





06 CLOSING THOUGHTS

FROM CATERPILLAR TO BUTTERFLY



Written by Bo Vialle-Derksen

**“We delight in the beauty of the butterfly,
but rarely admit the changes it has gone through to achieve that beauty.”**

—MAYA ANGELOU

CATERPILLARS ARE COOL

We’ve come a long way in this journey to understanding how to become the best version of ourselves. We explored the importance of nurturing body, mind, and purpose. We dove into physical well-being, mental health, nutrition, sleep, relationships, financial empowerment, and many more aspects of a balanced and meaningful life. You have picked up this book, likely to become a better version of who you are today. This kind of self-leadership shows humility and humbleness. You realize that all human beings can strive to become an even better version of themselves. There are a couple of things to keep in mind while you continue on your journey, however, that I would like to touch on in this closing chapter.

To visualize the transformation we humans go through, this book is sprinkled with illustrative images of darting butterflies. In the journey to become the best version of ourselves, we may well resemble caterpillars morphing into butterflies. The cinematographically appealing metamorphosis from a crawling caterpillar mucking around in the dirt to a glorious, lightweight butterfly is awe-inspiring. The butterfly is a fairy-tale-like phenomenon, and its drastic metamorphosis leaves us humans desiring an end state of similar agility and perfection. But, before you see yourself flapping around with butterfly wings, allow me to take us one step back. Let’s take a look at the caterpillar, which has a perfectly exceptional state of being in its own right.



Photo by Mihály Köles on Unsplash

This little buddy in the picture is a *Malacosoma neustria* or—more commonly—a lackey moth caterpillar. These caterpillars live in Europe and, like any caterpillar, they gorge on anything they can find. Any caterpillar's main goal is to eat as much as possible. In fact, a single caterpillar can increase its body weight 100 times or more between moldings.¹ Exponential growth is the name of their game.² To overwinter during the colder months, the lackey moth caterpillar spins intricate silken canopies. With its bright colors and bristles, this caterpillar is quite a sight, and it may even be considered more beautiful than its adult version, which is a plain beige moth. However, its beauty is not the quality that makes this creature especially interesting. Instead, a beautiful fact about all caterpillars is that they have the unique ability to regenerate.

If a caterpillar loses a limb or a portion of its body due to injury or predation, it can regrow the missing parts through a process called regeneration. The process of regeneration in caterpillars is a remarkable example of how biological systems can repair and replace damaged tissue. Caterpillars have specialized cells called imaginal discs, which contain all the genetic information needed to develop into

the adult butterfly or moth. When the caterpillar reaches maturity and its brain releases a hormone called ecdysone, the process of metamorphosis will begin. The imaginal discs grow and develop into the various parts of the adult insect—yes, the butterfly—including wings, antennae, and legs.³ But the ability to regenerate was available all along, tucked away in the caterpillar’s plump little body. Just like you! (I’m not calling you plump.) I’m encouraging you to trust the process—you have the unique ability to regenerate already inside you. You just have to tap into it.

REGENERATION IS KEY

The process of regeneration is fascinating and beautiful, as demonstrated by the incredible resilience and adaptability of caterpillars. It is also a powerful reminder that when we humans experience setbacks or challenges, we have the potential to heal, grow, and transform. We all go through various forms of regeneration throughout our lives. Sometimes these changes are subtle, like a caterpillar molting and growing larger. Other times, these changes are more dramatic, like the transformation of a caterpillar into a butterfly. But regardless of the magnitude of the change, regeneration is an essential part of growth and development.

Although natural, regeneration is not always easy. In fact, it can be quite painful and uncomfortable at times. When a caterpillar morphs into a butterfly, it essentially dissolves into a gooey mess inside its cocoon before reassembling itself into a new form. So, if you’re feeling stuck right now, you might just need to give yourself some time before you change from a pupae into a butterfly. Sometimes people find solace in understanding the cadence of change, which is beautifully depicted in William Bridges’s book *Transitions: Making Sense of Life’s Changes*. In the book, the greatest lesson is that such changes and transitions are natural, and we do ourselves a service to lean into these processes by embracing, recognizing, and even celebrating all the curveballs life throws our way.

Just like the caterpillar, we too go through periods of discomfort and struggle in order to grow and transform. It’s through these difficult times that we learn the most about ourselves and what we’re capable of. And it’s these transformations

that often lead to the greatest moments of joy and fulfillment in our lives. Humans have an incredible capacity for regeneration and growth, both in response to challenging experiences and as part of our ongoing development as individuals. By cultivating resilience, embracing opportunities for growth, and committing to lifelong learning and development, we can tap into this potential and become the best version of ourselves.

It almost sounds like a heroic effort to become the best version of ourselves. In a society that idolizes heroes, we often overlook the beauty of everyday life. If we are receptive to it, we will be able to see regeneration everywhere in our surroundings. Without too much effort, I can list some amazing examples of regeneration within my own close circle of friends and family. For example, my mom started a new job at sixty-two. Though others may dream of early retirement, my mom actively went out to look for a job that would fulfill her. She doubted whether people would hire her, but she also recognized that she was ready for a change. There is also my dad, who pursued his lifelong dream to run the New York City marathon. Though it had been thirty years since my dad set foot in an aircraft, that did not hold him back; he traveled to New York City by himself to run the marathon (which he completed in an enviable time, by the way). Or my husband, who adjusted to a vegan diet to increase his chances of seeing our children grow older, given that his father passed away at the incredibly young age of fifty-two. Or my sister, who shared the news that she is expecting a baby again after losing her daughter. My godfather, who survived a car crash in which he lost his daughter, and afterward supported his son's rehabilitation for years. My godfather enjoying all that life has to offer, with his son, daughter, and beautiful wife, while also holding space for grief and longing, is the epitome of regeneration. And my greatest teacher in gratitude, my mother-in-law, surprised us all—and probably herself the most.. On the day of her seventieth birthday, my mother-in-law dared to take her first-ever rollercoaster ride, to the delight of her two grandchildren. Although we recognize the power of people rising from the ashes like a phoenix after a significant challenge, there is also so much to recognize and honor on a much smaller scale. These are ordinary lives, lived by extraordinary people, who show incredible resilience, a growth mindset, and grit. Each demonstrates remarkable regeneration and—for me—serves as an endless source of inspiration.

IT STARTS WITH YOU

The reason why some people are interested in reinventing and regenerating themselves whereas others are not is a puzzle in modern psychology. In *YOU! The Positive Force in Change: Leveraging Insights from Neuroscience and Positive Psychology*, authors Eileen Rogers and Nick van Dam explore a range of topics related to positive psychology such as resilience, empathy, mindfulness, and a growth mindset that may impact a person's ability to become the best version of themselves. There is great value in the power of positive thinking and the importance of taking proactive steps to create positive change.

Humans have the ability to bounce back from difficult experiences and to recover from adversity. This resilience is rooted in our innate capacity for adaptation and change, as well as in our ability to draw on social support, positive emotions, and coping strategies to help us navigate challenging situations. Though challenging experiences can be incredibly difficult to go through, they can also be opportunities for personal growth and transformation. Positive psychologists have found that many people who have experienced trauma later report a range of positive changes, including greater appreciation for life, increased resilience, and a greater sense of personal strength and purpose.

So, how do we embrace the process of regeneration in our own lives?

- **Practice gratitude and self-acceptance.** A butterfly doesn't exist without a caterpillar. Self-acceptance is a necessary foundation for personal growth. Being content with who you are in this moment means acknowledging and embracing your strengths, weaknesses, and limitations, while also recognizing your potential for growth and improvement. It means approaching yourself with kindness and compassion, and without judgment, and allowing yourself the space to make mistakes and learn from them.
- **Aim for incremental and sustainable changes.** Overhauling your entire life and implementing all the recommendations in this book at once may be overwhelming. However, incremental changes have a significant impact over time, and research shows that people have an easier time sticking with them because they are more sustainable.

- **Create a vision of what you want to become.** Just like a caterpillar needs a blueprint for its transformation into a butterfly, we humans also need to have a clear vision of what we want to become. This vision can serve as a guidepost to help us navigate the ups and downs of the transformation process.

Metamorphosis isn't a solo journey. The caterpillar has the support of other insects and animals in its ecosystem; we too need the support of others as we navigate our own transformations. Whether it's family, friends, or an online community, having a support system in place can make all the difference.

THE BUTTERFLY EFFECT

The caterpillar's journey to becoming a butterfly is not just a tale of personal metamorphosis; it's also a testament to the profound impacts of seemingly small actions. When you strive to be your best self, the ripples of that effort extend far beyond what you can see.

Though initially applied to weather patterns, MIT professor Edward Lorenz's "butterfly effect" suggests that the flap of a butterfly's wings in one part of the world could set off a chain of events that leads to significant changes elsewhere. Similarly, your individual efforts toward growth, however small, can influence others and create change on a grander scale.

In essence, personal growth isn't just about the individual; it's about your community, society, and the world at large. Every positive change you make contributes to a collective transformation. By prioritizing your own growth, you also play a part in the greater metamorphosis of our world.

As you close this book and reflect on your journey, remember that every step, every challenge, and every triumph not only brings you closer to your best self but also contributes to a more connected and resilient world.

**Embrace your journey, trust in the process, and always remember:
your wings have the power to create whirlwinds of change.**

RESOURCES FOR EXPLORATION AND LEARNING



TOP 3 BOOKS

Bridges, W. (2019 [1980]). **Transitions: Making Sense of Life's Changes.**

Boston: Da Capo Lifelong Books.

From the Hachette Book Group's description of the book: "First published in 1980, *Transitions* was the first book to explore the underlying and universal pattern of transition. Named one of the fifty most important self-help books of all time, *Transitions* remains an essential guide for coping with the inevitable changes in life. *Transitions* takes readers step-by-step through the three perilous stages of any transition, explaining how each stage can be understood and embraced. The book offers an elegant, simple, yet profoundly insightful roadmap to navigate change and move into a hopeful future."

Brown, B. (2015). **Daring Greatly: How the Courage to Be Vulnerable Transforms the Way We Live, Love, Parent, and Lead.** New York: Avery.

From Amazon's description of the book: "Every day we experience the uncertainty, risks, and emotional exposure that define what it means to be vulnerable or to dare greatly. Based on twelve years of pioneering research, Brené Brown PhD, MSW, dispels the cultural myth that vulnerability is weakness and argues that it is, in truth, our most accurate measure of courage. Brown explains how vulnerability is both the core of difficult emotions like fear, grief, and disappointment, and the birthplace of love, belonging, joy, empathy, innovation, and creativity."

Cain, S. (2022). **Bittersweet: How Sorrow and Longing Make Us Whole.** New York: Crown.

From Amazon's description of the book: *Bittersweet* "explores the power of the bittersweet personality, revealing a misunderstood side of mental health and creativity while offering a roadmap to facing heartbreak in order to live life to the fullest. *Bittersweetness* is a tendency to states of longing, poignancy, and sorrow; an acute awareness of passing time; and a curiously piercing joy at the beauty of the world. It recognizes that light and dark, birth and death—bitter and sweet—are forever paired."



TOP 3 VIDEOS



Butterfly: A Life. National Geographic.

► tinyurl.com/cw8ettua

Prepare to be spellbound as you observe a modest caterpillar embark on a truly miraculous metamorphosis in this mesmerizing video. Behold the astonishing journey of this diligent caterpillar as it emerges as a resplendent butterfly. This video beautifully illustrates the potent message woven into the fabric of our book—that you already possess the innate ability to transform yourself.



Nature. Beauty. Gratitude. TED Talk. Louie Schwartzberg.

► tinyurl.com/38akudum

True happiness is born from the wellspring of gratitude. In our fast-paced, forward-leaning society, we often find ourselves in relentless pursuit of the novel, the extravagant, and the unattainable. Yet, when we simply pause, open our hearts, and savor the present moment, we unearth the extraordinary gifts that life and civilization have already bestowed upon us. This remarkable time-lapse photography, complemented by the profound wisdom of Benedictine monk Brother David Steindl-Rast, serves as a profound meditation on the art of cherishing each day with a heart full of gratitude.



The Person You Really Need to Marry. TED Talk. Tracy McMillan.

► tinyurl.com/72vwuhtp

The profound concept in this story is wholeheartedly embracing a relationship with yourself, a commitment that signifies self-love and acceptance. It's about recognizing your inherent completeness just as you are. Tracy McMillan, a distinguished television writer and renowned author in the realm of relationships, also penned the thought-provoking book *Why You're Not Married ... Yet: The Straight Talk You Need to Get the Relationship You Deserve*, originally inspired by her widely circulated 2011 Huffington Post blog.



TOP 3 PODCASTS



The Happiness Lab. Laurie Santos.

► tinyurl.com/yn29mycj

From the podcast website: "Laurie has studied the science of happiness and found that many of us do the exact opposite of what will truly make our lives better. Based on the psychology course she teaches at Yale—the most popular class in the university's 300-year history—*The Happiness Lab* with Dr. Laurie Santos will take you through the latest scientific research and share some surprising and inspiring stories that will change the way you think about happiness."



Re: Thinking. Adam Grant.

► tinyurl.com/4cxec3a4

From the TED website: "As an organizational psychologist, Adam Grant believes that great minds don't think alike; they challenge each other to think differently. In his new show, he has lively discussions and debates with some of the world's most interesting thinkers, creators, achievers, and leaders. ... By diving inside their minds, Adam is on a mission to uncover bold insights and share surprising science that can make us all a little bit smarter."



Tribe of Mentors. Tim Ferriss.

► tinyurl.com/4nuct6ts

Becoming the best version of yourself is not a solo journey. Throughout history, individuals have sought the guidance of mentors to enhance various facets of their lives. It's crucial to recognize the supportive ecosystems that surround us because they play an essential role in our journey toward self-improvement. Enter "Tribe of Mentors," a compelling podcast series curated by Tim Ferriss. It beckons to those who seek mentorship on their path to becoming the best version of themselves, reminding us that the wisdom and experiences of others remain indispensable on our journey of personal growth.

ENDNOTES

- 1 L. I. van Griethuijsen and B. A. Trimmer. (2014). Locomotion in caterpillars. *Biological Reviews of the Cambridge Philosophical Society* 89 (3), pp. 656–70.
tinyurl.com/5356xaur
- 2 K. Gotthard. (2008). Adaptive growth decisions in butterflies. *BioScience* 58 (3), pp. 222–30.
tinyurl.com/3wpetp35
- 3 H. F. Nijhout. (1994). *Insect Hormones*. Princeton, Princeton University Press.
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