birds" in Calabria, Italy, where he was shot. Both were made by sculptor Bruce Hasson.

THE BELLS

"The Children's Bell Tower" is tucked away in a peaceful meadow behind Bodega Bay's little community centre

where Nicholas went to preschool. A dirt path leads to a plaque describing Nicholas' story and the sculpture. One-hundred and forty bells given to the Green family and Bodega Bay are held aloft by twelve vertical and thirteen horizontal steel beams. A bell



that was blessed by Pope John Paul II hangs at the centre. This gift was from one of the world's oldest family businesses, the Marinelli foundry (est. 1339), which has made bells for the papacy for many centuries. It bears Nicholas's name beside the names of the seven Italians who received his organs. It is surrounded by a collection of bells from schools, churches, ships, mines, and more.² These were flown in by the Italian Air Force. Some were sent to California by parents who also lost young children. Others were placed directly into the hands of Reg Green by shopkeepers as he walked down the streets of Italy. Some are double bells, a smaller bell nested inside a larger one. They each have their own sound when the coastal wind blows.

¹ See Francesca Quintieri, Orsola Pugliese, and Pietro Chistolini, "Analysis of Organ Donation in Italy," *The Journal of Transplant Coordination* 8, no. 3 (1998): 188–190.

² For a more detailed description of "The Children's Bell Tower" and the exact process of its construction, see Reg Green, *The Nicholas Effect: A Boy's Gift to the World* (Bloomington, IN: Authorhouse, 2009), 199–205.

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Drawing by Scapegoat

Scapegoat: Architecture, Language, Political Economy



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THE BIRDS

An elegant sister monument — “The Birds” — was given to the Calabria region of Italy by the Green Family as a way of thanking the country for its generous support of the memorial in Bodega Bay. Plans for its construction followed soon after the completion of “The Children’s Bell Tower.” Reg Green asked the same artist, Bruce Hasson, if he would make one more bell, for Italy, from the

melted down metal of firearms confiscated by the San Francisco police department. Hasson, who had refused to be paid for his labour when building the first monument in Bodega Bay, gifted his work on the second sculpture too. Instead of making one bell for Calabria, he sculpted seven: one for each organ recipient.

These bells are carried by seven birds. The sculpture sits within a legislative building, the Palazzo Campanella, which houses the Regional Council of Calabria. The building was inaugurated in 2000 along with the ample Sala Nicholas Green, which seats up to 400 people. Hasson designed the birds and bells of this sister sculpture to be visual art. They do not sound.³ Instead, the birds lift their respective bells shaped from destroyed firearms into the air.

The Birds also cleverly references and refashions a symbol linking Nicholas Green's story to the Alfred Hitchcock film of the same name. *The Birds* (1963) was filmed in Bodega Bay. In the bizarre horror film, the birds of a small Californian town begin to attack residents and visitors without explanation. As in most Hitchcock films, the violence is unexpected and inexplicable in terms of its source.

The lifesaving gifts of Nicholas Green were also a surprise. Nineteen-year-old Maria Pia Pedalà was dying in a hospital when she successfully received his liver through transplantation. She went on to raise a family of her own and is alive and well. Her son is named Nicholas.

³ Email with Bruce Hasson, 25 September 2017.