

Fortune Fish

Silver Arts

Life Experience

Donna Powers

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My fortune fish says I'm wise beyond my years. Well, that really makes my night.

Nobody really thinks these plastic fish-shaped strips can discern our true futures, but they were placed near our plates at the Cub Scouts' "Blue and Gold Dinner." The dinner tonight had a Chinese theme, further emphasized by our boys' garish dragon masks and our plates of chicken and broccoli; egg rolls, and fried rice.

Tonight would be the last night of my Jake's Cub Scout years. Jake had gone through five years of den meetings and camping trips. He'd learned knots, swimming, lifesaving, outdoor skills and archery and U.S. History. He'd marched in parades and helped with food drives and popcorn sales. During those years, he'd gotten over his need to always be first in line. Jake had grown up – and not just in body.

My little boy was becoming a young man.

All that stood between Jake and his future was a large, wooden A-framed bridge, made by the boys and their leaders. Each of the Cub Scouts had to climb its wooden steps, walk across its wooden expanse and then descend to be greeted with "high fives" by the members of his new Boy Scout troop. It looked like a sturdy structure, and I figured it would take less than five minutes for Jake to cross it. But, to Jake, those five minutes would seem like an eternity.

Jake is afraid of bridges.

Jake is my grandson, and his mother was my oldest daughter. As a baby, Jake hadn't been afraid of anything. He'd been fearless; boldly greeting strangers and strange pets. Darkness had held no monsters for Jake, and his sunny smile was the highlight of every encounter. Bugs, snakes, noises, and heights had been adventures to be savored; and his musical laugh had been music to everyone's ears.

His laughter began to be less frequent when his mother was diagnosed with cancer. He seemed to sense how sick she was, and it began to decrease the frequency of his laughter. But when Jake visited

his mother, he did his best to bring a smile to her pale face.

On his mother's last night, Jake was at her side to tell her he loved her, as she slipped into her final sleep. He gave her a long, tender hug and said, "I love you, Mama," as she took her last breath.

After that, Jake began to have nightmares. How could a two-year-old boy understand such a profound loss? All he knew was his Mama was forever gone, and the nightmares evolved into fears of people and things he encountered during his days. All those things that had enlivened him became monsters that terrified him. No matter how much I tried to soothe him, he clung to me and remained terrified of almost everything.

Bridges were especially frightening to him. When we crossed bridges during car trips, Jake began to tremble all over and bowed his head in prayer. He would clench his fists and pray aloud while the car went over the bridge. Jake knew he couldn't close his eyes on the Cub Scout bridge, and he feared his little prayer might cause derision. I'd told him to look straight ahead as he crossed, and to trust God. He'd promised he would, although he said he'd still be scared. His Den Mother had given him permission to walk underneath the bridge, but he had declined. He wanted to do what the other Cubs did – no matter what it cost him.

Now, Jake stood at the bottom of the steps up to the wooden bridge. He held his breath as he ascended the steps, and I clenched my fist over the foolish fortune fish. Where was that "beyond-my-years wisdom" now? "Please help Jake, God," I silently prayed. I believe the only true wisdom comes from God; and trusted Him for just enough wisdom for Jake to cross that bridge. If Jake remembered to trust Him, I believed that would be enough.

Jake stepped gingerly onto the log. I saw the boys in his den cheering him on. All of them were giving him a "thumbs up." He looked downward for just a second, and his eyes became wild. I saw him tremble

and gripped the fish harder. If I could, I would have run up there and carried him over. I repeated my prayer for wisdom. Wisdom for Jake, to cross the bridge himself. Wisdom for me: to let him do it.

He drew in a tremulous breath, looked straight ahead and steadily stepped across the log.

My fist unclenched, and the fortune fish shimmied powerlessly to the floor. I smiled at Jake with tear-filled eyes, as he stepped downward off the bridge and toward his future.