



## How Turtle Flew South for the Winter

by Joseph Bruchac

IT WAS THE TIME OF YEAR when the leaves start to fall from the aspens.

Turtle was walking around when he saw many birds gathering together in the trees. They were making a lot of noise and Turtle was curious. "Hey," Turtle said. "What is happening?"

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

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

"Don't you know anything?" the birds said. "Soon it's going to be very cold here and the snow will fall. There



won't be much food to eat. Down south it will be warm. Summer lives there all of the time and there's plenty of food."

As soon as they mentioned the food, Turtle became even more interested. "Can I come with you?" he said.

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

But Turtle would not give up. "Isn't there some way you could take me along?" He begged and pleaded. Finally the birds agreed just to get him to stop asking.

"Look here," the birds said, "can you hold onto a stick hard with your mouth?"

"That's no problem at all," Turtle said. "Once I grab onto something no one can make me let go until I am ready."

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

"That's easy," said Turtle. "Now let's go south where Summer keeps all that food." Turtle grabbed onto the middle of the stick and





two big birds came and grabbed each end. They flapped their wings hard and lifted Turtle off the ground. Soon they were high in the sky and headed toward the south.

Turtle had never been so high off the ground before, but he liked it. He could look down and see how small everything looked. But before they had gone too far, he began to wonder where they were. He wondered what the lake was down below him and what those hills were. He wondered how far they had come and how far they would have to go to get to the south where Summer lived. He wanted to ask the two birds who were carrying him, but he couldn't talk with his mouth closed.

Turtle rolled his eyes. But the two birds just kept on flying. Then Turtle tried waving his legs at them, but they acted as if they didn't even notice. Now Turtle was getting upset. If they were going to take him south, then the least they could do was tell him where they were now! "Mmmph," Turtle said, trying to get their attention. It didn't work. Finally Turtle lost his temper.

"Why don't you listen to . . ." but that was all he said, for as soon as he opened his mouth to speak, he had to let go of the stick and he started to fall. Down and down he fell, a long, long way. He was so frightened that he pulled his legs and his head in to protect himself! When he hit the ground he hit so hard that his shell cracked. He was lucky that he hadn't been killed, but he ached all over. He ached so much that he crawled into a nearby pond, swam down to the bottom and dug into the mud to get as far away from the sky as he possibly could. Then he fell asleep and he slept all through the winter and didn't wake up until the spring.

So it is that today only the birds fly south to the land where Summer lives while turtles, who all have cracked shells now, sleep through the winter.

