

SIGNS OF SPRING

A Stephy's Place Reflection on Grief and Mourning
March 8, 2024 Kevin J. Keelen

With all the gloomy weather, it's uplifting to see Robins bouncing in the wet grass as well as one of the other first signs of Spring: when the beach chairs and umbrellas arrive at Costco. But this is not a typical springtime reflection.

What I call "signs" are communications from those we know who have died. Throughout my life, I have experienced my own personal signs and witnessed countless others' signs. I have been privileged to listen to hundreds of people share their amazing and consoling personal miracles.

Signs can take place in all kinds of ways, and some are simply unexplainable. They can come in feelings that well up inside us, almost overwhelming us, and they can come to us physically – when we're alone and we feel a gentle touch, a hug, or a tap on the shoulder, or perhaps a slight breeze in a room with no windows.

They can come in coins – pennies, dimes... They often come through nature - such as animals, insects, birds, and feathers, as well as rainbows and cloud formations. Someone once shared that she saw her husband's profile in a cloud formation. She brought in a photo of the cloud formation and a photo of her husband... and yes she did in fact see her husband's profile in a cloud formation!

Signs can come in smells- colognes, perfumes, flowers, and even cigarette smoke. They can come in annoying flickering lights, noisy alarm clocks, and even smoke alarms in the middle of the night. They can come in love songs that serenade us inside our heads, or songs that come on the radio at the right time and place. They can come in dreams, on billboards, or toddlers' observations and questions. Basically, if you feel it's a sign in your heart and soul, then it's a sign, it's a communication of love. (btw, every sign I have mentioned is one that I

either experienced personally or has been shared with me, and they are all real. There is no coincidence.)

My most profound sign (and I have received many) was when my sister Kelly died by suicide in August 2000. I felt tremendous guilt that I could have done more, should have done something, to help her, to save her. I felt responsible. I was angry with her for doing what she did and sorry that I felt that way, I felt tremendous sadness, anger, guilt, and confusion.

I had no concept or understanding of the pain she must have been bearing so unbearably. I quickly decided that I was not ever going to judge her. She was finally at peace. She was no longer in pain.

On the day of Kelly's funeral, I wanted to precede the rest of the family to see her and the way she was prepared. I wanted to make sure that there was nothing that would upset my mother. The funeral director escorted me to her casket so that I could have some private time with her. I walked to my sister's casket holding my breath. I expected the worst, only to find her appearing to be peacefully sleeping. I remembered how much she hated being the focus of attention. Flowers surrounded her and her dress was beautiful, but it was all so freaking tragic and crushingly sad.

I got close to her to ask her to forgive me for failing her and to give us all strength. I silently asked her to help me as I prepared to eulogize her and celebrate her funeral. As I looked down, I could not believe what I was seeing. I saw a bit of a glimmer in her left eye which was closed. I was pretty distraught, but I regained my composure and looked more closely as I watched a tear form in the corner of my sister's closed eye; I noticed it build up and roll down her cheek.

The funeral director was the only other person there. He said, "What's that?" He leaned over and looked closely. He seemed perplexed. He said, "I don't know where that came from." He took out his hanky to wipe it away, but I grabbed it from him and said, "Let me do that please, I know what it is." That was all I said as I gently wiped that tear from my sister's cheek.

I knelt in a pew for a few minutes as my family waited outside the church. I was blown away. I thanked Kelly for her incredible sign. I

knew in my innermost being that this was her way of saying she was sorry. It was her way of sending me confirmation that she was not gone, that she was okay, that she was on the Other Side, and that we would be together again one day. It was her way of sending me the strength and inspiration I would need to get through the ordeal and help others in the process. It was quite a gift.

My sister breached the barrier between this side and the next to give me a most amazing sign that would impact the rest of my life, and she still does. If that isn't a sign of eternal springtime, what is?