

March 2024

## Letter from the Executive Director

When was the first time you realized the effect a leader had on you?

How would you describe that effect? Was it a confidence-building experience?

Did the experience help to change the trajectory of your life in some way big or small?

I grew up in a home with parents who were trained as teachers and school administrators. We talked a lot about teaching and teachers and learning, plus art since our mom was also an art major. She grew up in a household of nature lovers, so we also spent a lot of time focused on the natural world around the village in southern Minnesota where we lived when my sister and I were in elementary school.

This facet of our lives led my sister to take a Monarch butterfly to kindergarten for show and tell. She had caught the Monarch in a butterfly net and placed it in a jar with a stick and a sprig of common milkweed that bloomed along the uncut borders of corn and soybean fields surrounding our home.

My sister's teacher asked her to leave the butterfly at school overnight, which my sister naturally agreed to do. What she didn't know was the teacher would liberate the Monarch from the jar without including my sister in the decision to let the butterfly go.

That small act by my sister's kindergarten teacher changed her life and mine too. Why? Our empathetic and always creative mom decided that we would learn more about Monarchs, including their egg-laying habits on milkweed and their metamorphosis from egg to caterpillar to butterfly over the course of a summer.

Every summer from then on, our mom led us on Monarch butterfly egg foraging expeditions in the ditches along country roads in Freeborn County to find eggs to take home, observe their growth into caterpillars (fed by further foraging of milkweed leaves), followed by the formation of a translucent green chrysalis and then rebirth as a butterfly on our kitchen counter.

Our mom has continued this practice for 55 years. My sister has dedicated her career to environmental policy action and environmental public health on local, national and international levels. And this summer I received a state grant to plant a pollinator garden, with the goal of supporting Monarchs in my new yard in Minneapolis.

Seemingly small acts of leaders can and do make a real impact on our lives. Those acts can be a profound source of learning and a call to action too.

Do you have a story about the ripple effects of leadership? I'd love to hear about it.

Until then, please watch for updates on [LinkedIn](#) and our website about our exciting new Research Fellows and their projects.



- Brian Hammer, PhD

Executive Director | [bhammer@t2pri.org](mailto:bhammer@t2pri.org) | +1 612.843.5017

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Contact: [bhammer@t2pri.org](mailto:bhammer@t2pri.org) | +1 612.843.5017