

On the Wings of a Monarch
The Great Journey

A Novel by James Bala

ISBN: 978-0-692-98848-0 (Softcover)
Printed in the United States of America

© 2017 by Gail Ferek
All rights reserved. Written permission must be secured
from the author to use or reproduce any part of this book.
Requests for such permission should be addressed to:
Gail Ferek
233 E 13th Street
Chicago, IL 60605

Cover design by Gail Ferek

CONTENTS

Part 1	The Carefree Days	1
Part 2	The Great Journey	33
Part 3	A Destination Where the Sun Never Sets	71

PART 1:
THE CAREFREE DAYS

A brilliant September sunrise is shooting laser beams through the trees into the grassy meadow while the birds announce a new day with calls that break the morning silence. It is a day to be alive, and I emerge from my chrysalis trembling with excitement. I am eager to fly and explore my new world but have to wait for my wings to dry and expand to the full size that will guide my flight.

While I wait I am deep in thought. Although all alone at birth I don't feel lonely. I feel that I belong here. It is as if the world completes me and I complete the world. I am bursting with energy to fulfill my powerful relationship with the earth.

As my wings dry in the sunlight I admire their beautiful shape and intricate symmetrical pattern of bold colors. It will be difficult to be humble with such obvious beauty. My first thought is that my purpose in life is to show off my beautiful wings for this surely must be the intent of the force that created me. Yet I also realize that there must be more to life than showing off. Even before flying I begin to contemplate who I am and why I am here.

Am I just a random life born of earth, to live on earth and die on earth? Or do I have a source for my existence separate from earth, a creator who gives me a life designed for a purpose on earth and a role in creation? Perhaps as I experience life I will be able to find the answers to these questions that will enable me to live a full and rewarding life.

My wings are fully pumped up and they feel strong as I flex them. It is time to fly. I launch into a warm breeze and soar effortlessly climbing higher and higher with a few easy wing beats. Below me is the panorama of a beautiful green world splashed with the beige and gold tones of late summer. There will be much to explore in my new world, but now I am enchanted to be flying through the air with a wonderful feeling of both power and freedom.

I quickly learn that my wings can do many wonderful maneuvers. I can hover in place or do sprints with surprising speed. I can spiral up or spiral down and suddenly turn direction in a heartbeat. But what I enjoy most is languidly riding the air currents with the soft breeze massaging my streamlined body. I feel peaceful but energized in the beautiful world before me, and I am free as only a butterfly can be.

As I explore the meadow, bright colors near a tree line catch my eye. I have powerful eyesight, and the red, yellow and violet colors in the distance draw me irresistibly closer. I fly to them and find a variety of wildflowers, many in full blossom, and I am able to smell them with my antennae and even more closely with my feet to determine which varieties are most appealing to me.

I settle on my very first flower and probe the blossom with my proboscis, my tubular tongue, to taste and sip out the

nectar. It is delicious. Although this is my first taste of nectar, I have a strange sensation as if I have been settling on flowers for a very long time. There is a powerful instinctive force guiding me to do what is natural and good. I know that the flower is more than willing to have me. By its color and fragrance, it gives me an invitation to visit and enjoy its nectar. I may be dependent on the flower, but it may also be dependent on me. We are in harmony with the earth. If this is my purpose in life, it shall be a very easy and good life.

As I move on to another flower, a bumblebee, its hair sparkling with grains of pollen, lands on a flower next to me. It is so busy that it completely ignores me as it manically bounces from one blossom to another.

Moving about the flowers I encounter butterflies different from me that look me over and quickly move on. I also look them over and while they are beautiful, it is different than the beauty of my wings. I see no other butterflies that compare to my flamboyant, burnt-orange wings, and I am proud of my unique and striking appearance.

In trying to better understand my feelings, however, I realize that pride is a good feeling but ceases to be so if arrogance takes over. When does pride become arrogance? Arrogance is a feeling and an expression of superiority that one is better than others in some or many ways.

It seems to me that pride is a way to tell the creator that he did a wonderful job with me although I must finish his work in a good way to remain proud. I guide my destiny in life but am able to succeed by virtue of the great potential that the creator has given me. If I become arrogant, I may begin to believe that I am special solely because of me and will become selfish even with my creator.

Although I am very proud of my beautiful wings, I thank the power that created me to be beautiful in the world. But there is beauty all around me that will help to keep me humble. I will strive to live my life proudly but without arrogance.

I soon fly toward another butterfly that looks just like me and can now see how totally commanding we are in flight with the bright sun blazing the intense orange of our broad, powerful wings. As males and potential rivals, we engage in an aerial display circling each other in a competitive test of flying skills. I tell him that I am favorably impressed by his amazing aerodynamics, and he returns the compliment. Monty and I quickly form a friendship inspired by our sameness. We continue to work the flowers, and the nectar tastes even better now with a new friend nearby.

I head for a large, yellow blossom, and as I approach it another butterfly is coming to the same flower from the opposite direction. With each of us seeing the other, we both veer away to another flower. We are different and

yet the same, and we live in harmony. We don't need to compete for there is more than enough for all of us. The world has ample gifts for all of its children so there is no need to fight or be greedy.

Monty has been around awhile and leads me to a place where humans have extensive flower gardens and a small water fountain, a perfect habitat for us. We spend hours there enjoying a variety of nectar and refreshing sips of water on a hot summer day. We see a couple of humans walking by, and I am eager for my first experience with them. Monty and I intentionally fly near the faces of the humans to get a reaction from them. They react in a gregarious way to our encounter. It is a nice experience for me to show off my beauty, and it is fun to intermingle with humans.

Monty has another surprise for me. He takes me to a nearby riverbank where we suck minerals from mud puddles that offer an interesting taste. More importantly we instinctively know that these minerals will aid our physical vitality.

It has been a long exciting day, and I have learned much from Monty. The sun is setting in a beautiful crimson sky. Monty leads me to a tree with a heavy canopy of broad leaves. I see that a few butterflies of a different species are already there, each resting perfectly still on the underside of a broad leaf that safely conceals them in the night. I find my own leaf next to Monty. We don't actually

sleep but rather go into a state of deep rest that will strengthen us for a new day.

Late summer brings cooler nights, and we wait for the sunrise to radiate warmth into our canopy shelter. I notice that Monty has exposed himself to the direct sunlight, and I do the same. The sun energizes our metabolism and enables us to take flight earlier in the morning. Monty and I are already good friends, and we fly off together into another carefree day. We could possibly be brothers because our mother may have deposited her eggs on milkweed plants in this general location. But we are definitely becoming brothers in spirit even if we may have different mothers.

I am feeling good about life and the wonderful world that is my home. Every day I will try to learn something new about the world and my position in it. The meadow in which I was born is adjacent to a forest where I can observe many different kinds of birds. They are strong flyers and really fast. If one wanted to catch me, I wouldn't have a chance. I am defenseless but also fearless, an interesting but logical combination. I was created to live carefree as a summer breeze.

Powerful instincts remind me, however, that the only thing I need to fear in this carefree life is a hard freeze that would end my life if I fail to leave before it. For my species it will be an incredible journey to a warm place where we can be safe. Yet I know that there are more

carefree days to enjoy and to gain experiences that will prepare me for the great journey.

As we forage for nectar, I see many different species of butterflies but not another monarch like Monty and me. As we only socialize with our own, I hope to make another friend soon when I have the opportunity. I am grateful for the friendship with Monty, however, and it is more than enough. Yet I feel that our friendship has been unbalanced. I have taken many benefits but have given nothing in return. This may be so because Monty is older and has looked after me like a big brother. But I will seek an opportunity to give back to him and secure our friendship in my heart.

A friendship is a lot like life itself. Success is not only measured by what we gain and earn but also by what we give. My purpose in life may be to show off my beauty, but perhaps a higher purpose is to be a good friend and to care for others.

This morning Monty wants to show me a special place that he has discovered. We have spent the night resting in a tree near the edge of the forest, and he leads me into flight high above the forest cruising toward its interior. The canopy of the forest spreads out below us waving in the wind like a green ocean of rolling waves. We have flown a good distance over the forest when I see a large hole in the canopy, and we descend to it. As we drop into the hole, warm thermal currents are drafting upward against

us making progress in reaching the ground difficult.

When we finally reach the ground, I amaze at the secluded beauty of the place. A crystal-clear spring lake is richly surrounded by wildflowers blossoming in a rainbow of colors that shine brilliantly in the midday sun. It is an oasis of vibrant life hidden within the dark, dense forest. It feels as if we have discovered a new world.

We see other species of butterflies working the flowers near the shoreline where we land, and we quickly join in. It is a mid-sized lake, and my powerful eyesight enables me to see across and realize that there are many flowers dotting the entire perimeter of the lake. It is a unique pleasure to forage here because of the beauty of the lake and the cool breezes from the water that refresh us as we work the flowers. We also enjoy sips of pure water from the lake.

This is a unique environment, much different than my meadow, and it is exciting and interesting to experience it. I fly over the sparkling, clear water to observe many fish of different sizes. Some remain perfectly still as others swim languidly among the water flora, but occasionally there is a sudden burst of speed as one chases another.

Above and around the lake there are many colorful dragonflies darting in all directions in a scramble of flying chaos. They are spectacular flyers. With two sets of wings that operate independently, they can instantly fly in any

direction including backward.

As I explore more of my world, I continue to be amazed at the complexities of life and the intelligence that has gone into creation.

We have spent most of the day in this special place but have circumvented only a half of the lake's shoreline. We will come back another day to finish the job.

I have learned new lessons today. The creator puts all of his gifts within our reach because he wants to please us. But his most precious gifts require greater effort so that we can appreciate them more. Hard work does not compete with pleasure but rather complements it.

Monty and I spend several wonderful days together, but one morning we fly off in our separate ways. I don't know who decided not to remain together, but I think that we both saw this to be the right course and not detrimental to our friendship. Butterflies live solitary lives most of the time because we love to be free, but I know by my powerful instincts that there will come a time when many of us will come together to be a strong force of cooperation for our survival. We will be brothers and sisters together on the great journey relying on each other to give strength and courage for a near-impossible mission of survival.

The days continue to be warm and carefree. As I fly high

over my territory I see the bright colors of flowers scattered in abundance everywhere. They stand as beautiful sentinels enticing me to come for a closer look. The rich, elegant blossoms offer their nectar to me in the chance that I may also leave some pollen with them that I have carried from another flower. It is a symbiotic relationship cleverly planned by the creator. All of creation is a partnership among living things. We depend on each other.

The mysteries of creation are fascinating. If life on earth occurs naturally without the intelligence of a creator, how did the butterflies come to be without the flowers or the flowers come to be without the butterflies and other pollinators? Somehow they came together in a wonderful coordination of life on earth.

I keep hoping to meet another monarch to have a new friend, but I am gradually accepting the reality that Monty and I are the only ones here in my territory.

As I am enjoying nectar from the wildflowers in the meadow of my birth, a commotion catches my attention. Behind the flowers a lone butterfly is in distress thrashing on the ground unable to fly. It may have been attacked by a predator such as a wasp, or perhaps it has fallen victim to an unseen infection. I am saddened to see such a beautiful creature stricken on the ground when it should be free of the earth riding the wind.

Although he is not a monarch I feel compassion for his suffering. I do what I can to ease his ordeal by going to his side to show my support. No longer alone, he takes comfort from my presence and calms down quite a lot. I stay by his side for some time and he remains calm. I communicate with him only by showing my compassion. It is a message that says, I stand by you because I care for you.

I leave my friend much better than I found him. I don't know if he will recover and survive, but my compassion made a good difference in his life. It also strengthens me by reinforcing my caring for the world and the other life that shares this wonderful planet with me.

I try to better understand this good feeling of compassion. When I am compassionate, I suffer emotionally with the sufferer even though I don't share the pain. But I care for someone other than myself, even someone I have never met, and will help them if I can.

I am compassionate because I love the world. I believe that the creator's love is the primal source of all life on earth; therefore, love is the mother of compassion and a powerful force of good in the world.

Now and then there is a rainy or stormy day, and I rest that day just as I do at night. That day passes very slowly. Most days, however, are sunny and carefree and pass so fast that I begin to feel a change of season and realize

that my summer home is waning. I sense that a time is approaching when I will have to leave my beautiful home on a great journey. I know this because I have infallible instincts that have been perfected for many millions of years. I am a little saddened to know that I must leave my home of birth and also fearful of the great journey. I know that my generation will have to perform what may be the greatest feat in all of nature and a supreme test of survival.

Today is a beautiful morning, unusually warm, with the eastern sky full of cumulus clouds illuminated in a spectrum of red and pink colors. In the warm air I begin my activities early with my first stop at the human place with extensive flower gardens and a small water fountain that Monty introduced to me. To my delight, Monty is already there. It is good to be with my friend again, and we enjoy the morning together sampling a wide variety of different nectar flavors. Adjacent to the garden is a line of flowering shrubs that have many fragrant white blossoms, and we both return often to find blossoms that still have nectar to offer a hungry butterfly.

While Monty is absorbed on the shrubs I catch sight of a large black bird dropping from the sky toward us, and I rush toward him to give alarm of the danger. He immediately responds to my alert and drops down among the large stems of the shrubs where he is safe from the threatening bird. I do the same, but the bird strikes me on the forewing before I can fully escape its attack. I don't

feel any pain, but the impact has dislodged some scales from my wing. With the danger passed I test my wings and they carry me without a problem.

It is surprising that the bird attacked us. As caterpillars we eat the milkweed plant that imparts a very bitter taste to our body, and over eons predators have instinctively learned to avoid us by our striking appearance that serves as a warning to them. Perhaps the bird was confused or desperate.

Today, Monty and I have reached a salient point in our friendship. Pleasures are more pleasurable when shared with a friend, but the value of friendship grows deeper from shared hardship than from shared pleasure.

This morning I fly to the meadow where I was born. It has such a profusion of wildflowers that I wish to meet another monarch here to share the bounty of my home. I do take an interest in the other butterflies, however, and marvel at such a variety of species all different and yet of the same nature as me. But of course none is as beautiful as me.

I like to explore my world to better understand it. The grasshopper is an interesting and amusing creature. When I fly over to take a closer look, it is startled and powerfully leaps away from me. I then amaze to see that it has wings and continues to fly after launching itself. What a clever way to escape a predator.

If the earth itself is the sole source of life, how can it be so clever in creation? If I assume that the earth is indeed a clever creator, I wonder who created such a clever earth? Could the earth have created itself? It does not seem possible that something can create itself. There is much for me to learn about life and my purpose on earth.

My foraging territory is not very large because of the abundance of wildflowers and flower gardens sufficient for my daily forays. About half of the days I run into Monty, and we always spend some time together. Our friendship has grown even stronger because I can say that I have finally given back to my friend for all the comfort he has given me. I may have saved his life. It is the highlight of my own life and has given me much greater satisfaction than just looking beautiful to the world.

Every day now I am thinking more strongly about the great journey. I know that other monarchs, maybe even Monty, will expect me to be strong and succeed in the great journey to help assure our survival. I now believe that the great journey is the highest purpose of my life and the very reason I was born. With this belief, I know that I cannot fail the challenge. I no longer dread the great journey. I am beginning to eagerly anticipate it.

After weeks of limiting my excursions to the familiar territory that I call home, I decide to expand my horizon into new surroundings. I fly over a river that has been a natural boundary of my daily forays. It is the same river

that I visit in search of minerals from the mud puddles that I instinctively know are beneficial for me. Beyond the river I observe increasing human activity. In the distance my strong eyesight sees a colorful chaos of many different kinds of flowers distributed over a large area. Many humans are walking around and through the gardens. Of course, I quickly descend into this paradise of botanical gardens.

There are butterflies everywhere, and I have never seen so many different species in one place. As I continue to explore these gardens I often observe several butterflies of the same species but have yet to see another monarch. It puzzles me as to why more of us are not here.

Except for mating and migration, we tend to lead solitary lives because there is no advantage in working the flowers cooperatively as the bees do. We can be more efficient working alone. But given the opportunity, we enjoy socializing with our own kind as other species of butterflies also socialize with their kind. To watch the other species here enjoying this social interaction makes me lonely for another monarch.

I have never seen so many humans gathered in one place. I'm not afraid of humans and rather enjoy interacting with them to see how they react to me. In my territory I usually see only one or a few humans at a time. They often ignore me, but if I am persistent they are likely to react in an admiring way. I can't let go of the idea that

my purpose after all is to show off my beauty to the world.

With so many different humans here, I begin to mingle with them to better understand what my relationship with humans should be. I fly among several children and greatly excite them. They begin laughing and chase after me. I circle around them in a teasing way, and it makes them laugh even more. I find that interacting with children can be exciting and much fun.

After leaving the happy children behind I am lured into a garden of marigolds by the array of brilliant colors. While working the beautiful blossoms I notice a woman in a wheelchair watching me closely. She is wrinkled and frail and not happy like the children, and I feel that maybe I can have a good affect on her. As I float tantalizing around her face, she becomes gregarious with me and reaches her hand out in friendship. Her face comes alive with joy. I keep up the engagement, and she is beginning to laugh like the children. For the moment she is a child again.

While I give her moments of happiness, she gives me a greater sense of purpose for my beautiful wings. I continue to learn my true purpose in life. When I arrogantly show off my beauty, it feels good but in a selfish way. I showed off to the woman in the wheelchair to bring joy into her life. It was about her and not me. I humbly shared my beauty from a kindness that I felt in my heart. It didn't just feel good. It felt beautiful. I realize that I can feel as beautiful on the inside as I look on the

outside.

I am hoping to meet another monarch to make a new friend but have visited all of the gardens without success. There are many butterflies in all of the gardens but none like me. I was about to give up hope when suddenly I almost fly into another monarch that comes straight at me. We begin to excitedly fly circles around each other because on this day we are the only monarchs here. But there is something more. Missy is a female, and she is beautiful. Although Monty is beautiful, Missy has a different kind of beauty and an exquisite scent that makes me dizzy. She invigorates me. I feel a strange but strong sensation that we complete each other.

As we work the flowers together, I can't take my eyes off of her. I admire her on a large yellow blossom as she hypnotically opens and closes her beautiful wings while her large, glistening eyes capture the sun. She is the perfection of beauty in the world. Then I see her exquisite beauty in flight. She floats softly above the flowers with a graceful elegance that humbles the blossoms that entice her.

We spend intimate hours together in the beautiful gardens bonding the special attraction that we have for each other. Because it is not the mating season, I feel only a subtle arousal with Missy. But my powerful instinct of mating comes alive for the first time, and it feels good being with her and knowing she is attracted to me.

I begin to connect my primal mating instinct with the great journey. It will be up to Missy and me, our generation, to journey south 2,000 miles to warm and safe wintering grounds. After a period of rest we will mate to assure survival of our species. The three generations that follow our generation will leisurely migrate back one-by-one to the northern latitudes where we began our migration. In each of these three generations, the greatest challenge will be for the females to find the scarce milkweed plant to lay their eggs and assure that the next generation will continue the migration.

We are the super generation, and our creator gives us a much longer life because the great journey will demand many days of strength, courage and determination. We must succeed. Failure would doom our children and the migratory cycle. Although we are born alone and never see our mother, we live our lives for our children. I finally recognize this to be the highest purpose of my own life that Missy now inspires in me.

After our beautiful day together, Missy and I reluctantly part. I can see that she is saddened by my departure as I habitually choose to return to my territory.

As I fly away I immediately regret my decision and realize that habits can mislead us. Habits are compulsions that often bypass judgement. Even good habits can cease to be good and should be ruled by judgement.

Alone in my territory I watch the big red sun edge down to kiss the earth. I feel lonely for the first time in my life.

The nights are becoming noticeably cooler, and this morning I need the direct sun to warm my metabolism before flight. I am anxious to get started, however, to visit the botanical gardens to be with Missy again. My wings are singing on the wind and I find myself much higher than I need to be, perhaps an instinctive rehearsal for the great journey. As I cruise over the river that is the natural boundary of my territory, I see from my vantage point in the far distance a great blue lake shimmering in the morning sun. I also observe many rectangular fields in distinctive, contrasting hues of yellow and green.

With ease I identify in the foreground the profusion of colorful flowers of the botanical gardens and begin my descent. I forego the tempting flowers in a hurry to find Missy. After some anxious moments we find each other and rush together in a joyful rendezvous. She is more radiant, beautiful and fragrant than any of the flowers that surround us.

I follow Missy now as she proudly leads me to her favorite places among these many gardens. It is a wonderful feeling to both follow her and yet to feel free as the wind. Choosing to live our lives together will not bind our freedom. Freedom can be shared the same as belonging to each other is shared.

Remembering the lonely feeling that troubled me after leaving her yesterday, I know that I will stay with her no matter where she chooses to be. Missy has spent most of her life at these gardens, and I want to show her where I was born. I lead her to the pristine meadow scattered with wildflowers that is my favorite place. She immediately likes this environment for its natural beauty. There are no humans here, and we are intimate together and in perfect harmony with the earth. The feelings I have for her are overwhelmingly beautiful and yet not easy to understand.

Missy and I have love. The power of love is that it has no boundaries. Love exists anywhere and everywhere. It is not limited in quantity or restricted by time. It is the ultimate power of good without limits or restrictions, and because love is boundless it must therefore be eternal.

Today, Missy and I became one in eternal love. If it is possible for a day on earth to be perfect, then this is the day. Its only fault is that it ends. Missy follows me into my favorite tree where we will rest for the night.

As Missy and I absorb the first rays of the morning sun, it is a quiet, soothing time to reflect on my life. I am satisfied by the goodness of the earth and the love that I feel, but I will not be complete until I fulfill the destiny for which I am created. The creator has given our generation of monarchs a life and spirit different from our mothers so that we may endure the great journey. We are the super generation that must perform the greatest migratory feat

in all of nature.

At the end of the journey I will fulfill my destiny by mating with Missy. Our progeny will continue to fill the world with beauty and goodness as our ancestors have done for millions of years. The migrations must go on until the end of time. It is the will and the power of the creator, and we have a spirit to honor him for giving us life and providing us with the earth as our beautiful home. I will give back to my creator by doing what he asks of me.

It is good to dream. We are all dreamers. There are no small dreams because every dream is a vision to realize our potential in life.

There are also great dreams. Great dreams don't allow the limitations of space and time. They are dreams beyond the stars that reach into eternity.

I am startled when Missy suddenly takes flight. I quickly follow and realize that she is leading me back to the beautiful meadow that has enchanted our intimacy together. She has accepted this place of my birth as our home. But it is our temporary home from which we will begin the great journey. Soon the flowers and the butterflies will no longer be welcome, and the sun will call us to follow it into the southern sky.

It will be sad to leave our home forever. It is the way of life on earth. There is a time when we can no longer come

home and must find a new home.

We are both preparing more earnestly for the great journey and consuming as much nectar as possible to store fat in our bodies. We instinctively know that certain difficult flying maneuvers will frequently be required on the journey. We can often gain elevation with ease by riding the thermal currents, and often this free ride can take us very high. There are times, however, when the weather is not favorable for thermal currents and we must work hard to elevate our position. Accordingly, we practice ascending spirals, a maneuver to quickly gain altitude, and it helps us build strength and stamina that will be necessary for our survival on the great journey.

While practicing this maneuver I observe a large storm approaching us for which we must quickly find cover. I see that the storm has turbulent winds, and a tree will not give the best protection because the wind will cause much commotion among the leaves. I remember a nearby outcropping of rock under which we can be safe from the storm. As we reach the cover, I am relieved that Missy will be safe here. With wings closed, we huddle together beneath a rock secure from the menacing wind and secure in each other.

Is love and responsibility to another the surrender of freedom? I think that it is just the opposite. When two are in love they agree to share a common destiny, and they have set their love free to each other. Love is the

perfect freedom.

As the carefree days roll by, I sense that they will soon be gone and I will miss them. Yet a day spent only for pleasure seems wasted, and at day's end I will wish that I had realized some experience or understanding to enhance my life. Perhaps every day can have the virtue of being gainful in some way, and I will endeavor to make it so. Missy feels the same, and we enjoy discussions about life on earth and our future.

The earth is my home and I should know as much as I can about where I live. There are days, I admit, when I look at the world around me and see nothing. My eyes catch only images that quickly vanish if I let them. To truly see, I must hold the image and see it with my mind to experience it.

When I truly see the world, its richness and vitality, its beauty and harmony, I become excitingly alive and intimate with nature. I take my rightful place at the center of creation, and here is where my heart can beat with joy.

Each new day I discover another flower and sometimes a butterfly on it that I have not seen before. There must be a reason for the profusion and variety of life on earth, and I ask Missy, "Do you ever wonder why there are so many different flowers and butterflies?"

Missy answers, "Yes, and I sometimes try to envision a

world in which there is only one flower and we are the only butterfly. It would not be an interesting and exciting world. The earth gives us an amazing and beautiful variety of life. I believe it is to inspire us to love creation and live our own lives in harmony with it.”

I add, “The creator must find joy in creation. If there is joy in creating one beautiful flower, think of the joy he must realize in creating thousands of different flowers, each beautiful on its own, but spread throughout the earth in colorful splendor.”

“It seems” Missy continues “that the creator’s joy is multiplied as he observes a world awed and inspired by the wonders of his creation.”

I conclude, “There could have been just one flower across our land, and we’d get by. But the creator gives us the world and fills it with alluring gifts that enrich and please us. By experiencing the fullness of nature, we share the creator’s joy in giving us our beautiful home. What could be more sublime than to be a part of the grandeur that we adore?”

This morning we will look for Monty so that I can see my good friend again and have him meet Missy. I lead Missy to the human place with extensive gardens and a water fountain often visited by Monty. It is the place where Monty and I escaped the attack of a large black bird, but I’ll keep a vigil there to be sure that no harm comes to

Missy.

As we approach I see that Monty is already there, and we greet each other warmly. Missy sees the enthusiasm of our friendship and joins us so that we all socialize together. I believe that it is the first time that any one of us has enjoyed more than one companion at a time. It is gratifying to see Missy and Monty bonding a new friendship. We spend hours together in the beautiful, sun-splashed gardens enjoying the nectar but with frequent interruptions to socialize.

I occasionally go over to the water fountain to peer into the pool beneath it and observe the fish gliding around the bottom of the pool. They are as beautiful and graceful in the water as we are in the air. The creator has many beautiful visions to admire. I try to be humble by admiring the amazing and beautiful creation all around me. Yet I can't resist a little arrogance that the monarch is one of the most beautiful visions of the world.

As the sun hides behind a bank of clouds on the horizon, I realize that this special day is almost over. I have noticed throughout the day that Monty has taken care not to intercede between Missy and me and rather comes to me from the other side. I took this as a signal of his respect for the intimacy of my relationship with Missy. It is my turn now to go to Monty and tell him how precious the love of our friendship is to me and that he helped to make this a perfect day.

As Missy and I fly off toward the setting sun, I look back at my friend with sadness that he is alone. This day has served to give me a better understanding of life. A good day is measured in nectar. A great day is measured in love.

As Missy and I rest in our favorite tree waiting for a new day, I feel a soft rain pattering the leaves and giving a soothing vibration to my feet. After the early morning rain, the air is scented by the aroma of the wet ground and trees. It is a primeval smell of earth itself unlike any other smell, and I have found none that can be more pleasing to my senses.

The sun follows the rain and calls us to the top of the canopy to feel the warmth of its rays. The freshened air bathed by the rain invigorates me. I have never felt better in my life than at this moment. We look at each other with the same knowing feeling of having a wonderful day to be alive and in love.

I ask Missy, “Where do you think our love comes from?”

Missy beams, “On the morning of my birth, love was already in me waiting to be called. It is the highest order of our nature.”

“It certainly is, Missy. When I know we are happy in loving each other, I fulfill my nature.”

Missy continues, “I believe that the creator gave us love because of his own love in creating us. Love is his nature and he wants it to be our nature.”

“Yes, Missy. The creator’s love is in all of us although some don’t care to realize it. I love this world that is my home. How can I love the world and not also love the creator?”

We fly down from the canopy into the center of our world, our beautiful meadow where the wildflower blossoms reach for the morning sun as they wait for our loving care.

Knowing that our journey will soon begin, Missy wishes to visit the place of her birth a last time. She leads me to an overgrown field in which there are among the weeds and tall grasses a few milkweed plants clinging to life that strangely attract Missy. She hovers above the dying milkweed plants for a long moment and then takes flight heading for the beautiful botanical gardens.

This place has always fascinated me by the large number of humans moving around the gardens. I previously had fun interacting with happy children to make them even more excited. I see that there are many children here running and laughing on this bright, sunny day. But I also see a lonely little boy who does not seem happy. He walks slowly and with difficulty. I feel sad that he is not running and playing as the other children. He has been given a difficult life because he cannot run and be happy.

I tell Missy how I once saw a sad, old woman in a wheelchair that I was able to make happy by flirting with her. I ask Missy to help me do the same thing for this sad boy to see if we can bring him some happiness.

I fly tantalizing close to the boy's face, and he erupts in excitement. Missy joins in and lands softly on his arm. This prompts a strange reaction in the boy for he seems to be crying. Humans are not always easy to understand, but as Missy finally leaves the boy his face is lit with joy. He is now as happy as all the other children. We are also filled with joy and fly a couple of loops around the boy as a loving goodbye.

Kindness is its own reward. Nothing is easier than kindness or gives more satisfaction all around.

We continue to enjoy the plentiful nectar on our last day here. It is a beautiful day to share with Missy in the gardens where we found each other. She says a final, bittersweet goodbye. Perhaps our progeny will return one day after us to show their beautiful wings.

We returned to my territory to rest for the night. It was another cold night and the great journey is now constantly on my mind. As Missy and I work the wildflowers in our favorite meadow, I notice that some flowers are dying. The bold, bright yellow blossom of the dandelion has shriveled into a flimsy white ball that is scattered by the wind into oblivion, but its seeds will search the ground for a new

The Carefree Days

beginning.

The earth gives and the earth takes. The old makes way for the new. All life is fragile and yet has a tenacious quest for eternity.

PART 2:
THE GREAT JOURNEY

It has been another cold night. As Missy and I wait for the morning sun to warm us, we are both certain that we will begin the great journey today. It is a mystery as to how we know this. The great journey is a miracle surrounded by many mysteries. Our weight is a tiny fraction of an ounce, and yet we will face forty-mile per hour winds high in the sky to reach a precise destination that we have never seen. It is so precise that we will find the same groves of trees used by our ancestors for countless migrations. We will travel a distance unrivaled by any flyer of our size in nature.

We have the highest ratio of wing surface to body weight of all flyers. This gives us important advantages. We can ride the thermals, the rising currents of warm air, to high altitudes with ease. Even weak thermals will carry us high in the sky on our broad wings with little weight resistance. These thermals will be very important on our journey. They will enable us to gain altitude to reach the strong northerly winds available higher in the atmosphere that will push us south with little exertion on our part.

Our high ratio of wing surface to body weight can also be a disadvantage. Although our wings are strong, headwinds pushing against their large surface can make progress very difficult. Powerful crosswinds can force us off course and cause us to lose hard-fought ground and waste precious fuel.

We will continuously seek ways to conserve our fat that

we have stored from nectar. The fat reserves are critical fuel for the journey. There may be occasions to refuel, to seek nectar during the journey, but these opportunities will only occur when conditions for flight are not favorable. The journey demands continuous flight as its first priority. By taking advantage of good winds and avoiding troublesome winds, we will use our wings efficiently and conserve our fat reserves.

Missy and I fly to our beautiful meadow to consume as much nectar as we can before beginning the journey. Some of the wildflowers have died, but there are late-blooming varieties that offer us precious nectar. As I watch Missy on a bright blue chicory blossom, I notice that her wings are abnormally large and of a deeper orange color. We have developed physically and metabolically in ways to be fully prepared for the great journey.

The creator knows that he asks us to do the most challenging migration on earth, but he also gives us advantages to succeed and an unerring instinct to use every advantage to its fullest potential. He gives us, the super generation, the spirit to complete the great journey so that the monarch migrations may continue forever. It will be up to Missy and me, the super generation, to assure this success.

Missy asks me, “Are you confident in our journey to reach a destination that we have never seen or known?”

I answer, “Every journey has a destination; otherwise it is an odyssey. I am anxious for our journey to begin although the destination is unclear to me. I envision a destination where many of us will gather in the ancient trees of our ancestors to rest after the long journey.”

Missy relates, “It is the same with me. I feel a calling that I must answer although it calls me into the uncertainty of a vast unknown. Only our love gives me the courage for the journey.”

“I agree, Missy. The great journey is most confidently traveled by two in love. We are stronger together to face the hardships and uncertainty. There is synergy in our courage that we add to each other. We face the unknown in a shared destiny with the enthusiasm that sharing inspires.”

Missy wonders, “Do you believe that some will fail on the great journey because they become discouraged by the hardships?”

I reply, “We have been given a strong spirit by the creator to endure the hardships and challenges of our journey. They are obstacles that may slow us but cannot defeat us. Failure is more likely to occur for those who lose sight of their destination and go astray. Most will be able to get back on course and continue the journey. Some, however, can go off course so often that the destination is lost entirely and their lives become an odyssey without a true

destiny.”

“Missy, our journey will be true. Our wings are strong and the sun calls us into the southern sky.”

Missy proudly states, “I am thrilled to be with you on our great journey as we ride the winds to our destiny.”

It is mid-day and the high sun is warming the land and creating thermals that will launch us high in the sky to begin our journey. We feel both excitement and sadness, but I focus on the sadness. This has been my beautiful home where I have lived my life, and I must leave it forever. These were my carefree days where I grew strong and found love. Change carries with it uncertainty, but I will carry with me the certainty of love.

Side-by-side Missy and I ride a thermal that lifts us from our beautiful summer home. Our great journey has begun. As we effortlessly glide in spirals higher and higher, I look below a last time at the landmarks of my memory. I see the botanical gardens where we met and can just barely see the humans moving around the gardens. The rolling meadow where Missy and I shared intimacy lies softly along the tree line where we rested during the nights after carefree days. As we move higher than I have ever been, these landmarks fade from sight but will never fade from memory. Finally the last landmark that I can recognize is the great blue lake, and from this altitude I see how enormous it is. We turn our backs to our home and feel

the northerly winds carry us on our southbound journey.

Soon we come upon more monarchs than I ever expected to see. There must be about twenty of them flying together in a somewhat chaotic formation. We quickly join this group. There doesn't seem to be a leader because every monarch is both a leader and a follower. Yet our remarkable instincts enable us to quickly organize together. It is the collective power of all of our instincts that assures us of the best outcome. We have strength in numbers.

Missy and I of course fly side-by-side. My confidence in this journey is growing stronger. It is the strength of our love that will enable us to endure the hardships that we will encounter. But we will also find strength in our brothers and sisters on the journey. I immediately think of Monty and wonder where he is. To have our friend with us on this journey would give me great confidence. Monty is that rare leader that would help strengthen our tenuous group into a well-organized migratory swarm.

We are moving at good speed as our wings fill with the northerly winds. One-by-one more monarchs continue to join our swarm, some coming from below and others merging from our altitude which is just below the cumulus clouds. It seems that as our swarm grows larger, it becomes a coalescing magnet drawing in more individuals and smaller groups to continuously expand our size.

Missy and I choose to be at the rear of our growing swarm, and suddenly another monarch joins us nonchalantly at my other side. It is Monty. We are overjoyed that our friend is with us. Although the serious business of migration does not allow time for socializing, we all feel the energy of being together again on the great journey. We have more than enough love on this journey to see us to our destination.

Our swarm has grown into the hundreds and has made good progress with favorable winds. The sun has dropped close to the horizon, and it is time to look for a good place to rest for the night. We maintain the cohesion of the swarm near the ground and find a stand of trees that can accommodate us. Our brothers and sisters quickly find cover under the canopy of these trees and become still in a state of rest. Monty, Missy and I can't resist a little socializing before we begin our rest.

During this quiet time I reflect on the first day of our journey. I could not ask for more than to have those I love with me. Flying on this first day was easy, very easy. I will not, however, be lulled into complacency. My instincts tell me that there will be hard days, and I must be ready for them.

The great journey has many stops along the way and, inevitably, there will be some missteps. Yet they are all steps toward an unknown but irresistible destiny that drives us to succeed no matter the effort and risk

involved.

What is this powerful force within me that drives me to my destiny? It is my will. My will is the source and power of my inspirations. The nature of my will is to find what I can do in life, to learn the limits of my mind and my body. The will is always testing me that I find the beneficial goals that I can achieve in life. My will is the inspiration of these goals, and it solicits the mind to help achieve them.

My will is the master of my mind while the mind rules the body. The will, however, can become weak or broken due to bad experiences, and it may lose command. Without the inspiring power of the will, the mind and body will go adrift. I realize, therefore, that it is important to keep my will strong and active that I may realize the fullness of my life and my destiny.

The creator gave me a body to do many remarkable things that I may succeed in life. But no matter how much I practice or how hard I try, I cannot fly like a bird. The creator has finished his work on my body, and I am what I am.

For the really important aspects of my life, the creator has given me a mind and a will so that I may finish his work. I have a life on earth to be as creative and adventuresome as I wish using the inspiration of my will and the potential of my mind. I can give the world the fullness of my potential or I can do nothing. It is up to me to complete

myself.

I often follow along with others, and companionship is the energy of my journey. But I am the leader of my own journey on earth. I am the master of my destiny.

It has been a mild and quiet night, and we are well rested. Our swarm continues to operate as a bonded unit, and we all leave the trees together. We still have the northerly winds, and we will take advantage of this. With the warming morning, we are able to leave the trees quite early and find thermals that will enable us to reach the altitude where the northerly winds are strong.

It is an impressive sight to see spiraling columns of orange racing upward into a brilliant, cloudless sky. The orderly nature of the spectacle gives it a mystical allure that adds to the graceful beauty of hundreds of beating wings reflecting the morning sunlight.

Missy, Monty and I stay together. Although we are with hundreds of our brothers and sisters, the migration is all business and has not given opportunities for new friendships. We are thankful that we have each other.

The thermals have carried us high into the sky to reach the strongest northerly winds. We are moving at a very fast pace again today. More monarchs continue to join our swarm that is becoming a highly visible cloud and serves to attract smaller swarms to join in and make our

swarm the dominant southbound force in the area. We soon number well over a thousand members.

Suddenly the attention of the entire swarm is focused on a danger that lies directly in our path about five miles ahead. There is a wide band of ominous storm clouds in which lightning strikes are brightly ricocheting among the dark clouds. Often there are simultaneous strikes of white daggers leaping to the ground. It is a beautiful but frightening display of power. Even from this distance we can see heavy rain pouring from the clouds. We must urgently seek cover on the ground wherever we can.

We immediately begin our descent, but being so high in the sky will require some time to reach the ground. The cooler northerly wind that we have been riding has become even stronger as it rushes to collide with a mass of hot air, and this collision is creating the storm. As we approach the ground the winds are forcefully swirling around us, and our swarm fights hard to maintain its formation. Although it is not yet raining we enter the lightning zone, and lightning bolts are striking the ground all around us with blinding flashes of light. We do not have ears but rather sensors that pick up the vibrations of sound waves, and the powerful thunder surges into us shaking us to the core. The lightning strikes are so close that we feel the thunder surge almost immediately after the flash of light. We are frightened by this chaos but try to maintain the discipline of the swarm.

On the ground there are large fields interspersed with lines of trees. Because of the swirling winds we have difficulty staying on course as we try to reach a line of trees where we can find at least some shelter from the storm. It is beginning to rain. As we cross a field heading for a long line of mature trees, a violent downdraft from the storm shears off a portion of our swarm and drives its members to the ground. The rest of us reach the canopy of the trees moments before a downpour erupts.

Our swarm did not panic. We stayed together guided by our collective instincts. I can only hope that some of those who were driven to the ground by the powerful downdraft were able to recover and become airborne again to reach shelter. Sadly, I know that others drowned in the field beneath the downpour.

Missy is safe, and our friend Monty stayed with us as always to give support. I don't know what I would do without them. They are my strength in life. They are my life.

We are each beneath a broad leaf in the tree canopy, somewhat shaken, but hanging on through the storm with our powerful feet. Soon it is quiet again and our day is done. It is time for rest.

During rest, I reflect upon the storm and how it affected me. I realize that some of us may have to die for the greater good of our species. I am reminded about the

power of love to give courage in life, but I now also know of love's vulnerability.

It was a cool night after the storm, and the winds this morning have become mostly southerly under clear skies. The day should warm quickly from the southerly winds aided by ample sunshine. Although the winds are not favorable for flight, they are not too strong at the surface. We will be able to get an early start and make slow but steady progress throughout the day.

The storm did bring us a benefit. We are able to refresh ourselves with sips of water this morning to replenish our fluids after two days of non-stop flying under the hot sun.

Our entire swarm leaves the trees in unison. I continue to be amazed at the mystery of our timing. We are timely in everything that we do, and we seem to act as one collective mind of instinctive wisdom.

As our swarm flies near the ground I see monarchs rising up to join us occasionally from new land that we advance upon.

The southerly winds have become stronger in midday, and we must work hard to make progress. I also feel some fatigue beginning to affect me.

Flying near the ground has caused an interesting situation. We are passing over a large meadow that is

filled with wildflowers of many varieties and colors. While the meadow is tempting to me, I adhere to the discipline of our swarm to continue the journey. But about thirty of our members cannot resist and drop off into the meadow. Although it is a tiny fraction of the swarm, it is interesting to me that they would defect.

It is the collective instinct of the swarm that has guided successful migrations for millions of years. The defectors may ultimately succeed in joining us at our destination, but their chances are not as good as if they had stayed with us. They no longer have the collective power of the swarm. As we migrate south, our enemy the frost is also migrating behind us. We must keep ahead. Our first priority is to keep moving. There will be occasions to refuel with nectar, and our instinctive wisdom will tell us when to do that.

There are temptations in life that lure us to goodness and other temptations that lure us to harm. The body is quick to fall to temptations because it is weak and submissive to pleasure. It is the strength of the mind that must rule the body.

The good feeling of a mind in control feels better than any pleasure that the body can know.

As the day nears an end, we settle in for the night at the edge of a forest.

The new day is cloudy and warm with mild crosswinds. I sense that there is rain ahead, and Missy agrees with me. I also believe that we will be able to make some progress and have no trouble finding shelter before we encounter the rain.

We are flying near the ground in an area with lush green fields and frequent stands of trees. We have made meaningful progress and also attracted some new members to our growing swarm. We approach a light rain ahead, and the swarm fans out in an orderly manner to occupy the canopy of surrounding trees where we will remain for the night.

Missy, Monty and I take advantage of the early retirement to socialize. It is a pleasant divergence from the rigors of migration. Monty is always positive and confident in everything that he does, and some of his strong spirit rubs off on me when I am with him.

I ask Monty, “Do you miss our summer home where we were born?”

He replies, “Yes, but we are all born to someday leave our home on a journey into the unknown. Life is never dormant but is always flowing toward a destiny like a river to the sea.”

Monty continues, “We are guided on our journey by an internal compass of powerful instincts that are in

harmony with our nature. The instincts are not learned by experience but are given to us at birth by the creator so that we may succeed in life.”

Missy inquires, “Do we always rely on this compass of instincts to guide us?”

Monty answers, “The compass is there to help us, but we have a free will to use it or to ignore it. Those who choose to ignore it will become lost on their journey, but the compass will keep working and try to bring them back on a good course.”

I question Monty, “If our journey is into the unknown, how can we know when we are lost?”

Monty explains, “The compass has special instincts known as a conscience. These instincts keep us true to our nature and help to prevent us from making wrong choices that can cause us to become lost on our journey. The conscience will make us uncomfortable if we are tempted by a bad choice.”

I interrupt, “But what happens if someone continues to defy the conscience time after time?”

Monty continues, “Then the compass is broken and that life is hopelessly lost in reaching its true destiny.”

I glance at Missy and see that she is as absorbed as I am

in the words of our friend.

The following day features a cold front moving out of the northwest toward us, and we are in the southerly winds flowing toward the front. The southerly winds are mild but intensify during the day as the cold front continues to advance. We know that when the front has passed by us we will have the advantage of northerly winds again to give us new momentum.

We fly close to the ground and make good progress for half the day, but then the southerly winds become too strong and seriously impede our progress. This is the opportunity to look for flowers so that we can refuel with nectar. We are flying over farm fields, and the perimeters of the fields have many wildflowers in blossom. We are fortunate for such a timely bonanza of flowers at a time when progress is futile. Despite the strong winds, we skillfully maneuver among the flowers for the rest of the day.

Missy, Monty and I enjoy working the flowers together, and it is like old times of our carefree days. It has been awhile since we have sipped nectar, and it tastes even better than I remember. We take a pleasure for granted until we no longer have it, but then when we have it again we appreciate it more than ever.

The front has passed by us overnight, and we have strong north by northwest winds this morning. They will be

helpful, but since we are moving in a southwest direction we will have to work a little into the crosswind to stay on course. We wait for the sun to create thermals that we can ride high into the sky where the winds are most favorable.

While waiting for this condition, Monty tells Missy and me that he would like us to lead our swarm cloud today. This does not surprise me because Monty is a natural leader. We are all leaders and followers, and this is why we act in such remarkable unison. But someone must lead, and I think Monty is a confident, inspiring leader. Missy and I will enjoy the experience by his side.

We closely follow Monty on a thermal high into the sky. He then skillfully maneuvers us to the front of the swarm and we are on our way. Leading the swarm is an entirely different experience. The leaders see only an open sky and must confidently lead the others on a correct course. The leaders are also the sentries of the swarm to be on the lookout for threatening hazards such as storms or wildfires. In this way they are responsible to protect the swarm as well as to guide it.

At Monty's side I have an unobstructed view of everything below me, and the panorama is spectacular. Far below I observe a great river lazily meandering through a rich, green landscape. The river is so long that I cannot see the end of it as it fades into a haze on the far horizon.

We are making good progress today, but I have seen only a few new members joining our swarm cloud. I think that we have become as large as we will be, numbering several thousand monarchs.

Sadly, we lose a member now and then who is unable to keep up with the swarm. There is always the possibility of injury although this is not likely for we are a strong, hardy species built for the rigors of migration. We are vulnerable, however, to illnesses caused by infection that can seriously impair our flying ability. Sometimes the unseen enemy within is the greatest threat to life.

As the day nears an end, Monty leads us to a forested area and we spread out in an orderly manner to occupy the trees. Missy and I tell Monty that we enjoyed being at the front of the swarm and how proud we are of his leadership. Monty simply replies that we will do it again tomorrow.

Leadership is always at the front and never from behind. The leader must show his purpose and determination to those who follow. Leading from behind is only followed by the wind that will choose its own course anyway.

This morning as we wait for the thermals to develop, Missy and I see that Monty has made a new friend with a female that admires him and successfully sought his attention. Monty introduces Melody to us and she is very beautiful and friendly. We become instant friends. Melody

joined the swarm a few days ago. She had no companions in her summer home, and is of course eager to enjoy the value of friendship during the migration. She made a wonderful choice in selecting Monty as her friend.

True to his word, Monty takes the four of us to the head of our swarm cloud high in the sky with the benefit of strong northerly winds. We are moving at the fastest pace that I have seen yet and require just a few easy wing beats now and then to keep a true course. Monty looks especially proud as our leader with Melody at his side.

It is a sunny day with a scattering of cumulus clouds, and we are flying as high as the clouds. We are moving faster than the clouds, however, and it is a strange sensation to slowly pass a cloud in the sky. It is another new and exciting experience for me. As we make good progress throughout the day, I no longer see the great, meandering river but rather smaller rivers running through an endless forest that expands into the horizon until it meets the sky.

The sun is still high but leaning into the western sky as we are past midday. Suddenly we spot an incredible sight. About seven miles lateral to us we see a most unusual cloud. It is orange in color and moving in the same direction that we are. It is unmistakably a swarm cloud of monarch butterflies on the same migratory path that we are. The sight fills us with excitement. We are not alone on our journey but are part of a powerful force that has made this journey since the earth filled with flowers and

butterflies. We are a relay of the eternal flight of the monarch butterfly.

We all have internal compasses aligned with the sun to guide us on our journey. Yet how we are able to reach such an exact location as a grove of trees in a distant land is a mystery. But the even greater mystery is how do we know that the grove of trees is there? We have never been there to see it or to know it, but we will find it as if it is one blade of grass in a rolling meadow.

I again seek answers to questions that have puzzled me all of my life. Am I nothing more than a random creature born of earth, to live on earth, and die on earth forever lost in time? Or do I have a source separate from earth, a creator, who gives me a life designed for a purpose on earth and a role in creation?

If I am of the earth only, I should be compatible with the natural laws of the earth. But the mysteries that lie deep within me are supernatural. How could I be a random creature of earth and yet be possessed with such supernatural powers? They did not come from the earth and cannot be explained by it. My innate knowledge and supernatural abilities had to come from an outside source, a creator, who designed these mysteries in me and in all of us so that we can fulfill our purpose of life on earth. Perhaps this purpose is the journey itself, but as I grow older I begin to believe that there may be a destiny even beyond the earth.

Deep in thought, I have fallen a little behind Missy and hurry to catch up with her. She is beautiful in flight and carries herself on the wind with a powerful and graceful elegance. She is the true destiny of my life. When we reach that grove of trees in the distant land, we will rest and hibernate after our long journey. Then we will realize our destiny together by mating to assure that our children continue the eternal journey.

At the end of the day Monty seems anxious to discuss his life with me. He laments, “My life is success driven. It is why I like to be a leader. But my mind is always preoccupied with my next goal, and I am never at peace. In you I see an inner peace that I wish I could have rather than the manic pursuit of a victorious life.”

I reply, “My chosen path for a victorious life is through inner peace in which I am in harmony and contentment with the world. I find that inner peace is itself a goal of life that is worthy of effort to help perfect my nature. It is not easy to attain. We all have ambitions and concerns that demand our attention and compete with inner peace.”

“I believe that the secret to inner peace is to keep ambitions subordinated to it. Inner peace is realized by reflecting often on the goodness and satisfaction of life rather than constantly dwelling on the ambitions and challenges that can clutter our mind.”

“The success of inner peace is as gratifying as successful ambitions, and it is a durable success to outlast them all.”

“Those of us who are high achievers become burdened with many ambitions, and there is always an urgency to succeed and take on a new challenge. For high achievers such as you, it is difficult for inner peace to take hold.”

Monty asks, “How does it feel to have inner peace?”

I answer, “Love is the key to inner peace because it is the ultimate contentment of life. For me, inner peace quickly followed my love with Missy and our shared love of the world. Inner peace comes from a very good feeling of being satisfied with life, and there is no greater satisfaction than love.”

“Melody has expressed her love to me,” Monty admits, “and I told her that I love her as I love all of my brothers and sisters that I feel responsible to help on our journey.”

“I greatly admire your leadership,” I assure Monty. “It is driven by your love for all of us that follow you. Your generous love attracts Melody to seek a special place in your heart. I believe you will feel the force of her love and give her that special place. My love for Missy came excitingly alive when I sensed her love for me. Loving and the beautiful feeling of being loved mingle together in a virtuous cycle of reinforcement that makes love so special. I believe that the cycle of love is eternal and will

survive any hardship. It can only be broken by neglect.”

Monty inquires, “Do you always feel inner peace?”

I reply, “There are times when I am troubled by the world and fall out of harmony and contentment with it. But I realize the earth is my wonderful home that has been provided by the great creator who seems to care for us, and I can always find a way to adapt to it and reconcile my harmony. Inner peace is such a good feeling that I wish to quickly regain it.”

“If the creator cares for us,” Monty wonders, “Why didn’t he give us inner peace as our steady nature? With his great power of creation, why not make us more perfect?”

I explain, “If the creator made us perfect, what would be our purpose on earth? Would life be meaningful without the incentives of improving ourselves and doing good in the world?”

“The creator gives us the potential to fully realize and enjoy our nature. It is within our nature and up to us to fulfill our nature and complete the creator’s work. This is the way of the natural world. All life is guided to seek a harmonious place within creation. When I am in peaceful harmony with the world, I feel a loving gratitude toward my creator for giving me life. By expressing gratitude to the creator, a tide of inner peace washes over me.”

Monty concludes, “My dear friend, you inspire me to reach for this wonderful perfection of inner peace. Although it will not be easy, I believe that I can have it within me side-by-side with the ambitions that have always driven my life. Each side must tolerate the other, and I will make it happen.”

I nod approvingly knowing the tenacity of my friend. If it is possible to live in the opposite worlds of high achievement and inner peace, Monty will find a way.

After five days of steady progress by our swarm, I notice that the land is transforming from a rich green color to a pale green increasingly rippled in beige and brown patches. It seems as if the ground thirsts for rain. It is a very warm morning with little wind, and we can get an early start but we will have to supply our own power.

Missy and Melody have become good friends and enjoy socializing together, and so Monty and I have more time to discuss the journey and what we expect from it. This morning Monty tells me that we should lead the swarm today because he believes that refueling with nectar is becoming a priority due to the diminishing opportunities that may lie ahead. He feels that today we can realize good progress and yet have time to search for an abundant field of flowers that can provide refueling for the entire swarm.

As we begin our journey Monty quickly assumes

leadership of the swarm with Missy, Melody and me alongside. We elevate a little to see if there may be favorable winds to help us, but there are only very light crosswinds. Yet with a full day of flying under our own power we can cover much ground.

As we progress throughout the day, I look at Monty with pride as our leader. Although there are many of us, we come to recognize the different leaders that assume responsibility for the progress and safety of the swarm. This is how Melody became attracted to Monty. Others come to offer him thanks after a day's journey. I have also seen Monty go over to some of our other leaders to give them encouragement.

In Monty I see that the three main qualities of strong leadership are experience, decisiveness, and benevolence to all followers. Two of the three will not suffice; there must be all three to be a good leader.

We are flying high enough to scan the land for the abundance of flowers that will enable the entire swarm to refuel with nectar. Monty has made a slight correction in our course and is heading for a large human city not far ahead. The city has a long river flowing through it and is rich in green land and trees. There are also several lakes along the course of the river. We see much color in and around the city representing an abundance of flowers as we approach it. This is an excellent choice to end the day, and there are many mature trees that will provide shelter

for the night. We begin our descent.

There are fields of wildflowers on the outskirts of the city, and part of the swarm drops off to begin working the blossoms. As the rest of the swarm continues into the city, more of our brothers and sisters drop into the many beautiful gardens that we find here. Before long only the vanguard of the swarm remains, and we also drop into the rich gardens deeper into the city. All along I have been watching the humans react to our invasion as we entered the city, and they all seem thrilled to see us. Many people were excitingly pointing toward us as we flew by.

Monty, Melody, Missy and I begin working gardens that are surrounded by several homes and we are rewarded by an abundance of nectar. Two young children come running over to get a closer look at us. I can't resist flying a couple of loops around them to see them giddy with laughter. It is good to be with humans again. I have missed them.

The city is still bustling with humans at twilight, but for us it is time to seek the shelter of the trees for the night. I can really use the rest. It has been a good day but a full day of flying without the aid of the wind, and I am exhausted. Missy looks strong, however, and I don't wish to concern her with my fatigue. Perhaps refueling with nectar will improve my stamina.

It is another warm morning with no wind, and we can get

an early start. Our entire swarm rises up from the city in remarkable unison to resume our journey. Many humans excitedly watch the specter of several thousand monarchs rising up to form a swarm cloud and leave the city on their southbound journey.

Monty does not choose to lead today as he believes we should rotate this function thereby broadening the leadership experience of the swarm. After leaving the rich, beautiful city, we soon encounter the contrast of an increasingly brown land that is stricken with drought. It reminds us of how beneficial the nectar was from the abundant flowers of the city as well as the plentiful sources of water to replenish our fluids.

After making good progress for much of the day, the entire swarm is suddenly stopped in its track. We detect with our strong sense of smell a lingering burnt odor in the air. This immediately sets off the alarm of a threat that could quickly overwhelm our sensitive respiratory system. Ahead of us some of the brown land has been blackened by a wildfire that is still smoldering along a distinct line between the brown and blackened ground. In unison our swarm reverses course and flies northbound for the first time on our journey. To assure that we are well out of harm's way, we retrace several miles of our progress until we locate a scattering of trees that will shelter us for the night.

I have learned another lesson of life on this journey.

Although contrary to our nature, there are times in life when a step backward is the best way forward.

The first thing on my mind this morning is how we will pass the obstacle of the wildfire that turned us back yesterday. I instinctively sense that the best way past this hurdle is to go over it, and Monty confirms that strategy. He says that he will help lead the swarm today but that we will wait until there are strong thermals to carry us high among the sparse cumulus clouds in the morning sky. If at this high altitude we should again smell the burnt odor, we will immediately turn back and accept another delay in our journey.

The sun soon heats the ground producing thermal updrafts that we ride high into the sky. Even when these thermals lose their thrust, we use our own power to climb ever higher above the clouds. It is the highest altitude we have ever attained. Monty is one of several leaders on this critical day, and Missy, Melody and I join him at the head of the swarm. There are fairly strong crosswinds at this altitude. In addition to using our own power we must also fight against the crosswinds to maintain course, and I soon realize that today's flight will be demanding on our stamina.

Before long we are over the blackened ground that covers a large area ahead of us until it meets virgin land in the far distance not affected by the wildfire. If our sensitive smell should detect any burnt odor we will immediately

retreat to a safe location. The first priority is the safety of the swarm. We are all very anxious until we can be well clear of the burnt ground below us.

It is well past midday before we are once again above virgin land. The strategy to fly high even above the clouds has worked, but it has been hard flying that has taken a toll on me. I have become fatigued and am finding it difficult to keep up with the swarm. I begin to gradually slip from the front. Missy eases back as well to stay with me. As we proceed I continue to drop further back. Missy and I are near the back of the swarm, but I am able to keep pace now probably because there is more of a vacuum from the wind at the rear of the swarm.

I am relieved to see that we are dropping closer to the ground on the lookout for an adequate stand of trees that can shelter us for the night. As we occupy a large stand of trees, I am anxious to learn whether others became exhausted as I did. Missy says that she did not feel any fatigue. Of course I know that she eased up to stay with me to give me courage and support. She makes no further comment about the incident as she does not want to burden me with her concern.

I tell Monty what happened to cause Missy and me to drop back from the lead. He says that there could be a number of reasons for my fatigue. What he suspects, however, is scary. He reminds me of the time that we were together and I was struck on the forewing by a large,

black bird. Perhaps the scales that were lost by the injury, though seemingly minor at the time, have resulted in friction that impairs the efficiency of my flying ability especially under challenging circumstances.

I now know the agony of fear. It is much more than the fear of my life. It is the fear of failing in this great journey with Missy to reach our shared destiny. It is the fear of failing in my promise to mate with her so that our progeny can continue the endless migrations. It is the fear of failing to do what I was born to do.

I am greatly troubled and ask my friend, “Monty, how do I find courage in the face of this growing fear within me?”

Monty replies, “Courage is not the absence of fear. To the contrary, courage is the acceptance of fear and the respect of it. Courage gives us the strength to confront fear and go beyond it to realize our dreams.”

I interrupt, “But the fear within me is so strong because it is the dream of my life, my life’s destiny, that I may fail. I cannot fail Missy and my promise to her.”

Monty continues, “The strongest courage comes from love. You are courageous because of your love for Missy. Your courage gives you the strength that you will do your very best in the face of fear. What more could you ask of yourself? Your creator would not ask more.”

Monty's words inspire me, and I realize that my creator may also be a source of courage for me.

For the first time in my life I pray. I know that I am more than a random being of earth to live a moment before giving back to earth a life forgotten in time. There is a great creator who has given me life and a purpose on earth. I plead to him now to give me the courage and strength to fulfill the purpose for which he created me. I pray that I complete the great journey with Missy.

This morning is very warm and we will get an early start on our journey. I immediately begin to assess the flying conditions to determine how challenged I may be today to keep pace with the swarm. There is no wind at ground level, and the movement of a few high clouds indicates that the wind higher in the atmosphere is unfavorable for our flight at that altitude. Accordingly, we will fly near the ground for it would be a waste of energy to go higher. We will have to use our own power.

Monty tells me that he will not be a leader today and that he and Melody will fly with Missy and me near the rear of the swarm cloud. There are two meanings to his guidance, the first that he explains to me. Should any headwinds or crosswinds develop, I will be less burdened near the rear of the swarm. The second meaning is that my friend wants to be close to me to give support should I falter.

We are on our way, and I feel the power of the entire

swarm feeding into my own power. I have a growing appreciation of why we travel together. I also have Missy and Monty at each side of me, and I draw even greater inspiration from their love and support. Although growing in confidence, a lingering fear persists. This journey is the essence of my life. I must not fail.

I am doing well until midday when I begin to feel fatigue. I respond to this by trying to put it out of my mind with visions of the carefree days with Missy and Monty before the great journey. For a couple of hours I am able to ignore my fatigue by focusing on these fond memories, but the fatigue is becoming more intense and is trying to take control of my mind. I must generate all the power that I can to keep pace. The fatigue is painful, but worse is the sense of losing control.

I begin to slip back unable to keep pace with the swarm. Missy stays by my side, and Monty nudges me a few times in an attempt to reinvigorate me. Soon I am alone behind the swarm, but Missy stays just ahead of me so that I can focus on her as incentive to regain my pace. I focus absolute attention on her, to be strong for her, and to never fail her. I call all of my strength in an effort to be with her. I must succeed. Little by little I gain on her as she continues to lead both of us back to the swarm. I no longer feel helpless but only an overwhelming need to be with Missy. At last I reach her and we are together again. Love has prevailed.

The swarm looks for a suitable place to rest for the night. It has come just in time. I will need the rest.

As we settle down to rest, I wonder whether the miracle of my recovery was due solely to Missy or whether the great creator heard and answered my prayer from the night before. I will pray again tonight. Tomorrow I may need all the help that I can get.

I feel that the gravity of my situation should be discussed with Missy, and I say to her, “Missy, at the end of our journey my life will be complete with you, but it will have been a wasted life if I fail you.”

Missy simply replies, “No matter what happens, you will always be with me.”

This morning there is a cloudless sky and it is very warm. Yesterday we traveled into a heat wave, and it will be very hot again today. Monty tells me that our best strategy is to climb to a higher altitude where the atmosphere is cooler. Otherwise the heat near the surface will drain our stamina, and this could be especially troublesome for me. He further explains that we will ride thermals up to the level where we find the best balance of temperature and wind factors. If we go too high we may encounter unfavorable winds that will negate the advantage of cooler temperatures. Monty will lead the swarm today to put this strategy into effect. He instructs Missy and me to position ourselves near the rear of the swarm as we did

yesterday so that I will be somewhat protected from any unfavorable winds that develop.

My friend wishes me well. I am confident that his skillful leadership will give me the most favorable circumstances for a successful outcome. As we part I realize that Monty is still a big brother to me and always will be.

We easily ride the thermals high into the sky. There are no clouds, but I know we are well above the ground and as high as the clouds would be. It is cooler here. There are weak crosswinds at this level that should not hinder our progress. Missy and I are near the rear of the swarm cloud in accordance with Monty's instructions.

After only an hour of flight, I am beginning to feel exhausted. I know that I am in deep trouble. I realize that I have not recovered from yesterday's ordeal. As we progress the fatigue is becoming painful, and I am using maximum effort to keep pace. I begin to fall back and am soon behind the swarm and continuing to lose ground. As she did yesterday Missy drops back with me to give support and encouragement.

As I focus on her I am now thinking the unthinkable. I will fail her. Pain of failure adds to my pain of fatigue to overwhelm me. I am weak in body and spirit and am losing the will to fight. Shall I end my life with a final cowardly act of surrender? My life is a wasted life. The creator that I prayed to has no desire to help a failure.

I have a flashback to the carefree days with Missy. Oh how beautiful life was then. I want to feel that way again. I need to be free from my pain and failure. I can only be free by surrendering my life. There is no other way. I must let go.

I have one last, loving look at my beautiful Missy. My wings can carry me no more. I let them go limp. The earth and the sky are spiraling around me as I go into a free fall. Each time the sun passes my eyes it grows dimmer and dimmer, and then it is gone.

I am still free falling into a black void. The only thing that exists is a helpless sensation of falling deeper and deeper into this nothingness. My existence is fading away into the abyss of this black hole of death.

The darkness of death has eclipsed the sun of my life, but I have thoughts within me. Therefore, I live. It is my spirit that lives and survives the failed body.

Although I am lost in darkness, I feel the freedom of my spirit, free from the pain and worry of the body. The body has been my prison, and I have escaped from it to be forever free.

Yet, what value is this freedom if the darkness that surrounds me is my new prison? I can only be truly free in the light of life, but I have no wings to carry me out of this deep black hole. Is this darkness my eternity?

Suddenly I see a tiny but intense point of light deep in the darkness. It appears as the specter of a single star in a vast black sky. I feel the sensation that it is pulling me toward it at great speed. The point of light is growing larger and larger as I race toward it. Soon it is the size of the sun, but unlike the sun there is no shine or radiation from it. It is an intense white light that is totally within itself. It is eerily beautiful. I continue to speed toward it until it fills all of the darkness ahead of me. It continues to pull me, and there is no hope other than I shall helplessly crash into it. Finally it is enormously upon me everywhere, and it absorbs me.

PART 3:
A DESTINATION WHERE
THE SUN NEVER SETS

I am captive in another world unlike anything I have ever known. All around me there is a beautiful, pulsating white light. The light has divine values, and I immediately know that it is radiating from God. The light flows into me as love, peace and truth causing me to become euphoric from the power of these virtues.

The light carries knowledge to me without words. By the knowledge within this light I know that my existence will become complete in a final act of meeting God, my creator. It will be the greatest act of my existence, even greater than my birth. God will soon judge me as to the fulfillment of my potential in life for which he created me. Although it will be the preeminence of my existence, serenity pours over me and I have no fear. I know that my fate rests in the hands of a true and just God. I do not fear truth. If I have been untrue in my life, God will be true in his judgment. I know and feel all of this from the light that flows within me.

Although I sense no movement, I am suddenly before God. In God's presence I know him fully and instantly experience my relationship with him. I am completely humble of his great power while at the same time comforted by his gentleness. I know he can mete out punishment but is also open to forgiveness. God is anxious for success in creation but has patience with failure knowing that failure can be overcome by goodness. In understanding this relationship with God, I am prepared for his judgment.

The most powerful emotion that I feel in God's presence is love. It is his spiritual essence and is supremely beautiful to behold and absorb. His love flows into me as the most complete and satisfying feeling that I have ever known. I feel a powerful love for him never suspecting that my love could be so strong. It far surpasses any love I have known on earth, even the great love that I have for Missy. I know that love is eternal on earth and in heaven. I am before God to learn if I will have his love forever.

There is a long silence, and I consider whether I should greet God in some way. I decide that it is most respectful to defer entirely to him.

God begins, "Do you know why I brought you to me?"

"To judge my life," I reply.

God surprises me and asks, "How do you judge your life?"

I reply, "At first I thought I was created to show off my beauty to the world."

God interrupts, "I made you beautiful to carry my love to the world."

I continue, "But I soon believed that there must be more purpose to my life than just showing off my beauty. I discovered that I could use my beauty to make people happy. Sometimes I would look for people who were sad

just to try to give them a moment of happiness.”

“Are you saying that your purpose in life was to give kindness to the world and make it a better place?”

“I did not think kindness was my purpose in life because it was so easy to do.”

“Because kindness is so easy,” God continues, “many believe that they can do good deeds anytime and the time never comes.”

God tells me further, “I gave you a spirit as beautiful as your wings. You could choose to use these gifts in life or to ignore them. You cared to use these gifts and bring hope where there was despair and joy where there was sorrow. You brought laughter into the hearts of children, and moments of joy for those near the end of their journey.”

It feels good to hear these words from God acknowledging my kindness. But yet there was more to understand and I say, “I then met Missy and we went on the great journey together, and I knew that the purpose of my life was to mate with Missy to continue the migrations that you ask of us forever. I have no success to bring to you, and I come as a failure.”

God instructs me, “Success and failure are often misunderstood. There are some who always boast of

success and blame others for their failures. If they would own a great continent it will not be enough, for they will want the world. All of their time is spent counting wealth, and there is no time to count their blessings. Their arrogance is testimony to their greatest failures in life, the virtues of truth, love and kindness. They will be loved most of all by themselves.”

God continues, “Failure teaches experience and humility, and there is no wrong or shame in it. An effort to do good in the world is honorable even if it seems to fail. No one truly fails in the pursuit of goodness. Your love never failed Missy and Monty, and you did not fail my world.”

At this time I can’t resist asking God, “Will Missy be all right? And my friend, Monty?”

God simply replies, “They wait for you and you wait for them.”

I explain to God, “When I was in fear that I might fail the great journey with Missy, I prayed to you to give me the strength to do what you created me to do.”

God replies, “I hear all prayers and answer many, but some are best left unanswered until the end of time.”

God adds, “Did you pray to me with love?”

“I didn’t know you then, but I love you now more strongly

than I have ever loved, even stronger than my great love for Missy.”

God says, “To love a creator that you cannot see is to love more boldly than you now love me.”

I then confess to God, “I did not pray to you with thanks for your gifts.”

God explains, “I fill the earth with the goodness of life to glorify my creation. I make all life on earth self-sustaining with the abundance of my gifts. My gifts are given with love and it pleases me when they are received with love.”

God elaborates, “Some thank me for my gifts and others selfishly consider them a right of entitlement. Although you were silent, you marveled at the beauty and goodness of the world and you appreciated my gifts. In doing so, you praised me and gave thanks.”

I admit to God, “I had loved the world that you gave me as my home and appreciated your wonderful gifts, but I gave nothing in return.”

God exclaims, “I am pleased when generosity in the world overshadows greed. It is a sign that the world is growing in love. There is no greater generosity than the generosity of love. In this way you have given much to my world.”

“But still I failed Missy and I failed you, dear God, for I did

not complete the great journey to fulfill my destiny for which I was created.”

God responds, “A journey is not just measured by where you go but more importantly by what you leave behind.”

“I was a child of the earth who tried to live a good life, but I faced death with an empty feeling of a life unfulfilled.”

God replies, “Love is all the good you are and all the good that you can be. Your wings have carried my love and your love to the world beautifully. I have always loved you as my son and never more than I love you now. Your great journey is the journey through life that ends with me. I have called you home.”

I cry with joy. God calls me his son and welcomes me home. The great journey is ended. My wings have carried me home.

