

# How the Butterflies Came to Be

*by Joseph Bruchac*

1 Long ago, not long after Earth-Maker shaped the world out of dirt and sweat he scraped from his skin, Itoi, our Elder Brother, was walking about. It was just after the time of year when the rains come. There were flowers blooming all around him as he walked. The leaves of the trees were green and bright. He came to a village and there he saw the children playing. It made his heart glad to see the children happy and playing. Then he became sad. He thought of how those children would grow old and weaken and die. That was the way it was made to be. The red and yellow and white and blue of the flowers would fade. The leaves would fall from the trees. The days would grow short and the nights would be cold.

2 A wind brushed past Elder Brother, making some fallen yellow leaves dance in the sunlight. Then an idea came to him.

3 “I will make something,” Elder Brother said. “It will make the hearts of the children dance and it will make my own heart glad again.”

4 Then Itoi took a bag and placed in it the bright-colored flowers and the fallen leaves. He placed many things in that bag. He placed yellow pollen and white cornmeal and green pine needles in that bag and caught some of the shining gold of the sunlight and placed it in there, as well. There were birds singing around him and he took some of their songs and put them into that bag, too.

5 “Come here,” Elder Brother called to the children, “come here. I have something here for you.”

6 The children came to him and he handed them his bag.

7 “Open this,” he said.

8 The children opened Elder Brother’s bag and out of it flew the first butterflies. Their wings were bright as sunlight and held all of the colors of the flowers and the leaves, the cornmeal, the pollen and the green pine needles. They were red and gold and black and yellow, blue and green and white. They looked like flowers, dancing in the wind. They flew about the heads of the children and the children laughed. As those first butterflies flew, they sang and the children listened.

9 But as the children listened to the singing butterflies, the songbirds came to Elder Brother.

10 “Itoi,” the songbirds said, “those songs were given to us. It is fine that you have given these new creatures all the brightest colors, but it is not right that they should also have our songs.”

11 “Ah,” Elder Brother said, “you speak truly. The songs belong to you and not to the butterflies.”

12 So it is to this day. Though they dance as they fly, the butterflies are silent. But still, when the children see them, brightly dancing in the wind, their hearts are glad. That is how Elder Brother meant it to be.

