

# The Sign

Category: Miracles

written by Bruce Campbell | June 2, 2017

*Give, give, give—what is the point of having experience, knowledge, or talent if I don't give it away? Of having stories if I don't tell them to others?... It is in giving that I connect with others, with the world, and with the divine.*

—Isabel Allende

My office at the hospital is not unusual. Amid the clutter there are several special mementos and notes received from patients and families over the years. Each one holds a story, brought back to life when I touch it again.

A few years ago, the sister of a long-term patient stopped by with a framed picture. We talked about her brother and his long battle with his cancer.

He had spent his career working for the city repairing street lights and signs. While in the prime of his life, he had developed a tongue cancer. After an initially successful surgical removal followed by radiation therapy, he developed a recurrence. Over the following months, the cancer had grown and spread. Eventually, there were no more options. He found peace and prepared for the end of his life.

He was, from my perspective, optimistic and unflappable. He understood what was happening to him and talked about what was coming. We often discussed his situation as though it was happening to someone else. Everything was “rational” and “logical.”

At the same time, his family also sought to make sense of his impending death. His sister, a devoutly spiritual person, viewed life and its transitions differently. In the months before his death, she asked him to send a “sign” when he was safely “on the other side.” She told me later that he had smiled but never gave her a response.

One evening, he came to her with an answer. “Remember when you asked for a sign?” he asked.

“Of course,” she replied.

“A white butterfly.” She was confused. It was the middle of winter. She thought about the response and sought meaning.

Not many days later, he died. When she returned from the visitation, a magazine had arrived at her home. She flipped it open and was amazed to see a picture of dozens of white butterflies. You can imagine her response.

She stopped by to give me a framed copy of the illustration. It has been on my office bookshelf for years. I don't know what to think of the story, but I

know that I am filled with memories of the patient, his courage, and his family whenever I pick up the gift and study it once again.

*Bruce Campbell*  
*Milwaukee, Wisconsin*