Butterfly Peace Garden
Far away on a tropical island there is a place called The Butterfly Peace Garden. It is an enclosed space, like a small park. In the center of the park is a huge (for a child 36 inches tall) mountain made entirely of wet clay. It is so big that a dozen children can circle it and have space to make figures of clay on the side of the mountain. The figures may be of a bird, or fox, or a butterfly, or a snake; for all of these animals reside in this enclosed space too. Each day for up to 9 months the children come to this garden to play and watch the animals as they go about their business of finding food and creating sons and daughters of themselves.

In the garden, besides the animals and the cages where the animals go to sleep at night, there are palm trees, a 3-story tree house, the replica of a wrecked pirate’s ship, and areas of sand. The children come to the garden to play. The children come to the garden because their parents let them. The children come because they find a place where they begin to feel their feelings, about what happened to them during the war which ended not too long ago. After weeks of visits to the garden, the feelings spill out on to the ground and the images fly out of the brain on to the palm branches and clouds above. And the children play with the feelings and images, incorporating them into stories, told in their own words and illustrated with drawings by their own hand.

As the weeks go by, the children band together to tell these stories as if they were plays. They create costumes for the characters in the story; they create some other props too. And the story is then told to all the inhabitants of the butterfly garden, to the children and the adult animators who have helped these stories become visual. Meanwhile the animals though go about their business; their brains are not big enough to take in the stories, though some of them participate as actors in the story.

At night the children return to their homes on the island, to the safe-keeping of the adults in their homes. The children bring with them what they saw and heard in The Butterfly Garden that day, along with the stories they watched and heard, and the drawings they made. Towards the end of their time in the garden, the bus that picks them up each morning may take all of their friends to the home of their parents and perform the play that they wrote, complete with dialog, costumes, props, and puppets.

What happens during their time in The Butterfly Garden is healing, healing wounds to the brain that resulted from what they saw and experienced during the year the war.

The Butterfly Garden is a creation of one of the Jesuits in this war-torn area. It re-defines what it means to be a missionary. He saw the need, obtained the funding and assembled a staff of animators. Their collective imaginations created the Garden and what it contains. Their belief is that children, healed from bad experiences, will not injure others in those ways when they become adults. That is why it is called a “Peace” garden. It spreads peace to future generations of children.