

LLOYD HOLLETT

BUTTERFLY MESSENGERS

True Stories of Comfort and Hope



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True Stories of Comfort and Hope

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To my parents, Herbert and Effie Hollett



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The man whispered,
“God, speak to me.”
And a meadowlark sang.
But, the man did not hear.

So the man yelled,
“God, speak to me!”
And the thunder rolled across the sky.
But, the man did not listen.

The man looked around and said,
“God, let me see you.”
And a star shone brightly.
But, the man did not notice.

The man shouted,
“God, show me a miracle!”
And a life was born.
But, the man did not see.

So, the man cried out in despair,
“Touch me God, and let me know you are here!”
Whereupon, God reached down and touched the man . . .

But, the man brushed the butterfly away and walked on.

Anonymous

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Preface

Butterflies have intrigued me since my days in college. We had a wonderful instructor, Bill Parrott, who taught a course in Forest Entomology. Entomology is the term for the study of insects. We were given the option of making an insect collection as part of our course, and I was one of only a half-dozen students who chose to do so. It was through Mr. Parrott that I was “bitten by the bug,” as I like to say, and I have been collecting ever since. I feel blessed to have been able to turn my passion for butterflies into a career that is still active after thirty years.

Soon after graduating from college, I was hired by the Provincial Department of Forestry in St. John's, Newfoundland. I spent twenty great years with the department, most of which were spent at Corner Brook, after our headquarters was transferred there in 1984. During my career with forestry, I started an insect collection for the department. Some of the insects in this collection were used to prepare displays for each of the forestry unit offices throughout the province. These were on display for school visits to the offices and for when the forestry technicians were invited into the schools for classroom presentations. I also put together a more extensive collection which I used on my many school visits throughout Newfoundland and Labrador.

In the early 1990s I became aware of a facility that was opening in Montreal, Quebec, called the Montreal

Insectarium. After some searching, I was able to make contact with the founder of the Insectarium, Georges Brossard. I sent Georges a request, asking him for some insect specimens to enhance my school presentations. The response I received was quite unexpected—an eight-page handwritten letter, in which Georges suggested that I build an Insectarium in Newfoundland.

My co-worker, Gary Holloway, and I were intrigued by the idea but thought it was too ambitious of a project for a couple of civil servants. After six months of putting the idea on the back burner, however, we decided to give it more serious consideration. It was a long journey and we encountered many obstacles and setbacks, but eight years later we finally saw the realization of our goals when we opened the Newfoundland Insectarium in the fall of 1998.

For those unfamiliar with the term Insectarium, Georges Brossard likes to define it as “a temple dedicated to the most successful animals on earth—the insects.” I like to define it as an insect zoo and museum all rolled into one. In addition to thousands of mounted butterflies, beetles, and other insects, there are live displays of ants, bees, tarantulas, and many others. We were very lucky in finding an old dairy barn in the town of Reidville, near Deer Lake, that had been built in the 1940s. It needed a great deal of work, but the three-storey structure that is now the Insectarium boasts a unique architecture to house the series of displays that define the facility.

The specimens needed to fill the Insectarium come from all over the world. Georges Brossard donated thousands of insects from his own private collection.

The rest were sent to us by Natural History museums, universities, and private collectors in nearly 100 countries. We corresponded with over 500 of these facilities and received a great response to our suggestion of trading insects from Newfoundland for insects from their countries. The resulting collection became the basis for the Newfoundland Insectarium.

It became an instant attraction with locals and visiting tourists. Schoolchildren visited for field trips and families bought yearly memberships. It has since become one of the top tourist destinations in Eastern Canada and has welcomed over 200,000 visitors.

In 2002, we added the butterfly pavilion to the Insectarium, which is home to hundreds of free-flying tropical butterflies. We have always felt that the Insectarium was incomplete without live butterflies, so we secured the additional financing and erected a large greenhouse. Butterflies were imported from faraway places such as Costa Rica and the Philippines, and this live exhibition soon became an added bonus for our visitors. It features a pond and waterfall, beautiful plants and flowers, and hundreds of butterflies. Visitors have described the butterfly garden as “like walking in Paradise” and “visiting Heaven.”

The addition of the butterfly garden led me to meet many people who have had special encounters with butterflies, stories that always involved a beautiful butterfly and the passing of a loved one. I wish now that I had taken the time to record many of the stories that were told to me. When my mother passed away, I ended up with my own special Butterfly Messenger story, one I will share with you in this book.

After hearing so many people describe their encounters with “spiritual” butterflies, and having had my own experience, I decided to put the stories together in a compilation. This book is a result of this effort and is a collection of stories from throughout Canada and the United States, with the majority coming from Newfoundland and Labrador. The fact that most are from this province is only a reflection of my limited ability to get the word out that I was looking for stories. It does not mean that there are more Butterfly Messenger stories in this province than in other areas. I am sure that there are enough stories out there to fill dozens of books.

To the best of my knowledge, these stories are all true, and they happened directly to the people who wrote them. The authors come from all walks of life and reflect many writing styles and abilities. In my effort to bring some continuity to the book, I have had to do some minor editing with a number of the stories. I have tried not to change the meaning of what the author was trying to express and I have kept each story as original as possible. Several of the longer stories were shortened so that they could be included here. The large number of stories I received made it impossible to include them all. I would like to thank everyone who submitted their Butterfly Messenger stories.

The majority of the stories involve an encounter with a live butterfly after someone close to the person had died. As you will see, however, not all of the stories fit into this category. Butterfly messengers can come in many different forms; you just have to have an open mind to recognize them.

The most touching stories for me were the ones involving children. Parents who have lost a child are often inconsolable in their grief. A visit by a butterfly can sometimes bring a sense of peace and comfort. I am grateful to those parents who took the time to write their stories, as it surely must have brought back painful memories of their loss.

The role of the butterfly varies greatly from story to story. Sometimes the butterfly is a very minor player, appearing briefly at a funeral service or during some special time such as a birthday or anniversary, and then disappearing as quickly as it came. Other times the butterfly is the central player, and the encounter that the person has can only be described as a “miracle.” Whether these butterflies are sent by others or whether they just happen to show up when someone desperately needs a “sign,” we will never know. I will leave it to the reader to form his or her own opinion. Are they just butterflies out for their daily flight, or are they truly Butterfly Messengers, sent by our loved ones, to reassure us that they are still part of our lives?

Once again, a sincere thank you to all the people who took the time to write their stories. Many of you expressed your desire to help bring a sense of comfort and hope to others by having your stories told. It has been a pleasure and an honour for me to meet many of you through your stories and to share a small part of what, to you, must be a very personal experience.

I would also like to thank you, the reader, for taking the time to experience these stories. I hope you will enjoy reading them as much as I have enjoyed bringing them to you.



Butterflies and Moths

Butterflies and moths are known scientifically as *Lepidoptera*, a Latin word meaning “scaly wings.” This is one of the main characteristics of this group of insects, and it distinguishes them from all other types. Their wings are actually covered with thousands of tiny, overlapping scales. These scales are quite often brilliantly coloured, and this results in the wonderful patterns that can be found in both butterflies and moths.

Throughout the world there are approximately 170,000 species of *Lepidoptera*, with about one-tenth, or 17,000 species being butterflies, and the rest moths. In Newfoundland and Labrador, there are approximately sixty-three species of butterflies, with forty-seven species found on the island. There are hundreds of species of moths.

Generally, butterflies and moths have a number of characteristics common to all insects. They have a pair of antennae, four wings, six legs, and three main parts to the body: the head, thorax, and abdomen. In addition to the scaly wings, making them different from other insect types, they also have a unique mouth. The mouth is basically a long, hollow feeding tube, the proboscis, which they keep coiled up beneath the head when not in use. When feeding, they uncurl this tongue and use it much like a person using a straw. The various species have different lengths of tongue, based on the



LLOYD HOLLETT was born in Harbour Buffett, Placentia Bay, and at the age of two moved to the community of Little Harbour East. He attended high school in the nearby town of Arnold's Cove. After graduating from college with a diploma in Forest Resources Technology in 1977, he started working in St. John's with the provincial Department of Forestry as a Protection Technician. In 1984 when the provincial forestry department was relocated to Corner Brook, he moved with his family to Pasadena in western Newfoundland.

In 1998 Lloyd co-founded the Newfoundland Insectarium, where he is the owner and director. In addition to operating the Insectarium he travels extensively throughout Eastern Canada giving school presentations.

More recently, his love of Irish and folk music has prompted him to establish Front Row Promotions, organizing performances across Newfoundland for international recording artists.

He is married to the former Sandy Frampton and they have three children, Matthew, Kelly and Adam.

Butterfly Messengers is his first book.

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