

SING TO YOUR CHILDREN (and grandchildren)

Do you know people who don't like to sing, or say they *can't* sing? Ask them if anyone sang to them when they were very young. Lullabies, silly songs, hymns, carols, game songs, any kind of children's songs or folksongs, the kind of song doesn't really matter. What *does* matter is if anyone sang to them, just as you would talk to a baby or young child. A child who has no hearing does not learn to speak as other children do, merely by listening. A child who does not hear singing in the same way does not develop that unique use of the voice which delivers so much joy to the rest of us.

I once attended a workshop given by the famous teacher, Edwin Gordon, who has done a great deal of research into the ways children learn music. Most of it came down to the all-important early years of life when, in the "good old days" parents and teachers used to sing with children. Now, much of the early (and middle and later) years is spent with the radio and television. Much of the vocal music heard in the media is pitched so low that children often begin singing it in their "speech voices." The result is actually not singing, but yelling. This can be overcome with proper training, as long as there was singing by someone in their early years.

After attending this workshop, I returned to my classroom and quizzed my students about who sang to them when they were little. One young lady, who had an exceptional voice, said that her father had sung to her. Others, one by one, told of a father or mother, or aunt, who sang to them. I was curious about what one of my students would tell us. She had a big voice, but had great difficulty staying on pitch. When I asked her the same question, she said, "Well, my mother *tried*."

I have come to think of our singing voices in the way I think of those cards with hidden messages or numbers on them. All you have to do is scratch off the surface camouflage material and you discover something wonderful underneath.

We all started life with voices for speaking and singing. How they are nurtured and used has everything to do with their health. Nurture your children's and grandchildren's voices. They will thank you!

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