

Who's Who in Little Lou

By Debra Collett © 2013

The Reluctant Butterfly had the working title of "Little Lou" for over 3 years. As told elsewhere, the story itself was written over the course of a long lunch hour – but finding an illustrator took much longer.

In the interim, I had time research and answer an important question that was bothering me: Can caterpillars really overwinter in cocoons to emerge the following spring? I learned that "fact" as a child, but where and when was beyond recall. The answer, to my delight, was yes – in the right conditions, it is possible for some pupae to do it. Even better, two of them – the very two butterflies I am most familiar with – are both capable of it.

This revelation was the definitive influence on my opinion of how I viewed the characters and even the story itself. The tale – written initially as a parable – was also biospherically possible. And since that was true, I wanted the characters to visually reflect my surroundings.

The following are my research notes, which I compiled for Carrie and sent to her. You'll note that some page numbers are mentioned that are now irrelevant, it was simply part of the process the story went through as the layout evolved.

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The characters of Little Lou honor my "neighbors". My house is situated on dry mesic prairie, and each of the plants mentioned below are not only native to Illinois, but indigenous plants on our land. With that in mind...

Little Lou is a FEMALE BLACK SWALLOWTAIL BUTTERFLY

<http://illinoisbutterflies.com/blackswtail.htm> *Papilio polyxenes* Fabricius, 1775

- **Papilio polyxenes asterias Stoll: Papilionidae, Lepidoptera**
(observations are from Robertson, Graenicher, Hilty, Clinebell, Guignard, and Ramsey; this butterfly is the Black Swallowtail)
LL is the "traditional" green background caterpillar. The dark background ones are native to New Mexico
- Especially note this page: <http://bugguide.net/node/view/562460>
- Black Swallowtails Caterpillars eat: parsley, dill, Queen Anne's Lace (the first two grow in my garden, Q.A.L. in my prairie grass)

Flowering Plants Visited by Papilio polyxenes asterias

- **Native Illinois Swamp Milkweed *Asclepiadaceae*: *Asclepias incarnata* [plpr sn]**

Plant both Little Lou and The Butterfly would sip from, and that Ladybug would be eating milkweed bugs off of. (It's a little yellow bug that is not a true aphid.) So pages 22- 23 could have LL, TB, and LBG perched on a milkweed (close-up, left page, and they are looking right, back over the garden which stretches out into the distance.

- **Native Illinois Pasture Thistle** *Cirsium discolor* (Plant only LL would sip from, not The Butterfly)
- **Native Illinois Hairy Beardtongue:** *Penstemon hirsutus*
- **Native Illinois Button Blazing Star:** *Liatris aspera*

So when Little Lou is “dreaming of sipping flowers” in the cocoon, the Pasture Thistle, Hairy Beardtongue and Button Blazing Star are what she’s dreaming of.

Ladybug is a true native IL ladybug, either a *Coleomegilla maculate* or a *Hippodamia parenthesis*

Native Illinois Ladybugs have all become endangered species thanks to the Asian Ladybeetle, the ones mentioned above were ones native to my childhood, and have been present on “the hill” over the years. I love the name *Hippodamia parenthesis*, because it feels like an inside joke – I’m a large (‘hippo’) woman (‘dame’) who’s very fond of writing with parenthesis (self-explanatory!)

However, visually I like both. Pick one that you like to draw most and that works with the other characters.

*[Additional Author’s note: the **Coleomegilla maculate** (Pink Spotted Ladybeetle) won the day for the illustration, but Carrie Pearce, the illustrator, had the artistic vision to dress ladybug in a kimono, in honor of the non-indigenous, yet abundant **Harmonia axyridis**, which we refer to in my neck of the woods as an Asian Ladybird Beetle. This wound up leading to an interesting and lively discussion on immigration reform!]*

The Butterfly is a MALE MONARCH BUTTERFLY, *Danaus plexippus*

I know, it’s almost too obvious... but it’s perfect for the symbolism in the story and is also the Illinois State Insect. In “real life” the analogy breaks down because the monarchs that fly south for the winter aren’t the ones that return here- it’s their great-grandchildren.

*[Additional Author’s Note: I very nearly caved and recommended that Carrie go with a **Limenitis archippus**, known as the Viceroy Butterfly, which is in fact more prevalent. Most folks can’t tell them apart, but I’d done so much research that by this summer I realized I can usually distinguish them with a glance. I actually felt guilty “leaving the Viceroy out” (This amused my family, but I’m betting other writers will understand.) However, as I was outside walking around, praying about this, a Monarch Butterfly very slowly and deliberately winged past me. I appreciated the fact that I worship a God who chooses to answer even when I’m being ridiculously analytical!]*

Resources

www.illinoisbutterflies.com

<http://www.lostladybug.org>

<http://www.lostladybug.org/files/LadybugGuide.pdf>

<http://www.illinoiswildflowers.info>

<https://www.prairiemoon.com>

<http://bugguide.net/node/view/8376>

http://www.pbase.com/tmurray74/lady_beetles_genus_hippodamia

<http://wild.enature.com/blog/the-monarch-butterflies-you-see-migrating-now-arent-the-ones-you-saw-last-s>

<http://bugguide.net/node/view/540>

http://alanchinlee.com/Alan_Chin_Lee_Photography/Welcome.html

<http://animals.nationalgeographic.com/animals/bugs/monarch-butterfly/>

<http://www.monarch-butterfly.com/>

<http://www.joyfulbutterfly.com/articles/lifecyclebutterfly.html>