

# Wishtree

## Katherine Applegate

My friends call me Red, and you can, too. But for a long time people in the neighborhood have called me the “wishtree.”

There’s a reason for this, and it goes way back to when I wasn’t much more than a tiny seed with higher aspirations.

Long story.

Every year on the first day of May, people come from all over town to adorn me with scraps of paper, tags, bits of fabric, snippets of yarn, and the occasional gym sock. Each offering represents a dream, a desire, a longing.

Whether draped, tossed, or tied with a bow: They’re all hopes for something better.

Wishtrees have a long and honorable history, going back centuries. There are many in Ireland, where they are usually hawthorns or the occasional ash tree. But you can find wishtrees all over the world.

For the most part, people are kind when they visit me. They seem to understand that a tight knot might keep me from growing the way I need to grow. They are gentle with my new leaves, careful with my exposed roots.

After people write their hope on a rag or piece of paper, they tie it onto one of my branches. Usually they whisper the wish aloud.

It’s traditional to wish on the first of May, but people stop by throughout the year.

My, oh my, the things I have heard:

*I wish for a flying skateboard.*

*I wish for a world without war.*

*I wish for a week without clouds.*

*I wish for the world’s biggest candy bar.*

*I wish for an A on my geography test.*

*I wish Ms. Gentorini weren’t so grumpy in the morning.*

*I wish my gerbil could talk.*

*I wish my dad would get better.*

*I wish I weren't hungry sometimes.*

*I wish I weren't so lonely.*

*I wish I knew what to wish for.*

So many wishes. Grand and goofy, selfish and sweet.

It's an honor, all the hopes bestowed upon my tired old limbs.

Although by end of May Day, I look like someone dumped a huge basket of trash on top of me.