

Precious Fall Transformations



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by Rebecca P. Cohen



It was the first day of school for my first-grade son. “I don’t know where I’m going,” said a little boy, perhaps in kindergarten. “Do you know who my teacher is?” asked another little girl. I found teachers to help these students in the sea of children that surrounded me, most knowing where they were going, following one in front of the other along a green line throughout the school. My son, Harmond, missed the actual first day of school due to a high fever

Ten minutes before, I was outside with my son and other children, waiting for the bell to ring. We bumped into our

neighbors and waited together. “Tell Shelby and Katelyn how many monarch butterfly caterpillars we have found,” I suggested, encouraging Harmond to forget about his first-day nervousness. “Like, 15!” he replied. The girls asked how we had found so many, and I explained that we had planted butterfly weed plants (*asclepias tuberosa*), which the caterpillars like to eat. “We even have a chrysalis!” said Harmond. One morning we noticed the caterpillar hanging, shrinking, and turning black at the top of the butterfly house. We were slightly afraid that our attempts to give the caterpillars fresh butterfly weed three times a day weren’t working. But we left the house for a while, and by afternoon the caterpillar was in a smooth green cocoon. It was amazing. As we brought more and more caterpillars into the butterfly house each day, I worried how they would react to one another with so many and of varying sizes. Would I have enough butterfly weed for them to eat?

“Look what I can do!” said Shelby. She crossed her hands, interlocking her thumbs and waiving her fingers to form a butterfly. We all started to do it, and as I was starting to say, “You know what is fun? Make butterfly shadows.” I noticed that the sun was to our backs, and my hands formed a perfect fluttering butterfly shadow on the ground. The kids followed suit, and we had a magical memory standing outside the school.

We found Harmond’s classroom and he quickly kissed me goodbye and turned to enter the classroom. I knew he was nervous, but I seemed to be the one having a hard time letting go. “I’ll be walking to get him from school,” I told the teacher, so she would know where to send him when the kids were dismissed for the day. Walking from the classroom through the school to leave, I was in awe at so many children buzzing with purpose to their classrooms. In the halls, I remarked to a smiling teacher helping to direct traffic, “It’s like a busy village of children.”

Walking out of the school I had tears in my eyes, and for some reason my mind went back to the caterpillars, so many and transforming so quickly. Would they know what to do in a sea of others just like them? We’re all transforming everyday; some milestones are more obvious than others. But with our best foot forward, we somehow find our way. Describing the morning at school to my husband when he anxiously asked how things had gone, he had tears in his eyes too. “It felt like we were the country mice entering the city for the first time; it seemed so overwhelming,” I said. “Although nervous, Harmond seemed to be fine.”

At the end of the day, Harmond’s dad and brother went with me to pick him up from school. After anxiously waiting 15 minutes for him to appear outside of the school and seeing every one of the neighborhood kids leaving, I went to the office to page him. But just then, he walked out the front door, having found his way just

fine. When I asked Harmond on a scale from 1 to 10 – 1 being the worst and 10 being the best day – how his day went, he smiled and said, “a 10.” I guess I didn’t need to be worried after all. And the caterpillars are doing just fine too.

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