



By Margaret Evans, Editor

It's been a crazy fall at our house. Our daughter is a high school senior, so we're caught up in a frenzy of college applications, senior portraits, cap and gown orders, campus tours, and whatnot. Add to that the fact that Jeff and I just bought a second business, the world's an absolute mess, the country's going up in flames – both literal and figurative – and everybody's finished their Christmas shopping while I haven't started mine, and well... I'm a wee bit stressed.

Y'all remember that I'm low-energy and easily overwhelmed, right? Frenzy is not my friend. Sometimes I wake up in the middle of the night – okay, more than sometimes – and just lie there, my heart and mind racing each other toward some invisible finish line. It ain't pretty.

Fortunately, the universe has my number. Call it God, a Higher Power, The Force, or what you will, but something “out there” seems keenly attuned to my various neuroses and determined not to let them take me down. In this season of waiting – that’s filled with too much *doing* – signs and wonders abound, mysterious little reminders to slow down, breathe, and marvel.

For instance, just the other day I found myself moderating yet another Facebook face-off – started by me. I always post these articles I come across with great hope in my heart, with the goal of “bringing people together” and “promoting mutual understanding,” and occasionally it actually works. Sort of. But mostly it doesn’t. Which doesn’t stop me from trying over and over. (And yes, I *know* the definition of insanity...)

Without going into detail, suffice it to say the “civil discussion” I’d envisioned quickly became more like the rumble scene from *West Side Story* – “the Jets are gonna have their way, tonight” – but nobody was dancing. Nearing despair, and angry at the hijacking of my civil discussion, I stormed away from the computer and went outside for a walk.

There, I spotted a large orange butterfly – a Monarch – standing in the middle of the road in front of my house. A strange sight. I hadn’t seen a butterfly since the first cold snap of the season, and butterflies seldom stand in the street, anyway. There’d been a freeze the night before, and I worried that the bright creature before me was “no longer with us.” But when I bent down and extended my finger, it crept aboard, then walked right into my hand.

And there I was, holding a butterfly.

Now, maybe you’ve held many butterflies in your day, but this was a first for me. I was stunned. Awe-struck. I could barely breathe, afraid the slightest ripple of air might send it fluttering off. But the butterfly seemed in no hurry to leave. It explored my hand, stepping gingerly from finger to finger, then into my palm, and back again, and all the while I snapped pictures with my phone. (They turned out pretty darn good, too, considering they were one-handed pics!) The butterfly and I wandered around my yard for a few minutes, then I set her down on a leaf – at this point, she seemed like a girl to me – and she sat for a few seconds, then flew away.

What an honor.

I proceeded on my walk, feeling a hundred times lighter, but somehow heavier, too, with the weight, the gravitas, of the gift I'd just received. Had my warm hand, my gentle touch, somehow saved this butterfly? I don't know. I just know this butterfly saved *me*.

That night, I didn't wake up at all. No racing heart. No spinning head. I slept till morning.

And it's not just Mother Nature that's serving up signs. Even that ol' devil Technology is in on the game. A couple of days ago, I found myself engaged in one of those First World aggravations one feels guilty complaining about, but one must. I was caught up in not one, but *two*, group-texts. Simultaneously.

You know how it is. You're trying to work, but your phone keeps buzzing away, distracting you. You respond to one group, only to realize it's the *wrong* group. You send a laughy-face emoji and apologize: "Sorry! Thought you were my sister!" Meanwhile, a third text comes in, reminding you that one of your daughter's college apps is due today. Then another, reminding you that the big sale on senior portraits will only last till tomorrow! And on it goes.

As I felt my peace and focus draining away – because *frenzy!* – I picked up my phone to put it on "do not disturb". . . and then I had to laugh. Because there on my screen, in an open text window – as if I were about to send it, though no recipient was named – was that little smiling emoji that wears a halo. You know the one. I guess it's supposed to be an angel? Or maybe Jesus? Who knows? All I know is that it was there. Nobody had sent it, and I hadn't put it there.

Oh, I guess maybe I *had* put it there, accidentally, while ham-fisting my way through that deluge of texts. But I sure didn't mean to, so I'm going with Divine Intervention. That's my story and I'm sticking with it. In any case, the appearance of Tiny Halo-Head defused my frenzy, calmed my nerves, and gave me a chuckle.

My point is this, dear reader: The holidays are upon us, bringing tidings of great joy, but also a

Seasonal Signs and Wonders

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not-so-heavenly host of commerce, chaos, and commotion. If you're anything like me, the seasonal frenzy can become soul crushing. But never fear. If you pay attention – if you keep your eyes open, along with your heart – there are signs and wonders everywhere. They still our minds and steal our breath away . . . and sometimes, they just make us laugh. It's all good.

May your days be merry and bright, your yuletide gay, your butterflies friendly, and your group-texts few and far between.

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