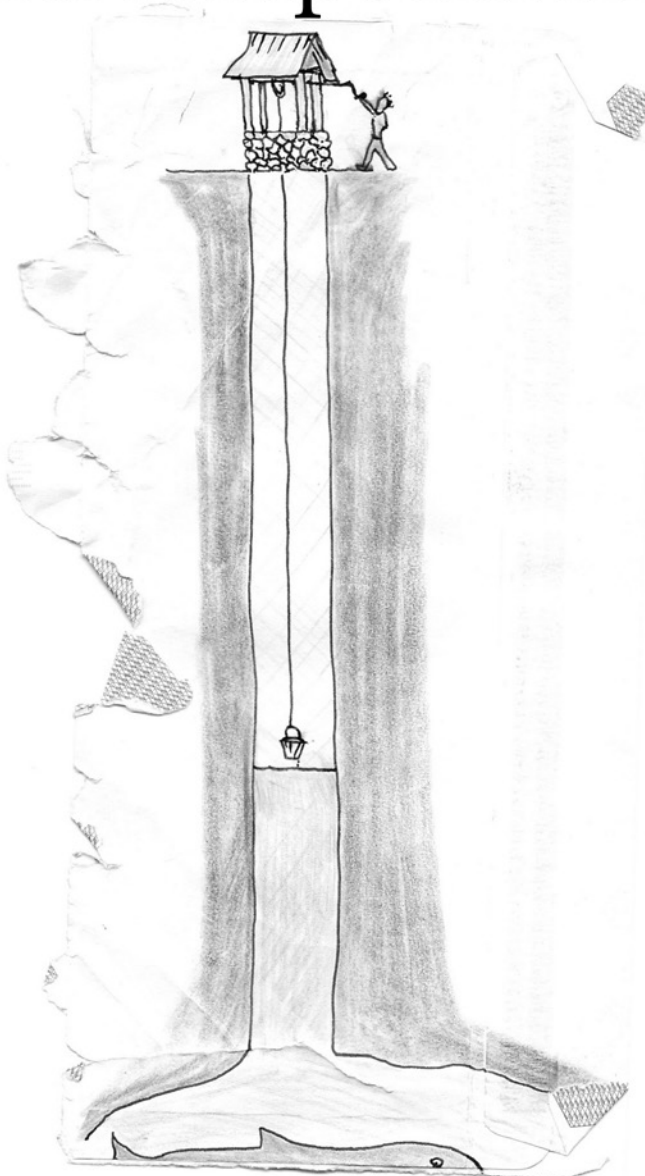


Recomposition



A prelude, fugue and variation

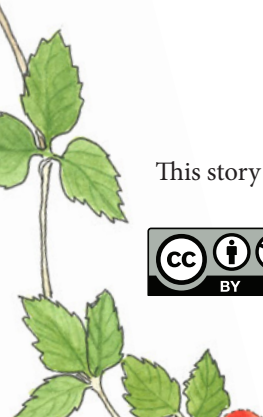


Survivors' Stories

This story contains references to sexual violence. Names have been changed.



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FOREWORD

It is an honour to be invited to write a brief foreword for this publication, and I am very grateful to David and Maggi Creese for their invitation and their courageous and vital work. There can be no more powerful testimony than that of a survivor, and the telling of a story from the perspective of the voice of one who has survived is a voice that cries out to be heard. To listen to a story you have to attend to the person telling it and be prepared to be challenged and transformed. In my own faith tradition, I often recount how Jesus told stories (that we know as parables) rooted in real lives and situations. Jesus did this to enable the Kingdom of God to be seen and experienced. This Kingdom is one of justice, grace, and mercy.

The Church has so often failed the victims of sexual abuse and the Church needs to listen to and give space to those stories of survival. In many ways, a foreword from a bishop is one that could be rightly received with suspicion. I am deeply grateful to the diocese of Newcastle for its important and ground-breaking work with survivors and the ‘Survivors’ Stories’ of which ‘Recomposition’ is the first publication marks a new chapter in this work. The unravelling of musical notes and the putting back together to form a new piece is a powerful image of hope. As I listen, I hear words that inspire and inform. My prayer and my hope is that you hear this too, and in hearing commit afresh to ensure that the Church is a place of flourishing, safety and justice.

+Helen-Ann, Bishop of Newcastle

Apart from the diminished 7th interval itself, the chord contains two other dissonant intervals. ... Each of these dissonances, of course, seeks a resolution. ... The chord as a whole is most satisfyingly resolved, therefore, when the next chord resolves all the individual dissonances, e.g. , though, as will be seen, it can be followed in other ways.

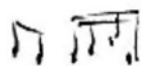
—Eric Taylor, *The AB Guide to Music Theory*, Part II (The Associated Board of the Royal Schools of Music, 1991), p. 155.



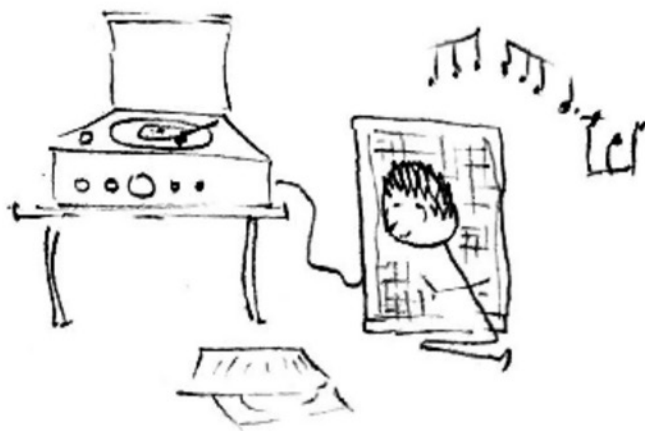
PRELUDE



This is Nick.



When he hears music, nothing else matters.

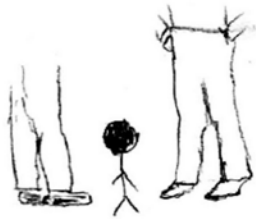


He listens to Sibelius, and forgets where he is.



His school music teacher says he is tone deaf. He doesn't know what that means, but it sounds bad. Nick is upset.

His father teaches him a song, to prove it isn't so. Nick sings and sings. Singing makes him happy.



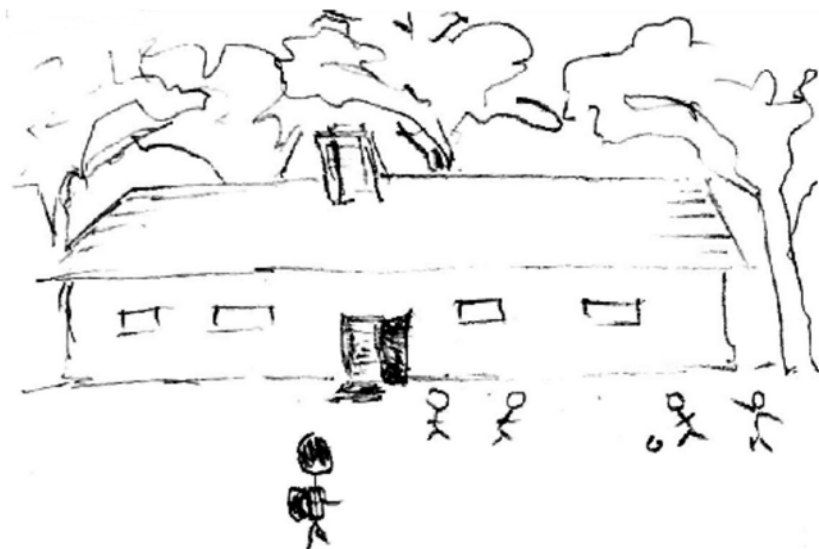
Nick's father takes him to meet Raymond, who directs a choir for boys. Raymond likes Nick's voice. Nick joins the choir.

Three years go by. Nick learns to sing and read music like a choirboy.



He earns his surplice and his first ribbon. There are other ribbons, of brighter colours. They are for choirboys who are special. Nick would like to be special.

He takes piano lessons from Raymond's friend, Edgar. He learns quickly, and wins competitions. Edgar calls him his prize pupil.



Nick goes to summer choir camp at Raymond's house in the woods.



Raymond tells the boys ghost stories by the campfire at night. Nick is frightened.

Raymond shows the children a scary film one evening. It is about an alien monster that rips people open from the inside. Nick is terrified.



One night Nick is awakened by one of the special choirboys. He says that Raymond wants him to sleep upstairs. Nick would rather stay downstairs with the rest of the choirboys.



But he goes upstairs, because Raymond has told him to.



After that night upstairs, something is not right. Something inside Nick. Raymond tells him nothing is wrong. He also says Nick must not tell his parents. This confuses Nick. He feels suddenly very lonely.

But Raymond doesn't stop asking Nick to sleep upstairs.



Or other places. Always away from the other choirboys. Always up some steps.

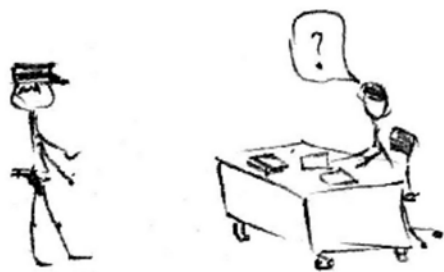
FUGUE

Nick feels more and more confused. One day he tells his best friend, Neil. Neil is alarmed. Nick makes him promise not to tell.



Neil tells his father. His father telephones the police.

The police visit Nick's father at work. They would like him to bring Nick to the police station to answer some questions.



That afternoon, Nick's father tells him that he knows.

The next morning Nick's parents take him to the police station. A policeman asks many questions, and writes the things Nick says.



That night, Nick watches television with his parents and his brothers, instead of going to choir practice. The telephone rings and rings. They do not answer. It rings again. And again.



Raymond isn't at church on Sunday to play the organ. He is in a cell at the police station. Hugh, the priest, tells Nick's parents they have done the wrong thing. Hugh tells them to forgive Raymond instead.

Nick's family stops going to that church. The church where Nick learned to sing.



Edgar tells Nick's mother that what Raymond did was a terrible blunder. That's not how it feels to Nick.

Nick stops practising the piano. No more lessons with Edgar any more.





Christmas comes. There are presents. But no choir. No nine lessons and carols. No Once in Royal David's City.



At school, Nick's teacher gets cross with him because he refuses to correct his spelling of the word ptarmigan, when she has marked it wrong. She asks him to show the whole class where his spelling is in her dictionary, if he is so clever. He does. She takes him to the corridor for a little chat.



Leonard, one of Nick's classmates, gets angry with him one day during lessons. When Nick leaves the classroom, Leonard is waiting for him. He grabs Nick by the hair and throws

him to the floor. Nick is knocked unconscious. His teacher is cross and unsympathetic.



In a courtroom, Raymond tells a judge he is not guilty. Nick waits to testify, but he is not called. An older boy tells the court what Raymond did to him. It happened earlier, in another choir. The judge sends Raymond to prison.





Nick is walking down the path by the east field toward the woods when he sees a white van on the road. Raymond has a white van. Nick hides behind a tree until the van disappears over the hill.

Nick wakes up in the middle of the night. It was the same dream again. The one where Raymond chases him around the school with a pistol. He always thinks he might escape just before Raymond jumps out from around a corner and shoots him in the face. That's when he always wakes up.





Nick staggers back after Warren's fist hits his chin. Something in his mouth feels different. His front tooth has broken off in the middle. A grown-up tooth. He spits his tooth into his palm and runs to find a teacher. Warren had hit him because he had hit

Warren first. He had hit Warren because Warren had kicked him in the stomach after he had made a save. Again. Nick had retaliated because his father had told him he had to stick up for himself or he would be bullied all his life.



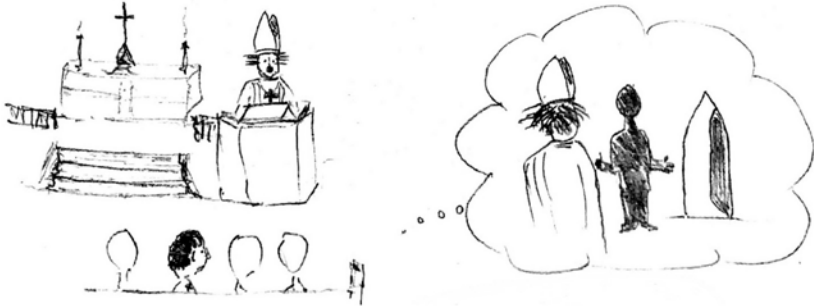
Nick's family starts attending a new church. The church needs an organist. Nick's father volunteers. The church needs a Sunday School Superintendent. Nick's mother volunteers. They are very busy with the church. Nick's father needs him to sing in the choir. Nick doesn't like singing in this choir. But he does, because his father needs him to.



Nick loses his temper and shouts at his little brother, who will not keep quiet. Their middle brother watches quietly as they shout at each other. The pot boils over on the cooker behind Nick. He is making supper following instructions his mother has written out for him. She is working this afternoon. Nick's father is at work, too. The three brothers are home alone together again, and Nick is not coping with the responsibility.



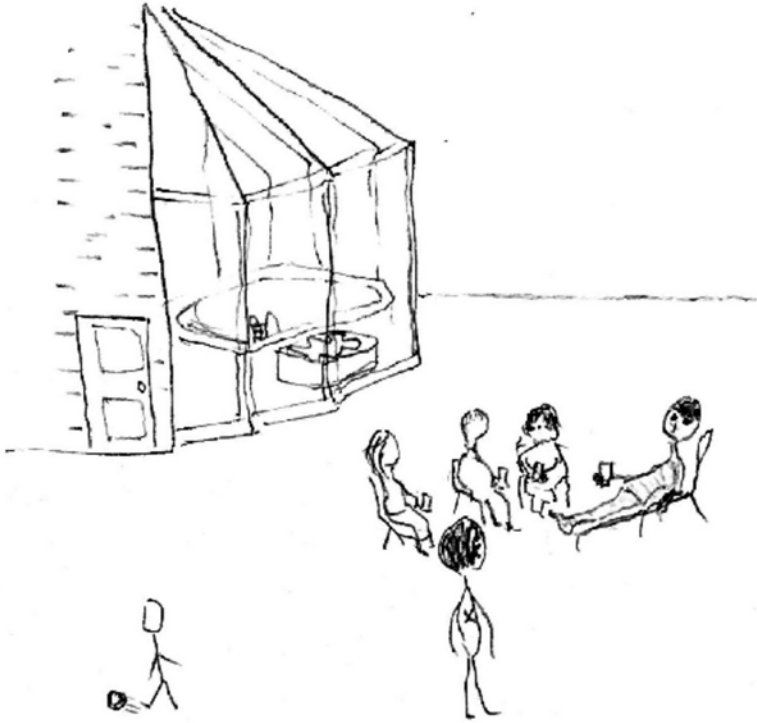
At church, new green prayer books replace old purple ones. Nick's parents are upset. They go to meetings, and write long letters containing arguments about why the word 'propitiation' is better than the word 'expiation', and other important distinctions Nick had not thought of before. The vicar and the churchwardens ask Nick's father not to play the organ any more. They ask his mother not to lead the Sunday School any more. They say Nick's parents are being 'divisive'.



Nick is confirmed by the bishop, Malcolm. Malcolm preaches a sermon. He says that angels don't really exist; they are metaphors. Malcolm is the bishop who brought the green book. He also preaches sermons at the cathedral where Raymond had been before. Malcolm was the bishop then, too. Nick wonders about this.



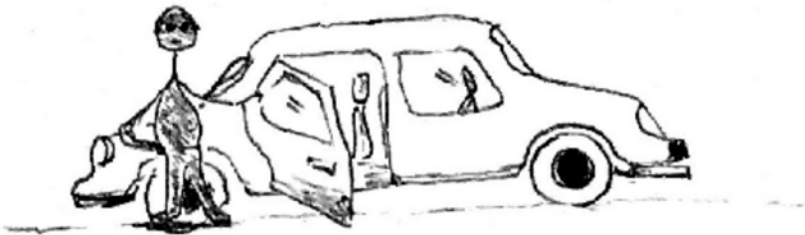
At home, Nick finds something from his mother on his bed. It is a hymn, written out by hand and dated the date of his confirmation. It is Raymond's favourite hymn. She must not have known that, Nick thinks. But still. 'True lowliness of heart,' he reads, 'o'er its own shortcomings weeps with loathing.'



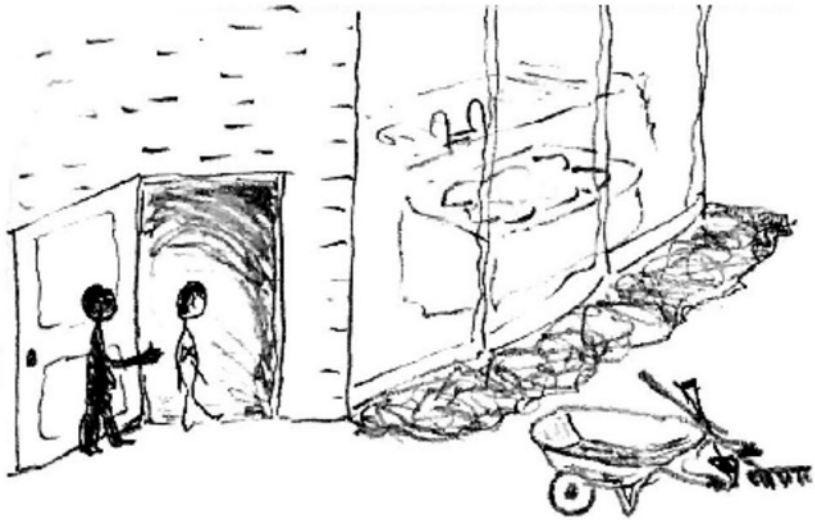
Nick's parents take him and his brothers to visit a lady from church, Bridget. While Nick is playing outdoors with his brothers, Bridget's husband asks Nick's parents if Nick would work for him, making flower beds for his garden. They say yes, and then ask Nick. He says yes, because he can tell they want him to.



Bridget's husband is called Lyle. While Nick works, Lyle watches him and talks. The things he says remind Nick of Raymond. He starts to feel scared. He tells Lyle that Raymond went to prison, to warn him off. Lyle acts offended, as if Nick had misunderstood him. Nick still feels uncomfortable.



After school, Lyle is waiting for Nick to come and work on his flower beds. He has brought his antique car. Nick gets in. Lyle drives him to his house. After that drive, something is not right. It is all happening again. No, Nick thinks, it can't be happening again.



The flower beds are nearly finished. The work has gone slowly because Lyle likes to stop early. He takes Nick inside and asks him to follow him downstairs to his basement. Nick doesn't want to. But he does, because Lyle has told him to.



Nothing is the same after that. Or after the next time. Each time it is worse. Finally the work is done. Lyle pays Nick. Not very much, because there was not really that much work. A while later he rings to ask Nick if he will do another job at his house. Nick wants to say no. He goes to find his parents to ask if he may say no to Lyle. They are in the basement fixing the furnace. Nick's mother asks him if Lyle has done anything to make him feel uncomfortable. Nick says no. He goes upstairs, tells Lyle no thank you, and hangs up the phone.

Nick tells himself that things can go back to the way they were before. That if he doesn't think about it, it can be as if it never happened. But it isn't true. And that doesn't work.



So instead, he finds ways to tell himself what he thinks of himself now. There is no one else to tell. Not this time.



VARIATION



That afternoon, Nick's father tells him that he has just learned from the police about the terrible things Raymond has done to him. About the ways Raymond tricked him and deceived him and betrayed his trust. He reassures Nick that he has done nothing wrong, that

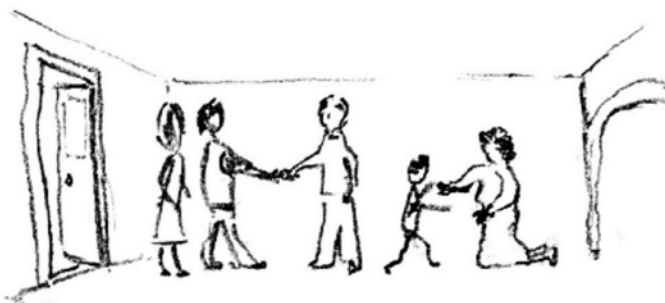
none of the confusing and horrible things were his fault, that he is not to blame in any way, that he did not bring it on himself, that he has not shamed himself or his family, and that he did a tremendously brave thing in telling Neil.

Nick's mother comforts him, too. They tell him he is safe now.



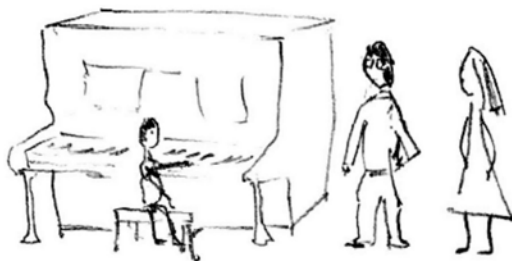
Raymond isn't at church on Sunday to play the organ. He is in a cell at the police station. Hugh, the priest, tells Nick that he did the right thing. He says he is sorry that the church hired Raymond without knowing that he

would make it such a dangerous place for children. He says that whatever happens, he and the congregation will be there to help and support and love Nick and his family. He tells them that no amount of fine music is worth the suffering Raymond has caused. He assures them that the church will be a safe place for everyone.



Nick's family goes to visit their dear old friends, Gordon and Frances. Gordon was a tenor in the choir, which no longer exists. As soon as Frances sees Nick, she says, 'Oh, Nick! What a terrible thing you have suffered! I can't tell you how angry I am on your behalf! If I could get my hands on that man, I would strangle him myself! You did nothing wrong. You were right to tell. We love you, and you can always count on us to stand up for you.'

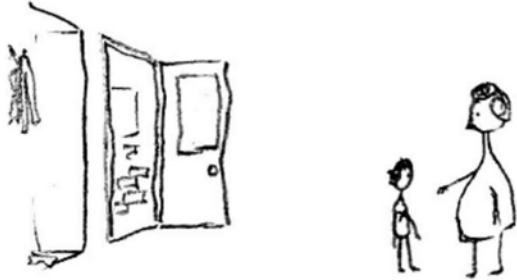
Edgar is shocked and horrified and saddened by what Raymond has done. He says he can never speak to Raymond again. He is sorry now that he ever called Raymond a friend. He encourages Nick about his piano lessons. Nick feels safe with the piano, and with Edgar as his teacher.





There are still some bad nights, and some scary dreams. Nick's parents comfort him, and ask him how he is feeling. They notice when he looks upset, and they encourage him to express his confusing feelings. They keep reassuring him that what happened was not his fault, and that they love him.

Sylvia, Nick's teacher, asks him privately one day if he is OK. She has noticed that he hasn't seemed himself, and that he has been bullied by some of his



classmates. There had been a close call with Leonard, and she was glad she had got there in time to keep Nick from being hurt. She is a little worried about him, and wonders if something might be wrong. Nick doesn't know what to say. Sylvia doesn't pry, but says she is there to help if ever he needs to talk about anything.

In a courtroom, Nick is called as a witness for the Crown.

Raymond is on trial for the things he has done. Nick testifies, as he was prepared to do.

He says out loud in front of all the people what happened. The defence barrister cross-examines him respectfully and sensitively. Raymond is found guilty and sent to prison. The judge believed Nick.



Nick is feeling more confident in school now. He is getting better at football, too, and that feels good to him. When Warren



was bullying him on the pitch, Nick went later and had a quiet word with Sylvia. She gave him good advice, and kept an eye on Warren. Now Nick can keep his eye on the ball, and his fellow pupils respect him, too.



As Nick grows older, there are some difficult times. It is not always easy for him. Sometimes he feels confused about his own feelings. At times like that, his father will often take a break to talk with Nick about how he feels, and listen without making Nick feel self-conscious or judged. Nick feels secure in his father's unconditional love.

Not all of Nick's feelings are ones he can find words for. Nor are they all unpleasant. Nick finds that some of them sound clearer to him in music than in words. He keeps playing the piano. He borrows his school's French horn over the holidays. He writes some music of his own. Maybe he will sing again someday, too. But for



now, he knows that this music belongs to him, and to everyone, not to Raymond, or to the choir, or to the terrible things that happened to him. The music, he now finds, has nothing to do with any of that. Now it is a forest, a field, a

mountain, a poem, a syllable, a needle and thread, an ocean, an echo.



