

In the Service of the King

By Ed Morrissey



Acknowledgements

Some of Ed Morrissey's most ardent female admirers – his beloved companion, artist Maggie Thomas, daughter Karree Whorf, granddaughter Kacee Whorf, and sister, Reggie Morrissey, helped the artist to assemble the elements of this little book in the months before he died on September 4, 2009.

On these pages, you will find his words, his images, and his sense of wonder at the events that took place in a 24-hour encounter - that's right – a 24-hour encounter – with a monarch butterfly.

Knowing how fleeting our encounters with butterflies can be, we share his marvel. We also have no doubt that this is a true accounting of Ed's experience. He related to all life forms with a remarkable, almost mystical ease. They took to him. They trusted him, as we did. He did not disappoint.

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Prologue

This is an experience that happened to the author and artist, the late Ed Morrissey, in the fall of 1984. It is a tale of mystery and wonders that left the author in a state of joy and disbelief.

The number of witnesses to the events made the story a valid case of inter-species cooperation. The species in question are a human and a monarch butterfly.

Ed's Spiral Notepad

In His Majesty's Service
Okay so he's gone. Took off
in a spiraling flight upward and
vanished in the glare of the October
sun. He ~~was~~ due in Mexico very
soon with the rest of the wintering
Monarchs. But he was here with
me for 24 hours. I know he was
I have numerous witnesses.
Then why does it feel like a dream?
I was sitting on the tailgate of
my old ^{Falcon} ranchero repairing my
tent which had blown down during
the night. ~~and~~ a sudden flash of color
caught my eye. ~~and there~~ ^{It} was a
Monarch butterfly just sitting there
against the cerulean blue nylon
He or she was beautiful. I held my breath

Ed Morrissey's spiral
notepad entry about
his encounter with
the monarch butterfly
in 1984

In a Flash

Okay, so the monarch is gone.

He took off in a spiraling flight upward and vanished in the glare of the October sun.

He is due in Mexico very soon with the rest of the wintering monarch butterflies.

But, he was here with me for 24 hours. I know he was here and I have witnesses who can validate this fact.

Then why does it feel like a dream?

How It All Began

It all started in the fall of 1984 when I spent a night camping at Thornehill Broome Campground on the Pacific Ocean in Mugu State Park, Malibu California.

I was at the end of a wonderful trip up and down the coast and had one more night of camping. The wind had been gusting on and off for most of the day, blowing about 30 to 40 miles per hour and changing direction frequently.

Now is about the time to let you know what I was camping in at the time. It was a 1962 Ford Falcon Ranchero with a cerulean blue 7-foot x 7-foot tent attached to the bed.

For those of you who have not seen one, a ranchero is a combination of car and truck that is great for utility, chores, and camping.

Port in a Wind Storm



The 22-year old Ranchero where the monarch butterfly stopped near Malibu, California for a spell on a gusty day, no doubt buffeted about on its trek to Mexico from Canada.

During the night, the tent had blown down around me. I just pulled it under control and went back to sleep. I had a repair kit and knew how to fix it.

When morning came, I crawled out through the hole where it had blown open and went to the tail gate where the repair kit was stored.

A sudden flash of bright colors caught my eye. I froze. It was a monarch butterfly perched atop the cerulean blue tent.

He or she was beautiful, as are all of their species. I was spellbound. I held my breath in fear that it would be startled by my motion. But it did not react to my presence.

I just stared in fascination.

More Than a Passing Fancy

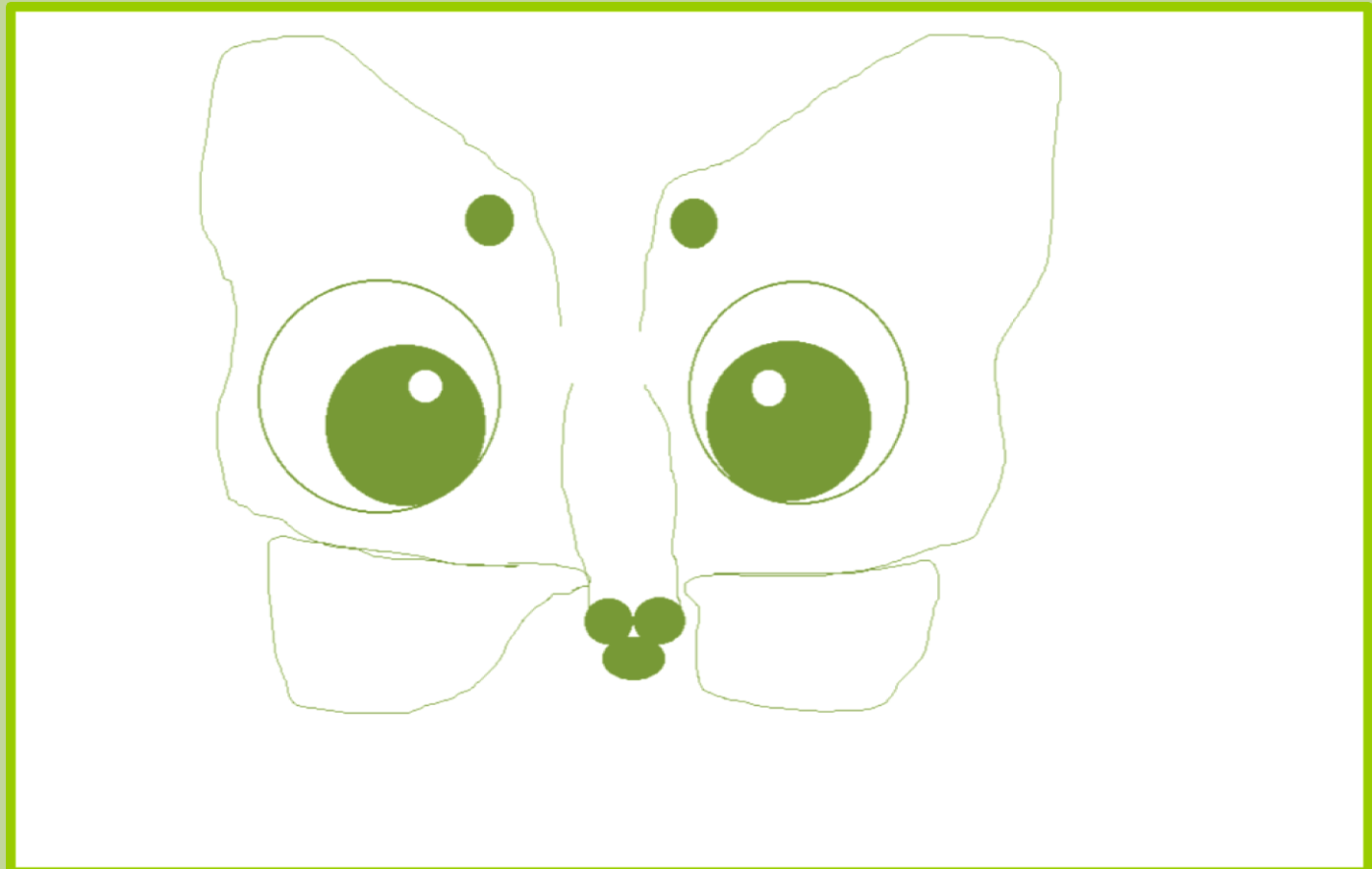
Now, I should tell you that I am a bug nut; yes, an insect fancier. I had even taken a college course in Entomology, the science of insects.

Insects are among the most complex and mystifying of creatures. In fact, monarchs are known for their incredibly long migration from Mexico to Canada and back.

I quickly ran to the cab of the Ranchero and grabbed my magnifying viewers. They provide 2.5 times enlargement at 10 inches. This is a handy tool for checking out insects.

I hustled back anxiously. The king was still there, standing out beautifully against the blue nylon tent.

I got down close and peered at him eyeball to eyeball, so to speak. His antennae were spread apart and he looked right back at me, as shown in the following sketch.



The monarch then turned his head from side to side as he uncoiled his long proboscis, the organ which butterflies use to sip liquid.

To me, it looked as if he were asking for a drink. Being a good host, I immediately offered him some water from the cap of my water jug.

Butterfly Sips

Knowing the butterfly had the ability to taste with his feet, I maneuvered the cap under his foot, where upon he responded as if parched.

It is always a wonderful feeling when a wild creature responds to my offerings, and this was no exception. He drank with what appeared to be gusto, and I smiled.

Then, I noticed the previous night's wind had not only damaged my tent, but had apparently caused damage to the trailing edge of the monarch's left hind wing. The split was going to break through a major vein if it wasn't repaired. One bad gust could prove fatal.

It was time to get that fixed and I believed it could be done. My skills as a model builder would prove handy doing just such a repair.

But first it was necessary to transport the butterfly back to my place of work, some 40 miles away.

He finished his drink and nodded his thanks, or so it appeared.

The Brass Bell Throne

Accepting my finger by gently grasping it with his six iridescent black legs, the butterfly seemed to agree with my assessment.

I cupped my right hand over his brightly colored form to protect him from the wind and carried him to the cab of my Ranchero.

Seeking a proper throne for his majesty, I glanced at the brass bell that was hanging by a leather strip from the rearview mirror.

It seemed to beckon as I placed him near the bell. He deftly transferred himself from my finger to his new throne.

He hung there in the warm sun and pumped his black veined wings with a flash of brilliant orange. He was a glorious sight.

Moment in Time

My torn tent forgotten, I sat enraptured by the intense feeling of friendship with this injured traveler.

How many times had I cast forlorn greetings to passing butterflies skipping by on the breeze? Their only reply was a flash of color and they were gone.

Here, on a wind-shredded beach in Southern California, all of my past greetings were answered with warm acceptance, filling all the voids of past meetings.

So there we sat, he on his leather-trimmed, golden-colored throne and I on my worn vinyl driver's seat.

A sense of peace was the reward for my awareness of the now.

Portrait of a Monarch

My sketch pad was at hand, along with a set of Berol Prisma Color Pencils and a black pen so his majesty's offer to pose was eagerly accepted.

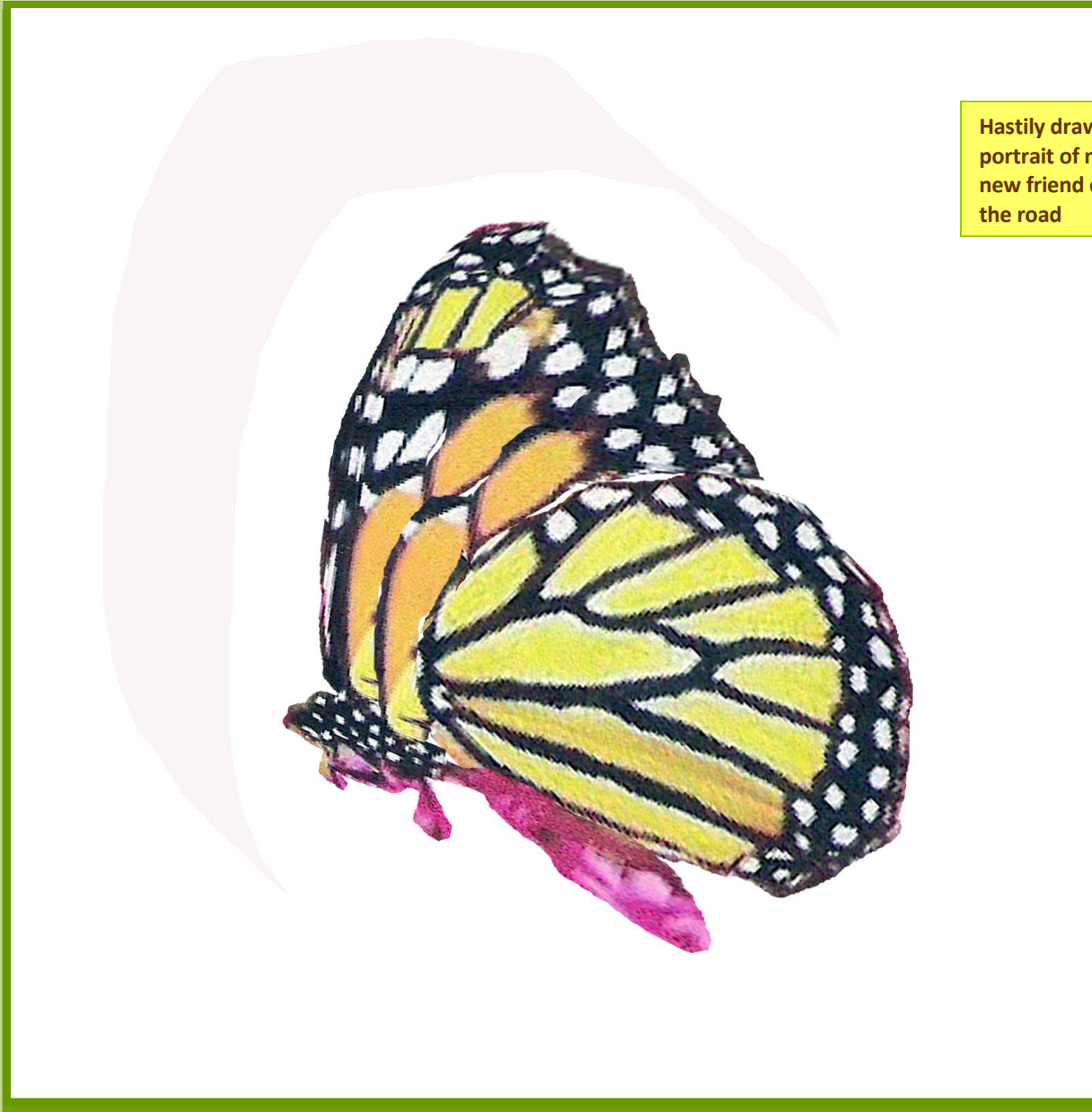
I had never bartered modeling services with a butterfly before, let alone a royal butterfly.

His black fuzzy body with sharp white spots demanded my first strokes, followed by a rendering of his thin, strong legs.

Cautioning patience, I slowed to meticulous pace and rendered an honest portrait in black ink.

The underside of his wings was patterned in pale flesh orange, with one slash of Valencia on the forewing. The trailing edge wing spots of brilliant white were laid out with mathematical precision. Four spots between each vein, recalling the ermine-edged robes of past kings.

Well, there he posed upon the bell and didn't he look at home, as the next illustration shows.



Hastily drawn
portrait of my
new friend of
the road

The First Eye Witnesses

With my drawing done, the tent still needed to be repaired, so it was rapidly fixed.

I was packing up when a boy of about 7-years old came by on his way to empty the trash from his camp. I asked him if he had ever seen a monarch butterfly.

"Sure." He answered, "All the time."

"Close up and still?" I asked. "No." he replied.

"Look there on that bell."

"Neat," he said and scurried off.

He returned with his mother and older sister, who were equally enchanted.

Then it was, "Thank you, bye and have a nice day." And they were off.

A Monarch's Detour

Driving down Pacific Coast Highway after leaving the campground, my kingly passenger swayed with the motion of the car and never fluttered a wing.

Each glance seemed a compression of time. A sense of reward filled my chest.

"I'm driving a monarch butterfly on a stretch of his migration route. Heck, I might even drive him all the way to Mexico!

Naw! If he's due in Mexico, it wouldn't do his offspring any good if he got there by automobile. He'd have to fly there by himself.

Anxious Moments

But first, we have to repair that wing.

We left the beach road and headed east. The butterfly rode well and appeared to be very comfortable.

As for me, I was not without anxiety about the state of his left hind wing. He had a serious, life-threatening injury.

He had been with me for about two hours and had not tried to get away!

He projected a sense of trust which left me feeling very humbled. I was going to honor that trust by fixing his wing!

Office Welcoming Committee

By the time we get to my office - the Youth Services Field Office on Colby Street in West Los Angeles - it was after lunch, and I could hardly wait to share him with my co-workers.

As anticipated, everyone fell in love with the butterfly, but they couldn't understand why he was so calm. Finally, my supervisor, Carol Ghenz said, "It's just Ed Morrissey and his way."

Contrary to popular opinion, insects can and do get excited. Butterflies are quite flighty. But I can't understand the butterfly's acceptance of the situation either, so I just accept it, too. Well, his majesty and I go around the office and let everyone meet the new monarch.

Healing on the Wing

Now it's off to fix the wing. Of all the repair jobs which I've ever attempted, this one seemed the most difficult. But, his lordship seemed to understand. He held himself very still while I fashioned a tool from a straightened paper clip.

Then, the butterfly sat on the back of my hand while I put together a mixture of white glue and water in an old soda cap.

I manipulated the edges of the tear in his wing together so that a drop of the glue-water solution flowed between both edges and held them in place.

Six Coats for the Monarch

There upon his lordship chose to fan his wings and I had to insist that he wait until the glue could dry which he agreed with and stopped flapping.

I applied about six coats to both sides of his wing and a film developed very nicely.

After the application of the glue, I held him in the sunlight by the window, allowing the glue to dry thoroughly.

He was then placed back on his bell throne in the car and left in the sun.

Warm, secure and appeared to be convalescing well, he was checked regularly throughout the afternoon.

On one occasion, I brought him back into the office for a drink. He tested his new wings by flying across the room and alighting on the dull green bulletin board.

It looked as though the glue had done its job.

Back to Business - Sort Of

We were all called into a meeting with my immediate supervisor, Michael, and a group of staff workers. This took place in Michael's office. But, between the distraction of the butterfly on my shoulder and the curiosity of the attendees, the meeting was a flop.

As I stood up, I could feel his majesty on my shoulder crawling up my neck. Sensing his need for another test of his wings, I stopped at the door and said, "Okay, you want to try out your wings, go for the bulletin board across the room."

Whereupon, he took off from my head and alighted beautifully on the bulletin board.

Overnight Guest

Going to the door to determine how the weather was, I discovered a chill had come into the afternoon air.

I decided his majesty should stay the night in my office where he would be safe and warm.

He appeared to agree as he gently stepped from my finger onto the bulletin board in my office. There he hung while I placed a light-weight box over him to keep the heat in his frail little body, to simulate nightfall, or should I say knightfall. (Oops, sorry.)

A New Day

The next morning I was anxious to see how he had fared the night.

When I lifted the box, his lordship flexed his wings as if to reassure me.

Again, he gently stepped onto my finger for a drink, a lepedoptorus libation really. (Oops, really sorry.)

There being no milkweed in my neighborhood, I was concerned about getting some nourishment for him.

We had no honey so I mixed a heavy concentration of sugar water in a white plastic spoon. I took him out in the sun so that he could be warm while he ate.

Curious Minds Want to Know

My office is next door to a kindergarten classroom and the children were assembling for class.

Carrying my royal passenger to the chain link fence, I called to the teachers to bring the children over. While this field of wide eyes stared, his majesty dined. And what manners!

As I explained earlier, the taste buds of my royal guest made it necessary for his foot to be in the water. Once again, he uncoiled his proboscis and sipped his breakfast.

This appendage followed the heaviest concentrations of sugar within the mixture. What a sight to see!

And, oh the Babel of questions from the children:

“What does he eat?”

“Why does he stay?”

“How are you holding him?”

“Where did you get him?”

“Can I pet him?”

One word repeated, “Marvelous, marvelous.”

The teachers thanked us for stopping by and we said our reluctant goodbyes.

Time to Say Goodbye

As we walked back into the sun, my gracious monarch flexed his wings and rolled up his proboscis. I felt our time coming to an end.

Sure enough, as I held my hand up to the sun, he rose from my finger, spiraled up, circled twice, and disappeared.

My dream was over and tears trailed on my cheeks. But they were tears mixed with joy over having been so royally honored.

For me, the future monarch migrations will be a much more personal experience.



ABOUT ED MORRISEY

A versatile artist and native New Yorker who made his home in Southern California for about 50 years, Ed Morrissey (1939 – 2009) enjoyed volunteering in his later years as a camp host for the state's park system.

Visitors to Thornhill Broome, Leo Carrillo, and Sycamore Canyon near Malibu knew him as the gent in native- American bead-trimmed campaign hat. Ed:

- Created the mural featuring the mountain lion and butterfly that graces the entrance of Sycamore Canyon Camp Grounds
- Crafted displays of wildlife that were exhibited in the parks nature center
- Played "Taps" on his recorder for the scout troops who camped there
- Sold firewood next to his checkerboard camper
- Biked around tidying up the campsite

