



## The Hunt for the 40 million

I'm Flying to Mexico, on the hunt for the 40 million. Monarch butterflies, that is. I'm dragging this old body around like a sack of coffee beans that are now grinds. Wet grinds. I'll be climbing almost 13 thousand feet. Up! you guessed it, up, and by the way, no power lift... or pharmaceuticals. Just 40 million hormonal spraying butterflies. Natural HGH therapy, perfect.

It all started with my wife. Most things do, now, after 39 years of marriage. "I love butterflies" she said, of course "pillow talk", what else. When else would you say, yes? Mexico, we've never been there. "Bring your walking shoes and long pants." my wife smiles. "Who're we going with?" Silence. It's amazing how sound doesn't travel. I can just see it now, our group of Vegan Millennials and 23 year olds. Walking all day, sex all night, and really tight pants. Sex, you say? What do you think those 40 million butterflies are doing down there? I hope it's contagious. Son of Zeus.

Landing in Mexico City is like landing in a brown bowl of soup, you never know what you are going to bump into. You can smell but you can't see. By the way, everyone speaks english. \$4, \$10, or \$20 please. Oh yes! 30 million Spanish speaking English people. The bus, 5 hours more on the ground. We're going into the realm of "The Treasure of Sierra Madre." Drinks and snacks, you know this could work out yet! We start to climb, my ears pop, and I get the Coca Cola stomach. "Everyone happy?" they ask. I now know why they gave us drinks. I'm sitting in the front seat— to get the view? Driving in Mexico requires skill. Insurance rarely pays off. In the dark driving is much better because you can't see. Much better.

The mountain town we arrive at is small. I'm looking for dinner. Pavlov is my friend. Ring that bell honey! Bags in the room, no lights, no heat, toilet seat creaks (I have to lose weight) but dinner. Yes. Long tables— who cares, serve yourself. Oops! we are at 10 thousand feet. I have

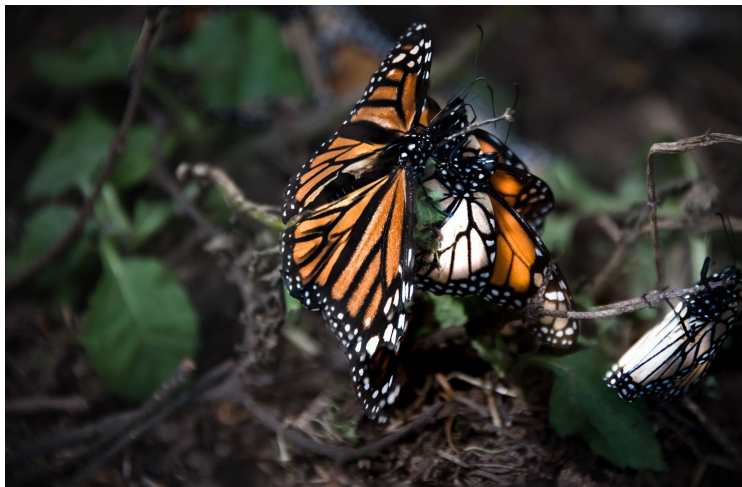
to try breathing. Two fingers of wine, I swear that was not chicken, and everything has sugar. No wonder the natives are so happy, they're on a sugar high.

Off to bed. My wife and I sleep in separate beds. We can because our room sleeps 14 people. Plenty of beds. It's funny how a wife's idea turns bad when she turns cold. At 10 thousand feet the outside as well as inside temperature is 20! My wife's at "zero." Lots of frozen breathing, like fog. Separate beds. Six layers of blankets. one hot water bottle. I guess the sex thing is not working out yet.

Bells. People yelling. Dogs barking. What is going on? Still dark? They go to church *early*. The pressure on my chest is flattening. Did I take my pills? Layers of blankets, 10 thousand feet, no oxygen and intense cold, that'll do it. Eyes open looking at the shiny black metal bathroom door. My near term goal. Legs away, cold floor, hairs are standing up but the important body parts are shrinking away. My body temperature just lost 10 degrees. Made it. Locks are on both sides of this door? Toilet paper? Yes! Safe at last. My wife stirs.

Words fly at me like a thousand cuts as my better half raises slowly from the mound of bedding. Steam from the shower floats into the bedroom and is sucked out under the 3 inch gap beneath the front door. Hair dryer blows the bedroom's fuse. Hope all is well. I hear the breakfast bells, I am going "native." Can't wait for the sugar high. Sugar and scrambled, Sugar and coffee, sugar and beans, plus sugar and juice. Long tables and a "cold" silent wife. No sugar there! The butterfly idea is slowly getting transferred to me.

Trucks, Trucks. Green army Trucks-1st world war vintage. I love diesel fumes. All aboard. "anyone need a blanket," asks the native who has a minus 20 Everest coat on. 15 hands stretch out. I keep one of mine in my pocket, it's frozen. The view is great, no truck top and only three blankets. Sun will be out soon. 3 thousand feet higher to go, which really means, around,



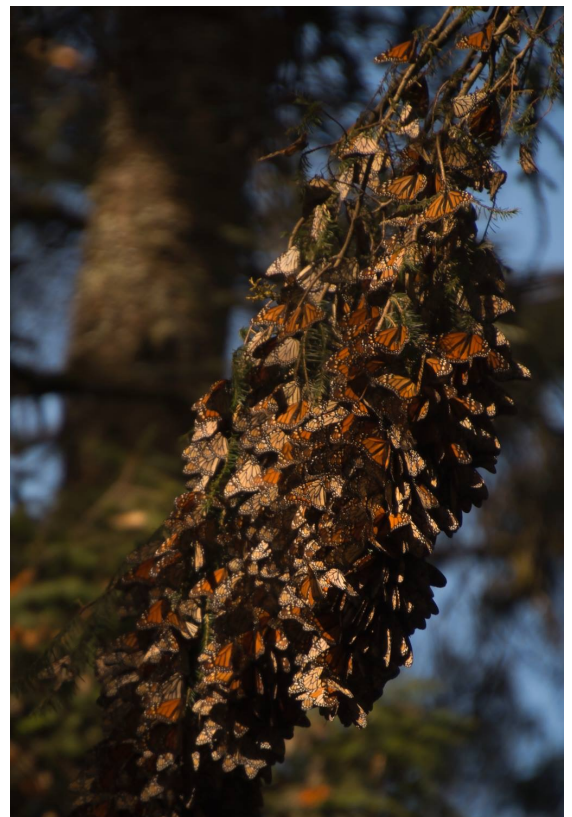
around and the higher we go. "How long in the truck", I ask. Somehow the natives no longer speak english. I have no feeling in my legs, I'm glad I got my back fixed but the views are great. I think my wife's smile is fixed, there is no change in her face movements and silence ensues. I'm beginning to worry.

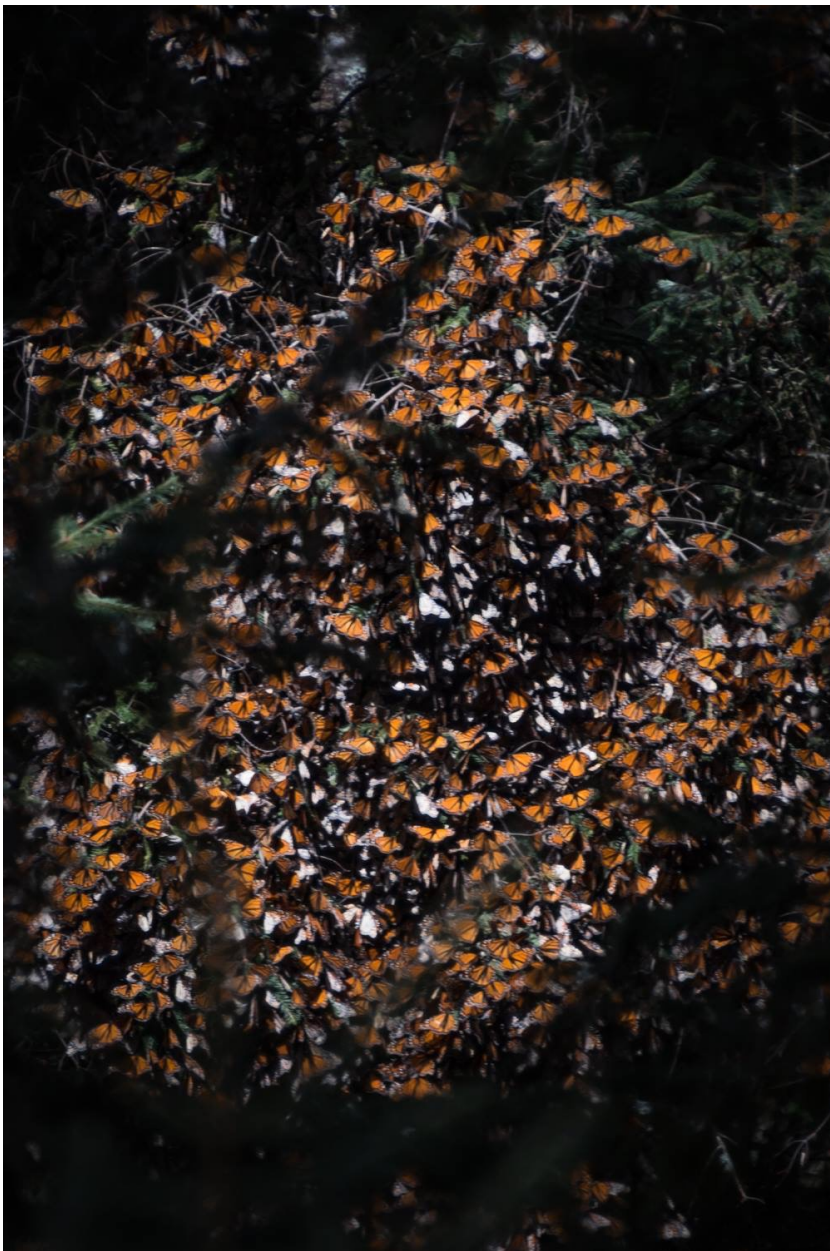
My only speaking companion, the warm body next to me, is a 90 year old lady, weighing eighty pounds from the mid west. "Why did you come on the trip," I ask. "sugar," she replies. "Me too," I suggest. Silence. 6 young kids jump out of the bushes onto the back of the truck and hang on. "Where did they come from?" My warm body replies, "Monarch children. Every year after the Monarchs leave, there is a spike in child birth rates." "Sugar?," I reply. She smiles, "why do you think I come here every year?" Bigger smile "Isn't the guide gorgeous? My Humphrey Bogart". "Fernando!" the name slips from my lips indiscreetly. "Remember dear, I'm a biology teacher," Who said that? This is a little too close. She seems to have napped off. Alone! I guess the sex thing could work out yet or I could be in over my head.

At 11,000 feet, Voila, the horses and ice. My legs don't work and I'm going to get on a horse? My wife is staring me, I hope she blinks, soon. The two 80 year olds from Maine, oh yes, it gets better, are cooing. The gay couple from NJ, just married, are honestly smiling, more to come on both. I get a teenage horse. Whoa there, whoa! I know it's teenager, it does nothing I tell it. "Follow the leader," Fernando yells. "We only take the horses up and walk back." He mumbles. How you get to 12,000 feet is you ride for 1 hour. Nothing is straight up. Around, around and up you go. The mountain sides drop way off and the fir trees seem 200 feet high. Bright sun is optional, blackness normal with flashes of sunlight. Orange dust, black dirt, and blue ice are every where. Smelling of diesel, horse, animal dust, and sweat, I'm having a great time. Slip! easy boy.

At 12,000 feet, I'm exhausted. Bumping, holding tight, with a lot of vertigo, I'm in terminus mode. Relax. I look around and see Noah, the other guide. Born in Alaska, tundra educated with a wild beard, I'm clean shaven; a t-shirt that shows his muscles, I have a parka that shows my rolls, and a attitude to die for, I'm a little under the weather. He's a Walter Huston look a like, don't call me John Goodman. My wife and the 80 year olds ride along with Noah. The chatter is incessant. I think they're having a 20 something moment. No birds, butterflies or bugs, except us. 30 minutes to go.

NJ couple have pleated pants and mirror shiny shoes. Not a hair out of place. Colors match. 4 hours into the trip, they just stepped out of GQ. Their horses are in lock step. Both hate butterflies and love birds. Only bird here is a 20 something millennial wearing premium yoga pants and fitted sweater pushing the boundaries of my mind. Her boy friend; I really hope he has money. We're all here for the adventure. Butterflies. yep, its them. On the ground, in the bushes, in the trees. there is a mist in the air, a sweet smell, I'm feeling great. "Wake up, wake up, you were sleeping."





"Thanks," Fernando. Oxygen deprived hallucinations are great. They're lifting my leg over the horse as I fall into the arms of the natives. Wrong sex. Oops, sorry guys. How you get to 13,000 feet is you walk. Breathing is not optional.

Everyone has wobbly legs. Sitting on a horse the first time in 30 years for an hour going uphill in the cold will do that. I have a 60 pound camera pack. "You sure you want to take all that?" wife says smiling at home 5 days ago. It now hits home. 1 hour to go. I'm awake now. "Anybody want me to carry anything?" asks Noah. Three packs appear at his feet, mine is not one of them. Speed at 12,000 feet is nonexistent. Camera sizes and packs vary. NJ couple has cigarette pack size one. 90 year old has zero size but uses an old 9 iron club as a walking stick. 80 year olds have a brand new camera and have tricked Fernando into a really close private class. Millennial couple have a big camera *and* pack, she uses it with a natural rhythm and he carries. I have a camera big enough for two, that's what my wife says. Nice.

The horses trot down into the future darkness, we all walk up into the sunlight. Around, around and up we go. The primeval forest is "hot", tall, closed yet open, soylent green, with never ending trees. "Why so high," I ask Fernando, who is really starting to look like Charlton Heston. "These are teenager butterflies mating for the first time, where would you go?" Hmm! Down a dark street in a big car?, as I trip over a bush that looks like a cactus from hell. Mind on the road, son. "And the males all die" Fernando chimes in. "Are the mothers here too?" I wonder.

Two steps, breathe. Two steps breathe. Routine. 90 year old is zipping along, I'm thinking about giving her my camera pack, with a candy bar. Only fair. They say looks don't kill, I now know my wife has the vulcan mind meld working. The end is in sight. 13,000 feet, only 1,000 feet to go. Which is over one mile in this mess of undergrowth. A white mist is in the air. NJ couple are hugging. How do you take a picture like that? It's getting weird. I feel springy and I swear my wife has developed curves. Oops! Telepathy.

Millions of butterflies. Brown, red, yellow, and black wings when open, white when closed. They land on you, the trees, the bushes, and the underbrush. They streak out of the dark into the slits of sunlight, then are gone. From one clump to the next, millions of teenagers let free. They warm the air and they hum. Yes, Hum! They fall out of the air in groups clutched together. Watch out! This is high school all over again. "What's in the air," I ask Noah. "Hormones." Noah says as he jumps from log to log. I sigh! I had those in the past. "Breathe deeply" shout the 80 year olds who are running through cactus-like undergrowth. My wife is smiling at 3 butterflies doing something. I saw that look 40 years ago at Berkley when people dropped acid. That is some smile!

Cameras are clicking. Everyone is taking 30,000 thousand photos. 90 year old is up in the bushes. Millennials are laying on the ground taking pictures of the sky, legs working in rhythm. NJ couple are now holding hands and making a strange noise. 80 year olds are into some type of close healing with Fernando and their camera and are grinding out the results. Flowers are every where- blue, red, pink and yellow but are covered in thorns. I can't get my camera to focus, it's not the only thing I can't get to focus.

"Remember, we're here for the butterflies," Fernando shouts as he tries to rally the troops. Good luck with that.

After 1 hour of a photographic and Dionysis ritual, everyone looks ecstatic, happy, and exhausted. Noah is still jumping from log to log, I guess the tundra has really taken hold. 90 year old emerges from the bushes

twirling ivy. Bacchus! Where's her 9 iron?. "In three hours it gets dark and goes to 20 in the shade," Fernando is talking with a Maine accent. "You have shade in the dark?" asks the millennial. Her eyes are Venus-like, brighter than headlights. First time I've seen her eyes. I have energy to spare. What will come next? My wife is holding my hand " we'll go down together, dear, and when we get down let's skip dinner and hit the bed." I have 3 more days of this. Ground hog day? I guess it is contagious. 40 million thanks.

