

BOWLS OF HOPE

By Linda Rogers

They're empty vessels, we say when we watch rows of babies through the nursery windows, thinking of how we will fill them with wisdom and love, teach them how to use chopsticks, how to dance the highland fling, or whistle with two fingers when the fat lady sings in the last act of the opera, and how to cover their infant heads with hands as fragile as newspaper hats, as monkeys do when the sky is falling.

In the rhododendron forest at Playfair Park, the petals came down like snow and I called out to my grandson, his headful of copper curls disappearing like new pennies falling down storm drains, "Be careful not to trip on the roots. Broken boys are hard to fix."

My grandson had his worst birthday ever when a friend squeezed his hamster too hard in his little fist. We cupped his hands to catch his grief. "Hold on," we said to him, "change is coming," meaning loss has a beginning and an end, and would vanish the way his tears leaked through his fingers.

There are so many begging bowls to fill with hope; and we were invited to choose from a thousand, each one a child at risk. There is so much good earth in the Garden City, it's hard to believe there are children as fragile as pottery living in the streets, their dreams leaking, making the sound of rain on the trees lining our boulevards.

I knew I had to choose my bowl carefully, the life within it as precious as the light transmitted by glass buried in ancient cities.

This one is too beautiful, I thought, replacing a Chinese bowl with its hidden pattern of bamboo leaves, and

picked up another with a frog face
and its tongue sticking out in relief.
“A school boy made this one.” I held it
up to my ear and heard frogs singing
in my grandson’s pond; or was it some
other kids, not so lucky, settling down
in the park for the night. Afraid I might
drop it and bring them bad luck, I put
the rogue bowl back on the table.

Later, my grandson told me that he had
made that very bowl at school; and I
wondered why I hadn’t chosen it.
Wasn’t I really listening, something he’s
been reminding me to do since the day
I found him in the rhododendron forest,
his knees bleeding, and *he gave me*
comfort saying, “Don’t worry, you can
glue *this* broken boy back together?”