

Greetings from the Inspired Youth Tutoring Program, Christmas 2004

*When the song of the angels is stilled, When the star in the sky is gone,
When the kings and the princes are home, When the shepherds are back with
their flocks,*

The work of Christmas begins:

*To find the lost, To heal the broken, To feed the hungry, To release the prisoner,
To rebuild the nations, To bring peace to earth, To make music in the heart.*

I thought of this poem by Howard Thurman, the African American theologian and writer, after we found a new location for the Tutoring Program this fall at the Boys & Girls Club. In August the pastor of Epworth said the church was going in a new direction in tutoring/outreach and would not be able to host the tutoring program per se. Some parents and I formed a new program, Inspired Youth, and found new locations -- the Boys & Girls Club and Margate Park Field House. Then began the work of Christmas.

The work of Christmas: In September 2003, M., age 12, would not speak to her tutor, due to language and personality. She came to the Tutoring Program every session, never missing a day. Many days she came early, to play on the computers. As the year went on she spoke more and more, but in a group, she froze. We found out at the end of the year she had just been diagnosed as EMH, Educably Mentally Handicapped. This year we began to notice that M. was speaking more and more, and that she was doing better and better in her studies. We finally realized, "M. is bright!" She is not EMH!

The work of Christmas: Last year Leslie, a stocky, quiet, first grader, often had tears in her eyes. Her skills were preschool level. Several tutors worked with her patiently all year. During the summer she worked with Eleanor Bilby, slowly, patiently. We gave Leslie some Spanish books to read at home. When she brought them back, her brother said, "Leslie read all these books! We helped her." This year she is working with Eleanor again. Leslie read a short section of a Spanish beginning reader and beamed, "I worked hard!" One day as my husband and I were walking the afternoon tutoring children from school to the Boys & Girls Club, guess who held the door open for everyone? Leslie! She had a giant, radiant smile. She was so proud to be serving.

The work of Christmas: "Hey! Hey! Wait!" There was a faint sound a block away. Then it was audible. "Hey! Wait!" A tall, neat young man crossed the street and caught up with me. He introduced himself, Caprice, who had been in the Tutoring Program as a second grader in 1986. Caprice never concentrated in the tutoring program and gave his tutor, Don Heldt, a hard time. We took him to Dr. Walsh to get eyeglasses. He came sporadically in third and fourth grades and then dropped out of our program and high school. He said he kept asking his mother about me. Now he finally caught up with me to say hello. I noticed the McDonald's insignia on his shirt and was excited that he had a job. He said, "I'm going to college!" I asked him how long he had worked at

McDonald's. He said three months, and then said he loved college. Notice: *I* was interested that he had a job at McDonald's. *He* wanted me to know that he was going to college! He said he had finished the remedial classes and was all caught up and going forward. He was doing well. He said, "I enjoy it!" and he was proud. He had a book in his hand that he had been reading, a book about the African American experience. He said he was working on getting himself together so he could make it on his own. I said, "You have a fantastic mother." He said, "I agree." Caprice had made a 180° turn-around and was going strong.

The work of Christmas: Can you imagine 15-18 children singing in Eleanor Bilby's living room? Many of them have never sung before. The new Inspired Youth Singers sang joyously for two nursing homes in December. Now we are planning concerts for February, March and April, involving around 40 children and youth. The Inspired Youth Singers love to sing.

—*Blessings from Beth Palmer*