



## THE BUTTERFLY

A Symbol of Hope, A Symbol of New Life

The butterfly lays a tiny dewdrop of an egg on a juicy milkweed leaf. Inside the egg is her baby. When the baby hatches, however, she is not a beautiful butterfly like her mother. She is a caterpillar, who eats and chews on the milkweed leaf for two weeks. The caterpillar's skin doesn't grow with her, so she has to take it off. She spins a little thread, clings to it, puffs air under her skin until it splits. She stretches and twists, until she emerges dressed in a new and larger skin. She eats, grows, and changes her skin three times.

Then she hides herself in a dark, cool place and spins a little button, hooking herself there. Once again she crawls from her old skin but this time she takes off her caterpillar feet, head and horns. Underneath is a cocoon, hanging by a black thread. She hangs for days in stillness; no longer a caterpillar, but a chrysalis, preparing her secret. Then one day a head can be seen - a foot comes out. She struggles and struggles. She must pump something from her body into her wings to strengthen them. After a long time she emerges, fanning her wings slowly to dry them. Then she rests for hours. This beautiful butterfly has never flown. She had done nothing but a "caterpillar crawl". Finally she soars into the air as though she has been flying forever.

We might be tempted to help release the butterfly from her cocoon. It is human nature to want to assist; but if we do, she will fall to the ground and die. By the struggle to free herself, she strengthens her wings enough to survive and fly.

Grief is certainly like this process. We feel ugly, we change, we hide, we sometimes spin a cocoon around ourselves, and we struggle. Like the butterfly, we need to free ourselves. It takes a long time. There is a difference, however; others may help us as we struggle. We need not do it all alone as the butterfly does; but the ultimate responsibility is ours. We have to grieve, hurt, cry, be angry, and struggle to free ourselves from the cocoon of grief. And one day we do emerge - a beautiful butterfly - a stronger person, a more compassionate person, a more understanding person.

"You need not walk alone, we are The Compassionate Friends"

