

LINDVALL ORGAN STORY

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"They asked me to play, of course," the young man went on. "They had to ask. But grandpa knew I'd say no. I remember how he sighed with relief when I said no. Then he slapped me on the back."

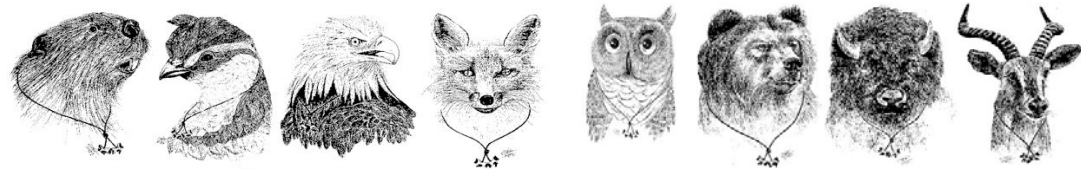
"You're an organist?" the preacher asked.

"Eastman (School of Music) class of '84. I've had some big church jobs, the last one down in Texas, big church . . . brand new organ, 102 ranks. Four services a Sunday. Then I got sick. I've been HIV positive for six years. The personnel committee of the church figured it out,

the weight loss, all the sick days, not married. They told me it would be best if I moved on, but not till after Christmas, of course. My parents live in St. Paul, but my father and I haven't spoken since I was 19 . . . I'm not sick enough to be in the hospital, just too tired most of the time. I really had nowhere to go. My grandfather said I could move in with him and Agnes. To tell the truth, I feel right at home in a town of 80-year-olds."

He paused and went on, "They keep Agnes and they took me in. And since I moved up here, most every night Lloyd or old man Engstrom from down the road opens up the church for me. If it's cold, they lay a fire in the wood stove. And then I play the organ. It's a sweet little instrument, believe it or not. Lloyd's kept it up.

"These last weeks it's been almost warm in the evenings, so they leave the doors and windows of the church open and everybody sits out on their front porch and they listen to me play—Bach, Buxtehude, Widor, all the stuff I love. And they clap from their porches, even Agnes claps."



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A couple of years ago, my minister shared the following story about Michael Lindvall, pastor of the Brick Presbyterian Church in NYC. He wrote a piece called, "Our Organist", about his experience of being a guest minister in a small town church in Minnesota. It took place in a town on the way down and out. This church hasn't had a minister of its own since 1939. But a handful of people hold on and gather one Sunday a month, at noon, for Sunday school and worship with whatever preacher they can convince to come to their town. The clerk of the congregation, Lloyd Larson, tells him that there are only eleven members, but they'll all be there. "And he promised an organist, the same organist the church has been promising guest preachers for 60 years, Lloyd's sister-in-law, Agnes Rigstad."

The Sunday of his guest appearance arrived and Michael describes the small white frame building, the large sentimental stained glass windows of Jesus, the Good Shepherd, lamb in one arm, staff in the other, and Jesus praying alone in the Garden of Gethsemane, and two cars and a pick-up truck out front.

There were twelve worshipers, actually, including a young man, scattered throughout the sanctuary, sitting in their customary pews. Lloyd explained that there was no bulletin, that the preacher should just announce the hymns. Michael nodded to the organist, with her wig slightly askew, who responded with a broad smile.

Worship began. Michael announced the opening hymn, # 204, "Spirit of God, Descend Upon My Heart." Agnes smiled at him and played "What a Friend We Have in Jesus." The eleven elderly members sang by memory. Only the young man used a hymnal.

Following the sermon, Michael announced the next hymn, "Love Divine, All Loves Excelling." He looked directly at Agnes, who smiled back and played "I Love to Tell the Story."

After the prayers and offering, Michael walked over to the organ bench, bent down, and whispered, "Agnes, what are we going to sing?" She smiled and began to play "Just as I Am, without One Plea."

After worship, Agnes shook his hand but didn't say a word. Lloyd sheepishly explained: "Forgot to tell you about Agnes. . . . You don't need to tell us *what* the hymn is, only *when*. Agnes only knows those three hymns, so we always sing 'em."

"Good grief, Lloyd, you mean to tell me you've been singing the same three hymns for 60 years?" Lloyd was concentrating on the frayed sanctuary carpet. "We like those hymns well enough, and we know 'em by heartAnd she's our organist"

After greeting the eleven worshipers including Lloyd Larson and his sister-in-law Agnes, the organist, the lone young man lingered on. He introduced himself as Neil Larson, Lloyd's grandson, who explained, "Agnes is my late grandmother's lit-

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