

This edition contains a beautiful illustrated story for children in transition, based on the RAFT model developed by David Pollock (please see the end for full credits). It is the second of two stories about Theo the chameleon and his family (see Educare September 2021). It will be helpful for families with younger children who are about to move to a new place.

Gill Bryant

**Building a raft**

Theo and his family had been living in the green village for a while now. At school, things had become easier for him after he had changed colours on the football field. His old friends understood him better and asked him every now and then about his experiences in the red village. Theo enjoyed that very much. He also caught up on the many things he had missed, things that had happened in the green village while he was away. In a certain way, he felt home again.

One night, when they were all gathered at the dinner table, Theo's father looked at each of his children very intently. His serious face made Theo nervous. What would his father have to say? Did something bad happen in the village? Was there a problem at Dad's work? But before Theo could give it any more thought, his father started to speak.

"Children, you know that I have been speaking with our pastor the past couple of weeks."

The chameleon children looked at their father curiously.

"The pastor and I have been speaking about another village where the chameleons have never heard of their Creator," their father continued. "It's a very big village, and it is quite far from here. We think that we should move there to tell them about Him. Mother and I would like to know what the three of you think about that."

It remained very quiet at the King family's dinner table. None of the children had expected this. Moving again? Leaving everyone behind – again?

Theo's younger brother Tim was the first one to speak. "Will it be an adventurous journey, Daddy?" he asked.

His father smiled, "Yes, I think so, Tim."

Theo's sister Thessa was the next one to find her voice. "Will I be able to talk with my friends on the phone? Do they have internet there?" she asked.

"I expect so," her father reassured her.

Theo remained quiet. His dad looked at him and said, "What do you think, Theo? Would you like to go?"



Theo looked at his plate. How should he respond? He wasn't very happy to move again now that he had finally started to feel at home in the green village. Also, the red village wasn't too far. This summer he had planned to go and visit his friend Lars there. That would probably no longer be possible if they were to move again. However, if these chameleons have never heard of the Creator, how could he say no? All these thoughts went through Theo's mind. When Theo remained silent, his father spoke again.

"Your mother and I are aware that it will not be easy to leave friends and family behind again. We totally understand that. Saying goodbye is never easy. That's why we will prepare everything well and take time to say goodbye to friends and family. We will learn things about the new place ahead of time so we will know what to expect. You don't have to make a decision right away. Take some time to think about it and talk with the Creator. He can show you His plan." Theo nodded and asked his mom if he could be excused.

That night, Theo stayed awake for a long time. What would the new village look like? Would he be able to make new friends? Would they speak the same language? How would they travel so far? Theo's mind was full of questions. There was no way he could fall asleep now. He kept tossing and turning until he decided he would talk with his Creator.

Of course, the Creator already knew everything. It was not that Theo had to tell Him about his family's plans for Him to know it. Talking with the Creator would help Theo himself, and the Creator had promised to always listen because He cared so much for Theo.

When Theo finished telling the Creator all that was on his mind, he waited. He wanted to listen if the Creator would answer him. After a while, he heard the kind voice of the Creator.

Not an audible voice he could hear with his ears, but with his heart. The more Theo took time to listen, the easier it became to recognize this voice.

“Dear Theo, I am with you. I love you very much, and I will go with you. I will care for you like a good father does. You can give me all your fears. I have created everything, so I am able to carry all your burdens. You don’t have to be afraid.”

After these comforting words from the Creator, Theo fell asleep.

The next morning, Theo still had a lot of questions, and he still didn’t want to say goodbye. However, deep down, he felt peace. Before the others were awake, he went to talk to his father and told him how the Creator had given him peace of mind. Theo’s father was happy about that and reassured his son that they would do everything together as a family.

And that’s exactly what they did that weekend. To be able to go to the other village, they would have to build a raft. Tim and Thessa went looking for strong branches. Theo helped his father cut them into the right size and his mother kept an eye on the building plans. She also prepared a wonderful lunch because everyone got very hungry from the hard labour. They gathered at the picnic table, thanked the Creator for the good food, and enjoyed the nice meal consisting of green beetles and a ladybird that their mother had kept for this special day. It was also a reminder of their time in the red village.

“How was school, yesterday?” Mom asked. “It was great, Mom. The whole break I played with Linda, and we did crafts in the afternoon,” Thessa replied.

“I looked up some things about the village on the other side of the lake, for an essay,” Theo said.

Tim quickly took a big bite of his beetle burger, so he couldn’t answer. His mom noticed it, but didn’t say anything. However, when she joined Tim and Thessa later to look for branches, she moved closer to Tim to ask him about his time at school. She spoke in a soft voice so the others couldn’t hear them.

“How was school for you yesterday?”

“It was awful. I am glad we are leaving. I cannot stand Victor. He was so mean!” Tim said angrily.

“Victor?” his mom questioned. “Isn’t he your best friend?”

“Was!” Tim responded. “Not anymore!”

“Do you want to tell me what happened?”

“He made fun of me in front of all the other boys. I never want to see him again!”

His mother didn’t say anything. She just kept walking close to him.

By the end of the day, they had made a great start on their raft. They would need a couple more weekends to finish, of course. During the upcoming summer holidays, they could work much faster and be finished in a couple of weeks.



That night it was time for another family meeting. The King parents had promised the children that they would do this all together as a family, and they had important things to discuss.

Father started to explain what they would do. "I would like to share with you something about moving," he said. "As you all know, we will need a raft for moving to the other side of the lake. However, we also need a **RAFT\*** to help our hearts make the move."

The chameleon children looked at their father wide-eyed. To help their hearts move? What kind of crazy thing was that? They had no idea what their dad was talking about.

"Do you remember when we first moved to the red village?" he continued. "At the beginning we kept thinking a lot about the green village we had left behind, and we missed it a lot. After a while, we got used to the new place and felt at home. Now we feel at home again in our green village. Again our hearts will need time to adjust to the new place, so that we may feel at home there, too. It will not be easy, but it will help if we do this with a **RAFT**. The first letter of **RAFT** is the **R**. It stands for **Reconciliation**. Do you know what that means?" father asked the chameleon kids.

"A little bit," Theo responded.

"I will explain it," his father said. "It means that we make sure that everything is right between us and our friends, family, neighbours and all the people we know in this village so

that we don't leave with negative thoughts or feelings about the people we leave behind when we arrive at our new place. It creates space in our hearts to make new friends."

It remained quiet for a bit. Then Theo asked: "What do the other letters in **RAFT** stand for, Dad?"

"Maybe it's better we talk about the rest of the letters another time. We can look at each letter and word it stands for in the coming weekends. In this way, we can think about each word for a whole week and see how we could work it out, seeing what the Creator wants us to do with these words)." Everyone agreed.

That week, mother baked a cake for their neighbour. She had been planning to do this for a while, but never got around to doing it. While playing football one day, the boys had accidentally kicked a ball through the neighbour's window which had shattered the glass. Although the boys had paid for it from their own pocket money, mom still felt that something extra was needed.

Theo returned one of his football cards to his friend. He had kept it much longer than he was supposed to. Although Tim liked the idea of getting reconciled with others, he found it extremely hard to actually do it. Did he really have to reconcile with Victor? Victor had not even apologized to him. Yet Tim knew that he could not happily leave when things were not right between him and his best friend.

He decided to ask his mom for advice. And she gave him a very good suggestion.

"Why don't you tell him how you felt when he was mean to you? Would it be possible to forgive him after you talked about it?"

"I guess so," Tim said.

Mom continued, "Then tell him that as well. You will see. You will feel relieved."

Two days later Victor came over to play with Tim after school. When Tim told his friend how bad he had felt, Victor said he was very sorry. From that moment on, the King family made sure they said sorry to anyone they might have hurt and forgave all those who had been unkind to them. So later, when they had reconciled with everyone, they felt free to leave and to start new friendships in the new place.

Saturday had come again, and the chameleon family went to the building site to continue with their work on the raft. By the end of the day, it had started to look like a real raft. However, it still needed to become a lot bigger. They needed to be able to sleep on it in a small tent, and it also needed to have enough space for their suitcases. They needed to tie their things up in such a way that their belongings wouldn't end up in the water, of course. The journey would take two weeks, so they also needed some space to play and walk around.

That night, father explained to them about the second letter in the word **RAFT** just like he had promised.

"The letter **A** stands for **affirmation**. We want to let others know that we care about them."  
"Thessa," father asked, "how would you feel if suddenly Linda didn't want to play with you anymore?"

"I would find it weird, and I would ask myself why she didn't like me anymore." Tessa replied.

"Exactly. We don't want people to believe that we are leaving because they are not important to us." Dad said.

"How could we let them know that they are very important to us?" Mom asked the chameleon kids.

"Have a farewell party!" Theo and Tim shouted together.

"Farewell is for the third letter in RA-F-T," their dad mentioned. "So that would be a good thing to do, not too long before we go."

"Give them a present," Thessa suggested.

They all liked these ideas. They agreed to have the party at the start of the summer holiday so that all their cousins could stay up late.

"And you may give a present to two or three of your best friends," Mother chameleon added. "I also think it is a good idea to spend a lot of extra time with your friends and tell them yourself that we will be leaving. In that way, they will realize how important they are to you even though you have to say goodbye."

Thessa bought necklaces for her friends, Linda and Joelle. She had their names engraved on them so that they would always remember each other. Tim gave Victor a pocketknife because he liked venturing out into the forest just like Tim. Theo was still thinking about what to give to his friend Harm. He knew which present Harm would really like. Harm loved Theo's football with the signature of the most famous chameleon football player in the country on it. Should he give his own football away? Theo had to think hard about this.

And there was another problem. Theo also wanted to give a present to his friend Lars, but Lars lived all the way back in the red village, and Theo didn't think it was possible to go and visit him before the move. It seemed unlikely that he could give his friend Lars a present.

After two days of struggling with the problem, he decided to go and ask his mom for advice.

"Mom," Theo said, "I would love to give a present to Lars, but I won't see him this summer."

"Your dad and I have a surprise for you," his mother replied. "We have asked Lars's parents if he can come and stay with us so that you can spend time with him before we leave."

Theo jumped up, ran to his mom, and hugged her. "Thank you so much, Mom! That is so cool of you!" Theo also decided to give Lars his green team football clothes for a remembrance. And, anyway, he didn't need them anymore. By the time he returned to the green village these clothes would be way too small for him. Theo's football clothes would

remind Lars of the great match they had once played. And Theo's signed football would be for Harm.

Father and Mother Chameleon also gave lots of their precious belongings to their friends. They had to give away things that they could not take with them on the journey. Things that they were attached to, as well as useful items. In this way, they too showed their chameleon friends how much they appreciated them.

"What are we going to do, Dad?" asked Thessa when it was Saturday night again. They had been working on the raft all day long.

"We are going to visit Mr. and Mrs. Reizinga. They have been to the village where we will be going. We like to learn about the place, so that when we come closer to leaving we can **think destination**. This is what the "**T**" of **RAFT** stands for. It is much easier to focus on our destination if we know some things about it."

"That's great!" Thessa exclaimed, "That means that I can ask them all I want to know about our new village."

"You sure can," Dad responded. "It would be good to make a list of things you need to know."

Immediately all three children left the table to get pen and paper for they had lots of questions. It was going to be a long list. All three of them moved to Thessa's room to discuss what to ask. They did not want to all write down the same questions, so they needed to work together about what was important to ask. The first question Theo wanted to ask was, *do they speak our language?* And Tim wanted to know if there were green beetles.

On Sunday afternoon, after church, the King family went to see Mr. and Mrs. Reizinga. They were welcomed with a big smile. After they had their lunch together, Mr. and Mrs. Reizinga showed them pictures of the town located on the other side of the lake. What the children had understood to be a small village was actually a large town. There were more chameleons there than in three villages put together! The three chameleon kids were amazed at what they saw. They saw all kinds of colours and shades of colours. Purple, hyacinths, brown, the colour of cones on a pine tree, and high rise yellow sunflowers. They had never seen such a thing! The children asked many more questions than were on their list. Mrs. Reizinga pointed out many things in the photographs. For instance, that the pink chameleons love to eat jewel beetles and grasshoppers because they are pink, and the yellow chameleons prefer to eat yellow ladybirds. There was a picture in which there were yellow chameleons in banana boats floating through the channels. Tim could just imagine being on such a boat himself.





They all had a great afternoon. If Mother King hadn't had to prepare for dinner, they might have stayed much longer. Thessa found out that there was a good internet connection in the new town, and Tim was glad to know that there were many delicious foods there. Theo heard that the chameleons over there spoke many different languages, but most of them would be able to understand Theo's language. At their new school, these different languages were taught. Theo liked that. He was pleased to know that most of the chameleons would be able to understand him, but he was a little anxious about learning yet another language.

The next morning Theo, Tim and Thessa told their school friends what they had learned about their new town. The school kids showed a lot of interest and wanted to know everything about the place where their friends were going to live.

Now that the school year was ending, the King family were spending more and more time planning for the coming move. At school, mostly fun activities were taking place now that most of the school work had finished. In the meantime, at home preparations for the family farewell party were in full swing.

The party was planned for the first day of the school holidays. Mother King and lots of her friends came together to prepare a variety of delicious food. Thessa and her friends, Linda and Joelle, met together each afternoon to make colourful decorations for the party.



Theo was planning activities for when his friends Lars and Harm arrived. The plan was that when Lars came to stay for some days, Harm would also be invited to join them. Theo was making preparations to go camping with his friends and his brother Tim. He could not leave Tim behind since he was a real adventurer. When Mom suggested that Victor could also join them, Tim became as keen as Theo, and together they came up with exciting activities to do.

Father King was busy getting the raft ready and had started packing their things. On and off, the others joined him to help with the packing.

The farewells were not done all at once. First, there was the farewell with their classmates. They did that on the last Friday before the holidays. Theo, Tim and Thessa took treats to school to hand out to their schoolmates. In return, all three received a present – a book with the names of all their classmates in it. The books were for reading during the journey. Mother put the books in their suitcases so that they would not start reading right away.



During the family party the kids played lots of games like hide and seek. There was much laughter, but there were also tears, mostly because it would be a long time before they would meet again. The granddads and grandmas together with the uncles and aunts gave each of the three kids their own mobile phone as a present. In this way, they could stay in contact and talk to one another whenever they wanted.

It was getting late, already after dark, but they still did not feel like breaking up the party. One by one, everyone started to leave. First the families with small kids, then the others.

The grandfathers and grandmothers were the last ones to leave. The chameleon kids hugged and kissed their grandparents as if they would never see them again. Saying goodbye was really difficult, but they would come again to the lake side to see them off on the raft. They wanted to see them once more before the family left for their new destination.

The day after the party, all three children helped with tidying up the house and the garden, throwing rubbish in the bin, and putting away the decorations.

Theo was excited about the coming of his friend Lars. He could hardly wait to see him again. Lars was allowed to come and stay for a whole week! On Friday, the other boys would join them and together they planned to camp in the woods behind the Kings' house. In this way, the boys got a sense of freedom, and yet they were still near enough to home in case there was a problem. On Wednesday, as soon as Lars came into sight, Theo ran towards him and gave him a big bear hug. Tim and Theo showed Lars all the nice places in the green village. On Friday, Harm and Victor arrived too, so the five of them were complete and ready for camping. They packed their camping gear and went to look for a good spot in the woods.

At first Thessa didn't like the idea that she was not allowed to join her brothers, but Mother King promised her she would take Thessa out for something special. Together with Mom, they went for a high-tea in the Tea Cafe around the corner. The boys didn't care much about a high-tea, but Thessa loved it. She enjoyed having Mom all to herself, and together they enjoyed the green tea and all the goodies.

That Sunday, they all went to church together. After the service, it was time to clear the campsite and take home their camping gear. The five boys agreed to meet each other for playing football until Lars had to return to the red village. Theo felt as though time was flying compared to how long each hour took when he was still in school. The time of saying goodbye to Lars came much too fast. That night, mom heard him crying while he was in bed, but soon he fell into a deep sleep.

From then on, the King family didn't have much time to think about the fun time they had during the party. So many things needed to be done! The house had to be cleaned and made ready for another chameleon family to live there. The rest of their things needed to be packed and loaded securely onto the raft. Everyone was busy.

When the raft was ready, the children took the tent and pinned it onto the raft. In the meantime, Father fastened their luggage with ropes to the raft. Mom and Dad had their own small hut on the raft. In front of their little bedroom, they put a tiny table for the family to sit around for meals and to use for playing games.

By Saturday night, they were all set to go. The King family sat together on the raft and looked up at the stars. They prayed together asking the Creator for a safe journey and for strength to say goodbye to their friends and family. They had helped their hearts build a RAFT, and they had built a real raft together. They had reconciled with all those they had to leave behind. They had shown their love and care for the other villagers. They had learned

about their future destination, and tomorrow they would say their last goodbye. This was their last night in the green village. Now came the time to think about their destination.

The next morning was Sunday, and at church, Father once more explained to the chameleons in the green village about their plans for the town on the other side of the lake. The chameleon church members prayed for the King family and blessed them. After the service, they all came along to the lakeside for the last farewell. They gave one last hug, and then the King family stepped on board. They all waved when Father took the paddles and pushed the raft away from the shore. The raft slowly started floating further and further from the chameleon crowd. Linda, Joelle, Victor and Harm were standing closest to the water to wave at their friends. The grandparents were there too, close to the shore.



Father used the paddles only for keeping the raft going into the right direction. They could make use of the current to float towards the other side of the lake. The three chameleon kids were wearing their life jackets as they stood at the edge of the raft, waving at their friends. Tim nearly needed his life jacket because he leaned forward too far in all of the excitement. Theo and Thessa grabbed him at the last second, thankful their journey didn't start with an accident. They were now focussing on their destination. The chameleons at the lakeside stayed there and kept waving until the raft was out of sight.

“To my courageous students who went through so many transitions this past year.”

With ideas from Hannah and Micha from Switzerland.

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\*The RAFT acronym comes from the book of Dr. David Pollock, Ruth E. Van Reken and Michael V. Pollock.

Pollock, David C. & Van Reken, Ruth E. & Pollock, Michael V., “Third Culture Kids: Growing up among worlds. 3<sup>rd</sup> edition. Boston, MA, USA: Nicholas Brealey Publishing, 2017. pp240-246.

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