

THE *Current*

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[Andrea Estrada](#)

Children's Book by UCSB Greenhouse Manager Studies Monarch Butterflies

Joan Calder didn't know much about Monarchs when she became the greenhouse manager at UC Santa Barbara. Heeding the advice of a colleague in UCSB's Department of Ecology, Evolution and Marine Biology, however, she took special care of the caterpillars that feed on milkweed in the garden. She watched them become chrysalises, and, shortly thereafter, emerge from their shells as brightly colored butterflies.

The Monarchs so captivated her that she decided to write a children's book about them. "Airplanes in the Garden: Monarch Butterflies Take Flight" (Patio Publishing), which has just completed its second printing, tells the story of Sergio and Stanley (named for Calder's lab assistants) as they make the transformation from caterpillar to butterfly. With watercolor illustrations by Santa Barbara artist Cathy Quiel, the wonder of the caterpillars' metamorphosis is presented through the eyes of a little girl named Bonnie.

"One day I took two caterpillars home, and because I have plenty of milkweed, I decided to start them at my house," Calder explained. She deposited them in her garden, hoping they'd make their chrysalises somewhere near the house so she could watch them. "We have a patio right outside our family room, and two days later, there was Stanley, right under the table." He was assuming the "J" position, according to Calder, the shape caterpillars take as they hang from a stem or branch -- or the underside of a table -- and shed their exoskeletons.

"It was like a miracle," Calder continued. "And I thought, this is a story I could tell. So I started learning more about them. I got on the Internet and discovered how endangered they are because of habitat destruction. And that's when I started the book."

Geared toward children -- and adults -- of all ages, the book includes a wealth of information about Monarchs, such as fall, spring, and summer migration patterns; tips for planting a Monarch-friendly garden (among their favorite nectar plants are asters, cosmos, verbena, and zinnias); and Monarch facts and photographs.

Calder said her intended audience for the book is first- and second-grade children. "I want this to be an engaging story, but I don't want it to be just a story," she noted. "I want teachers to be able to embrace it as a teaching tool. That's why I did so much research, and why I included so much factual material."

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