

## **The caterpillar story: A Visual Transformation**

A few weeks ago, my five-year-old was given a caterpillar at her preschool along with instructions on how to care for the caterpillar. This was not unusual. Chloe, my five-year-old, is fascinated with bugs of all kinds. She has brought home many creepy crawlies in different containers hoping to raise them to adulthood and keep them as pets. She always willingly releases them when I explain that they will die in the container she caught them in. She has a regard for life that outweighs her desire to have bugs as pets.

We watched the caterpillar eat and move for a week. The instructions told us that it would shed five times as it grew, before it became a chrysalis. At that time, it would attach itself upside down to the lid of the container and remain that way for 7-10 days as it morphed into a butterfly. I to was curious, as I have never witnessed this phenomenon up close before. I also did not know what to expect.

The caterpillar did indeed shed as it grew. It became almost 3 times its initial size and it left little fur balls behind as it shed! Then, one day, Chloe and I looked with wonder as the caterpillar hung upside down in its cocoon. In fact, it was no longer a caterpillar; it was a chrysalis. Looking closely, we could see bronze and copper colors, which the instructions told us, were wings in their early form. Had we not had the instructions, I would have thought it had died. In this state, it doesn't move at all. In this state, its cells are completely breaking down and forming new ones to become a butterfly: inactive in appearance, yet very active inside the cocoon.

We followed the instructions and moved the chrysalis to a shoebox for the final transformation into a butterfly. I marked the calendar for the earliest day it would become a butterfly.

Eight days later, Chloe and my older daughter, Madison, came running into my room crying that the chrysalis was gone and the butterfly was dead. I went to look and it seemed true. The butterfly was lying on its back in a small pool of blood and it was not moving. It did indeed appear dead. Unwilling to face the hard truth just yet, I declared that we would wait until the evening before we did anything with the butterfly.

Looking closely, I didn't quite believe it was dead. After all, in birth, it is common for there to be blood. Since I had never witnessed a butterfly forming, I couldn't say what was right or not. Madison, she is nine and very wise, looked over her sister's head and gave me that knowing look of, "She needs to face the truth sometime." I shushed her and told Chloe we would monitor it all day. I added the lid full of sugar water as the instructions required, said a small prayer, and left.

When I came home mid-day, Chloe excitedly exclaimed that her butterfly was alive. It had moved from the spot it had been in that morning. I looked and it was true. It hadn't moved off its back yet, but it had definitely moved. I explained to Chloe that the butterfly was tired. It had worked hard in the cocoon. Awhile later, the butterfly moved to the stick that we had placed in the box when it had been a chrysalis and in a few days, it will be ready to be released out into the world.

Watching this transformation was a huge learning for me. As a professionally trained life coach I am in the business of transformation. The metaphor of the caterpillar is so true for how transformation occurs in life. As people move through transformation, they begin to shed old beliefs and ideas and literally grow into new beings. It also sometimes appears as if nothing is happening, but like the chrysalis, there is internal movement. The coaching happens between the calls, as we are often reminded of in our training. As clients learn to listen to their inner wisdom, amazing things begin to happen.

Sometimes it is messy, and it never looks like we expect it to. It is the coach's job to provide the nourishment and sticks and let the clients struggle in the act of transformation. Just like the caterpillar knew what it was doing, so to do our clients. They are after all, "naturally creative, resourceful and whole." Just as I marveled at the butterfly, so to do I marvel at my clients. It requires faith and trust in the process and it is a truly magical experience!

About the author:

Suzanne Ness is a CTI trained Co-Active Coach. She is a partner and Coach in the coaching firm, Living Forward LLC, "*Transforming the World One Person at a Time.*" As a coach she works with individuals, groups and organizations that are up to something and wanting something different in their lives or the lives of their organizations. She also works with clients around their legacies by helping them find their passion and being intentional about their impact in the world. The coaches at Living Forward have a combined life experience of more than 40 years working in all types of organizations. Suzanne currently lives in Crystal Lake Illinois with her husband, 2 children, and a dog named Eddie. Feel free to email her at [sness01@sbcglobal.net](mailto:sness01@sbcglobal.net) for more information.