



A conversation with
Mary Alice Monroe
author of
A Butterfly Called Hope
and *Turtle Summer!*

Have you wondered how Mary Alice Monroe is able to draw inspiration from nature to create her stories, or the difference between writing for children and adults? She has shared with us how her passion for nature leads to creating wonderful stories for all ages to enjoy.

How did you know that you wanted to be an author?

As a child, you could always find me curled up with a book or writing. One of my strongest memories is visiting the public library for the first time—I couldn't believe that all of those books were there for me to read! I began my writing career by writing plays and musicals that my brothers and sisters performed. I later went on to freelance as a non-fiction journalist and co-authored or authored several non-fiction titles. Then, I was finally given the opportunity to write the novel I had always dreamed of writing. I was confined to my bed for the final months of my pregnancy, so I chose to write. I ended up giving birth to a baby and a book, and I've been writing books ever since!

Where do you find inspiration for your books?

I draw themes for my books from nature and their parallels with human nature. I try to bring to life the beauty and mystery of the fabulously varied Lowcountry ecosystem and various endangered species. I also work with several environmental groups throughout South Carolina, and my work with these groups has truly inspired me in my writing!

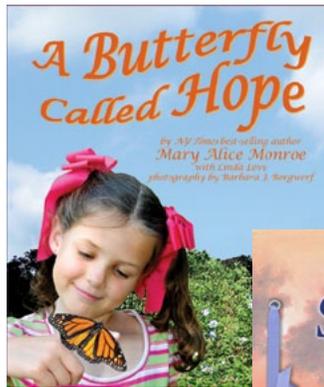
How is the process of writing a children's book different from writing for adults?

Much like poetry, each word in a children's book is essential. There should be a rhythm to the words, perhaps a touch of humor, and most of all

a poignant touch that will reach child and parent alike. In an adult novel I have thousands of words to accomplish this. For children's books, it's a completely different approach. People are wrong when they think children's books are easier to write!

What do you want your readers to gain from your books?

I want my readers to become inspired by my books to support efforts to protect various endangered species. Hopefully they will then understand the dangers that some of these animals face and how it's up to us to help them!



What sparked an interest in butterflies for both THE BUTTERFLY'S DAUGHTER and A BUTTERFLY CALLED HOPE? And how much research did you do before writing about butterflies?

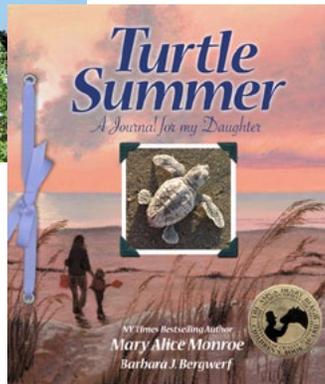
I've always had butterflies on my list of topics to write about, and now that the monarch population is threatened, I couldn't delay. I always begin a writing project with the research because my inspiration for story is organic to the experience. I spent several years doing an academic research of monarchs, travelling to the sanctuaries in Mexico, interviewing experts, tagging monarchs. Linda Love, with whom I wrote the book, was my mentor in the process of raising monarchs. This experience sparked my desire to write a children's book. Linda Love has founded butterfly habitats in Texas and South Carolina and is known as "Nana Butterfly" in the local schools. Her passion for butterflies is contagious!

What is the one thing you would like people to know about A BUTTERFLY CALLED HOPE?

Children often have a fear of bugs. In *A BUTTERFLY CALLED HOPE* we help children to overcome the fear by experiencing the awe and wonder of nature through the intimate raising of a caterpillar to butterfly. The use of photographs is important. Barbara's photographs are beautiful and meticulously done. When I ask children what the difference is between a photograph and a drawing, their answer is "the photo is real." We want a child to read the book and to think, "I can do that, too!"

What is the story of TURTLE SUMMER?

TURTLE SUMMER is the companion book to *SWIMMING LESSONS*, which is the sequel to *THE BEACH HOUSE*. A young mother named Toy is writing a journal for her young daughter, Little Lovie. The journal explains the nesting cycle of sea turtles



and the natural life along the southeastern coast. The book features original photographs which readers will particularly enjoy!

What is next?

Dolphins!

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