

PRIEST HELPED JOURNALIST RECOGNISE SIGNS FROM SPIRIT

GROWING UP in the Republic of Ireland, author and journalist Karen McCarthy soon learned that her childhood conversations with long-dead relatives were not an asset. They were bad for her mother's nerves, and they did not win her many friends.

There was also the religious aspect. As a pupil at a Dublin convent school, such eccentricities were not particularly welcomed.

Deciding to become "a normal teenager", she ignored her spirit voices for years and by the time she was an adult they had stopped entirely. Everything changed, however, when she met John after she moved to New York.

McCarthy tells her story (17 January) on Salon.com website, one of the first entirely digital major media outlets on the internet, under the headline, "Love, sex and death: What my fiancé's death taught me about the afterlife".

"John was handsome, smart, artistic yet vulnerable, generous of spirit yet deeply wounded," she writes. "When he suddenly said we should get married, it hit me in that moment that I had a visceral

remembrance of something I was born with but somewhere had forgotten. I was always meant to be with him."

Two months later, John went for his usual Saturday bicycle ride. "By noon he was dead," she writes.

Not only did she have to cope with her grief but also with the good intentions of those who tried to console her with words of sympathy that she found irritating.

In desperation, she visited the local Catholic priest, something she had not done for years. He spoke to her of the afterlife, and how our loved ones send signs to let us know they are all right.

Thus inspired, next day she visited the local Spiritualist church where the medium told her, "There's a man beside you. He's young, tall, blond and recently passed to Spirit. He seems to love cycling. He's very protective of you. Do you know who he is?"

The priest had suggested that John might send her a butterfly, as sometimes happens to the recently bereaved.

"After that, butterflies appeared everywhere," she writes. "Along the street, on the windows of every room I was in." This sense of humour was typical of John, so she asked him mentally, "Are you sending me butterflies?"

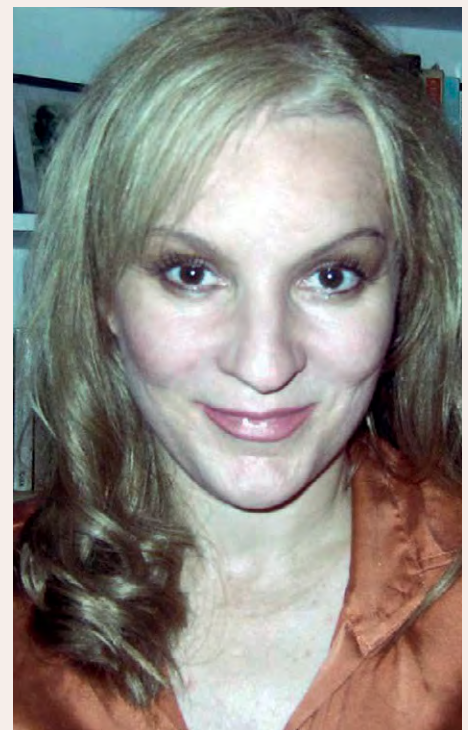
A butterfly then landed on her foot. "This was not some abstract heavenly concept," she adds. "In that moment, everything I thought I knew about life and death was up-ended. We weren't separated by space and time; we were united in something bigger than ourselves."

Karen McCarthy is a former political journalist and war correspondent. She is also an accredited medium. At present she is writing her second book, on science and religion, and studying for a PhD in Religious Studies.

[Butterflies also play a significant role in John West's feature on p49.] ■

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