

# Message in a Bottle

by Nan Zastrow



*Chad's Milk Bottle*

In my journey through grief, I'm always amazed at how Gary and I continue to grow. And, how many times and in how many ways God has reinforced our Wings ministry as our mission in this life.

In our support groups, we are often asked: "Do you believe that our loved ones can communicate with us after death? Can unusual "happenings" be signs or messages?"

Some people will never accept that our loved ones can provide us messages after death. Others believe and hold tightly to the signs and messages that may appear coincidental, but typically provide a beautiful, confirming message that love lives on.

The subject of after death communications (ADCs) has been scrutinized, hypothesized, and factualized for many, many years. There will always be skeptics, and there will always be advocates. Our newsletters have shared experiences over the years. We've invited experts like Lou LaGrand to our annual Spring Seminar to share his research. And, inevitably such seminars are hugely popular. Perhaps the reassurance that life continues is exactly what we need to know when someone loved dies.

I've had my share of messages over the years ... but it's been a few years since I've had one so emotional and moving as an occurrence this September that was epic to me.

For over 20 years, Gary and I treasured this large twenty-inch "milk" bottle that belonged to Chad. He deposited his loose change in it. After his death, we took the bottle and put it in the back of our closet on the floor. We've moved it about a half-dozen times since his death, as we relocated from one new house to another. But we never had the heart to empty the jar. It was as though its presence was a "message" that Chad was with us always.

This time, as we began packing the boxes for yet another move, I lifted the seriously heavy jar from its hiding corner on the floor of our closet. I talked to Gary about “giving it up,” emptying the contents, and letting it go---the fact is: “It was about time.” We agreed to take it to the bank and cash it in.

Perhaps this jar was just another linking object that bound us to the memory of our son. After all, he touched the jar and coins almost every day. No matter how long we hang on to something that was a precious reminder of our loved one, at some point the decision must be made to relinquish the treasured piece. I reasoned that if we didn’t do it, someone else would. Someone else would have no idea what the jar represented. Someone else wouldn’t understand how the message of this jar gave us a sense of peace! It’s not as though it was growing monetary interest in its hiding place. Every time I vacuumed the floor, the head of the vacuum cleaner clunked into the heavy jar. And I would say, “Hello, Chad.” I finally justified our decision. I chuckled as I thought Chad was probably wondering what the heck we were doing hanging on to the jar since 1993!

Gary carried the heavy glass milk bottle into the bank and began dumping the change into the automated coin counter. The sound of metal clinking and clanging as it swirled around in the machine was almost unnerving. Finally, it quit, but the attendant tried just a couple more swirls as there were a number of coins that didn’t count or pass through the machine. She removed the orphan coins. One was a quarter with a hole drilled through it. There were several Canadian coins, but most amazing was a lead token. Gary scooped it into his hand. In the car, he retrieved the token and handed it to me. The message on that token in the bottle was mind boggling. After all this time, there was one more message we shared with Chad.

I was unprepared for the impact of the token that Gary held. Chad got this token from somewhere. I don’t remember giving it to him. He deposited it in the bottle along with other loose coins. And on this particular day, bridging the gap between the past and the present, it brought us joy!

During those twenty-plus years (since Chad’s death), we formed a nonprofit organization named “Wings.” We selected the name based on a verse that I once cross-stitched and framed. It hung on our wall during the growing years. The verse simply stated: “Two gifts we should give our children. One is roots and the other is wings.” When Chad died, we found comfort in believing he “spread his wings,” leaving this life for something greater. We, in turn, spread our wings to help ourselves and others cope with grief through our organization which educates the bereaved about grief and finding hope to live again.

I rolled the token over in the palm of my hand and read the inscription with tears streaming down my face. Beneath a set of embossed wings on the token, it read “Spread Your Wings.”

For just a few moments, I felt a resounding sense of peace. And I thought: “I’m not sure, Chad, if the inscription on that token was meant for you or for Gary and me, but I believe we both accomplished this sacred goal!”

**Editor’s Note:** In 2018, Wings celebrates its 25th anniversary as a nonprofit organization. At our Spring Seminar, we will be sharing some of our history and testimonials of those who have been touched by the programs of Wings, the support group, seminar, the newsletter, or in any other way. If you have a story to tell, please submit it to Wings by e-mail or US Postal mail by December 1, 2018. We will begin producing a booklet of the responses of our partners, sponsors, volunteers, and wonderful contacts we met through these years.