

GOOD NEWS FROM THE EPWORTH TUTORING PROGRAM December 2001

This is the 17th year the Epworth Tutoring Program has been helping children of Chicago's Uptown/Edgewater neighborhoods with school skills, etc. There is a lot of good news this year--much of it about little boys.

"Break forth, O beautiful heavenly light, and usher in the morning."

Last summer we had a wonderful time with the Epworth Summer Music Institute. Around 45 kids came to Epworth for two free one-hour piano lessons every week for nine weeks. We had a grant to buy a few keyboards, tutors with piano background helped teach, and we put an ad in the newspaper for other volunteer piano teachers. Besides the lessons, the students played in two recitals at Epworth and went to play at two nursing homes and the Kiwanis Club, as well as attending a free jazz concert in downtown Chicago.

The students loved playing the piano. 12-year old Alice practiced for 2-3 hours straight. 14-year old Barbara learned enough to accompany the Youth Choir. 10-year old Krystal taught 12-year old Crystal how to play a piece.

All spring seven-year old Red acted thoughtlessly and immature. His foster mother said he had regressed and "forgotten everything" at his last placement. At Red's first and second piano lessons in June, we thought he wouldn't be able to read notes or play the piano; his brain seemed not to be connected. At the third lesson Red played the piece he couldn't play at the second lesson, and he began progressing, little by little. In the fifth week, Red started playing a new piece, on his own. He was reading the notes! His brain was connected! At the end of July his foster mother remarked that Red couldn't read at school yet. Red chimed in, "I was reading in summer school!" Perhaps reading piano music helped Red learn how to read words. The piano lessons were a turning point for Red.

"O shepherds, shrink not with affright, but hear the angel's warning."

In September 2000 8-year old Chris could barely read. He could not do math. He could barely write. He got angry very easily. Twice he put on his coat and walked out of the tutoring session (only two other students have done that in 16 years). Frequently he hid under a table for most of the session, sometimes crawling from one table to another, always underneath. Occasionally, he would do his work under a table.

Homework was hard for him. Usually he had to copy five words four times each, write a sentence using each word, and do two sides of a page of math. At the beginning of the year, he stated every day that he did not have any homework. Gradually he began to do it, bit by bit.

During the year we helped him read our first three readers. "The Magic Hat" caught Chris' attention. He enjoyed reading it! He wanted to read instead of doing his homework. After he read "The Magic Hat" he could read his books from school. We had taught him to read!

In September of that year Chris' writing was hard and forced, as if he were just learning how to write. Two journals from the beginning of the year were filled only with tic-tac-toe games. In one he had written part of his name, but it was misspelled. In February he refused to write something for our *Sunshine* magazine. The next day he started telling his tutor about something that happened in class at school. The tutor said, "Why don't you write about that for *Sunshine*?" He took out his journal and wrote about the event: "A Zoo Class?" In March he started talking about leprechauns and wrote in his journal two pages (with pictures) about a

leprechaun. One day he came to tutoring, took out his journal, and began writing. When he had finished writing, he said, "My uncle is in jail, and I'm writing about it." In May his tutor gave him a small notebook which he could use as a journal over the summer, when he was living with his sister. Chris had come a long way during the year!

"This child, now weak in infancy, our confidence and joy shall be."

We were told Martin was 10 years old, but he looked 8. We were told he had been to school for one year where he lived before, but it seemed as though he had never held a book before in his life. His teacher at school was discouraged about him learning to read. We started teaching him to read in Spanish, his native language, since he didn't know any English. We had him read the same stories every day until he almost memorized them, and then he began new stories. We also began teaching him English words and how to read beginning English books. We worked with him on 1st grade arithmetic.

This was hard work. In September, he would work for ten minutes and then lie down on the floor and roll over like a little dog. By December he could almost read Spanish, was beginning to learn English, knew how to regroup in adding, and he would lie down on the floor and roll over only once or twice during the session. We all like Martin.

"The power of Satan breaking."

One day at tutoring 6-year old Tony threw things on the floor, swore at his tutor, and hit his tutor. He also was carrying matches in his book bag. We called Tony's mother to come to the tutoring center to talk with Tony and his tutor.

Tony's mother was shocked to hear what Tony was doing. She didn't want any of her children behaving that way. First we talked about the swearing, then we talked about throwing things on the floor, then we talked about Tony hitting his tutor. Tony's mother was hurt. She told him to apologize to his tutor, but he wouldn't. She begged him to apologize, but he just stood there. His mother told him what to say in Spanish, and we told him what to say in English to say he was sorry, but he refused to say anything. Then we talked about the matches, and then we waited for Tony to apologize. We waited and waited; his mother begged and begged. Finally in desperation his mother said, "Tony, Tony, do you remember what day this is? Mi cumpleaños (my birthday). You're doing this to me on my birthday?" And she started to cry. Tony started to sob, and he went to hug her. We all started to cry. Then Tony hugged his tutor and the rest of us. He told each of us he loved us. We told his mother that good things would come from this and that this would be a happy birthday after all.

"Our peace eternal making."