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Mariposa

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Mariposa

Inspired to write following the sudden and tragic death of a friend

By Jen Femenella

I remember when I first met Jenn (Mariposa). We worked together at the high school. She was the Spanish teacher that year and I was teaching the ELD classes. Her bright smile and bouncy personality immediately caught my attention, and I remember thinking that I wanted to be her friend. Before I could introduce myself, she flies on over to my classroom saying “Hi, I’m Jenn. What’s Your name?” As soon as we exchanged formalities, we began to notice all of the parallels of our lives. To begin with, we were both mothers of two kids; her son being the same age as my twins. She said, “We should get our kids together and hang out.” She liked to say that often. “We should...we should go to the beach, we should go to the river, we should go to the Farmer’s Market, we should go to the woods, etc.” And we did. It was an immediate friendship. I knew she was an amazing person when I met her. Our kids got along famously, and we continued to find similarities in our lives.

Jenn was an incredible person. Her biggest desire was to travel and learn language. Language was her passion. In fact, when I met her, she was bilingual, fluent in both English and Spanish, and twenty years later she was fluent in French with a spattering of Japanese. Oh, that was one of our escapades together, taking Japanese lessons at HSU. I was never very good at it, but she was picking it up. Years go by and our friendship flourishes. Mariposa no longer works at the same high school and has spread her wings and flown on to new adventures. She flew to Spain where she taught for two years. She taught at two more high schools before fulfilling her dream of flying and working at the same time. She became a flight attendant and continued flying across the world. Simultaneously reaching out to underrepresented populations doing outreach for the Redwood Regional Center, always trying to help others, always with her butterfly smile. Marries the love of her life and has two more beautiful boys, both with their mama’s smile and fierce determination and desire to

live life to its fullest. She made up her mind to make sure they had all the opportunities. Raising them with three languages and taking them to places all over the earth.

Then came that fateful day, the world was changed, a life cut short, and in butterfly fashion, Jenn leaves us too soon. But not without saving her baby's life at the last minute. The car comes barreling towards them, in a marked crosswalk, 25mph, what was he doing? How could he not see? She miraculously pushes the stroller out of the way so her boy is unharmed. Too much impact, too much stress, my beautiful mariposa is shattered, smashed like an insect in the middle of the road. They say the life of a butterfly is amazing, and I believe it to be true. It's one of the only creatures that has four life stages. I'd like to think of her life as one that went through each stage to the fullest. The first stage, teaching resiliency, the second stage, the most precarious, living through the danger of all the nefarious elements that surround her, the third stage, the chrysalis, waiting to emerge and spread its wings, and finally the butterfly, la mariposa, spreading her beautiful, delicate wings, taking off into the world, and finding her mate to begin the butterfly life cycle all over again. I'll never forget how you visited us that day at the park, that day when you were in between worlds, flying over our heads and landing on us, to say goodbye. I'll never forget you mariposa. I'll think of you every time you visit.

