

MY

July/August 2015
Oakland County Michigan

FROM
CATERPILLAR
TO
Butterfly

CHIP
& LISA
ST. CLAIR

ST CLAIR
Butterfly
Foundation

My Life

From Caterpillar to Butterfly



Chip
& Lisa
ST. CLAIR

Chip: Versace Collection Jacket, \$1095, T shirt \$185, both available at L'Uomo Vogue, Bloomfield Hills, 248.855.7788.

Lisa: Black Blouse, \$68, Peacock Room, Detroit, 313.559.5500. Gold Line earrings, Wink Boutique, Grosse Pointe, 313.882.8100.

All Cover and Cover Story photo's taken at The Planterra Conservatory, 7315 Drake Rd, West Bloomfield, MI, 248.661.1515.

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Sometimes there is no one to console us. All we have is ourselves. It is from a time and place of utter desperation that written words or artistic expression can impact us the most. Music, dance, cooking, gardening, meditation, art, and poetry offer boundless power to those who are willing to see, to listen, and to allow the experience to transform and grow them into what they are truly meant to be.

*Out of the night that covers me,
Black as the pit from pole to pole*

From his early memory as a small boy, Chip St. Clair recalls only violence from his father. The kicking and beatings from a man who used profanity as punctuation loomed in his memory and overrode his childhood with terror. There were no warm family gatherings or moments, only a helpless alcoholic mother and paralyzing fear. His father used any excuse to justify his monstrous raging and physical abuse.

*I thank whatever gods may be
For my unconquerable soul.*

It was the poem Invictus, by Ernest Henley, that saved eight-year-old Chip when his father threw him out of a row boat in the middle of Lake Michigan. He braced against the frigid dark water with the poem fresh in his mind from that morning. Against the odds, he was able to summon enough strength to make it to a raft before hypothermia set in.

When Chip was 11 years old, they were living in the International Towers apartments in Long Beach, California. His father forced him outside of a balcony railing on the 28th floor and proceeded to pound on his hands as he clutched the railing in terror. All the while his father was teasing him and telling his mother that Chip was trying to commit suicide.

As Chip grew into his teen years, he began to mimic his father's irreverence for his own life. He learned not to love or care for himself and took big risks and engaged in reckless behavior. He felt no love for himself and saw no future.

*In the fell clutch of circumstance
I have not winced nor cried aloud.*

Through it all, Chip survived. He rationalized his father's behavior as a result of post traumatic stress disorder from the Vietnam War. He was told his dad was a war hero, a decorated veteran, and former prisoner of war. Of course he would have some anger issues.

Chip did not know that his father was really an escaped prisoner, a convicted killer under the alias of David St. Clair, whose real name was Michael Dean Grant—one of America's top most-wanted killers. He did not know that the reason they moved so frequently was so that his father could avoid being caught.

As a young man, Chip discovered that his mother helped Michael Dean Grant escape from prison and they had been on the run for 26 years, all of Chip's life. Their cover was blown by Chip's girlfriend, Lisa—who is now his wife—when she called the police on Grant when he dislocated Chip's arm while beating on him in a fit of rage. Michael Dean Grant returned to prison.

*Under the bludgeonings of chance
My head is bloody, but unbowed.*



A charcoal self portrait of Chip St Clair drawn by Chip at age 16

While both his parents were in jail, Chip had the chance to open his father's black trunk that he was never allowed to look in. Inside, he found news articles, bags with baby teeth, children's hair, and pictures of other young boys with the name "Chip" written on them. His father was a suspect in the Oakland County child killer case, which remains unsolved today. The depth of his father's corruption, his secret life, his violent tendencies, and a life of profound lies poured out of that trunk. He was not a Vietnam veteran or a war hero. He was not a Green Beret captain. He never received any metals of honor. He was not a prisoner of war.

He was a sociopath who murdered a little boy.

*Beyond this place of wrath and tears
Looms but the Horror of the shade,*

The trunk contained a forged birth certificate, social security number, and documents and papers showing loans and accounts taken out in Chip's name. His own parents stole his identity. He was only in his early 20's and was tens of thousands of dollars in debt, debt that he was never aware of. His identity, his real age and true birth date remain a mystery to him still. The discovery of his father's true identity devastated Chip and cast him into a hopeless search for answers to his own identity. There are no words that can describe the empty feeling when someone loses connection to their parents, and this disconnect was particularly torturous.



Chip; Etro Striped Shirt, \$375, L'Uomo Vogue, Bloomfield Hills, 248.855.7788

Lisa; Sanctuary Purple Blouse, \$69, Meghan Marion, Royal Oak, 248.268.4781;
Butterfly Necklace, \$89, Sole Sisters, Royal Oak, 248.547.7653

*And yet the menace of the years
Finds, and shall find me, unafraid.*

The chilling reality that unfolded for Chip St. Clair first brought depression. He attempted suicide and, like many abused children, was at risk of becoming something of a monster like his father. Violence, torture, and masterful manipulation were all he had known. He credits Lisa for providing the emotional lifeline that helped him to recover from the complete loss of himself and his parents—the only family that he really knew.

"The unintended consequence of my father's violence was that I learned that fear is a tool that you give to someone else to use against you." says Chip St. Clair.

*It matters not how strait the gate,
How charged with punishments the scroll,*

Throughout his childhood filled with brutality and unpredictable assaults from his father, Chip escaped through reading. He read book after book after book, losing himself in the words. He relished poems and stories that took him to places far away from his own desperate life. He would also draw and paint and listen to music when he had the opportunity. Immersion in art was a great escape route from circumstances and memories that haunted him. Through his creative expression and the enjoyment of artistic release, Chip found his footing, his strength, and his future.

*I am the master of my fate:
I am the captain of my soul.*

What Chip did was go one step beyond saving his own life. His self-soothing techniques of creative expression have transformed this child of violence and deception into a gentle man of peace, compassion, and character. Now Chip is channeling his knowledge, strength, and resources into helping other at-risk children.

Truly, Chip St. Clair's life represents a lighted path for many children who have suffered at the hands of adults in their lives. This same butterfly theme is the basis for his 2008 book about his life called, "The Butterfly Garden."

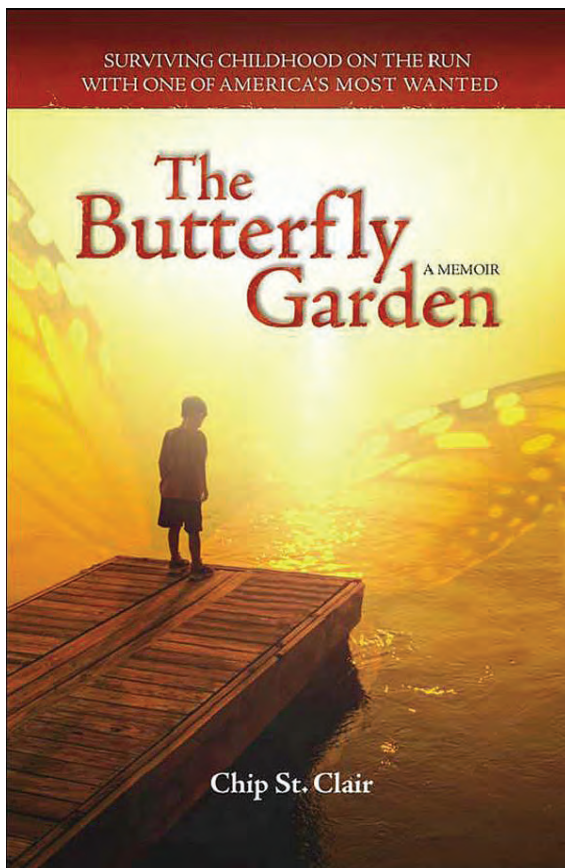
Chip recognizes the symbolism in everything and sees that there is so much for us to learn. Some years ago, he visited the butterfly house at the Detroit Zoo where he had his revelation regarding the butterfly metaphor.

"I remember looking around at all the amazing butterflies. It is such an amazing place. I noticed how vulnerable but

beautiful these creatures are. But what was most interesting was the people that were there in the butterfly house with us," he reflects. "The people reacting to the butterflies, from the smallest of children to the oldest men, they had the same expression on their faces. These little creatures unknowingly disarmed them. Their emotions were reduced to innocence and purity. That was all that was left. There was just this deep appreciation for the beauty. There was no judging, no pain, and no anguish. It was just purity."

Chip began to see the world as a butterfly garden. "The purpose of the caterpillar, by its nature, is to eat. It consumes, devours, and destroys everything around it to get the fuel it needs to make the rest of its journey, and then it goes into chrysalis, a cocoon. Within weeks, it emerges as a butterfly to pollinate. So now this creature that used to destroy its surroundings, now helps to create a beautiful world from flower to flower."

Chip relates, "What if our purpose in life is to be like a caterpillar that metamorphosed into a butterfly through transformation and introspection?"



The Butterfly Garden ~ A Memoir about Chip St. Clair's life, written in 2008.



Chip; Ingram Shirt, \$325, Ceramica Gray Jeans, \$289, both available at L'Uomo Vogue, Bloomfield Hills, 248.855.7788

Lisa; Talia Dress, \$110, Talia Aspen Vest, \$110, both available at Sole Sisters, Royal Oak, 248.547.7653; Black Cuff, Ann Taylor, \$68

We all are at some point in our lives on a quest to figure out who we are. I had to do that in a more literal sense."

Indeed, it is clear that he has succeeded.

THE FOUNDATION

With the help of Anne Nechal, their effervescent Executive Director, and a supportive Board of Directors, Chip's creative immersion methods have become part of his philosophy and have been developed into best practice programs that he and Lisa sponsor through their nonprofit organization, the St. Clair Butterfly Foundation. The foundation is aptly named for the metamorphosis effect that Chip experienced as an abused child into a healed adult. That same process and the foundation's programs have been adopted by the Madison Heights School District, with flagship programming at Madison Preparatory, the district's alternative high school. Over time, the results are being studied and measured. The outcomes for the children of abuse in these programs are stunning.



Overall skill level and proficiency in the program's curriculum is easy to track, as well as the overall elevated grades in other courses for these children who previously limped along and held no personal investment in their outcome. There are also intangible aspects that the program clearly invokes, such as elevated confidence, self-esteem and self-respect. There is an aspect of community and shared investment in each other.

"There is a powerful psychological effect these programs have on the children," emphasizes Chip. "This is not an 'artsy-cool' thing. There is a lot of science behind this." Studies have demonstrated that this type of creative expression has been shown to influence brain waves and synaptic connections in the brain.

"Through our programs, we provide our kids with power tools," conveys Anne Nechal. "All of our programs have built in success. There is no way for these kids to fail." This has been shown to be an important aspect for children who feel the world has not given them any breaks or allocated them any success.

"Kids in our programs have—for one reason or another—already failed in the traditional school setting," explains Anne. "They find their success in every project they undertake through the foundation. We give them an opportunity to use their voice and their minds."

"During Halloween last year, we got some pumpkins to carve. We discovered that some of these kids have never touched a pumpkin or dealt with carving a pumpkin," shared Chip. It is well documented that children learn through creative play and personal exploring. These children have been deprived in a very deep way of this type of learning.

"Some kids don't thrive without playing. Our programs are extremely interactive, so the kids do very well through

creative play and artistic expression," says Anne. "They don't have to sit or be quiet the whole time, and it helps them to lower their walls and become more accepting of school and themselves. We don't talk at them, we talk with them; they find their voice and, therefore, find their success."

This is about taking children who face neglect, fear, despair, and abuse in their life and helping them to find their fierce spirit and their gentle heart. The programs help kids to be strong, calm, and resilient in the face of adversity and change. They heal and learn to grow their ability to create, to tolerate, to accept, and to forgive.

Their mission: To be the leaders in the prevention of the cycle of violence against children and youth through intervention and rehabilitation, focusing on evidence-based creative arts programs.

The St. Clair Butterfly Foundation will be working with the Detroit Lions Academy through a new partnership with Neighborhood Legal Services of Michigan starting this month for four weeks. They will be doing programs that deal with anger management and conflict resolution. The Foundation is actively looking for more opportunities to insert these creative programs into other schools and camps.

"My biggest take-away from all of this has been in understanding leadership, the power of people, and the power of one person's ability to make a change," says Chip. "The goals of our foundation cannot be accomplished alone. To give children hope, we need help. We need an army of volunteers, we need compassionate corporate sponsors, and we need strong community partners and passionate individuals who truly want to be the change. And so our call to action, our challenge is this: If this resonates with you, how can you help to leave a legacy of change?"

Are you ready to be the change and help give each and every child a voice? If you would like to discuss an opportunity, or if you would like more information about the St. Clair Butterfly Foundation, or contribute monetarily, please contact Anne Nechal at 248-330-4164, or email at info@SCBF.org.

