

# LEONARD BERNSTEIN

By Carole L. Cooney

Leonard Bernstein was a famous pianist, composer, teacher and TV star. Although Lenny had many struggles in his life, it was music that made significant changes happen to him. At age 10, music came into his life in a big way. He discovered a piano in his living room and immediately began to play it. One evening the family was awakened by Lenny playing the piano. So much piano playing upset his father because he didn't think music was important. But that didn't stop Lenny. He kept playing. Then something magical happened. Lenny began to grow from a scrawny, sickly little kid to the biggest kid in his class. Not only was he better in sports but he was a superior student who always earned excellent grades and honors. These changes occurred because of the confidence playing the piano gave him...

Setting: Leonard's house

Characters:

Narrator

Lenny, Leonard's nickname

Shirley, Lenny's sister

Samuel, father

**Narrator:** When Lenny was young, he had many health problems and always wanted to be left alone to listen to music. But, when he was 10 years old, music came into his life in a special way – and it changed his life. He came home from school one day to see his Aunt Clara's ugly, old piano in his living room. He immediately ran over to it, sat down and began to play popular songs.

**Lenny:** I guess I'll go up to my room and listen to some music while I lie down and rest. Wanna come up, Shirley?

**Shirley:** No, not now, Lenny. I'm going to get some milk and cookies. Do you want some?

**Lenny:** Yes, Shirl. Just pour me some milk and I'll be down in a minute.

**Shirley:** Lenny! Lenny! Come here! Look what I found!

**Lenny:** Where are you?

**Shirley:** In the living room!

**Narrator:** Lenny ran down the stairs into the living room. He stood still, eyes wide open.

**Lenny:** A piano! I can't believe it! A piano...

**Shirley:** It sure is ugly. I think it was Aunt Clara's. What's it doing here?

**Lenny:** I don't care what it looks like just as long as it sounds pretty good.

**Narrator:** Lenny walked to the piano, sat down on the bench, and began to play. Lenny played all the time, until one night, well past mid-night, Lenny's father rose from bed and stood at the top of the staircase.

**Samuel:** Lenny! Lenny! Don't you know what time it is? It's two o'clock! What in heaven's name are you doing?

**Lenny:** Father, I have to do this. These sounds are in my head and I have to get them out.

**Narrator:** That was the beginning of a long struggle between Lenny and his father that lasted for years and years. Mr. Bernstein didn't think music was important. He wanted Lenny to take over the family business when he grew up. But Lenny refused to give up music. Soon, Lenny's family began to notice changes in Lenny.

**Lenny:** Hey, Shirl, do you think I've grown taller this past year?

**Shirley:** Yeah! I think you're the tallest boy in your class now. AND you're sure handsome. All the girls are crazy over you.

**Lenny:** Cut it out, Shirley.

**Shirley:** I heard Mom and Pops talking yesterday. They're proud of you for getting such high grades this year.

**Lenny:** Thanks for telling me, Shirl. I don't know what's happening but I think it's got a lot to do with playing the piano. Everyone's inviting me to their parties so they can hear me play all the latest songs. It's swell!

**Shirley:** Well, you sure have a lot of friends. Not like the old days when you were sick all the time. I'm glad you're so happy.

**Lenny:** Thanks.

**Shirley:** I've been meaning to ask you, what's that new music you've been playing?

**Lenny:** It's called jazz. It sure is fun to play – you just sorta make it up as you go along as long as you follow the rules.

**Shirley:** Do you think Pops will ever change his mind about your wanting to be a musician?

**Lenny:** I'm not sure. I hope so, but that won't change my mind. I know I'll be a musician and maybe some day, I'll be a famous musician, too.