

Grace-Full Days - Article and Photo by Sherry Freels, C.T.R.S.

When was the last time you held a beautiful, silky, living butterfly? Actually held one? Have you ever? Have you ever had one of these glorious, fluttering little creatures sit on your fingertip, open its wings in your palm with not a care in the world or quintessentially tip-toe, ever so delicately up your arm? Have you ever watched its amazingly intricate proboscis unfurl before your very eyes to sip a little juice from a fresh orange section that you were holding?

When was the last time the child, teen, adult or senior in your Therapeutic Recreation setting held one?

You can take a trip to a local butterfly garden or sanctuary and hope that a beautiful Monarch or Swallowtail will land on you. Or, you can purchase a butterfly habitat from a local department store or an on-line retailer. This past spring I purchased a habitat from a catalog and within days received it along with instructions and a coupon to order butterfly larvae from a providing company.

The instructions were detailed and very easy to follow. After being ordered from a separate company, ten Painted Lady caterpillars arrived. Clients of the TR program enjoyed being involved from the very beginning of this special event. They attended TR groups where they reminisced about butterflies and learned how to care for the caterpillars that were shipped to us. They learned about chrysalides and the transformation into butterflies that the caterpillars would make right in their very home. They had lots of decisions to make: where to locate the habitat; ensure that everyone would be able to see the transformation; who would keep record of which days butterflies emerged; who would feed the butterflies when they did emerge and when would they all be ready to be set free.

For about two weeks the “flutter” was around every corner. Nearly everyone had a question or comment on the eagerly awaited event. Conversation at meal times was flying high as new interests had been piqued between friends and tablemates. Eventually we watched all of the butterflies emerge from their chrysalides and politely saunter up and down the mesh walls and over orange slices in their habitat. Once all of the butterflies emerged, we decided on a gentle, breezy afternoon to let their delicate wings take new flight.

You would have thought those precious little imps would have been eager to venture into the wind they were destined to glide upon, but no. They were in no hurry at all. Instead each of the ten beautiful butterflies stayed a little longer with us. They walked and lingered on fingers, hands and arms of each of their caregivers before taking new flight. They sipped the sweet orange juice from the slices we held and several of these little ladies even seemed to leave a few clients with a kiss, as if to whisper, “thank you,” when they landed on their necks. After about 20 minutes and many photographs later, one by one, each sweet lady fluttered into the wind and graced us with the sweetest memory of summer.

We were blessed to have been able to watch all ten of the caterpillars emerge from their chrysalides and be set free as the elegant painted ladies they were destined to be. This is what summer, grace, beauty and Therapeutic Recreation is meant to be.