



Signs of Hope from Heaven:

Inspirational Stories from OpenToHope.com

By Dr. Gloria Horsley and Dr. Heidi Horsley
And the Open to Hope Contributors

Foreword by Bill Guggenheim,
coauthor of *Hello from Heaven!*

The following is an excerpt from the uplifting grief support book,

Signs of Hope from Heaven

To read the entire electronic book, please

go to Amazon.com

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Foreword

Death is simply a shedding of the physical body
like the butterfly shedding its cocoon. It is a transition
to a higher state of consciousness where you continue
to perceive, to understand, to laugh, and to be able to grow.

—Elisabeth Kübler-Ross, M.D.

When Dr. Gloria Horsley asked me to write the Foreword to *Signs of Hope from Heaven*, I had two responses. Initially I felt honored by her request because her daughter, Dr. Heidi Horsley, and she are so well known and highly esteemed for the innovations and contributions they make to the bereavement community through their Open to Hope Foundation. Then I travelled back to 1988, when Judy Guggenheim and I started our research for *Hello From Heaven!* At that time, topics like receiving signs and messages from deceased loved ones were among “America’s best kept secrets.” I marveled at how much the cultural and spiritual climate had changed during the past 25 years.

Back then, at the start of their interview, people would typically say to us, “I’ve never shared this experience with anyone” or “I’ve told only a few family members and friends about this. I don’t want people to laugh at me, or worse yet, to think I’m crazy and have gone round the bend due to my grief. Please don’t use my name in your book.”

In contrast, the courageous contributors to *Signs of Hope from Heaven* are professionals and published authors, who would have had a great deal to lose and nothing to gain by sharing their experiences with the general public three decades ago. Today, in the words of the song by Loretta Lynn, *We’ve Come a Long Way Baby*.

The death of a child, spouse, parent, or other loved one is still as painful now as it was then, of course, but today there is much more openness and support for those who are grieving. And there are many more bereavement resources available, including books, support groups,

workshops, radio and television programs, CDs and DVDs, and a vast number of sites on the Internet.

The bereaved ask many questions including: Is there life after death? Will we be reunited with our deceased loved ones when we make our transition? Can they communicate with us now? Countless religions, philosophies, and other belief systems – including science – provide a wide variety of answers to these questions.

Today, many people accept evidence for life after death based upon after-death communication experiences (ADCs), near-death experiences (NDEs), out-of-body experiences (OBEs), shared death experiences (SDEs), photographs of orbs, encounters with angels, readings by psychic mediums, and various other forms of spiritually transformative experiences (STEs). And some people have mystical experiences while in deep meditation or during centering prayer.

It isn't necessary to have faith in a religion to have a spiritually transformative experience. Devout believers, agnostics, skeptics, and even atheists report having them. For those who are fortunate enough to have an STE, "life after death" is no longer a subject to ponder or debate – it becomes part of their new, expanded understanding of life, death, and reality. They *know* they will continue to exist after their physical body dies – that death is merely a transition from one level of consciousness, or dimension of reality, to another one. And they *know* they will have joyous reunions with their deceased loved ones, who are waiting to meet them and greet them when they arrive.

I attended Protestant and Catholic churches as I grew up, and was led to believe that some part of us – generally called our "soul" or "spirit" – would leave our body, when we die, and go to Heaven or some other "place" in accordance with how we lived our life. Now, after thirty-eight years of study – and having had many spiritual experiences myself – I affirm the

following when I present my ADC workshops:

“Each of us is a soul or a spirit or a Being of Light right here and right now. We are wearing a physical body that is our ‘Earth suit.’ We need our body to function at this level of reality, in this dimension. At some point our physical body will cease to function – it will die – but the ‘I’ who I am – and the ‘I’ that each of us is – will continue to exist in the afterlife or Heaven, where we will have joyous reunions with our loved ones who are already there.

“We chose our current lifetime in physical reality aboard *Spaceship Earth* – as a student enrolled in ‘The Human Experience’ – to achieve spiritual growth in a universe of duality. We came here to learn kindness, compassion, love, forgiveness, gratitude, peace, wisdom, etc. To master these lessons, we must treat everyone with loving kindness, including ourselves. And when we complete the courses we came here to learn, our physical body will die, and we will graduate from Earth school into the afterlife that many people call Heaven.”

My younger daughter, Jaenet, ended her physical life at age 47 in April 2011. Very fortunately, I’ve had a series of telepathic conversations with her. And I saw her in an internal vision in full color, during which she was very happy, dancing in circles, and laughing – and we had two-way verbal communication as well. Joyful tears ran down my cheeks, and my heart overflowed with love for her – and with gratitude for having this fantastic experience. These and other ADCs with Jaenet have made all the difference in my grief recovery.

Signs of Hope from Heaven provides comfort, hope and healing for anyone who is grieving the death of a loved one, especially bereaved parents. This compilation of stories covers a wide range of relationships, types of ADCs and other spiritual experiences, readings by psychic mediums, and more. In short, there’s a lot for everyone in this wide spectrum of accounts. Reading them with an open heart will change your beliefs about life after death and assist you

with your grief.

The spiritually transformative experiences contained in *Signs of Hope from Heaven* and *Hello From Heaven!* consistently affirm an essential spiritual message: **Life and love are eternal.**

—Bill Guggenheim, Longwood, Florida, Coauthor of *Hello From Heaven!*

Introduction

By Dr. Gloria Horsley

Heidi and I have wanted to publish a book on signs and connections for many years. The idea was inspired by the thousands of stories we have heard while being involved in the grief community and by our own personal experiences.

I know there are those who don't believe in signs, but I agree with Albert Einstein when he said, "There are only two ways to live life. One is as though nothing is a miracle. The other is as though everything is a miracle." I choose to believe that everything is a miracle and if you are reading this book, perhaps you do too.

Foreshadowing

Even in my early years I experienced foreshadowing of things to come. I was 9 years old and my cousin Verabelle and I had gotten identical dolls and baby carriages for Christmas. It was a warm summer afternoon when we decided to take our dolls out for a walk. We thought it would be fun to push our carriages into a large field of beautiful yellow flowers, which our mothers called weeds, and have a pretend picnic. The foliage was waist high and difficult to maneuver, so we were pleased when we discovered a small clearing where we could park our carriages.

After our picnic, we carefully tucked our babies back in their buggies and left them to nap while we explored the area and climbed a nearby tree. We played in the tree for close to an hour until we noticed that the sun was getting low in the sky, which was our signal that it was time to go home.

But after much searching, we could not find the clearing where we had left our carriages. We trekked back and forth, feeling more and more frantic with every passing moment. It was

getting dark and we knew our parents would be wondering where we were. Thankfully, just as we were ready to give up, Belle saw the clearing. What a relief for two little girls who thought they had lost their special babies!

Thirty years later, Belle and I would simultaneously lose our real babies. Our 17-year-old boys were enjoying an evening out together one rainy night, wearing their safety belts, when they were killed in a freak automobile accident.

Belle and I are still very close and often comment in a joking way, "If you find the boys, send them home." We hope that one day we will again find that clearing. We know the boys are not lost; rather, we have just not discovered how to locate them.

The Dream

Scott was a wonderful 17-year-old boy when he was killed. He was the catcher on his school's varsity baseball team and the quarterback of the football team. He had always been very athletic, and loved watching and playing baseball. His baseball bat and mitt were always handy. When he died, so unexpectedly, I was so very heartbroken. We all missed him so much. I was inconsolable and looked to my religion and my religious leaders, but no one seemed able to help me. I prayed to God to give me some comfort, some sign or dream that Scott was okay.

Then one night, about six months after his death, I had a simple but powerful dream. I saw Scott standing with his baseball bat in hand, ready to hit the ball that he was telepathically pitching toward his bat. He was in deep contemplation, learning the physics of moving the ball toward the cocked bat.

Scott suddenly stopped and studied me, with a look of "Is there something you need?" I said simply, "How are you?" He looked at me as if that was a very curious question. At that moment I felt joined with him and at total peace as he said simply, "I Am."

Through the years I have found comfort in that dream and still find several ways to interpret it. One is that “I am God” and we will all be, in the end. Another is that Scott is with God. However we choose to interpret them, dreams can be powerful reminders that we are not alone.

Signs

Since Heidi and I started The Open to Hope Foundation several years ago, we have been finding dimes everywhere. We find them in strange places—golf course cart paths, seats in New York City cabs, and just laying around on the ground. Dimes are significant because my father-in-law, after whom Scott was named, was the president of a bank and used to bring home bags of coins and sort through them at night, looking for rare coins. He loved those shiny dimes.

Whatever the reason, when times get tough we believe that when we find dimes it is a sign from Scott that we should continue our mission of helping people find hope after loss. I think Scott is very proud that our family has chosen to use his death as an opportunity to help others.

Part 1: “Give Me a Sign”

The Last Seconds of My Brother’s Life

By Heidi Horsley

When I was 20 years old, I was awakened in the middle of the night with the most devastating news I had ever received. My 17 year-old-brother, Scott, and 17 year-old-cousin, Matthew, had been killed together in a traumatic car accident. My beautiful little brother whom I

had grown up with, shared a history with, and expected to grow old with, was suddenly gone forever from my life.

Scott had unruly blond curls and bright emerald green eyes. He devoured Twix candy bars, chewed Big Red gum, was a New York Jets fan, and loved playing practical jokes. My brother was funny, easy going, compassionate, and adored by me and my sisters. Unlike me, Scott was very athletic, and was the catcher on the high school varsity baseball team and quarterback on the varsity football team, even being awarded most valuable player. He was healthy, physically fit, and in the prime of his life, and it was inconceivable to me that he could die.

For a long time I replayed his death in my mind like a broken record, and the question that haunted me most was: did he suffer during those last seconds of his life? The only account I had was a police report, which stated the following:

“The accident happened shortly before midnight. It had been raining when the car skidded sideways near the George Washington Memorial Parkway, smashed into a bridge abutment, and burst into flames. It was not known if the youths died from the impact or as a result of the fire.”

Although Matthew and Scott were burned over 90% of their bodies, ironically, both their right feet were completely intact. This made no logical or rational sense. How could this be? Perhaps it was a sign. It gave me comfort to think it was because they were putting their right foot forward as they entered heaven, on that dark rainy April night, one minute before Easter.

My story may have ended there, had it not been for a head-on automobile collision I would have some twenty years later. By this time, Scott’s death had changed my career path, and I was now a psychologist specializing in grief and loss.

Heading home to New York City one night after working with a family who had lost a firefighter in the World Trade Center attacks, I was driving along a dark narrow road when a car going 75 miles per hour rounded the corner and lost control. As the car came barreling straight towards me, my last thought before being hit was, “my parents cannot lose another child.”

I passed out on impact and was immediately enveloped by a warm bright light. As I moved towards the light I had the most euphoric feeling of love and inner peace that I had ever experienced. It was a place that I never wanted to leave, and I felt that I would soon be reunited with my brother again. I have no idea how much time elapsed, although it couldn’t have been long, when I was jarred awake by an emergency medical technician pounding on my window and using the jaws of life to pry open my door, while firefighters threw gravel on my smoking engine.

My car was totaled, and as I was taken by ambulance to the hospital, I was told that it was a miracle that I had survived the crash. Being pregnant at the time, I learned several days later that I had unfortunately experienced a miscarriage as a result of the accident.

As traumatic and frightening as the accident was, it was a turning point in my life, for I realized only then that I didn’t really know what the very last seconds of my brother’s life were like. I had often wondered if my brother and cousin had been stuck in the trauma, trapped, and fearful in those last seconds. However, after my own “near-death experience,” I now believe they were not trapped in the car, as several newspaper articles had insinuated. While their bodies may have been trapped in the fiery blaze during the final seconds of their lives, I believe their spirits were enveloped by light and love, just as mine had been, and that they were at peace as they made their way together out of this life and into the next, with their right foot stepping forward into heaven.

Dr. Heidi Horsley is an internationally recognized grief expert who co-founded The Open to Hope Foundation with her mother, Dr. Gloria Horsley. Dr. Heidi currently serves on The Compassionate Friends board and the Tragedy Assistance Program for Survivors advisory board. She is also an adjunct professor at Columbia University, where she worked for ten years on the outreach program to provide support to children who lost firefighter fathers in the World Trade Center on 9/11. She has a private practice in Manhattan, has written numerous articles, and is co-author of several books. Read more by Heidi at opentohope.com.

Free Bird

By Sheri Perl

A week or so after my son, Danny, died at age 22 of a drug overdose, I was lying in bed, unable to bring myself to get up and get dressed. My heart was heavy and I could think of no way to lighten it. For lack of anything else to do, I opened my computer and began to look at the music that was listed in my iTunes library.

My eyes immediately locked on a song called “Free Bird” by Lynyrd Skynyrd. I had never listened to the song or had any interest in it before. It was included in a movie soundtrack that I had previously imported into my computer, but now, for some unknown reason, I felt drawn to the song. As a matter of fact, I felt as if I had to hear it. I hit “play” and proceeded to be astounded by the lyrics because, to me, the words could have been coming right out of Danny’s mouth! Here are the lyrics to “Free Bird”:

If I leave here tomorrow

Would you still remember me?

I must be traveling on

Cause there’s too many places I’ve got to see

But if I stay here with you girl

Things just couldn’t be the same

Cause I’m as free as a bird now

And this bird you cannot change

And this bird you cannot change

And this bird you cannot change

Lord knows I can't change

I sat in wonder. Could Danny possibly be sending me a message through this song? It certainly felt that way, but of course, I couldn't know. The fact that I was drawn to listen to lyrics, which touched me so profoundly, gave me cause to ponder. I decided to nickname Danny "Free Bird" for no other reason than it felt right. I knew that as a bereaved parent, my own imagination could be weaving the entire scenario to distract me from my pain. Every mother wants to believe that she is receiving messages from her child. However, six weeks later the plot thickened.

It was a warm, late afternoon in August when my husband, Jerry, decided to play golf at the country club near our former home in the suburbs, which we had recently vacated. Feeling out of sorts and wanting to stay close to Jerry, I decided to accompany him to the club and ride around in the golf cart with him while he played. Now that we lived in the city, the golf course seemed very peaceful and serene, like a respite in the country.

As soon as Jerry pulled off the highway, I was hit with a wave of sorrow. The familiar streets and stores where Danny and I had been together so many times were all around me and my heart began to ache. The pain literally felt like a knife in my chest, making me gasp for air. All I could think of was Danny and how much I missed him and how unbearable it was to accept the fact that he would never drive his car through these familiar streets again, or cook dinner for me the in the kitchen.

I began to regret that I had made the trip in the first place. My heart, like a heavy weight,

was pulling me down into deep despair when I felt this huge, warm, presence surround me. Thoughts entered into my mind so quickly that I could hardly keep up with them. This is what I heard:

“Mom, stop idealizing me. It was not a bed of roses and it was never going to be. And whether you realize it or not, I am with you more now than I ever was then. Think about it, Mom. I didn’t usually get up before three. When I did I could be very grouchy. Later in the day I would often go out with my friends and then stay up way late. Now I am with you all the time.

Think of it this way...you used to worry about me all the time. Now you just miss me. That’s not so bad. There are things worse than death, like incarceration, Mom. Things were not going to be easy with me. I’m better now and that should make you feel better, too.

You don’t have to be so sad. I’m okay, I still love you, and I know that you still love me. So feel better...please. When you are so sad, it makes me feel so guilty for screwing up. You have to try to feel better if you want to help me.”

I was blown away because it all made sense and it sounded so much like my boy. It comforted me enormously and the pain in my chest began to ease. As we pulled into the parking lot of the country club, I blew my nose and wiped my face dry from the torrential flood of tears that had soaked my cheeks.

Jerry took off to the locker room while I began to make my way to the path that leads to the first tee, where I’d meet him. As I was walking along the tree-lined path, I spotted a group of men approaching with their golf carts. Always the vain female, I thought, “Oh my God, I must be a mess after all that crying.”

As I was fumbling in my purse for my pocket mirror, I heard my son saying, “They are probably all assholes, Mom. Why do you care?”

Now, I can't even begin to tell you how much more that sounds like Danny than me. I started to laugh out loud and mentally I answered him back by saying, "Well, Danny, they might not *all* be assholes. But you're right, why do I care?"

I left the pocket mirror in my purse and met Jerry at the first tee, feeling very much better than I had in the car. Jerry played for a couple of hours as the sun set and the birds chirped. My heart felt a great deal lighter than it had in a long time.

However, as any bereaved person will tell you, the highs are short-lived and, as soon as we began driving back to the city, nagging doubts surfaced. "How do I know that was Danny speaking? It's probably just my imagination," I told Jerry, and I persisted in this line of reasoning as we drove south on the Henry Hudson Parkway, down the west side of Manhattan.

I was beginning to lose heart when I got an idea. I would ask Danny to give me a sign. As we continued to drive south, with the Hudson River just to our right, I mentally said, "Danny, if this is really you and not just my imagination, give me a sign."

As soon as the words passed through my mind, I had the impulse to look over at the river. To my astonishment, sitting right there, in plain view, was a beautiful white sailboat with the name FREE BIRD written across the side in big bold royal blue letters!

"Oh my God," I thought, and I shouted out for Jerry to look quickly! Fortunately he caught a glimpse of the FREE BIRD, before pulling off the highway.

"Okay, my boy," I mentally said to Danny, "You're on. From now on I will take you at your word and I won't ever doubt you!"

I can't say that I have always been able to live up to that promise. Doubts do surface from time to time, but if what I hear in my mind sounds more like Danny than me, makes good sense, and brings me comfort, I take it on faith that it is coming from him! After a sign like that, what

would you do?

Sheri Perl is a spiritual healer, interfaith minister, author and lecturer. In 2008 Sheri lost her 22-year-old son Daniel to a drug overdose. In his honor Sheri has formed The Prayer Registry for parents who have lost children. She is the author of *Healing from the Inside Out*, which tells of her miraculous healing experience with the late British spiritual healer Harry Edwards. Read more at www.opentohope.com.

Grandpa's Grave

By Marianne Bono

When my father died, I was devastated. He was such a wonderful man and loving father. I was eight months pregnant at the time, and I felt so bereft knowing Daddy would never see my child. My father died on June 27 and was buried on June 29, my birthday.

Amidst the enormous grief, I somehow found the strength to go on. A few weeks later, my precious son, Kris, came into the world, a sweet little bundle of joy. There were many occasions when I wanted to take Kris north from Florida to Illinois to visit my Mom and family. I was also anxious to take Kris to my father's grave, so Daddy could finally "meet" his grandson. But I knew that traveling with an infant can be stressful, so I put off the trip until Kris was two years old.

It was a beautiful, crisp autumn day when Kris, Mom, my sister, and I drove out to the cemetery. I hadn't been there since Daddy's burial two years prior, and I was struck by its vastness. It's one of the largest cemeteries in Illinois.

With Daddy's gravesite our destination, we were chatting away as we walked along the rolling grassy hills. Minutes later, to our dismay, it was clear that we were completely lost. My sister said she hadn't a clue which way to go, as she didn't often visit our father's grave.

But Mom was a frequent visitor, and she was becoming increasingly angry with herself for losing her way — and ours.

To add to our frustration, little Kris chose that exact moment to run off. I kept one eye on Kris as my sister and I helped Mom look at grave markers. Surely she'd find one that seemed familiar, which we hoped would act as a compass and point us in the direction we needed to go.

As Kris got farther away, I mumbled, "Rats, I gotta go after him." Mom was losing what little patience she had left as I ran toward Kris. I'll never forget the sight of my little guy, dressed in blue jeans, the green hood of his sweatshirt flopping up and down in the breeze as he sped forward.

Suddenly, Kris stopped. Something caught his eye, and he knelt down. As I came near, I saw his little forefinger moving across one of the flat gravesite markers, as though tracing shapes and letters.

I knelt down beside him. Kris was happily tracing his finger along the letters that formed my father's name. Two-year-old Kris had found his grandfather's gravesite! I was so astonished that it literally took my breath away. Two-year-olds — and mine included — are too young to read. There was absolutely no viable explanation for his stopping at that particular grave marker.

That is, of course, unless Daddy was sending us a sign that he and Kris were already so sweetly connected in a way that transcends our normal human understanding. What surprised me most, I think, was my mother's reaction to this unexplainable event. Mom was a matter-of-fact, practical woman, who only seemed to see what was right in front of her. I never would have expected her to acknowledge the enormous significance of this incredible "coincidence."

But the look on her face told me she knew that what had happened was awesome beyond belief. Then she added matter-of-factly, "Well, he found his grandfather." Indeed he had, and I whispered a loving prayer to my father: "Daddy, here's your little grandson." But in my heart I

knew for sure that my Dad's spirit and Kris's had always been — and would always be — lovingly intertwined.

Marianne Bono is a long-time hospice nurse based in Tallahassee, Florida. In working with hundreds of terminally ill patients and their families, she often has observed synchronicities and heard of dreams and unexpected connections that bring hope and comfort not only to those who are dying, but also to those who are bereaved. Marianne lives with her family in Northern Florida. Learn more at www.opentohope.com.

Hook 'em Horns and Other Visits

By Patrick Malone

When our second son, Lance, was born, he quickly found that the middle two fingers of his right hand served him well as a pacifier. His index and little finger extended straight up on each cheek creating the “hook ‘em horns” symbol made famous by the University of Texas at Austin. When his habit continued as a toddler, we would gently remind him he was sucking his fingers by saying, “hook ‘em horns” and he would stop.

Lance was killed in a motorcycle accident on Memorial Day, May 29, 1995, at age 25.

Two years later his younger brother Sean married Jennifer, and while they were expecting their first child, we were expecting our first grandchild. On a Friday in late August, I was in my office and got a call from my wife, Kathy, saying that Jen was at the hospital in labor and there was some distress. More than 25 years earlier, our son, Scott, had died 16 hours after birth, so we both realized distress was a serious situation.

We made our way independently to the hospital, and along the way I spoke with Lance as if he were in the car with me, and I said that his brother and I needed his help to safely resolve this unknown distress. As I was to discover later, Kathy had asked Lance for the same help.

About an hour after arriving at the hospital, we learned that the medical concerns had passed and Devin Patrick Malone was welcomed into the world with no further problems. Mother and baby were fine. A short time later we got our first look at our new grandson.

Jennifer was holding Devin in her right arm and he was tightly swaddled in blankets. Kathy was standing next to the bed on Jen's right side, closest to Devin when he began to wiggle. After much effort and wiggling, unnoticed by most of us, Devin managed to free his right arm from the blankets and, to Kathy's amazement, immediately placed the middle two fingers of his right hand in his mouth, producing the tiniest "hook 'em horns" symbol for all to see.

While I expect others could offer many explanations for these events, for us this was clearly a sign that Lance had heard his mother's and my prayers, and had interceded on his brother's behalf to ensure that his nephew and our first grandchild would arrive safe and sound.

We have had other signs that Lance is never that far away. Like many bereaved parents, I needed to know that Lance was all right, so when the opportunity arose to have a private visit with George Anderson, the medium from Long Island, we jumped at the chance.

Knowing that this field is loaded with frauds and carrying a big dose of skepticism, Kathy and I agreed that we would ask Lance in advance of our session for a sign during the visit that only he and we knew about, in order to prove it was really him connecting with George. We also took care to maintain our anonymity until the moment we sat down.

About 15 minutes into our session, George told us the spirit is saying his name is a long name and we respond, "No"—after all "Lance" is a short name. This argument goes on periodically until George says the spirit is sitting at a "round table" with other respected men. Like a bolt out of the blue, Kathy and I suddenly realized that when Lance was a toddler we used

to call him “Lancelot” (King Arthur and the Knights of the Roundtable) and that he was using his nickname as the sign to prove to us it was actually him. We left the session assured that it was Lance and I left knowing he was all right.

These signs and other connections all seemed to occur in the first few years of our grief following Lance’s death. This was also the time that we needed it most. As we have journeyed further down this road, they have gradually diminished in number, and now we receive none. This is in spite of my attempts every Tuesday and Friday to ask Lance to intercede on my behalf in the Mega Millions Lottery drawing. Apparently even the spirits have limitations in their ability to influence events in the world they have left.

Patrick Malone’s twenty-five-year-old son, Lance, died in 1995 in a motorcycle accident. Earlier, his children Scott and Erin died as infants. Patrick is a senior partner with The PAR Group, with more than thirty-five years of experience in operations, customer service, and sales management. He is the co-author of the business book, *Cracking the Code to Leadership*. Patrick speaks extensively on the topic of surviving loss and has served on the National Board of the Compassionate Friends. Find his articles at www.opentohope.com.

Despite His Death, He’s Always There

By Ellen Gerst

When my late husband died of suicide, it felt as if I had died, too. The searing pain pierced my heart so deeply that I felt disconnected from everyday life. I would watch the world go by as if it were a movie and I did not have a part. However, my two children needed my caring attention, so I walked through life accomplishing the necessary tasks. When I was alone at night and in the confines of my bedroom, I would incessantly replay my life in my mind’s eye like a never-ending rerun.

Over time, I was finally able to shut off these replays. Very slowly the fog began to clear, although not without some hard work and introspection on my part. Moreover, while I came to

discern some of the reasons why my late husband thought he had to leave, I still could not reach a definitive conclusion because he left no note. As with many suicide survivors, I felt guilty for being unable to pick up on the clues about his unhappiness and spiraling descent into that final darkness from which he saw no return. The unrelenting need for answers was what initially caused me to turn to intuitive therapist Melinda Vail.

Through her abilities, I was able to connect to my late husband. As we spoke, Melinda relayed the minute details of my life, which included a rash on my son's leg, recent contact with a friend with whom I had not communicated for more than a year, the name of a new doctor I was visiting after my appointment with her, a new business associate's name, and many more details. Someone had to be informing her of these facts. I came to realize that my husband was still present, watching over our children and me. Perhaps he was not physically there for me to see and touch, but he was in my heart and in another dimension close by.

After the reading, I went home and talked to him every night before going to sleep. I would beseech him to give me a sign he was listening—to either throw down a book or rustle the blinds. Not two weeks later, in the middle of the night, I was awakened by a loud thumping noise. The room was very dark and I was too sleepy to recognize what had really happened. I drifted back to sleep and, close to morning, I heard a whistling noise.

By this time, the light was wafting in through the blinds, and I saw the dustcover of a book floating through the air. It finally dawned on me what had caused the thumping noise. I looked on the floor, and there was a book lying quite far from its proper place on top of my armoire. I laid back down to think about it, and moments later I heard some clicking noises over the intercom.

I jumped out of bed to see where the noise was coming from. I looked outside for noisy trucks or cars rattling by and I checked to see if my children were safely asleep. Finding nothing out of the ordinary, I climbed back into bed. About a half hour later the noise reoccurred. I followed the same procedure but again found nothing amiss. I turned off the intercom and told my husband, “Thank you for the message!”

That particular book, *Chronicle of the 20th Century*, had been sitting on its shelf for over a year and has sat there for another two years since this incident. My entire house is filled with books and has been for the last 25 years, and a book has never fallen from its place.

So now I am careful about the things I ask for. How could I not believe that my husband was sending me a message, letting me know he was close by and fulfilling my request for a sign, when that is exactly what I asked for? I felt strangely comforted by this startling turn of events.

My interaction with Melinda opened up the door for me to truly believe I had not “lost” my husband; he had simply moved to another dimension. How reassuring it is for me to know death is only another stage of life and our loved ones remain with us always —and not just in our minds and hearts. It has made acceptance of his death easier, whether I ever discover the answers to my questions or not.

Ellen Gerst is a life coach specializing in grief and relationships, an author, and speaker. Losing her husband to suicide after 20 years of marriage set her on a path to finding her true self and the inner strength she possessed. She is the author of *A Practical Guide to Widow(er)hood*, *Love After Loss: Writing The Rest of Your Story*, and co-edited an anthology of stories, *Thin Threads of Grief & Renewal*. The article above is excerpted from the book *The Other Side of the Vail: Spiritual Guidance for Everyday Living*, which she co-authored with Melinda Vail. Learn more at www.opentohope.com.

The Miracle of the Vigil

By Jane R. Westerfield

On Friday, November 5, 1999, as the sun rose over the ocean at St. Simons Island, Georgia, my mother, LuReese Watson Robertson, quietly yielded her spirit to God's eternal care. The week before had been a time of prayers and tearful goodbyes for our family as we watched her slip away. In the hours I spent alone by her bedside, I talked to her even though she could not answer.

Somehow I believe that she heard me as I thanked her for being such a wonderful mother, wife to my father who passed years earlier, and grandmother to my children. Since there were some indications that she was aware of what I was saying, I made one last request. "Mama, when you get to Heaven and find Daddy, please find a way to let me know that you are together."

She did not reply and so I continued my vigil during her final hours on earth.

In the moments after Mother died, I gathered her belongings and prepared to return to her home to join the rest of our family. However, I decided to go down to the beach for a while to be alone with my thoughts.

It was a cool, crisp day and the sun was beginning to warm the air as I walked on the beach alone. I stood lost in sadness watching the ocean waves caress the sand, when I noticed two bright orange butterflies off to my left.

Never have I seen two butterflies just alike but these appeared to be identical, and even more unusual, they flew so close together that their wings seemed to be intertwined! I watched entranced as the butterflies flew very close to my face, hovered for a few seconds, and then flew away together.

Since my parents' Christian faith was strong and real, I knew that this was God's way of letting me know that they were together with their Heavenly Father.

What better way to grant my request to my mother than for God to send me two butterflies, a symbol of eternal life, as I stood alone in my grief? May God grant the same peace I have found to all those who grieve.

Dr. Jane Robertson Westerfield is the author of three books on death and dying and a contributing author to a fourth book. She is a seasoned educator, and has broad experience as a writer, speaker/performer, director and producer, including as a featured panelist for Women's History Month at Edinboro University. She enjoys working with Music and Drama in her church and serves as the Website Content Editor for People for Christ International. Learn more at www.opentohope.com.

Kim's Butterfly

By Sandy Wiltshire

My life at 47 was good. I had a wonderful husband and three beautiful daughters. We were a close and loving family. From the day I gave birth to my oldest daughter, Kim, I knew that staying home and being a mom was my first priority and the most important job I would ever have. I chose to set work aside and stay home with the girls while they were growing up.

At 22, Kim was a vivacious young lady who was in her fourth year of university. She had started a co-op work term with Microsoft Canada and had moved back home in September to be closer to her job. Kim was heading for France that January, having been accepted into the international business program. She was so excited to begin this new adventure, and we were thrilled for her.

In the early evening of October 27, 1998, our beautiful daughter was driving home from the gym, when a 4x4 truck swerved over the centerline and into her lane. Kim never regained consciousness and died in the hospital a few hours later. Our daughter was gone and with her all our hopes and dreams for her.

A few months later in the midst of my inconsolable pain, I received what I believed to be a sign from Kim letting me know that she was okay. The message came in the form of a butterfly while I was out cutting our lawn one morning. While sitting on the riding lawn mower I noticed a little white butterfly circling around my legs. It proceeded to weave in and out around my head. It continued to remain near me while I finished cutting the front part of the lawn.

After watching this butterfly hovering around me for ten minutes or so I recall thinking, “Kim is that you doing this?” Not daring to think it really was a sign from Kim, I put out a challenge to prove to myself that this butterfly was Kim’s way of saying she was with me. “Let the butterfly stay a little longer,” I pleaded silently to her. I completed the entire back lawn, which took me about 45 minutes, with the butterfly flitting around me for most of that time. As it fluttered away I looked at my watch. This tiny white butterfly had remained with me for most of an hour. “Okay,” I rationalized “don’t be foolish,” as I returned the lawn mower to the garage. “You can’t prove that Kim was here!”

During the next couple of days my mind often wandered back to the unusual behavior of that butterfly. I wanted so desperately to believe that it was a sign from Kim.

A few days later, a friend called to coax me to join her for coffee. When we met at the coffee shop that evening, Judy placed a small gift bag decorated in angels on the table and quietly stated, “I just felt I had to buy this for you.” As I opened the bag, I was stunned by what I saw. It was a tiny butterfly pin.

This was only one of many “miracles” I experienced as I began my spiritual journey to find healing for a broken heart. As I progressed down this path, opening to the miracles around me, I discovered a new direction and purpose to my life. It has not been an easy journey, but it has been an enlightening one.

As author Iyanla Vanzant says, “Remain open. There is something bigger than you know going on here.”

Sandy Wiltshire is the author of *My Gift of Light: A Bereaved Mother’s Loving Journey from Skeptic to Psychic Medium*. She lives in rural Ontario, where she gives private readings to bereaved parents. Learn more at www.opentohope.com.

Dragonflies and Synchronicity

By Nina Bennett

Synchronicity is the term coined by Carl Jung, a Swiss psychotherapist, to describe the phenomenon in which events are connected in such a meaningful way that their occurrence seems to defy the calculations of probability. Part of my new normal since my granddaughter, Maddy, was stillborn is that I no longer believe in coincidence. I do, however, fervently embrace the concept of synchronicity.

My earliest experience of synchronicity in this particular journey of bereavement, grief, and transformation occurred while my daughter-in-law was in labor. It is only in retrospect that I am able to label it as an act of synchronicity. When my youngest son and his wife were pregnant with their first child, they made it very clear that they did not want grandparents present during labor and delivery. They were going to call us when their baby was born, and we would then join them to greet and toast our newest family member.

My son, Tim, called me throughout the day to update me on Jenn’s labor progress. The hospital where I work is a few blocks from where they were delivering. When he called shortly before the end of my workday and told me she was six centimeters dilated, I knew that by the time I drove home, about 30 minutes south, he would be calling and I would have to turn around and drive back into the city—both trips made in rush hour traffic on the turnpike.

In a statement that is totally out of character for me, I told him I was going to come over and sit in the waiting room. His response was also uncharacteristic. He did not argue with me, he merely said, "Okay."

My world came crashing down a few hours later when my son stood before me and told me he needed me upstairs, that Jenn had just delivered a baby girl who did not have a heartbeat. I was not *supposed* to be present for my grandchild's birth, but I was certainly *meant* to be there.

So many acts of synchronicity have occurred as I've made my way along this path of love and grief. I connected with an online support community of grandparents. I was drawn to a grandmother whose grandson was stillborn the same day as Maddy. As we began sharing, we found many other seeming coincidences. Not only were our grandchildren stillborn on the same day, same year, but when the time difference is taken into account, it was approximately the same time.

My family uses the dragonfly as our symbol of Maddy, and my friend's family uses butterflies. Dragonflies and butterflies are found in similar locations and frequently are spotted together. It gave me a modicum of comfort to think that not only had I found a friend, but perhaps my granddaughter and her grandson are together in another dimension.

I was actually able to meet in person with one of the grandmothers on my support forum. We picked a restaurant and shared a lunch full of tears, hugs, and love. As we made our way out to the parking lot, we asked somebody to take a picture of us together. While we were posing for the picture, we noticed a shrub with a dragonfly hovering near one of the blossoms.

I have frequently seen dragonflies and dragonfly items while traveling. I was asked to speak at a conference for bereaved parents; as an organization, they use the butterfly as their symbol of deceased children. I did not expect to see any dragonflies, but the morning of the

opening meeting, a woman sitting directly in my sight line was wearing a beautiful flowing blouse embroidered with them.

At a remote waterfall high in the Mayan mountains of Belize, a dragonfly entertained me for several moments. Most of my crying is done in the car; several times when I am feeling especially sad, a dragonfly has appeared in front of my windshield. A huge dragonfly actually put on an acrobatic performance outside my second-floor, inner-city office window.

One of my strongest experiences occurred during a writing workshop at the 2006 MISS Foundation conference. The workshop facilitator was a woman I have become close to through e-mail. She introduced me to her mother, who has been a consistent source of support to me. The exercise was a free writing activity where we were instructed to write from the voice of our deceased child.

Until that workshop, my writing had always been from me to my granddaughter, so I wasn't sure how this would turn out. I was amazed at what I wrote. I shared it with the group, crying softly as I read the final statement from Maddy: "Keep looking for the dragonflies, Grammy. I've sent some you haven't found yet."

As the facilitator hugged me, she whispered, "They're in my room." She had painted a whimsical dragonfly on a glass, and her mother had made a set of note cards with gorgeous stamped dragonflies to be given to me.

If you open your consciousness to the possibility of synchronicity, you will discover it in your life. So many times things happen that we dismiss too quickly as coincidental. Part of my new normal is putting aside my skepticism and being open to these experiences. When you least expect it, when you are feeling alone and misunderstood, glance out the window and if you should happen to see a rainbow, a dragonfly, or butterfly, a white feather, a pinwheel—any of the

signs and symbols of our beloved children and grandchildren—smile and believe in synchronicity.

Nina Bennett has four grandchildren, one of whom was unexpectedly born still. She has worked in reproductive health since 1976, and was a childbirth educator for nearly 10 years. Nina presents talks and workshops nationally. Her articles and poetry have appeared in several journals and anthologies. Nina is the author of *Forgotten Tears: A Grandmother's Journey Through Grief*. Read more at www.opentohope.com.

Signs, Signs Everywhere!

By Jenny Lee Wheeler

I've been seeing signs from loved ones who have died ever since I was 5 years old and both my grandfathers died within a month. I started seeing hearts everywhere—heart-shaped clouds, stones, puddles, leaves. My grandmother died when I was 11, and I started seeing yellow butterflies whenever I thought about her. I think she sent me yellow butterflies as a reminder of her love because they were her favorite and she often pointed them out to me when we played together outside.

Signs don't have to be huge or obvious to everyone; they just have to be special to you. I'm now 19, and I see signs everywhere!

The last outing that my father had, even though we didn't know it at the time, was when my mom, Dad, a couple of friends, and I went out to dinner at a restaurant downtown. My dad wasn't feeling well, but he insisted that he drive us home, even in the pouring rain. It was dark by the time we reached our neighborhood, and as we pulled into our long driveway, my dad suddenly slammed on the brakes. We all lurched forward.

"Whoa! Did you see that *huge* frog?" he asked. Soon the frog was hopping in front of our car and safely across the driveway. Ever since then, at significant moments relating to my dad, I find frogs in unexpected places. I see them on our patio, hopping into gardens at the park, or

pictures of frogs on billboards and in my school textbooks. I'll be thinking about Dad or telling a friend one of his many favorite jokes, and when I look up (or down), there's a frog!

Dragonflies also came to be symbolic for my mom and me soon after my dad knew he was sick with advanced cancer. One day he came home humming "Happy Birthday" to my mom. It was a bit odd at the time, because her birthday wasn't for a couple months. Plus, my dad had always been a last-minute shopper for such occasions.

The very next day, my dad announced that he wanted to give my mom an early birthday present. He had always given her heart-shaped silver jewelry from their favorite jewelry store for anniversaries and birthdays, but this time he gave her a beautiful dragonfly pin. He explained that it just jumped out at him, so he bought it, and he had a strong feeling he needed to give it to her right then. The pin had eight tiny diamonds on its body, my mom's lucky number.

It turned out that my dad never lived to see my mom's actual birthday. He went into the hospital a few days after he gave her the pin, and he never came back home.

I started seeing dragonflies at significant moments while my dad was still in the hospital. One day after visiting Dad in the Intensive Care Unit, I could tell that he was probably dying. As my mom and I got into the elevator, she asked me what I was thinking and feeling. I told her it was like part of Dad was already in Heaven. She said she felt the same way. We were both sobbing as we walked down a long hallway toward the parking lot. As we stepped out into the parking lot, through our blur of tears, we saw thousands of dragonflies. It was like a parade of them in the sky! Then I noticed they were only flying around us. I couldn't see dragonflies dancing anywhere else in the parking lot.

A couple days later, my mom asked me to join her on our favorite bench in our backyard so she could show me Dad's living will and explain why we were going to honor Dad's wishes

and remove him from life support. A dragonfly flew around us the entire time we were talking, hugging, and crying.

Every time I see a frog or dragonfly I know it is a sign from my dad, especially if it is in an unlikely place, like the time my mom and I traveled from Florida to California to speak to a group of people about our experiences of seeing signs of continued love after Dad's death.

It was December, and the morning of the day we were to give our presentation, I was feeling a little nervous. My mom speaks to grief groups often, but this was my first time. As we sat down to have breakfast in the hotel lobby, suddenly we heard this loud, scratchy noise.

I turned to my mom and asked, "Is that a frog?" She just smiled, and we both looked around the lobby to see where the sound was coming from. Other guests were looking up at the chandelier or at the Christmas tree, trying to figure out what was making this odd sound. Someone said, "Okay, I give up. What is it?"

The lady at the front desk immediately apologized. "I'm so sorry. That's our tree frog. We can't get him out of the lobby, and he does this every so often. I'm so sorry he disturbed your breakfast! People complain all the time!"

We both laughed hysterically. We might as well have seen a huge billboard with the headline, "Dad loves you!" I imagine the small print on the billboard would say, "And he is so proud of you and Mom for traveling to speak with other grieving people, reassuring them that love never dies."

I hope that you find signs from your loved one who died. Signs come in any way, shape, or form, so keep your eyes, ears, mind, and heart open to these incidences and synchronicities, which will make you feel connected to your loved one's unending love.

Jenny Lee Wheeler is the author of the national award-winning teen-to-teen grief support book, *Weird Is Normal When Teenagers Grieve*. She was 14 when her beloved father died, and she

decided to reach out to other grieving teens by sharing her grief journey, particularly her experiences with signs of continued love. Much of the article above is excerpted with permission from her book. Learn more at opentohope.com.

About the Authors

Dr. Gloria Horsley and Dr. Heidi Horsley are a mother/daughter team and internationally recognized grief experts. They are the founders of The Open to Hope Foundation and host a weekly Internet radio show and an award-winning television show, *The Open to Hope Show*. They founded the Open to Hope Foundation in memory of Scott, Gloria's son and Heidi's brother, who died in an automobile accident at age 17.

Dr. Gloria serves on the national advisory board for The Compassionate Friends and writes a monthly post for Maria Shriver's Blog. Dr. Heidi is an adjunct professor at Columbia University and serves on the National Board of Directors for The Compassionate Friends and on the advisory board for TAPS, the Tragedy Assistance Program for Survivors of Military Loss.

Together Dr. Gloria and Dr. Heidi have written numerous articles and several books, including *Teen Grief Relief* and the award-winning *Real Men Do Cry*, which they coauthored with Eric Hipple. With the Open to Hope contributors, they have coauthored *Open to Hope: Inspirational Stories of Healing After Loss*; *Open to Hope: Inspirational Stories for Handing the Holidays After Loss*; *Fresh Grief: Inspirational Stories from OpenToHope.com*; and *Spouse Loss: Inspirational Stories from OpenToHope.com*. Dr. Gloria also wrote *The In-Law Survival Guide*. Learn more at www.opentohope.com.

Dr. Gloria and Dr. Heidi are deeply indebted to the authors who graciously shared their journeys through grief in this book and the many more on the Open to Hope website, www.opentohope.com.

The pages above are excerpts from the uplifting grief support book,

Signs of Hope from Heaven

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