

The making of my moth doll

BY RACHEL MYREN

It was in mid December on a dull gray day when the question came to me, "What do I really want?" This idea of *what I wanted* was new territory for me. What stirred in me was that I wanted to make a doll!

So, I set aside my irrational fears and garnered up the courage to just start this doll having no idea what was to come of it. I started with the head. Once it was stuffed, I needle-sculpted the facial features. I then held this little muslin doll head in the palm of my hand. In that very sweet moment, "she" told me she "wanted to be a moth!" I thought to myself, "a moth... really? What kind of moth? And, *why a moth?*" Clearly, this doll knew what she needed to become and I had been *chosen* to create her. It felt like such an honor! I realized my role in this project was to listen and to trust. In a vague way this felt exciting to me in the dull of winter.

For months she sat on my worktable in varying stages of development and frequently my sewing clients would ask, "What is she going to look like when she is done?" I had no idea! It was as if she was unfolding in my hands, little by little as I worked on her. I had lots of resistance when it came to making the wings. This,



Harken's transformation took seamstress Rachel Myren around 200 hours to complete.

I knew, was an inner personal resistance. These wings represented a profoundly transformed state. Something was also going on inside myself. I, too, was being transformed by this process.

Insects have an exoskeleton made of chitin so I represented these tiny scales on the limbs with the applied dull lace over the sheen of the iridescent silk dupioni fabric. Her forearms have skin showing



through the lace indicating that she is still changing. Moths also often have dull-colored, furry bodies. I "just happened" to find the perfectly colored taupe fur for her thighs, bottom and back on either side of her newly emerging wings. Her "petticoat" is made of white fluffy feathers, which implies lightness and coming flight. For her hair I found the perfect combination of taupe and teal twisted together, which I fashioned into pigtails of youthful-looking looped braids. Somehow they reflect the newness of her emerging condition. Due to the imbalance created by the heavy glass beading on the backs of her wings, I had to add three fishing weights inside her bottom. A little grounding is not a bad idea!

The question that most often came up was, "Why a moth and not a beautiful butterfly?" My answer was that moths are comparatively unnoticed. We marvel over butterflies and their graceful beauty. Moths are not thought of as beautiful, but they are if you really look closely. Both moths and butterflies go through a significant metamorphosis entering into a still, chrysalis-like state, *alone*, to later

emerge completely transformed with wings. Moths also seek out the light, which is what this doll is all about!

One day, about five months into her making, it came to me that her name was to be Harken, which in Old English means to actively listen. As it turns out, Harken is a woman who is *in the process of morphing* into a moth. She is aware of something changing within her. She can sense the emerging wings, the antennae and even the thorax, but she is not able to see any of these changes because they are happening behind and above her. From the front, Harken is dull in color, much like a moth's body, but from the back there are bright colors emerging on her wings. Harken's upward expression is listening attentively to gain an understanding of what she is to do with these emerging, brightly colored "gifts," her newly changing life form.

To finish, I gave her a single teardrop on her necklace, which represents the bitter-sweetness of sloughing off the old and the taking on of the new. Change is rarely easy.

Doll-making can be a powerful and personally transformative journey. The fact is that the doll is me. Like a moth that is so often not noticed, my life has been largely consumed by invisible work that is noticed only when it is not yet done. Harken represents the transformation I am experiencing at what I call my mid-life upheaval. I'm glad that I *accepted the inner challenge* to listen and create Harken for she seemed to know what she needed to become.

Now, after nine months, Harken is finally complete. She continues her harkening—gently reminding me to sit still, quiet my thoughts, actively listen and to trust in this sometimes daunting inner process of mid-life upheaval.

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Docile moth provides photo ops

BY LINDA KAPPEN

The second largest and one of the most recognizable insect orders in the world is Lepidoptera, which includes butterflies and moths. Moths make up the largest number in this order. There are 150,000 to 250,000 species of moths with more still to be described by scientists. The United States has around 11,000 moth species, and in southwestern Oregon alone there are 1,000 known species.



Pacific Green Sphinx Moth found at Applegate School. Photo: Linda Kappen.

The Pacific Green Sphinx Moth (*Proserpinus lucidus*, formerly known as *Arctonotus lucidus*) is of the Sphingidae family that includes a majority of the moth species. Its range is in the Pacific Northwest.

This moth is on the wing very early in the season from mid January to April. In southwestern Oregon the habitats for this species are oak woodlands or chaparral and mixed grasslands.

In the caterpillar stage, food plants are evening primrose (*Oenothera dentata* var. *campestris*) and clarkias. Some sources say this moth does not feed as an adult; others say it feeds on flower nectar.

At night you may see males of this species attracted to light. This beautiful Pacific Green Sphinx Moth (see photo) was found at Applegate School one evening during February 2010. Last winter several

moths were observed under porch lights at the school. There are many similar habitats in our area and it is worth a search on your porch to see the heart-shaped designs, bright olive-green color with rosy-pink and light-brown lined markings.

This moth with its docile nature will let you photograph and observe it for a long period of time. Observing moths can be fun with their diversity of shapes, sizes, colors, and fascinating patterns.

More information about moths can be found at the PNW Moths website (pnwmoths.biol.wvu.edu) and Butterflies and Moths of North America website (butterfliesandmoths.org).

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Ed. Note: Linda Kappen earned a naturalist certification from Siskiyou Field Institute (SFI) and has hosted a two-day butterfly/moth course there.

Diana Coogle joins the Applegater Board of Directors

Diana Coogle, long-time Applegate denizen and writer, has joined the *Applegater* Board of Directors. Jumping in with both feet, she also wrote a story for this issue about some talented local artisans.

After growing up in Georgia and studying at Cambridge University as a Marshall Scholar, Diana moved to an Applegate mountainside where she lived without electricity, closer to neighbors in nature than to human neighbors, teaching part-time at Rogue Community College (RCC) and writing commentaries for Jefferson Public Radio (JPR), happily half a hermit, for more than 35 years. In 2006 she began a weekly commute to Eugene to pursue a PhD in English and to teach at the University of Oregon.

During graduate-school years she acquired a wonderful granddaughter and a new house (on her same land) designed by her son, where she now lives, still happily, with common electrical conveniences. After graduating in 2012, she is home full-time, continuing teaching at RCC and writing. Diana has published three books of selected JPR commentaries: *Fire*



The Applegater board is that much stronger with the addition of Diana Coogle.

from the *Dragon's Tongue* (an Oregon Book Award finalist), *Living with All My Senses: 25 Years of Life on the Mountain*, and *An Explosion of Stars*. In addition, with Janeen Sathre, she has published *Favorite Hikes of the Applegate: A Trail Guide with Stories and Histories*.

Besides her many years as an Applegater, Diana brings to the *Applegater* board her past experience on other boards along with journalism and writing expertise.