

Alison Farmer, Nov 17 - 24
Liberal Arts 1
Liberal Arts Essay

Very recently turning 42, I remarked that it was not an important birthday and my son immediately affirmed, "ooh but it IS, it's the answer to life, the universe and everything." This number was the answer to the "Ultimate Question" that arose out of 7 ½ million years of calculating and checking by "Deep Thought" on the "The Hitchhiker's Guide to the Galaxy." For years, people quizzed the author, Douglas Adams, on the significance of the number and many plausible scenarios were put forward. Apart from it being a funny number that John Cleese used for a punch line, Adams insisted until his death, that the number had no hidden meaning. Thirty years later, the number has transformed into a symbol for the answer to everything, and Google honors it with a link.

As a Visual Artist and closet Mystic, my use of image and symbol has become my preferred method of communication to control, form and clarify my many intuitive, organic and inexpressible thoughts. As a Liberal Artist, I am on the Hitchhikers Galactic search for the answer to everything, and searching for the many signs and symbols that can help me. Looking for a suitable analogy to tell my story for this essay, I immediately thought of the Butterfly, and jumped onto the World Wide Web to do some research. The image of the Butterfly is the classic metamorphic symbol of rebirth and resurrection, and the web was rife with overtly religious messages pertaining to the butterfly being the soul of the afterlife and "rebirth" (Gods promise to transform the earth-bound man to a heaven-bound one). I was looking for a symbol that celebrated life, not death, and it nearly caused me to discard the idea entirely. However, further searching gave me many comparable tales to the one I wanted to tell. One of my favorites was a biblical antidote for civilization if people

turned from caterpillars into revolutionary butterflies. The final paragraph reads: *“It is time for caterpillars to stop killing one another and live in Peace on earth, that the blossoming of each one's Butterfly nature might manifest as the Great Butterfly Rainbow Millennium of World Peace for the next 2000 years!!!”* (Advent of the Butterfly Rainbow Millennium from the Butterfly Gardeners Association). **What a wonderful dream!**

The mere magnitude of fairytales out there reiterating the one I wanted to tell, of a spiritual re-birth during life, confirmed my belief in Jung's “collective unconscious”. As he himself said, *“religious symbols in particular, have a distinctly revelatory and transformative character”*, I decided to join in the stream of shared thought and add to the flow. More in-depth investigation instilled me with confidence to go ahead. Ralph Metzner from the Green Earth Foundation says, *“Mystics try to show us the ineffable, to point to visions of reality inexpressible in ordinary terms. They are the butterflies who try to awaken the human larval caterpillars to the "immortal heritage" that awaits them”* and he prefers the ancient symbolism of *“humans like that of caterpillars dimly sensing their potential as scintillating, liberated butterflies”*. He also believes the *“process of sharing these inexpressible experiences of transformation may bring us to a greater awareness of our interdependent, common humanity: whether we speak of union with God, or with the Tao, or of cosmic consciousness, or of wholeness”*. **There is that dream again!**

Cocooned in a deep world of self-reflection, waiting to hatch, I wanted to enlighten you with the lessons I have learned while spending 35 years as a nubile green caterpillar grazing here and there. You would get to feel my nervous anticipation in expectation of my

emergence into a wider world as a bright colorful butterfly, able to cause global change one moment at a time with the flutter of my wings. **This is my Dream!**

From a very early age, I always felt life was too short and I did not want to waste it. This resulted in an exciting 35 years experiencing a variety of things and an image of myself as a life learner. Very short lengths were spent chewing on the plants of history, literature, and language, the words contained within them always tripped me up. Now aware that these plants contain the nutrients that will help me flourish in my new contextual world, I have a desire to seek them out. A long time ago, I tried the plants of Math and Science, but they left me in confusion. Recently though, the appearance of bits of them in other plants has led to less disorder, and had I spent longer, the connection too many more plants could have been made. My first trip to the plant of philosophy had me going round in an endless circle of questions and feeling giddy. After coming up with the answer to everything, 'Deep Thought' was then asked, "what was the Ultimate Question?" He replied he did not know, but would help design a more powerful computer "Earth" that would be able to decipher the answer. Now that I have some personal answers, I would welcome a revisit to the plant of questions so that I can add in own, and enjoy the merry-go-round ride for the ultimate truth. Some of my understanding of the world came from the longer time spent on the chewy plant of psychology, but I only got half way through and it was a long time ago. The knowledge that I would have to consume the same portion to fulfill my desire to complete the plant stops me wanting to, as my life is too short. My many visits over the years to the prickly plant of social responsibility have left me scarred. I would like to go there again but would be sure to find a new less painful approach and retreat. Always holding great reverence for the beauty of the world around me, I strived towards becoming

'toxic free' so as not to harm the plants I sat on, but am now aware that my mere touch could have had causal effect and should have been more careful. Seven years ago, the plant of self-discovery (one I now carry with me) led me to stop longer on a group of my favorite plants, the passionate tasting ones of art. They were the ones I kept returning to and liked to sit on, and they gave sweetness to all those next to it. When a storm blew I would like to hide on the Fibonacci sunflower, it cradled me in its artistic spiral, nurtured me with its natural power, and understood me with its scientific roots.

Two years ago, I spun my barrier to the world just before a big storm hit. I had done clearing, forgiving, loving and finally felt my life was complete. However, spending the last few years in my shell, confronted with re-tracing my own steps and consuming my own juices, I began to worry that too much time had been spent sampling and observing rather than chewing, (a caterpillar's only job was to eat) and was not very fat with facts. Was it possible that I had failed as a caterpillar, not collecting enough core substance to sustain me, which now undermined my own structure and posed a threat to my transformation? The insight was a little sad, but thinking it 'could be fixed', I temporarily re-emerged to search for the plant that would fulfill my needs and arrived at Antioch to get the caterpillar degree needed for a full revolution into a highflying multicolored butterfly that would have no recollection of ever being so green and low. My Liberal Arts 1 class gave me exactly what was needed, plenty digestive history and literature to keep me going. My priors class was painful, quite the opposite of what I was searching for, forcing me to go over my flighty past and bringing concern that my degree was not the one required for survival. A brief search elsewhere found 'no entry' signs everywhere. Left doubting my own authenticity and that of the degree I hoped to obtain, I desperately finished the class so that I could

leave it behind, hoping never to return. Able to then cast the torture aside, my enthusiasm crept back until suddenly my skinny shadow darkened my mood again. For this paper, my Liberal Arts class asked me to look back and discuss myself in relation to the Liberal arts and its core competencies. The feeling that I had a diminished core due to my failure of feeding it well enough was turning into reality. Boom! 3 days later, at a meeting with my Faculty Advisor, I had to look at the way my weakened core was now threatening my future choices, ouch! Suddenly I was an Oedipus caterpillar, not able to run away from my "true identity". All I could do was gorge my eyes out and accept the shallow and naïve path traveled, the restricted doors of opportunity it now left open, and the miserable possibility of never becoming a butterfly in this lifetime. The acknowledgement was hard, but having no choice and faced with my own extinction, all I could do was carry on and try to survive long enough to write my story so others need not make the same mistake.

Looking into the nature of a caterpillar, I realized its focus was narrow, but deep, preferring only one kind of leaf and chewing away. This was not a reflection of the life I had previously led. My life had been full of variety, and the flowers of the plants had always been more of an attraction to me than their leaves, preferring to sample the essence rather than destroy the wondrous image bite by bite. My father had often called me a butterfly but I had put it down to just an adhering criticism arising from my flirtatious nature. Sitting on the plants surrounded by other caterpillars, I had often felt different but never considered myself as anything else. Was it possible I had lived the life of a butterfly first?

In the darkness created from the hollow left by my missing eyes, I realized my shadow was no longer haunting me and had finally been able to perceive myself in a different light. If I

had always been a butterfly then my past, present and future could look very different.

What are the implications to Evolution, The Liberal Arts and me, if I have only ever been a butterfly?

Firstly, I need to tackle the major evolutionary argument. Unless I can prove the hypothesis that, “a butterfly can exist without ever being a caterpillar”, my other insights will not have any ground and I will have to give into the miserable idea of a lifetime destiny as a caterpillar until my death. To my relief, I found some credibility for my new image in the fact that nitric oxide allows larvae to delay metamorphosis. With this knowledge, Brandhorst and Bishop proposed in Nov of 2003, *“That larval forms were an evolutionary insertion that arose because animals could delay their adult formation. Forming swimming larvae allowed them to more easily escape predation or to grow bigger and therefore produce more or bigger eggs, providing a selective advantage in the struggle for survival of the species”*. (Which came first? Bruce Brandhorst). Thankfully, it looks like it may be possible for me to have been born a butterfly.

The inserted caterpillars are creating turf wars and killing each other. They have dissected one universal god into many and are destroying the earth and the skies that keep us alive. I would like to propose that the evolution of butterflies has reverted to just ‘a butterfly life’ as a way to save our planet and prolong their own lives. A world full of butterflies could solve all our problems.

Now to address the Liberal Arts: It is the original authentic Butterfly education that existed before the evolved modern caterpillar one. Holding the key to learning - teaching wisdom

rather than mastery, it is an 'Ugly Duckling' transformative education full of color and connections, a great attraction and perfect education for butterflies like me. It provides the invisible connective tissue that somehow binds the different caterpillar dismembered facts into a meaningful whole, re-joining them into a never-ending web that can hold the world together and help the people in it to travel further. There are some doors, but in a "without walls" education you can choose to step through and open the door from the other side. This metamorphic holistic education has the potential to create a 'Great Turning' in the universe.

Lastly, what are the implications of a butterfly only life for me? It turns out that what was previously a faulty caterpillar life now appears to be a perfect butterfly one. Having collected many flower essences, I just need to learn how to mix them into a world remedy. My erected barrier to the world turns out not to be a chrysalis, but the ancient multi-cultural journey of the hero. After going out into the world I have now come home for reflection and getting ready to venture out again. With no looming transformation, there is no longer any fear of becoming something else and losing myself. My depleted caterpillar core with its looming destruction and need for nutrients, now turns out to be my butterfly exoskeleton that provides structure and protection and is made up of protein. I may never get to see the dissected caterpillar view due my shortened life span and butterfly nature, but my discovery of the existence of a fractal flower assures me they are not seeing any more beauty than I can from my bigger picture. As a butterfly, I no longer wish for transformation, only desire to make my life as complete and whole as possible. There comes excitement in the realization that the passion and wisdom with which I fly has the capacity to cause global change and **make my dream come true.**

Some may question the flighty ideal of always living a butterfly life and reviewing the lesson of transformation contained within “Tao Living, The Dream of the Butterfly”, Derek Lin says, *“To jump directly into the butterfly stage can only be a dream that soon comes to an end. If you encounter people who claim to be enlightened, be especially cautious, because in all likelihood they are merely caterpillars no different from you and me. They may be convinced they are the butterfly, but that’s because they are dreaming.”* If I am dreaming; then there are no limits. **All my dreams can come true.**

An astrology update from Carol Barbeau states that, *“We move into 2008 with a wonderful aspect of truly reconfiguring our ideas, our visions of what our world should be and a strong connection to psychism, the other side, feelings, poetry, music, and so much which raises mans soul high above War and strife and aligns us with Higher visions as well as with a new way of thinking”.* **Maybe my dream will come true.**

My previous identity essay talked about how Antioch had knocked me off my tracks, though it felt so real at the time, it now feels just like a dream. The more I follow the symbols of my intuitive galactic journey searching for the ‘Ultimate Question’, develop my life as a Liberal Art Butterfly and evolve my symbol from one of death and rebirth to life, the harder it becomes to tell my dreams from my reality. **Could I be I living my dream?**

“I thought I was Chuang Tzu who had a dream of being a butterfly. What if I am a butterfly who, at this very moment, is dreaming of being Chuang Tzu?” (Chuang Tzu)

Even though difficult and complicated to write, this has been a very organic intuitive paper (was not aware of the scientific evidence before I started writing) that turned into a transformative experience. Once I finished this essay, I wanted to add an intuitive note in celebration and assurance. I chose to pick a card from my Osho Zen Tarot pack and write what ever it said. The card that appeared to me was the King of Fire, 'The Creator'.

There are two types of creators, one of 'works' who creates objects (artist) and the 'mystic' who creates himself; he makes himself into a masterpiece. You are carrying a masterpiece hidden within you, but you are standing in the way. Just move aside then the masterpiece will be revealed. Drop the idea of becoming someone, because you already are a masterpiece and anything that you undertake now, with the understanding that comes from maturity, will bring enrichment to your own life and to the lives of others. Using whatever skills you have, whatever you have learned from your own life experience, it is time to express yourself.

Looks like I just came out of the closet, moved out my own way and am

already creating my dream,

at this particular moment in time, I believe I am a butterfly

and even starting to believe 42 could be the answer to everything.