**THE CATTY-PILLAR LESSON BY MISS IRMA - A MASTER TEACHER**

**My recent concentration about Milkweed and the Monarch Butterfly has acted as a “trigger” causing me to recall an incident I observed back in the late 1960’s! At that time I was the representative of the Education Division of a corporation that was working with Headstart staffs, and other community based “Early Childhood Education Centers” around the country. I enjoyed the work.**

**Now, more than fifty years later, I am remembering the occasion of a visit to a Headstart Center in North Carolina. I was standing in front of a small single family house that had been converted into a Headstart Center. I was there to meet the Director. I remember walking up a few steps and opening the front door to find a lady and about fifteen “little people” in the room, . . . . .**

**Ms.I: “*Boys and girls this is the man from New York,I told you he would***

***be visiing us. His name is Mr. May. Can we welcome him?”***

**Children: *“Hello, Mr. Maaaayy.”***

**HMay: *“Hello everybody. Thank you for that welcome.”***

**Ms.I: *“My name is Irma Billings, but everybody calls me Miss Irma.***

***Mr. Warner said you would be coming; he had to leave to pick up***

***the lunches from the pantry center. He will be back in about***

***fifteen minutes. We are getting ready to take our afternoon walk.***

***Come, walk with us. Mr. Warner will be here when we get back.”***

**We left the building together, and you could tell that this was something the children did often. They stopped and waited before going around the corner. They knew how to walk together. They seemed to enjoy the walk. There were no stragglers. Miss Irma was in the center of the group pointing out different things as they walked along, and I followed in the rear behind everyone, observing what was happening.**

**Ms.I: *“Stay away from that fence, you know that dog is back there,..***

***we don’t want him barking and making a whole lot of noise.”***

***“Look at that Robin over there pulling on that worm.”***

**Girl: *“Miss Irma, Miss Irma, Jimmy got a worm in his hand, and he says***

***he’s gonna squeeze it. Uugh!”***

**Ms.I: *“What!... Thanks for telling me. James, what-you got in your hand?”***

**James: *“I got a worm, Miss Irma.”***

**Ms.I: *“Lemme see that worm you got. James, that aint no worm, thas’s***

***a “Catty-pillar.” You got, a beautiful, fat, “Catty-pillar!”***

***Looks like he’s been eating pretty good, but he still might be***

***a little hungry. Where’d you find him?”***

# ***James: “I found him over there on that bush. He was on a leaf.”***

**Ms.I: *“Oh yes, that’s the only kind of bush he lives on. He nibbles on***

***the leaves, and when he is finished eating, he makes some glue and***

***sticks it onto a branch where he can hang while he covers himself***

***in a little house of his own.***

**Ms.I: *“His house is really a case he builds around himself. It does not***

***have any stair steps, windows or doors. He’s all closed up in there***

***by himself changing, and he won’t come out until he has completely***

***changed.”***

**James: *“Changing? What do you mean? Changed to what?”***

**Ms.I: *“Yes, it changes. Won’t be no “Catty-pillar” any more. When he***

***comes out, he will have changed into one happy, beautiful***

***butterfly! He might come back one day so you can see him,***

***just-a flapping his beautiful wings, and flying all over the***

***place, from flower to flower, so happy to be alive...***

***Come along children, lunch is here, let’s get our hands washed***

***and cleaned.”***

**As the children marched toward the house for lunch, I was surprised**

**to See James walk over to the bush and shake the Catty-pillar onto a leaf. He turned and skipped along to catch up with the other children, ready to wash his hands and**

**have lunch.**

**Miss Irma did not reprimand or belittle James. She didn’t give him any orders. I think she knew James, and as tough and rough as James might have been, his inner spirit would cause him to recognize the importance of life, even for a Catty-pillar. It was difficult for James to do anything else but return the Catty-pillar to a leaf!**

**As smart as I thought I was, and as good as I might have been at teaching, I realized that I had been privileged to witness a “Master Teacher” at work. What a lucky group of children. What a fortunate circumstance for me!**

**Henry A. May April-2020**