

How Turtle Flew South for the Winter *

It was the time of year when the leaves turned golden yellow and fell from the aspens. Turtle was walking around wondering what to do. All the other turtles had buried themselves in the mud at the bottom of the pond, and Turtle was bored and lonely.

He heard a lot of noise and looked up to see hundreds of birds sitting in the trees.

"Hey, what's going on?" asked Turtle. He didn't want to miss out on anything.

"Don't you know?" the birds said. "We're getting ready to fly south for the winter."

"Why are you going to do that?" asked Turtle.

"Don't you know anything?" the birds replied. "Soon it's going to get cold and the snow will fall. There won't be any food to eat. Down south it's warm and sunny all the time. Besides, there's plenty of food."

Turtle was feeling pretty hungry himself, so when the birds mentioned food, he was even more curious.

"Can I come with you?" he asked.

"You have to fly to go south. You're a turtle, and you can't fly," the birds said.

By now, Turtle really wanted to go. He begged and pleaded until the birds agreed.

"Can you hold onto a stick with your mouth?" the birds asked.

"Sure," said Turtle. "Once I grab onto something, no one can make me let go until I'm ready."

"Okay," said the birds. "Then hold on hard to this stick. These two big birds will each grab one end of it with their claws. That way they can carry you along. But, remember, you have to keep your mouth shut!"

"That'll be easy," boasted Turtle. "Let's go! I'm ready for all that food and warm weather in the south."

So Turtle grabbed onto the middle of the stick, and two big birds grabbed each end. They lifted Turtle off the ground. Soon they were high in the sky.

Turtle had never been so high off the ground. He felt dizzy and everything seemed so far away. He couldn't see his old pond or the woods nearby. He started to wonder where he was. He wanted to ask the birds, but he couldn't talk with his mouth closed.

Turtle tried to get their attention. He rolled his eyes, but the two birds just kept on flying. He tried waving his legs, but the birds still kept flying. Now Turtle was getting upset. He made a sound in his throat: "Mmmmmph," trying to get the birds to look at him, but it didn't work.

Finally, Turtle lost his patience.

"Why don't you listen to . . ." he began, but that was all he said, for when he opened his mouth to speak, he let go of the stick and started to fall.

Down, down, down he fell, for it was a long way to the ground. He was so scared he pulled his legs and head in to protect himself. When he hit the ground, he landed so hard that his shell cracked.

He was lucky he wasn't killed, but he ached all over. He crawled into a nearby pond, swam to the bottom, and dug into the mud to get as far away from the sky as he could. There he fell asleep until the next spring.

* Adapted from Michael J. Caduto and Joseph Bruchac, *Keepers of the Earth: North American Stories and Environmental Activities for Children* (Golden, Col.: Fulcrum, 1989), 157.

