



All in the Family



From Horns to Halos

by Helen Kemp



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

During the past decade, I have learned amazing lessons from children I have taught — not things that could be documented in a doctoral thesis, but certainly scenes that have found a permanent place in my heart.

Take Tommy, for instance.

At a large United Methodist conference in California, when the new hymnal was being introduced, I had a group of 24 children who met each day as a choir while their parents were in classes. Our choir had been asked to sing for one of the evening celebrative services. Now, this was a challenge for a small group of children . . . to sing for several thousand people in a very large auditorium. Our choir was what I call a “You-all-come” group, with the usual variety pack of young singers.

Tommy was in the front row.
Tommy was 8 years old.
Tommy was a constant motion,
very short attention-span
young man,
with no sense of focus or self-control.

At our final rehearsal, we were singing our song titled “A Lenten Love Song.” At the end, there were four *quiet* measures of accompaniment after the children finished singing the words, *Ubi caritas et amor, Deus ibi est*, which means “Where charity and love are found, God is there.”

But four long measures of stillness was too much for Tommy.

Tommy sighed.
Tommy wiggled.
Tommy tied his shoe laces!
Tommy spoiled the ending!

Well! . . . What to do to create a positive experience for Tommy and for the other children who were very annoyed at the antics of Tommy.



Somewhere from the heavens came the thought, “Helen, try the heart.” “Tommy,” I said, “Do you think you could take this red heart, keep it

behind your back as you sing all the way through the song? Then could you *slowly* bring the heart in front of you, and *slowly* lift it high above your head so everyone in the whole auditorium will remember what the song said, ‘Where charity and LOVE are found, God is there’? Do you think you can do that? It’s the most important part of the song.”

Tommy looked up at me with big eyes and said, “I think I can do that”. And do it he did . . . with awesome concentration from introduction to the end. His focused effort held the large audience spellbound.

Tommy discovered he could be the hero instead of the bad guy. Some call this process Behavior Modification. I call it TRANSFORMATION . . . from horns to halo. Yes, I was reminded again that giving a child of any age responsibility, and adequate instruction to assure success, can impact the *desire* and the *ability* to achieve.

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