

RANCHO BODEGA HISTORICAL SOCIETY

Nicholas Green .. A Boy's Gift to the World

The Children's Bell Tower

The Children's Bell Tower in Bodega Bay is a magical place. It stands on open ground, a thick growth of cypress trees on one side and green hills on the other. In the background are high dunes and a tantalizing glimpse of the ocean. The tower is 18 feet high, three tubular steel pyramids from which hang 140 bells, almost all of them sent by Italians: school bells, church bells, ships' bells, mining bells, cow bells.

The centerpiece is a majestic bell, thirty inches high, from the Marinelli foundry in Italy, which has been making bells for the papacy for a thousand years. Nicholas Green's name and the names of the seven recipients are on it, and Pope John Paul II went to the foundry to bless it. Whenever the wind blows, as it often does on this exposed coast, the bells chime, sometimes a few at a time, emphasizing the solitude of the surroundings, sometimes an entire orchestra, sounding like happy children at play. Then the sound fades away, and the children are gone.

The bell tower was conceived and built by a San Francisco sculptor, Bruce Hasson. It is on the west side of Route 1, behind the Bodega Bay Community Center. During a visit to Italy in 1994, seven-year-old Nicholas was killed in a botched armed robbery, their rental car mistaken for a jeweler's. Nicholas's



parents donated his organs and corneas, and seven Italian patients received the precious gift from Nicholas. Although it was inspired by Nicholas' death, the tower was designed to be a memorial accessible to everyone, a place where children would feel at ease. Its delicacy reflects both the preciousness and fragility of young life.

The Green family's decision stirred a lot of attention in Italy, resulting in a dramatic increase in organ donation levels that had been among the lowest in Europe. This increase and everything else good that came from the tragedy has come to be known as l'Effetto Nicholas, the "Nicholas Effect." ■

