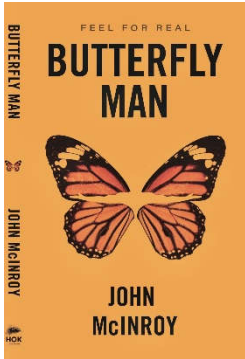


Book Review by Ronwyn Bentham



Book: Butterfly Man
Author: John McInroy
ISBN 9780620789479

Feel for Real

“This is everyone’s story. This isn’t just a book. It’s a guidebook to a healthier new world. It’s part of an educational initiative that seeks to inspire others to look for more honest answers, to see through the institutions that have made us sick, and find the energy to create our own solutions.”

As readers, we may have many fascinating stories to share about our reading experiences; be it fairy tales, novels or autobiographies. At times, we may even find ourselves at a loss for words when attempting to describe these experiences. These stories augment our appreciation for reading. For this review of *Butterfly Man*, written by John McInroy, I can only attempt to describe my journey with the book and its author. How I came to this book, or rather, how this book came to me, has certainly contributed to my experience of reading it.

It was a sunny Saturday afternoon and I was spending my leisure time beside a hockey field. I was drawn to a barefooted man with long hair, wearing a dungaree. To me, he was the definition of freedom. In between watching the hockey game, it was hard not to glance over and notice how colourful he was. A friend noticed my interest and mentioned that the colourful man had recently written a

book, *Butterfly Man*. Needless to say, I was curious. After the game, I introduced myself and shared that I was interested in reading his book. He accepted a short interview on another day to share more about his book. I was not as prepared for the interview since I had not had the opportunity to read the book; however, we agreed to keep it casual and allowed the conversation to flutter where it may.

Any feelings of anxiety had disappeared upon greeting John. My interview with him was the beginning of my reading of *Butterfly Man*. While not everyone may have the opportunity to meet the author, I would propose that reading his book comes close enough. It's difficult to define the genre as it is part memoir, autobiography, poetry, and in some sense, it is a conversation. Nevertheless, it is the true story of John McInroy. The ways in which he delivers the truth about himself, is contentedly raw. He uses simple vocabulary to express his deep pain, and for the reader there is no way to shy away from this. The language is uniquely South African, embedded in a poetic style. Reading *Butterfly Man* may even invite you to a new definition of love – not in a romantic or sexual sense, but the love that connects us as human beings. It invites you to an understanding that is free of judgement towards ourselves and others.

John describes who he was as, “a digital form and I left the human part behind”. John was a star athlete, actor, model and founder of two social movements. He was possibly living the life many young men aspired to live, but these accolades did not express who he really was, and, in a sense, they were further away from who he now is. For John, writing the book was a cathartic experience, and sharing it took courage. When I asked him what had inspired him to write, he said “the words inside of me are heavy and words outside of me are less heavy”.

John expresses that his “medical defect” had brought him to a place of self-loathing and suffering, as there seemed to be no place in our society to express who he really was. While the “defect” he mentions is at the core of his story, it highlights how we not only hide from others, we hide the truth from ourselves. There are pages in his book where he scribbles words which signify how the words appear in his head. Often, we have words that scream at us, but it is only loud enough for us to hear. The fear of speaking these words

aloud or writing them down is our fear of letting others know how we truly feel about ourselves.

In my opinion, *Butterfly Man*, is one of those books that are more than a collection of words on page, it is the human - who not only liberates himself, but each reader that finds the book in their hands. He also unashamedly addresses real concerns in our world. In a way, *Butterfly Man* is a protest to conforming to structures which are harmful to a human being. It is a voice of its own, enabling the voices of many who are afraid to face their fears and ignominies. This voice echoes Ubuntu and invites one to feel for real.

John spent 15-days in two different locations to write this book. He wrote 77,000 words on his cell phone. He praises his editor, Emile Raymond, who contributed to this work of art; highlighting how he invites collaboration into his world.

I conclude this review by saying that when a caterpillar undergoes its stage of transformation and grows its wings, it is no longer named a caterpillar, but is seen and known as a butterfly. To the writer, Bodhi, thank you for having the courage to fly and for sharing your story to inspire others to be brave enough to do the same.

