

Chasing Butterflies

Clifton Fadiman, in *The Little, Brown Book Of Anecdotes*, tells a story about Vladimir Nabokov, the Russian-born novelist who achieved popular success with his novels *Lolita* (1955), *Pale Fire* (1962) and *Invitation of a Small Creature* (1969). One summer in the 1940s, Nabokov and his family stayed with James Laughlin at Alta, Utah, where Nabokov took the opportunity to enlarge his collection of butterflies and moths. Fadiman relates:

Nabokov's fiction has never been praised for its compassion; he was single-minded if nothing else. One evening at dusk he returned from his day's excursion saying that during hot pursuit near Bear Gulch he had heard someone groaning most piteously down by the stream. 'Did you stop' Laughlin asked him.

'No, I had to get the butterfly.' The next day the corpse of an aged prospector was discovered in what has been renamed, in Nabokov's honor, Dead Man's Gulch."

While people around us are dying, how often we chase butterflies!

Vernon Grounds