



# All in the Family

## Chad and the Tree Song

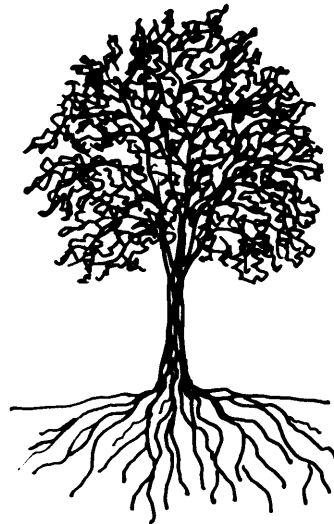
“The things that children say and do may be God’s way of calling you.”<sup>1</sup>

by Helen Kemp

What makes a child fall in love with a song? I have watched the process many times. Often the object of affection is a gentle song whose text connects with the soul, the inner feelings of the child. When does it happen? Is there a major moment when love shines through the faces and eyes of children as they sing? Or is it a song-relationship that grows because it was taught, nurtured, and experienced?

When I think about how and why children fall in love with a song, I remember Chad, a winsome, lively nine year old chorister. Chad was stocky and shorter than most of his peers. He excelled in sports. Although Chad came to choir willingly and regularly, his enjoyment of singing seemed to be limited by constant huskiness caused by allergies. He would go through the song-learning process from sight-reading to memorizing with a cooperative attitude, but often without enthusiasm or joy.

Then we started to learn “Tree Song,”<sup>2</sup> a ballad about trees that grow where they are planted: by a flowing river, on a busy street, in a winter forest. The lilting refrain always summed up the story in the words of the tree:



I’ve got roots growing down  
to the river,  
I’ve got leaves reaching up to  
the sunshine . . .

After the second rehearsal, Chad waited to talk to me. “Mrs. Kemp, could I take the ‘Tree Song’ music home with me?” I explained that we didn’t take music home because it so often got lost on the way. He accepted my explanation. Just a little later, Chad returned and said, “Mrs. Kemp, could I buy that music? How much is it?” “It costs eighty cents, Chad,” I answered. He counted his forty cents left over from choir supper. Sadly, it was not enough.

Then I started to wonder why Chad had fallen in love with this song. I read over the text of the refrain again:

This is what my tree friend sang to me—  
I’ve got roots growing down to the water,  
I’ve got leaves reaching up to the sunshine.  
I’m knowing what the Lord of Life has meant me to be  
A tall, strong tree.

That was it. The text of “Tree Song” was like a secret prayer for Chad. He wanted to grow tall and straight like that tree. Chad felt a special connection with that song.

Later that evening, I saw Chad’s Dad in the hallway and asked him to take a little present home for Chad—a copy of “Tree Song,” signed, “To Chad, with love from a tree friend.”

<sup>1</sup>Brian Wren, from “When Children Pray.” Written for the Children’s Choir, July 1993, Montreat Conference Center, Montreat, NC. © Hope Publishing Co., Carol Stream, IL 60188. Reprinted by permission.

<sup>2</sup>“Tree Song” by Ken Medema. Shawnee Press E212.