



The entrance of the butterfly sanctuary, Santuario De Le Mariposa Monarca.

# Where the Monarchs Go

ARTICLE AND PHOTOS  
SUBMITTED BY JAN KURTZ

Angagueo. Never heard of it before, but I was headed there, seat-belted right behind the van's driver so I could ask him all my questions as we meandered through the canyon before ascending into the Sierra Chincua mountains of central Mexico.

This was a dream come true. A dream dating to childhood summers spent in the northwoods watching the orange and black butterflies flit down the ditches of gravel roads, over fields and along the lake's shoreline.

These brightly decorated monarchs were a harbinger of spring, a richness of summer and their departure – a sign of fall. They danced in my heart. They even showed up on the matching dresses my mom sewed for herself, my doll and me when I was four. Later, I developed the habit of looking for caterpillars, putting them in jars and watching the whole metamorphosis process, never thinking too much about where they went when not in my yard.

Until I came across that National Geographic magazine with a Mexican woman on the cover surrounded by a snowstorm of butterflies, black and orange flakes floating on the air currents around her. Where? Central Mexico – in the cloud forests of oyamel fir trees where the ecosystem provided them with the required altitude, moisture and protection. There were so many monarchs clustered in the pines warming themselves the branches bent and broke under their weight. I couldn't imagine butterflies keeping each other warm much less having enough of

**You can help the monarchs starting in your own garden.**

Excellent site on growing milkweed, pollinator gardens, cutting back on Round-UP: [vermontwoodsstudios.com/blog/saving-monarch-butterfly-tips/](http://vermontwoodsstudios.com/blog/saving-monarch-butterfly-tips/)



them to break tree limbs. My back prairie included blazing stars and milkweed flowers that drew in migrating monarchs, but not by the millions. I wanted to know how it would feel to be totally enveloped by monarchs soaring, fluttering and landing on me.

But, it wasn't that easy. It never occurred to me that one day the monarchs' habitat would be in danger on both sides of the human border. To the north, pesticides and mowing ditches stripped miles of pollinator feeding grounds. No

**"I wanted to know how it would feel to be totally enveloped by monarchs..."**

**- Jan Kurtz**

milkweed, no monarchs. To the south, illegal logging literally cut into the oyamel fir tree habitat at an alarming rate. Visits to that area were deemed dangerous. Finally, the Mexican government stepped in and took action. If the locals could make a living out of tourism promoting the monarch, the deforestation might be stopped.

When an email from the Spanish Language Institute of Cuernavaca arrived in my inbox advertising: "January; Monarchs in Michoacán; Visit the Rosario Sanctuary of. . ." I forwarded it to my Spanish group. Jamy Olson responded, "I still have my passport." That sealed it. We did the paperwork resulting in our van ride up the Chincua to approximately 10,000 feet and the Santuario de la Mariposa Monarca, World UNESCO monarch sanctuary.

First however, we flew into Morelia's airport and taxied off to the 17th century center city Hotel de la Soledad for a few days of cultural and altitude acclimation. Maru Cortes, group



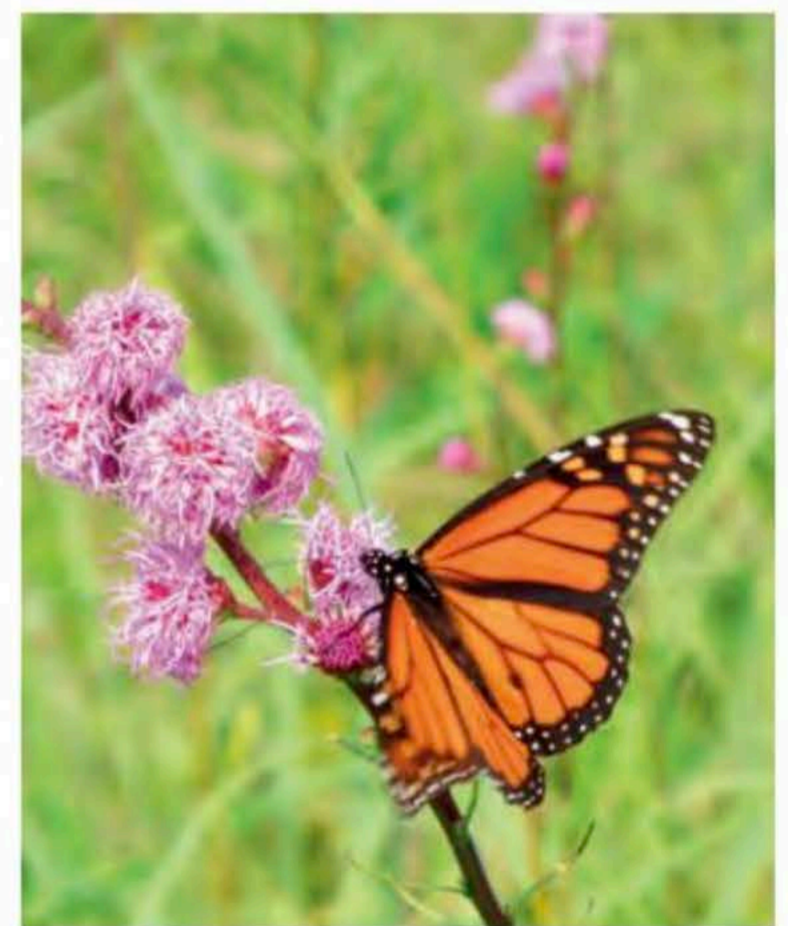
Jamy Olson, traveling partner, and Maru Cortes, group leader riding out of Chincua.

leader, and Debora, local guide, introduced us to this beautiful colonial town with its exquisite art, cuisine, history and oriented us for our monarch expedition. After detailing monarch protocol, Maru informed us we could either hike or rent a horse to arrive at the observation points. With my record of harrowing mountain horseback rides, I chose to hike. Jamy concurred.

**"...It never occurred to me that one day the monarchs' habitat would be in danger."**

**- Jan Kurtz**

The van traversed the switchbacks until we glimpsed Angangueo up ahead. Even at dusk, the lime green, pink, turquoise and yellow painted buildings jumped out at us.



35TH ANNUAL SPRING  
ARTS & CRAFTS FESTIVAL  
Saturday,  
May 9, 2020

41ST ANNUAL FALL ARTS  
& CRAFTS FESTIVAL  
Saturday,  
October 10, 2020

HOLIDAY  
ARTS & CRAFTS FESTIVAL  
Saturday,  
November 14, 2020

• 9:00 am-3pm •

Located at: Riverside Elementary, 220 NW 3rd Street, Brainerd, MN 56401

FREE ADMISSION

OVER 100+ EXHIBITORS

CONCESSIONS

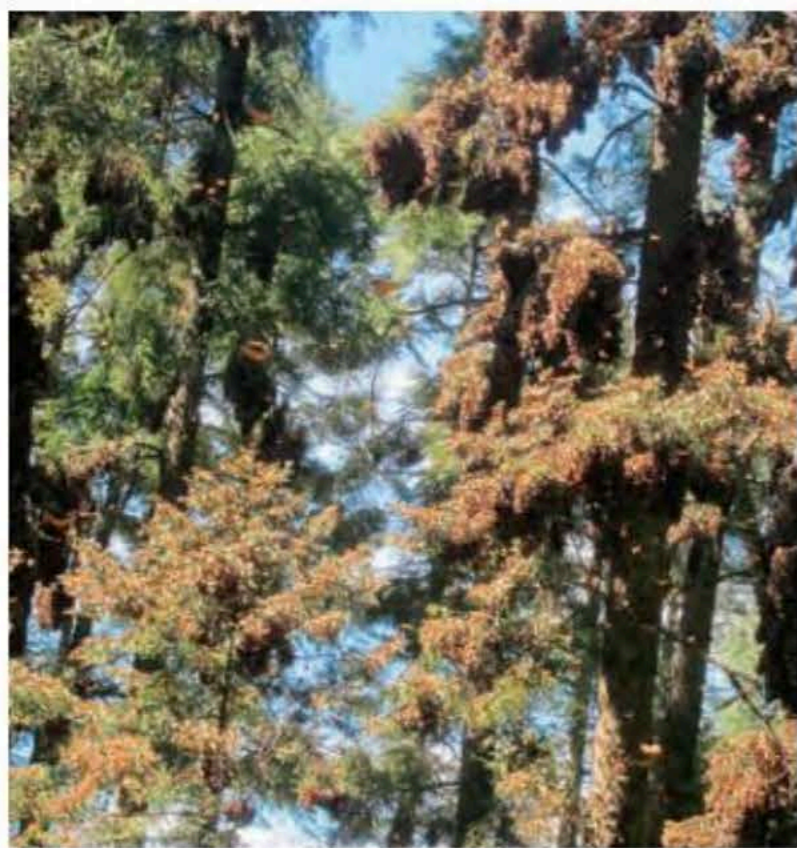


**Brainerd Community Education**

Sponsored by Brainerd Public Schools  
Brainerd Public Schools Community Education 218-454-6954



**"It was beyond belief..." - Jan Kurtz**



A kaleidoscope of monarchs among the oyamel fir trees.

We checked in at the Hotel Don Bruno, only to find more climbing within. The patio rose to the steps leading to the stairs rising to the three stories built into the hillside.

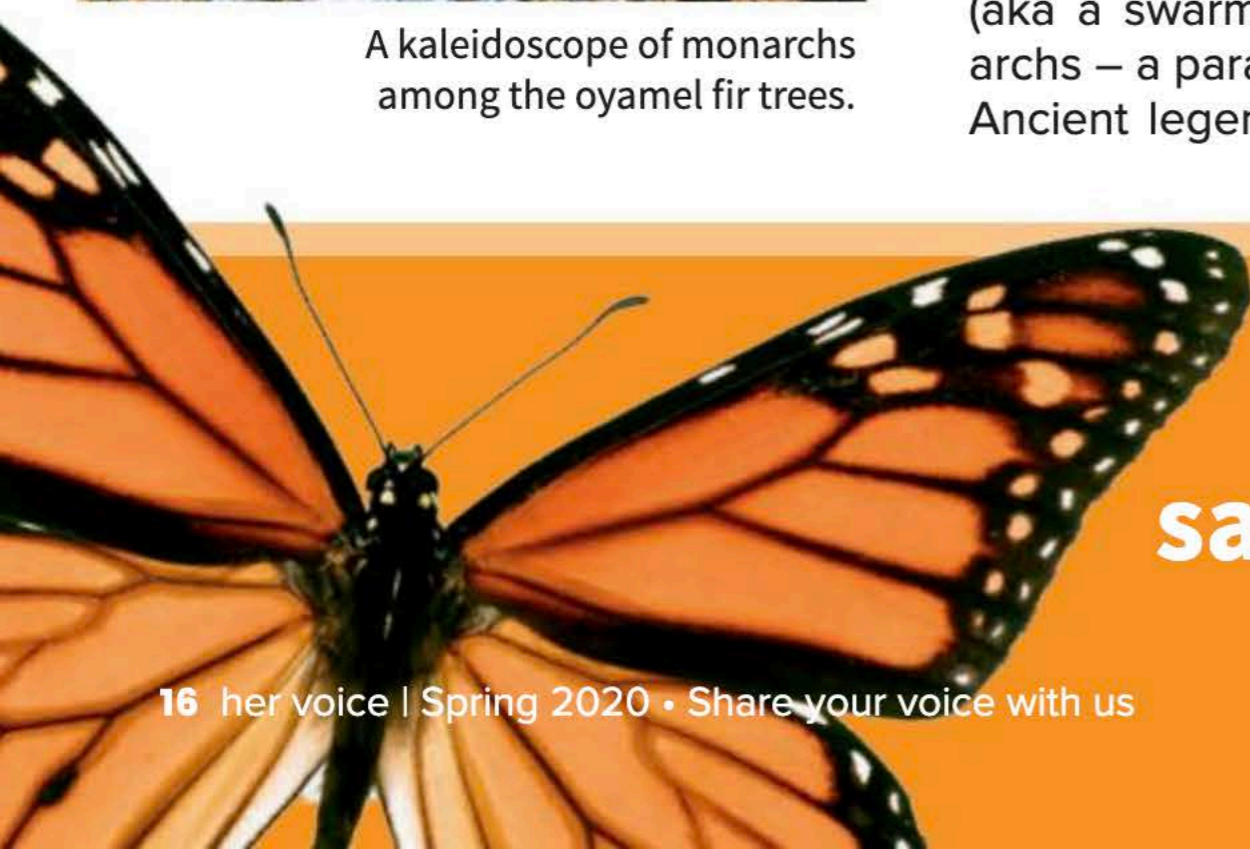
Any warmth from the day left when the sun slid below the mountaintops. We were at 8,460 feet and had been advised to bring warm clothes. Our room included a chimenea, fireplace, but the firewood wasn't cured and gave little heat. After a hot shower, we put on all of our clothes, and burrowed into our beds. Tomorrow we would finally be embraced by a kaleidoscope (aka a swarm, flock, bunch) of monarchs – a paradise of ethereal beauty. Ancient legends speak of deepened

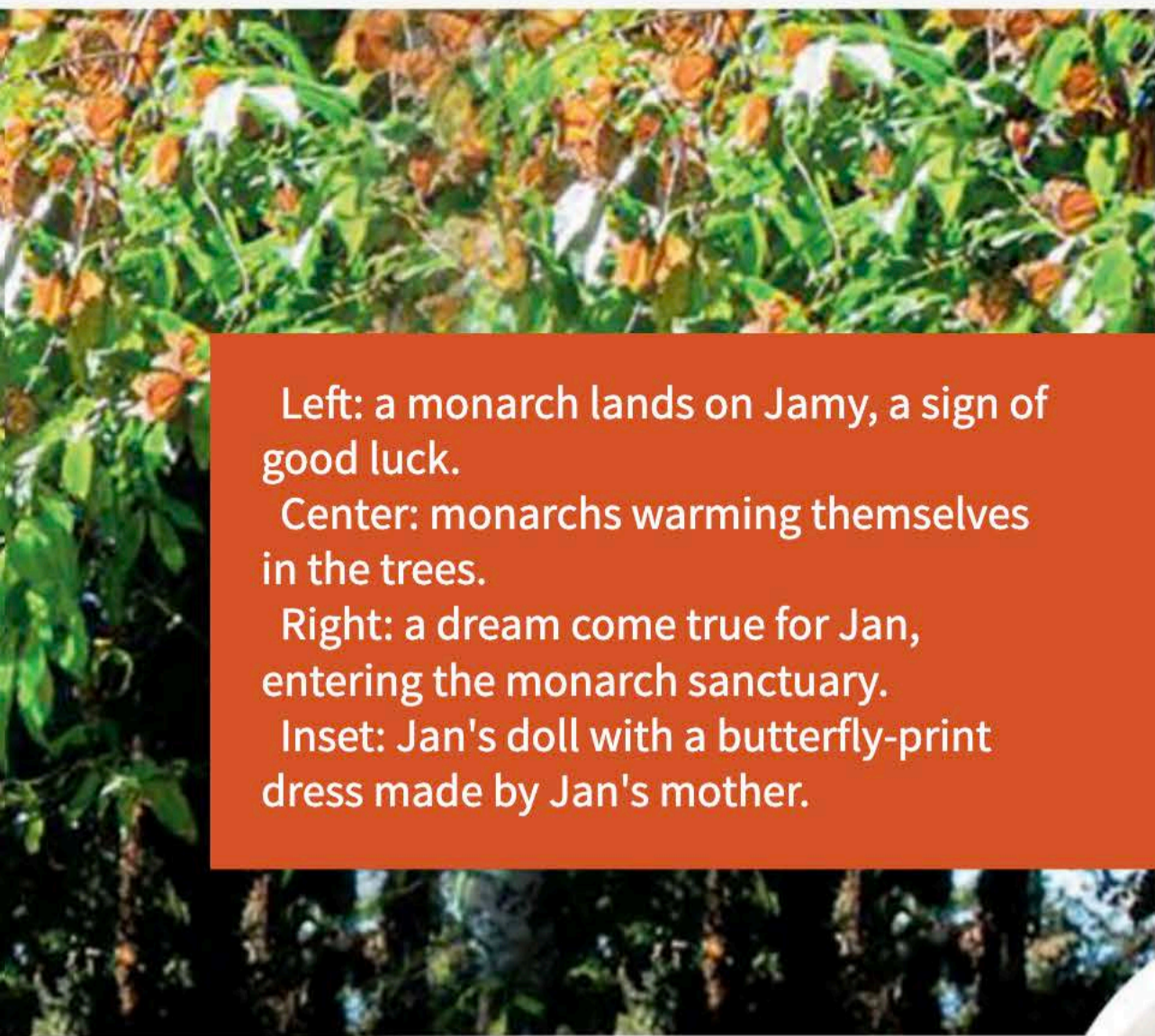
spirituality, soul metamorphosis, and messages delivered to the gods. A bolt of excitement ran through me as we chattered ourselves to sleep.

The sun rose into a glorious blue sky. The van wove its way higher, passing a man with his firewood laden burro. We turned right at the butterfly mural and came to a stop at the line of wooden-planked shops, a gauntlet of butterfly commercialism. The boardwalk led us narrowly past embroidered monarch tablecloths, hair pins, napkin holders, paintings, and finally, hiking sticks, in case the path ahead seemed too steep.

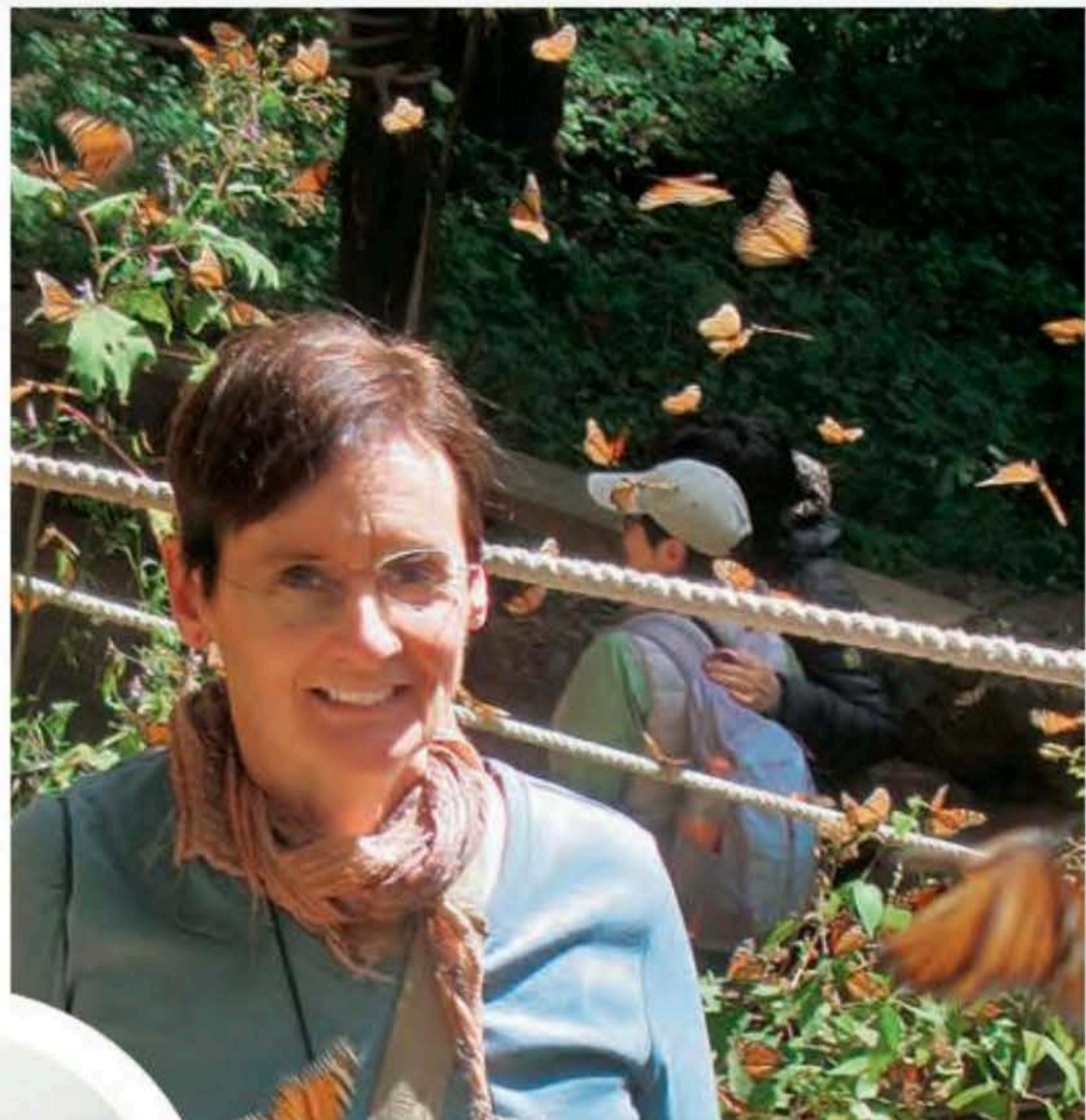
Our footfalls fell silent when we stepped off the boardwalk onto the

**Eight ways you can help save the monarch butterflies:**





Left: a monarch lands on Jamy, a sign of good luck.  
 Center: monarchs warming themselves in the trees.  
 Right: a dream come true for Jan, entering the monarch sanctuary.  
 Inset: Jan's doll with a butterfly-print dress made by Jan's mother.



forest floor. The clatter of vendors calling to us in broken English faded. Towering pines replaced taco stands. One, then two, then dozens of monarchs rose off the nearby bushes, snatching my breath away. I exhaled slowly, releasing a prayer. Reverently, we proceeded to our waiting guide. He whispered a welcome before reminding us to stay on the path and maintain quiet. Together we climbed to an opening and stopped.

It was beyond belief. Pine branches looked like giant hanging hives quivering, pulsating, shedding thousands of butterflies into the updraft. Hundreds of monarchs flittered over the wet rocks of trickling streams, soaring up, then diving down for a dainty drink. So much life in the air. So much death on the ground. Our guide picked up two lifeless butter-

flies, pointed out the black dots distinguishing the male, and explained that this generation mates and dies here. It is the next generation that begins the return trip north. It takes four generational cycles to complete the nearly 3,000-mile migration. Incomprehensible. Amazing.

Amazing to be among an estimated 200 million monarchs. We gasped, giggled, grinned. My heart lifted; my soul filled. I made it.

Now, what can we do to assure that they make it, too? ■

**Jan Kurtz's** roots are in the north country, but Spanish continues to add extra dimensions to her life's journey. Since retiring from teaching Spanish, her travels cycle between family, the Wisconsin cabin and the occasional foray across borders. She is writing a book about the surprising places and unexpected adventures opened to her by virtue of speaking Spanish. Find her writings at: [www.janetkurtz.com](http://www.janetkurtz.com).

**Are you ready to simplify your life by downsizing?**

Each Listing Comes With 4 Hours of:  
 Decision Making • Organizing and Sorting  
 Home Staging • Service Referrals  
 Prepare, List AND Sell Your House



**Making Transitions Manageable**

**Jana Froemming**  
 REALTOR®/Home Stager  
 218-820-3282  
[SimplyDownsizeHome.com](http://SimplyDownsizeHome.com)



1. Don't use pesticides in your garden.
2. Avoid genetically engineered foods.
3. Plant native Milkweed.
4. Create a monarch way-station.
5. Join the fight to stop climate change.

6. Use Forest Stewardship Council (FSC) certified wood.
7. Learn more.
8. Spread the word.