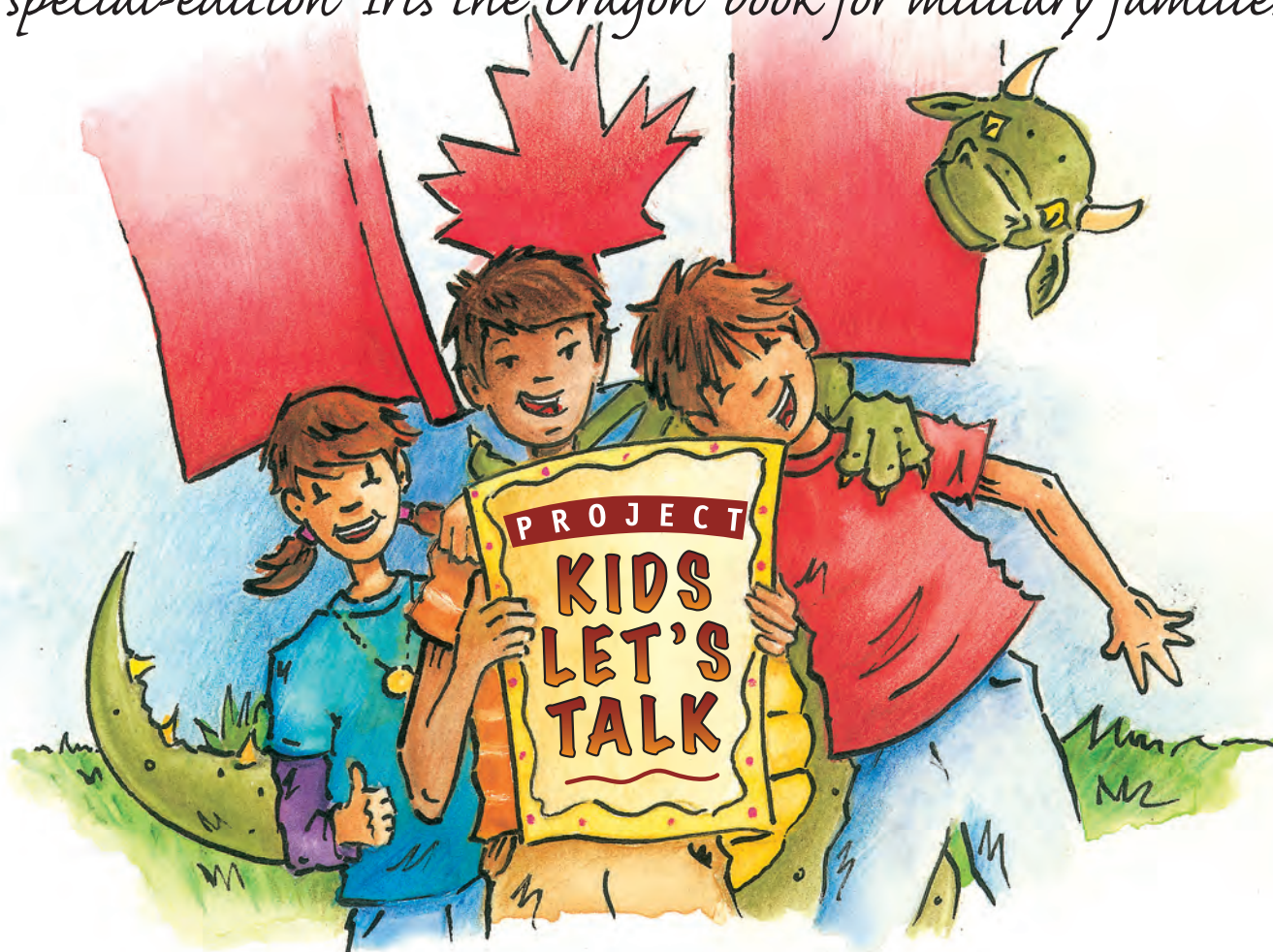


# PROJECT: Kids, Let's Talk

*A special-edition 'Iris the Dragon' book for military families*



Author: Gayle Grass    Project Manager: Jessica Grass

Illustrator: Graham Ross

## Introduction

**“Project: Kid’s Lets Talk”** is a special edition Iris the Dragon book for military families. In this edition, Iris and her Riverbank friends meet a young boy named Luc who is dealing with some of the more challenging conditions that come with living in a Canadian military family.

Living in a military family has many benefits – living in places across the country and abroad, connecting immediately to a strong community, experiencing interesting adventures, to name just a few. These can bring families closer together. But living in the military also comes with challenges.

Families of military members face a number of unique challenges associated with the military lifestyle, including frequent relocations, temporary housing, spousal unemployment and underemployment, separations, and deployments of their military member to potentially dangerous situations. Such stressors can have adverse consequences for families of military personnel. (Quality of Life among Military Families: Results from the 2008-2009 Survey of Canadian Forces Spouses: Kerry Sudom; DGMPPRA TM 2010-017; Defence R&D Canada – DGMPPRA; August 2010.)

When Iris and the Riverbank friends first meet Luc, his family has just been posted to the military base. He misses his friends from the other base. His family is very busy trying to settle into the new home, while also preparing for his father to be deployed. He feels lonely, worried and a little angry.

With the help of Iris and the Riverbank Community, Luc learns to talk about his feelings with his family and with others in similar situations. Luc starts an email pen pal project with children living on other military bases where they can share their experiences and make friends. And Iris connects him with the local Military Family Resource Centre for support programs and other fun activities.

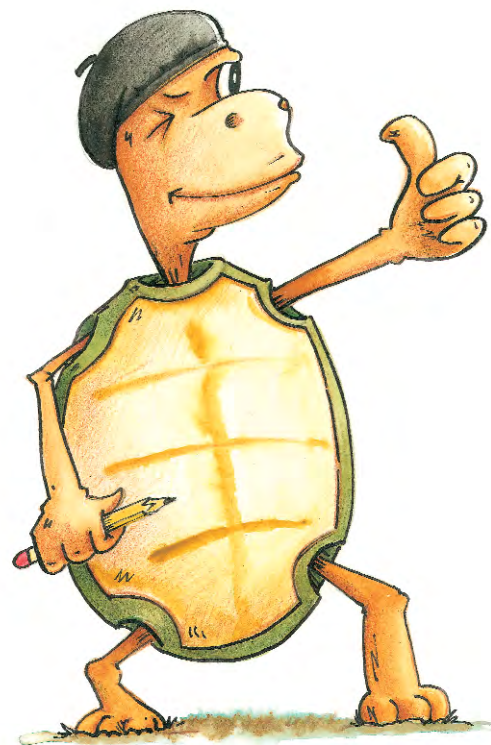
By expressing his feelings and connecting with others, Luc creates a new social support network for himself and his family.

Research has shown that the presence of social and community support, both informal and formal, can be an invaluable resource in helping children and youth cope with the deployment of a military parent as well as with the other challenging conditions that come with living in a military family, like frequent postings and relocations.

The Military Family Services Program (MFSP) promotes and facilitates community-based services which strengthen CF families and communities. The Program is designed to help families manage the unique stresses of the CF lifestyle through personal, family and community development.

Canadian/Military Family Resource Centres (C/MFRCs) deliver the MFSP. C/MFRCs are committed to enriching the lives of individuals and families in CF communities through positive action, education and support. They provide relevant programs and services that empower and encourage strong, independent individuals and families within the CF.

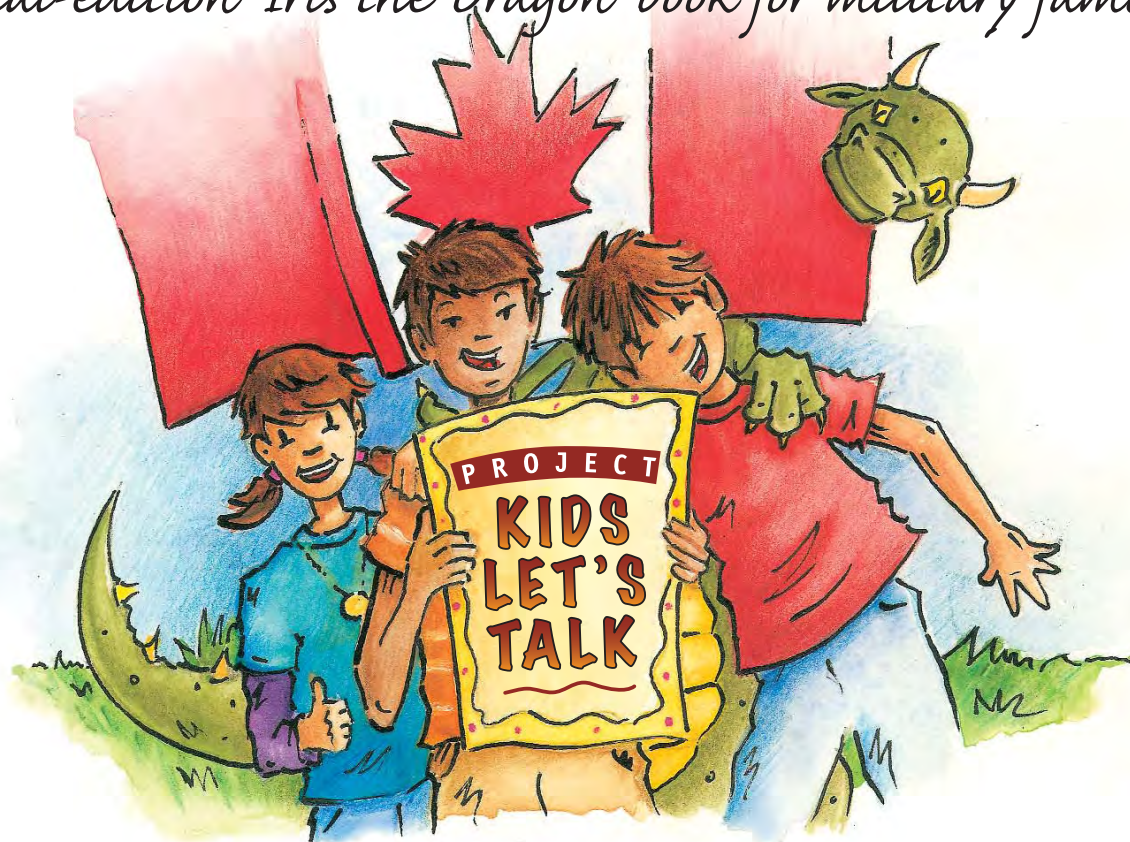
This new book in the Iris the Dragon series highlights some of the unique challenges of the CF lifestyle and demonstrates how children can be encouraged to cope positively and powerfully by expressing their emotions and finding social and community support connections.





# PROJECT: Kids, Let's Talk

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Once upon a time, there was a small, green, magical marsh dragon called Iris. She lived by a river, in a cave, under an old log bridge. Iris and her many animal friends called themselves the Riverbank Community.

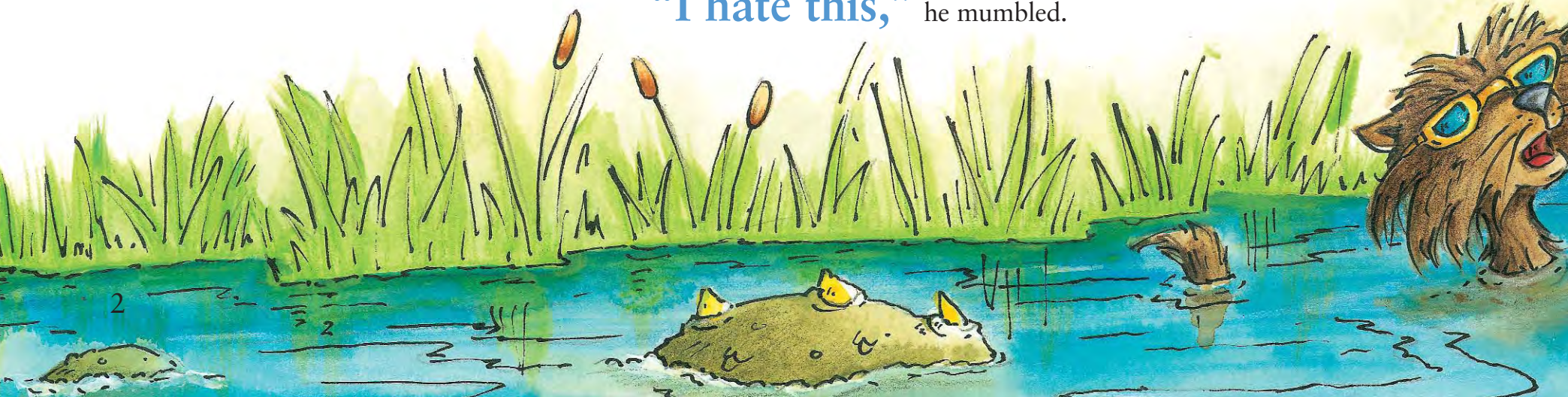
On this lovely summer morning, Iris and her Riverbank friend Ottie Otter decided to go for a swim. As they swam upstream, they saw a boy in the field, playing with a soccer ball, alone.

“Who is he, Iris?” asked Ottie.

“I don’t know,” said Iris. “I have not seen him before. He must be new around here.”

The boy stopped suddenly and kicked the ball as hard as he could into the water.

“I hate this,” he mumbled.









Iris caught the ball with her tail and threw it to Ottie. They began a game of catch, throwing the ball back and forth across the water with their tails. The boy ran to the riverbank to watch.

**“Who are you guys?”** he yelled. He was a little frightened, but he really wanted to know who these animals were and how they could throw a soccer ball with their tails.

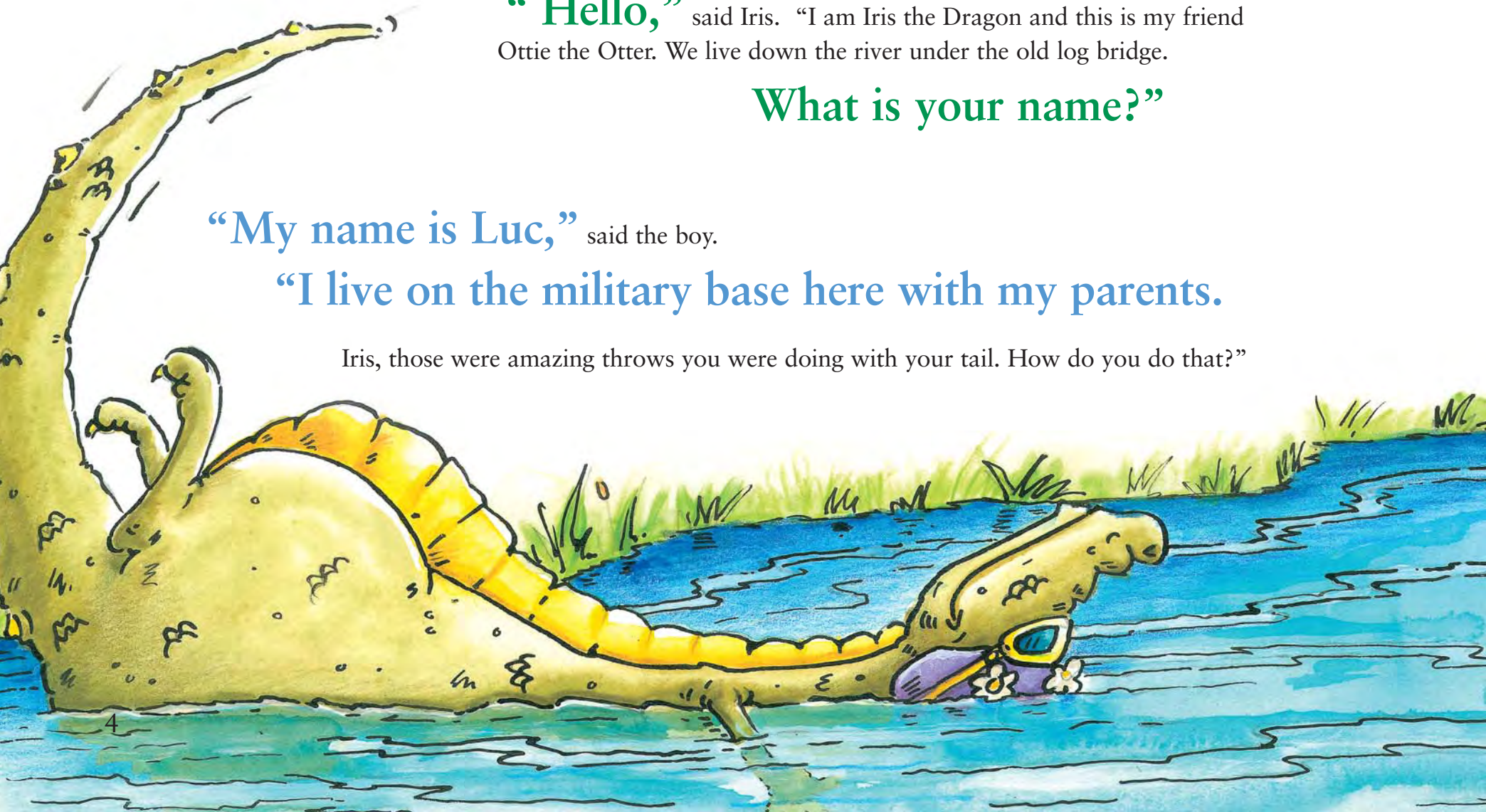
**“Hello,”** said Iris. “I am Iris the Dragon and this is my friend Ottie the Otter. We live down the river under the old log bridge.

**What is your name?”**

**“My name is Luc,”** said the boy.

**“I live on the military base here with my parents.**

Iris, those were amazing throws you were doing with your tail. How do you do that?”





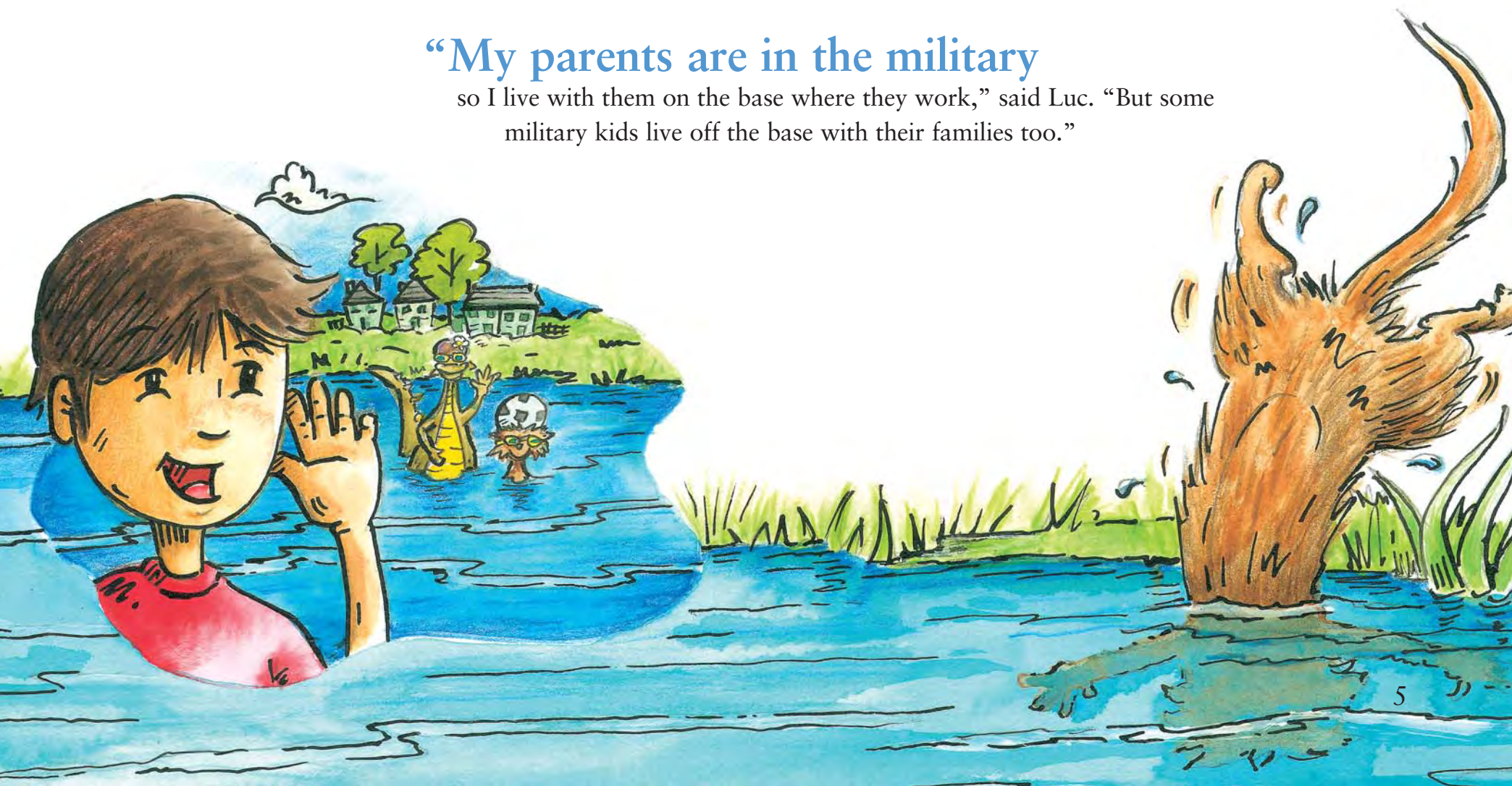


“I would be happy to show you someday,” said Iris as she waddled out of the water.

“But for now, I am curious to  
know why you live on a base.”

“My parents are in the military

so I live with them on the base where they work,” said Luc. “But some  
military kids live off the base with their families too.”











“Luc, let’s sit under the apple tree so we can talk some more. I would like to know more about your life in a military family,” said Iris

“What do your parents do?”

“My Dad is in the Army and  
my stepmom is in the Air Force part-time.



We live over there behind the soccer field,” said Luc as he pointed to the buildings in the distance.

“Luc, how do you feel about having parents who are in the military?” asked Iris. She could tell that Luc seemed worried and anxious about something, and that it might help him to talk about his feelings.

“Most of the time I’m fine,” said Luc. “I really enjoyed living on our last base. But lately, there have been a lot of changes in our family. We just moved here and I miss my old friends, especially Jacob. He was my best friend, and it’s hard to make new friends. My dad is hardly ever home because he’s doing special training to get ready for when he goes away. My stepmom is really busy too. She’s trying to get our new home set up and she says there is always so much to do when we move. She says now that I am older, she needs me to do more around the house, to take on more responsibilities.

I guess I am feeling lonely.”



“What about the military base where your parents work?” asked Iris. “Are there programs they offer that could help your family with your move here? When a new animal moves into our community, we throw a welcome party where we tell them about all the things the Riverbank has to offer.”

“Yeah, I think so,” said Luc. “At least I know there were some great things to do at my last base. My stepmom is going to check it out.”

**It just seems that there are so many new changes  
to adjust to...and nobody to talk to.”**



“I think my Riverbank friends and I can help you, Luc,” said Iris. “Why don’t we meet here tomorrow morning for a game of soccer? Then we will go back to the Riverbank for some lemonade and we can talk some more,” she suggested.

**“That would be great,”** said Luc.

“See you tomorrow Iris and Ottie.”

After Luc had left, Ottie said to Iris, “But how are we going to help him, Iris? He is very worried about his parents and his move to this new base. He doesn’t know what to do to make it better. He is lonely and needs somebody to talk to.”



“Don’t worry, Ottie;  
I have a plan,” said Iris.

“What is  
your plan Iris?”  
asked Ottie.









“Well,” said Iris. “Let’s give him a surprise welcome party tomorrow at the Riverbank. We will make him feel welcome, and hopefully a little happier about his new home.”

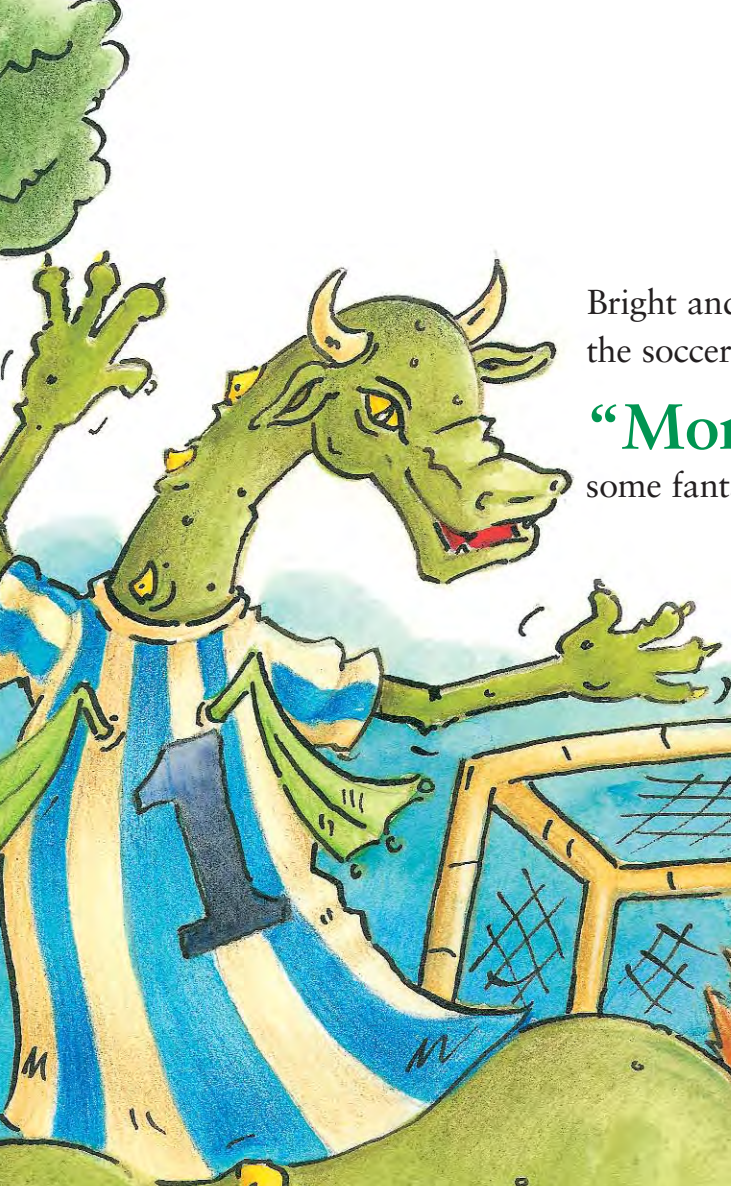
**“That is a great idea,”** said Ottie. “I will go and get all the other Riverbank animals to help me organize Luc’s welcome party. We love parties,” laughed Ottie as he swam away.

After Ottie had left, Iris went to her cave to read about how Canadian Forces families live. She learned that there were many bases in Canada and around the world. On some of the bases, Military Family Resource Centres existed offering many great programs for military families, including programs for families that are new to the community or for those who need help preparing for a family member going on deployment. As she read, Iris thought that these programs could be very helpful for Luc and his family.

Now this all sounded very good, but Iris, being 912 years old, knew a lot about children. She knew that it was important for children to have a way to talk about their worries and other difficult feelings—especially to their parents. She decided that she would give Luc a special project.



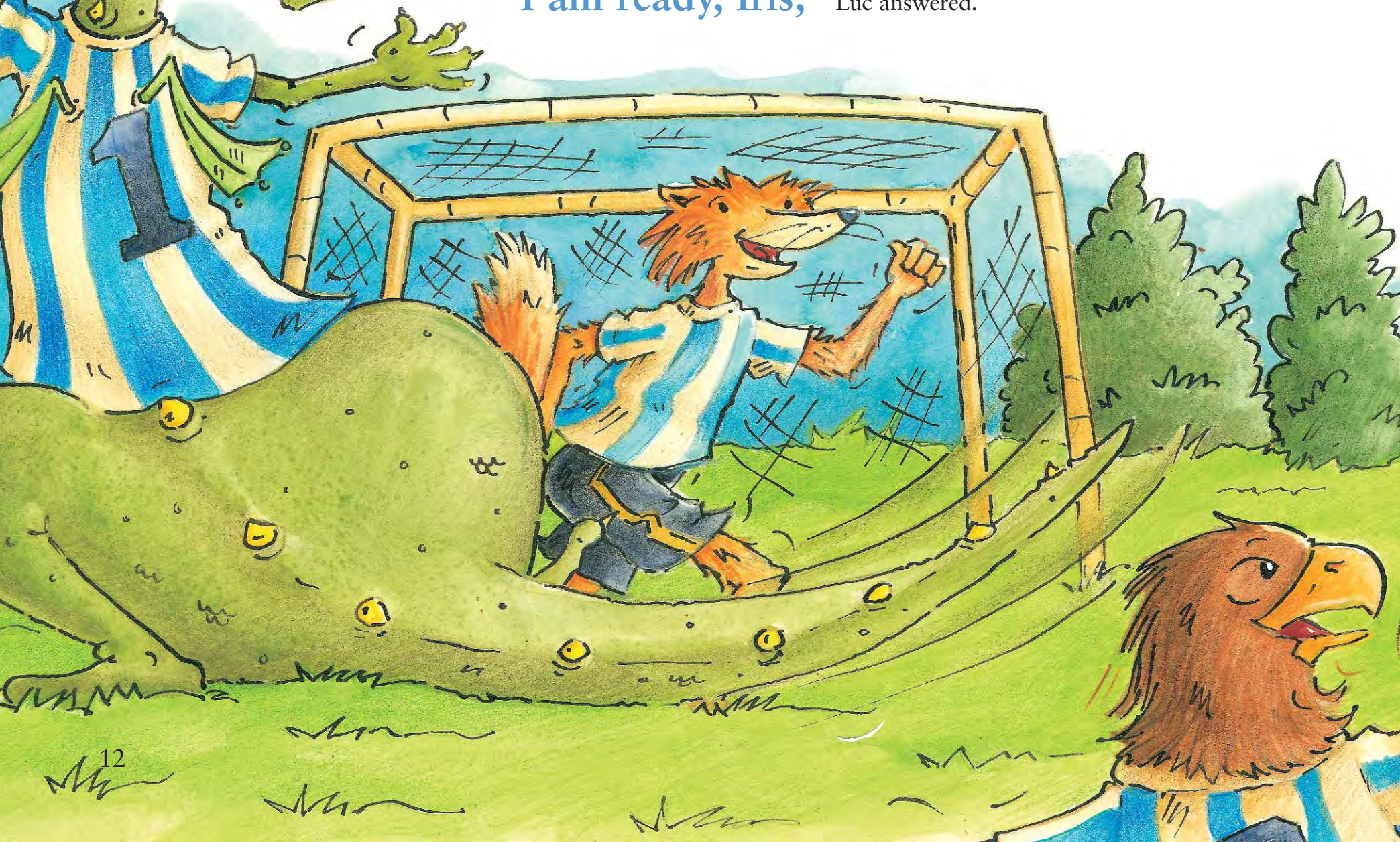




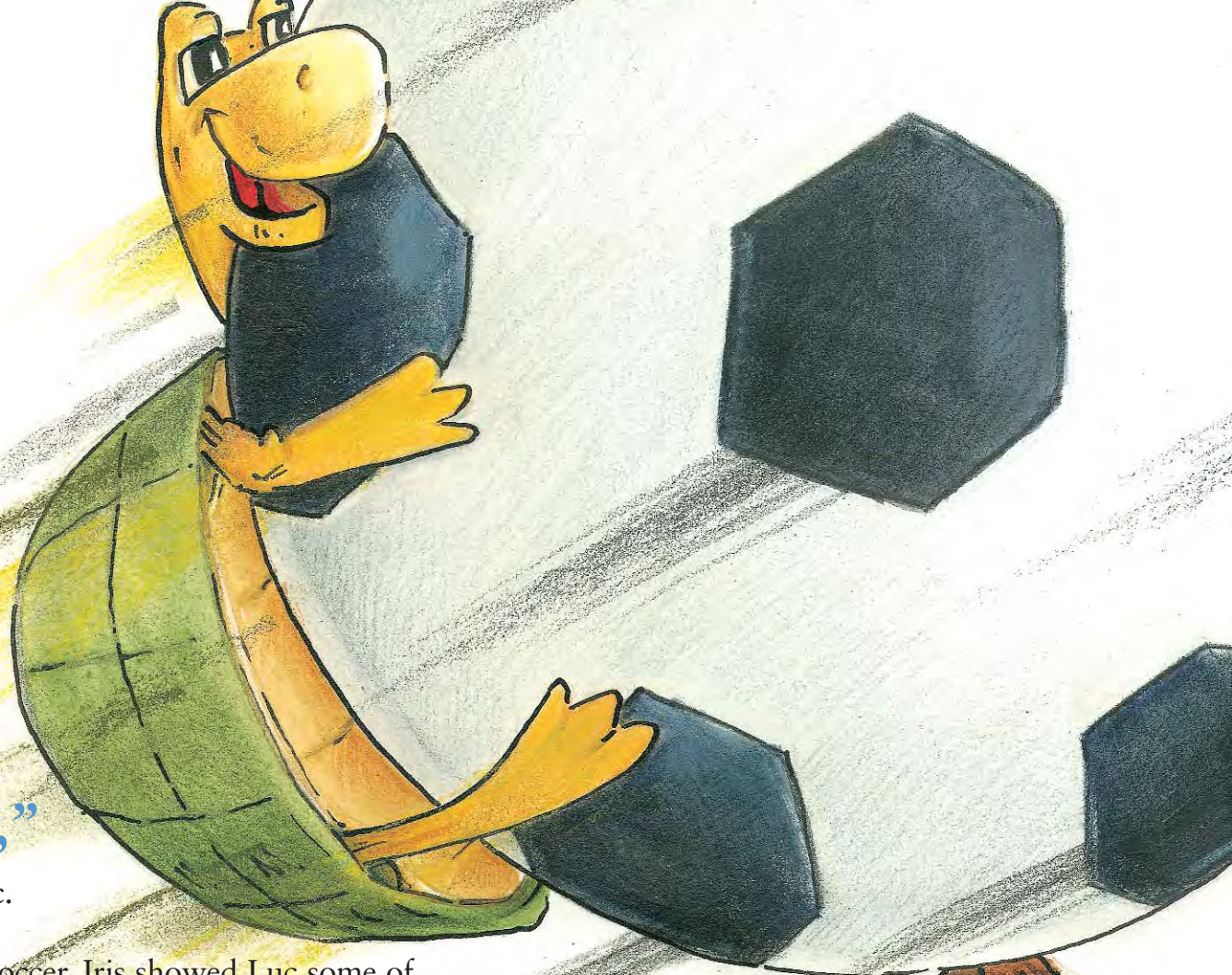
Bright and early the next day, Iris and the Riverbank animals went to meet Luc at the soccer field.

**“Morning Luc,”** Iris called out. “I hope you’re prepared to learn some fantastic new moves from my Riverbank team!”

**“I am ready, Iris,”** Luc answered.







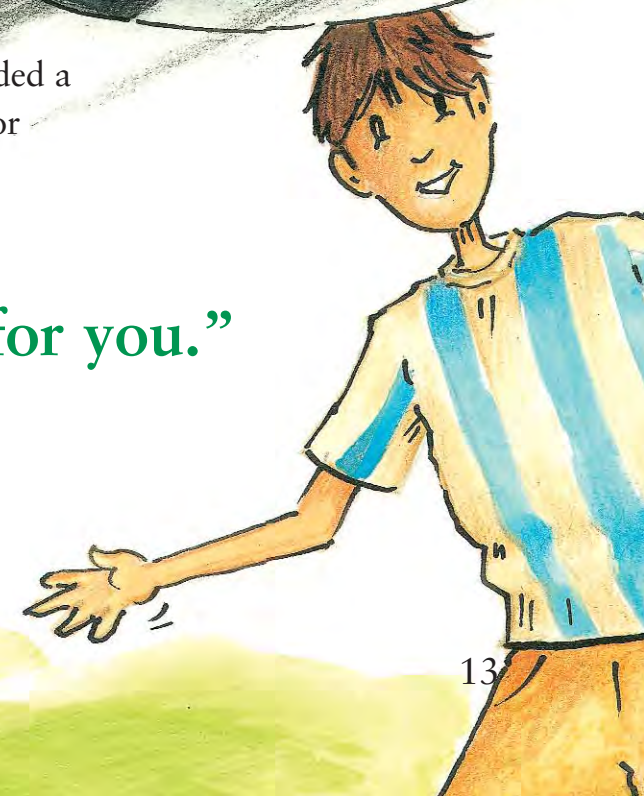
“Well okay, then. Ottie Otter, Freddie Fox and Madeleine Frog all want to be on your team,” said Iris, “and Tommy Turtle and Sky Eagle will be on mine.”

**“That seems fair,”**  
laughed Luc.

They had an exciting game of soccer. Iris showed Luc some of her amazing tail skills. When they were tired and needed a break, Iris suggested they go back to the Riverbank for some lemonade.

“I want to show you something, Luc,” said Iris.

**“We have a surprise for you.”**





The Riverbank animals had prepared a wonderful surprise party. There was a large banner saying: "Luc: Welcome to the Riverbank." Tables were set up with lots of great food, and the Riverbank animals had even decorated to make Luc feel welcome.

**"Welcome,"** they all cheered as he came up the path with Iris. "We are very glad you have moved to this area, and we want to be your friends."

"Thank you," said Luc. **"This is great."**

"Luc, I think you will find that once you get settled, this new base will be great too," said Iris,

**"but I think you need a special project to help you adjust."**

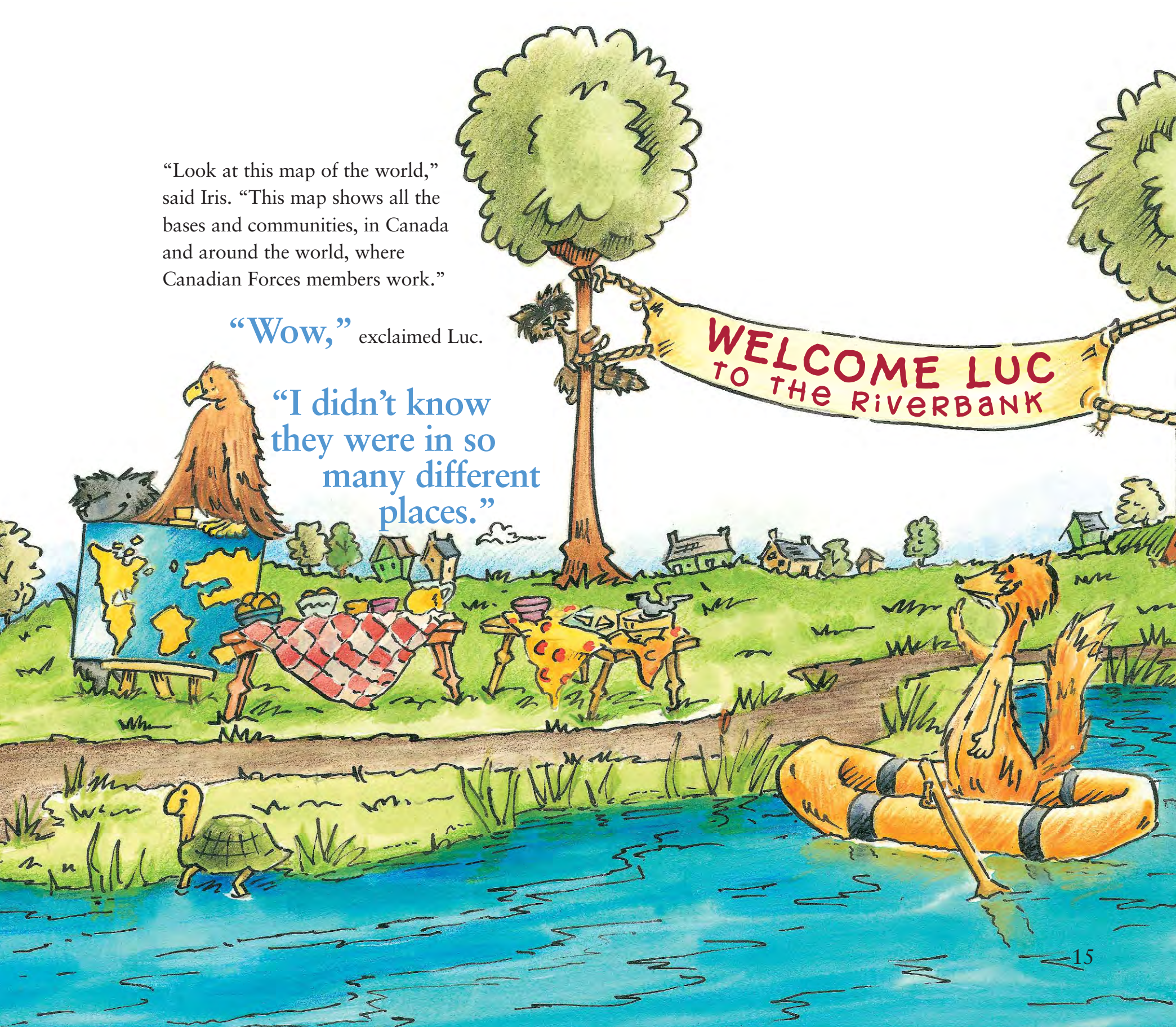




"Look at this map of the world,"  
said Iris. "This map shows all the  
bases and communities, in Canada  
and around the world, where  
Canadian Forces members work."

"Wow," exclaimed Luc.

"I didn't know  
they were in so  
many different  
places."





“Yes,” said Iris. “That’s why I have a special project for you. I would like you to write to some of the children in these military communities. I want you to ask them how they feel about being children in military families—and you can tell them how you feel. I think a lot of military kids may have similar worries and concerns, and by sharing your thoughts with each other, it will help you get to know that other children feel the same way. Also, you will learn what things they do together as a family to help them adjust and feel positive about their lives. The Riverbank animals and I would be happy to deliver your letters.”

“That sounds great Iris,” said Luc. **“Could I write one now?”**

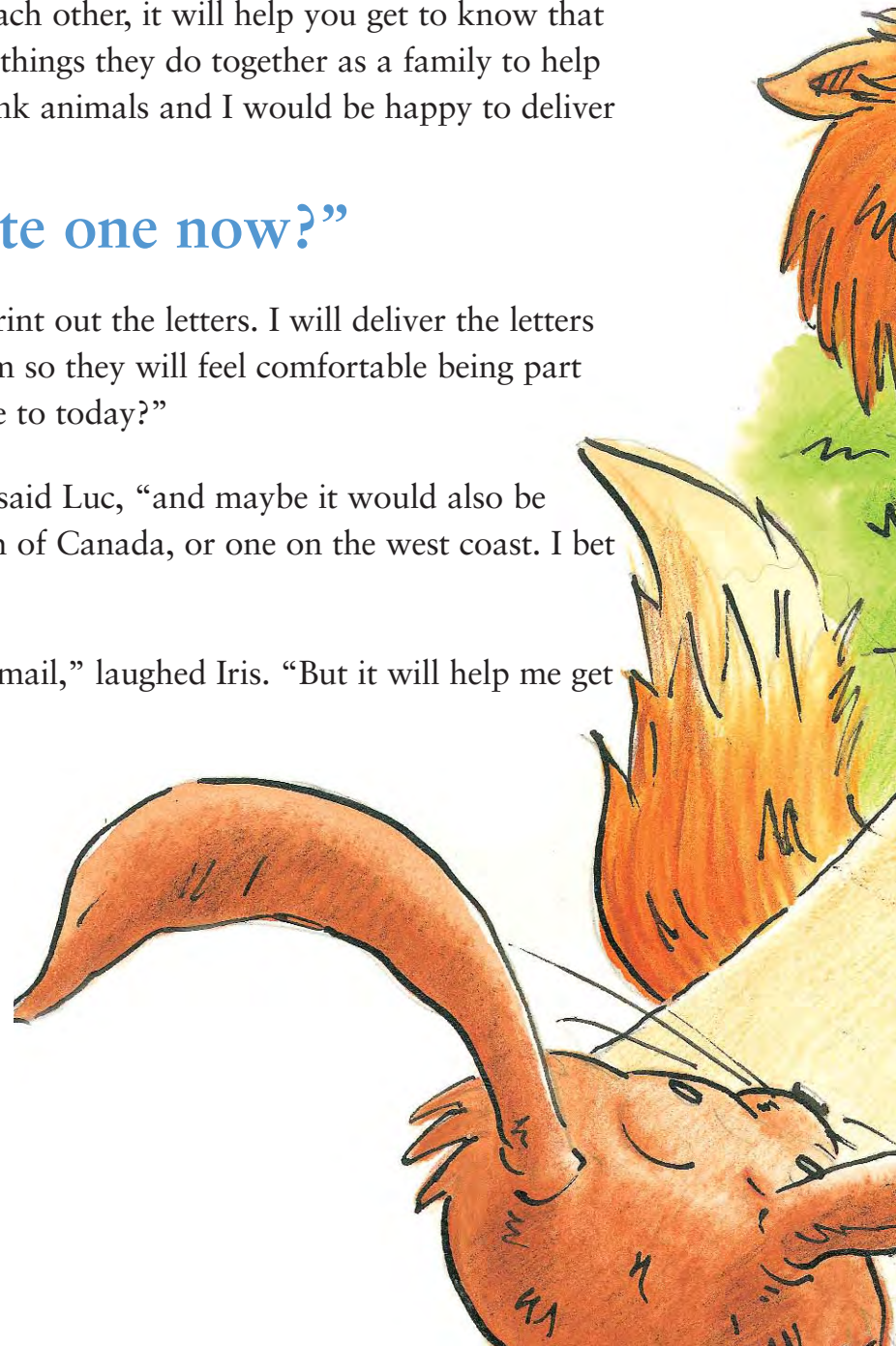
“Sure,” said Iris. “You can use my computer and we will print out the letters. I will deliver the letters directly to the other kids and introduce your project to them so they will feel comfortable being part of this plan. Which places on the map do you want to write to today?”

“I would like to write to my friend Jacob at my old base,” said Luc, “and maybe it would also be interesting to write to a military community in the far north of Canada, or one on the west coast. I bet it is interesting to live in those places.”

“I can see I’m going to get a lot of exercise delivering your mail,” laughed Iris. “But it will help me get fit and feel like I’m only 400 years old again,” she joked.

Luc sat down at Iris’s computer to write his letter.

When he finished, he read it out loud to Iris:







Hi,

My name is Luc and I live on a Canadian Forces base. My dad is in the Army and he is in training to go away. He is really busy and I don't see him a lot.

I would like to be your pen pal so we could tell each other what it feels like to be kids of military parents. We just moved here and I am a little lonely. I am trying to find other kids to play soccer with. My stepmom says I will meet more kids when school starts in the fall.

I have just met a new friend called Iris. She says she will fly to your community and deliver my letter to you personally. She will introduce you to my project, and I'm hoping you will take part in it. Do you play soccer? I am a very good soccer player.

If you want to reply, please e-mail me at [luc@basecommunity4.ca](mailto:luc@basecommunity4.ca)

Luc





**“Excellent,”** said Iris. “So, tomorrow morning, I will fly to these communities and deliver your letters. Can you come back next week, Luc?”

**“I can hardly wait,”**  
exclaimed Luc as he ran off home.

Bright and early the next morning, Iris put on her flying outfit and took off. Her first stop was at a base on the west coast of Canada. She saw some children playing baseball, and landed right in the middle of their field. The children all stopped and stared at Iris.

**“Good morning,”** said Iris. “My name is Iris and I am a magical dragon. I have brought you a letter from a boy whose parents are also in the military. His name is Luc and he would like to exchange e-mails with you so he can talk to kids in other military communities. He would like to get to know how you feel about being in military families. He is curious about what your community does to help you and your families adjust to moving or having your parents away from home.”

**“Hey, that is a neat idea,”** said one of the children.

“Let’s read it now and then we can write him back. Does he have an e-mail address?”

**“Oh yes,”** said Iris. “It is in his letter.”

Throughout the rest of the day, Iris flew to several other military communities in Canada and explained Luc’s project to the children. They were all very excited about the idea and said they would e-mail Luc. Iris was hopeful that her project might work, and she flew home to wait for Luc. She was hoping he would come back to the Riverbank with some good news.







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ris didn't see Luc for several weeks. Summer had ended and the days were getting cooler. Iris and the Riverbank animals had just finished their annual fall cleanup along the riverbank, and were enjoying some of Iris's homemade apple cider.

**"Look Iris! Here comes Luc!"** exclaimed Tommy Turtle.

"Where have you been, Luc?" asked Iris. "I was worried that something was wrong."

"Well," said Luc, "my dad had to go away on a training exercise and my stepmom needed me around the house after school. There is so much to do when moving into a new place. She is grumpy. I have been doing a lot of things for her but she still gets upset with me."

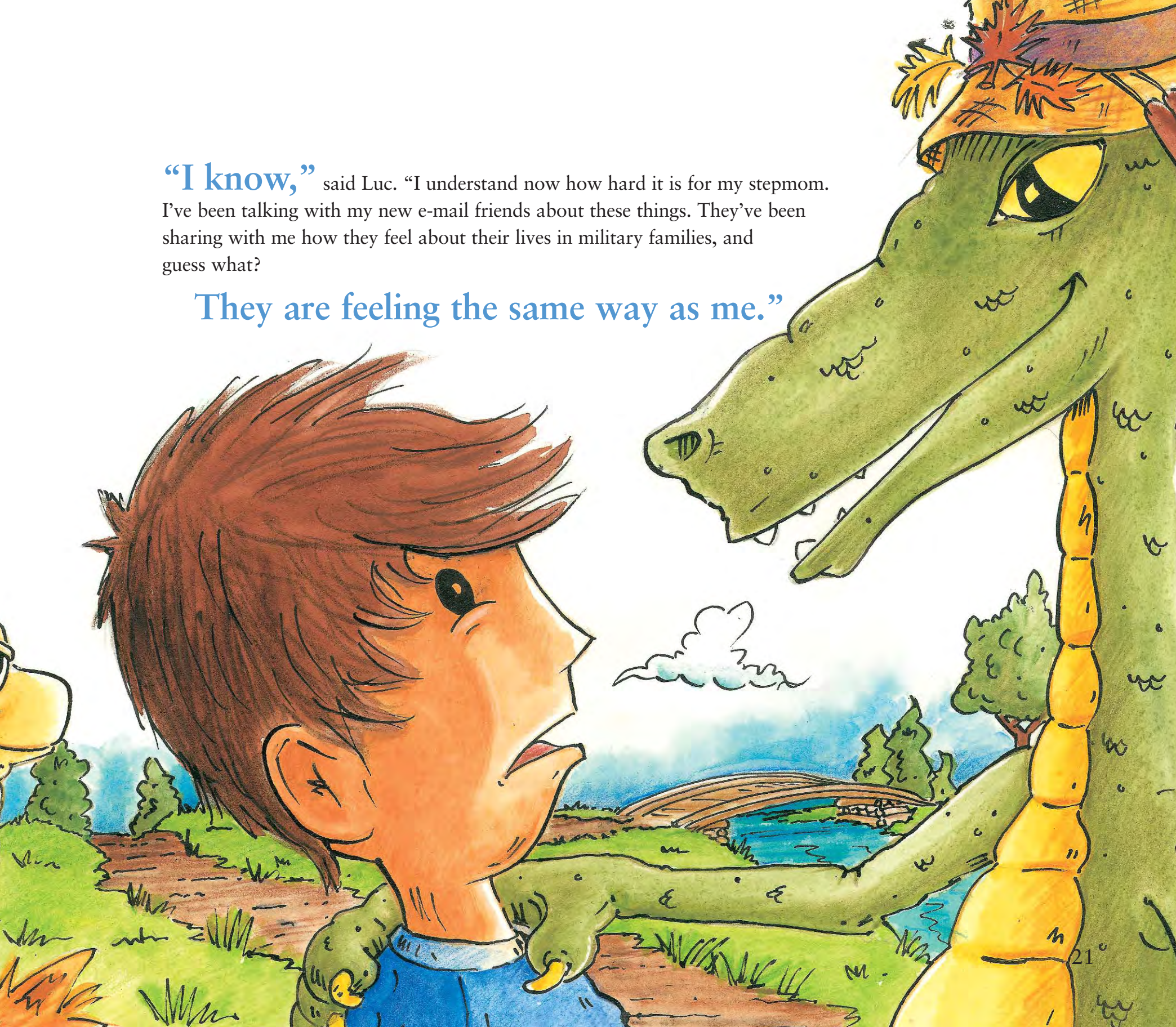
**"I'm sure she's doing her best,"** said Iris. "The first few months of any move are very busy and tiring, especially since your dad is away so much."





**“I know,”** said Luc. “I understand now how hard it is for my stepmom. I’ve been talking with my new e-mail friends about these things. They’ve been sharing with me how they feel about their lives in military families, and guess what?

**They are feeling the same way as me.”**







Hi Luc,  
This is such a great idea. I would like to e-mail you. I just moved to a new base too, and it is lonely. But my dad says that there are a lot of programs in our community for us kids and he is going to look into it for me.

I know how you feel about your dad being away a lot. It's really hard for me every time my mom tells us she is going away. She has gone three times to other countries and I am hoping that she will not go away anymore.

I am going to tell the other kids about our e-mail project and I hope we can get lots of kids from all the military communities to join in. I would like to write to some of the kids on bases outside Canada because it would be fun to talk to them about what life is like in a different country.

Thank you for writing to me. My e-mail is  
[susie@basecommunity8.ca](mailto:susie@basecommunity8.ca)

Susie



“That’s good to know, Luc,” said Iris. “I was hoping the children would e-mail you.”

“They did, Iris,” said Luc. “and I brought one to read to you.” He read it out loud to Iris:

*Hi Luc,*

*This is such a great idea. I would like to e-mail you. I just moved to a new base too, and it is lonely. But my dad says that there are a lot of programs in our community for us kids and he is going to look into it for me.*

*I know how you feel about your dad being away a lot. It’s really hard for me every time my mom tells us she is going away. She has gone three times to other countries and I am hoping that she will not go away anymore.*

*I am going to tell the other kids about our e-mail project and I hope we can get lots of kids from all the military communities to join in. I would like to write to some of the kids on bases outside Canada because it would be fun to talk to them about what life is like in a different country.*

*Thank you for writing to me. My e-mail is susie@basecommunity8.ca*

*Susie*

“This project is really fun,” said Luc. “I am making friends with kids who are a lot like me. They get lonely too when they move, until they meet new friends. It is good to talk about these things. I am going to write letters to kids at other military communities in Canada and get to know what they are doing. Can you deliver them for me?”

“Yes I can. I have my flying helmet on, my tail revved up, and I am ready to go,” laughed Iris.



Iris was kept busy delivering Luc's letters during the fall, but she enjoyed it.

She knew that Luc was making many new friends to talk to and share his feelings with.





One lovely fall afternoon, Iris had just returned from a long flight to deliver more letters, and was enjoying a cup of tea with Oattie on her porch when she saw Luc coming down the riverbank path.

“Hi, Iris and Oattie,”

said Luc.

“What have you been up to, Luc?”

How is your e-mail project going?” asked Iris.



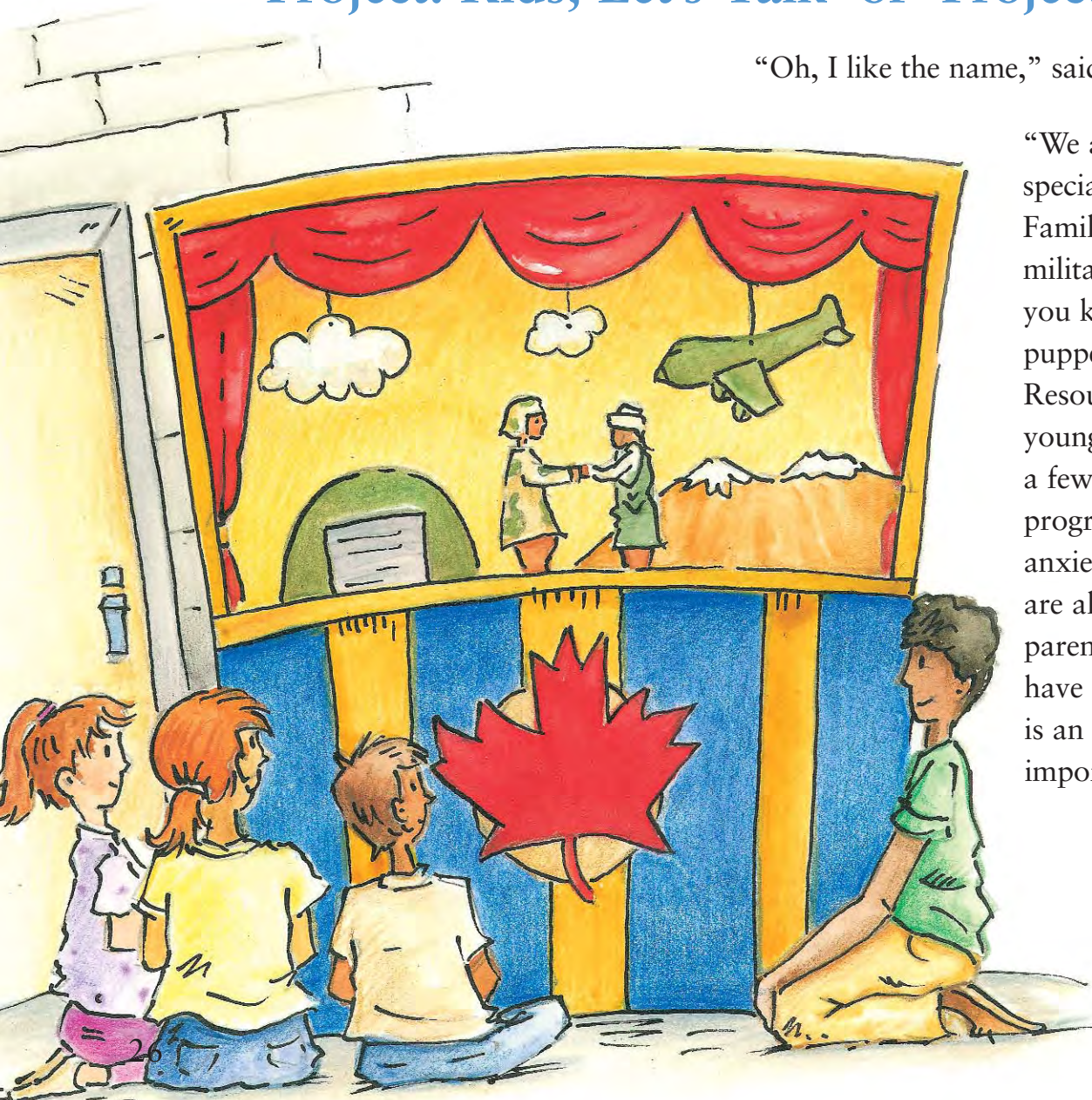


"It's amazing!" Luc exclaimed. "Susie and I are working together to get kids to join our project. Our goal is to get kids to participate from every Canadian Forces community in Canada and around the world," he explained. "We even have a name for our project. How does this sound?"

## 'Project: Kids, Let's Talk' or 'Project KLT' for short."

"Oh, I like the name," said Ottie. "It sounds very important."

"We are learning so much about the special events and programs the Military Family Resource Centres offer kids in military communities," said Luc. "Did you know that in one place they offer a puppet show through the Military Family Resource Centre on the base? It helps the younger kids express their feelings. And in a few other communities they offer a program that helps kids understand what anxiety is, and how to deal with it. We are also sharing information on what our parents do, and the many things they have done to help Canadians when there is an emergency. I never realized how important my parents' jobs were."

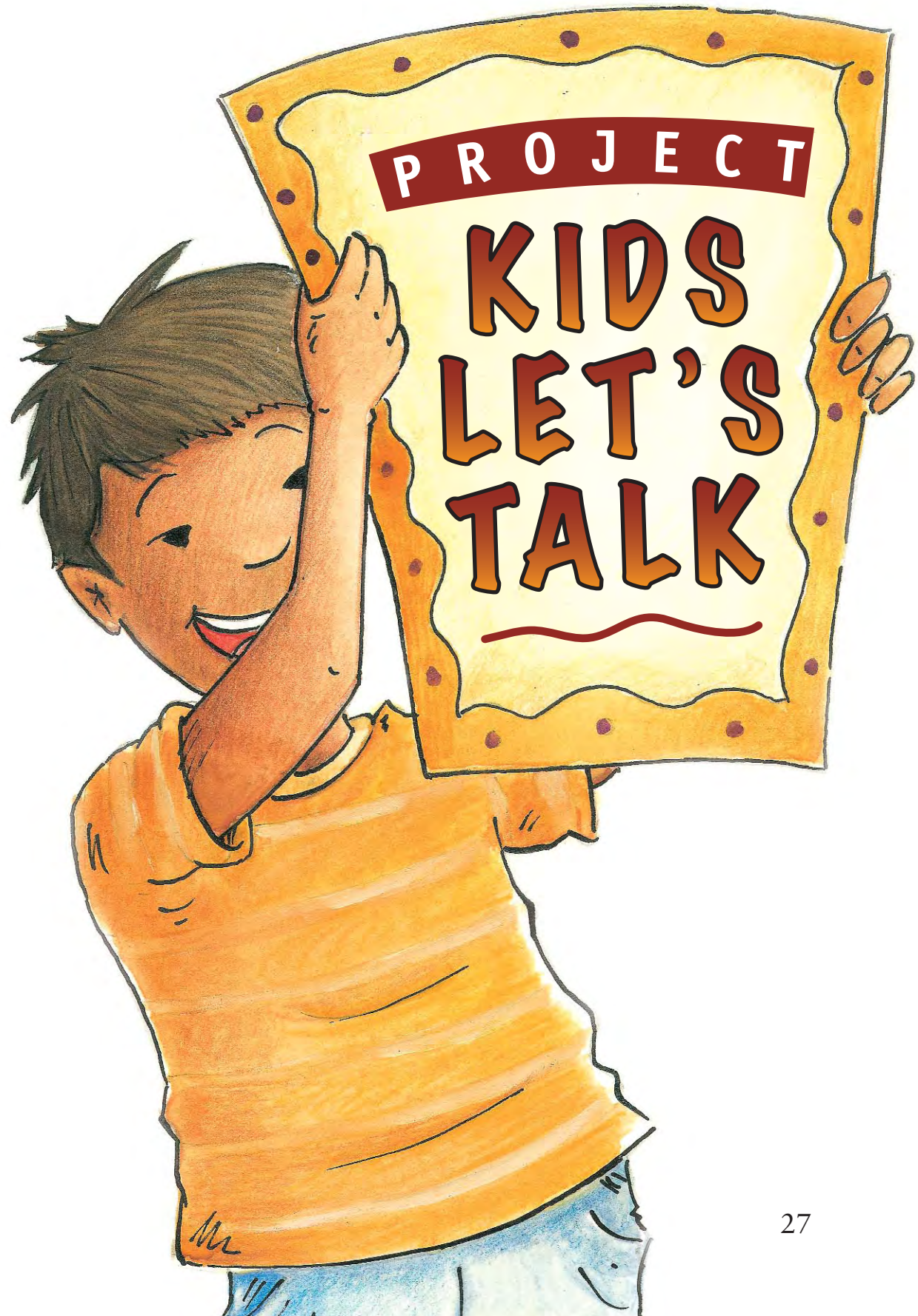




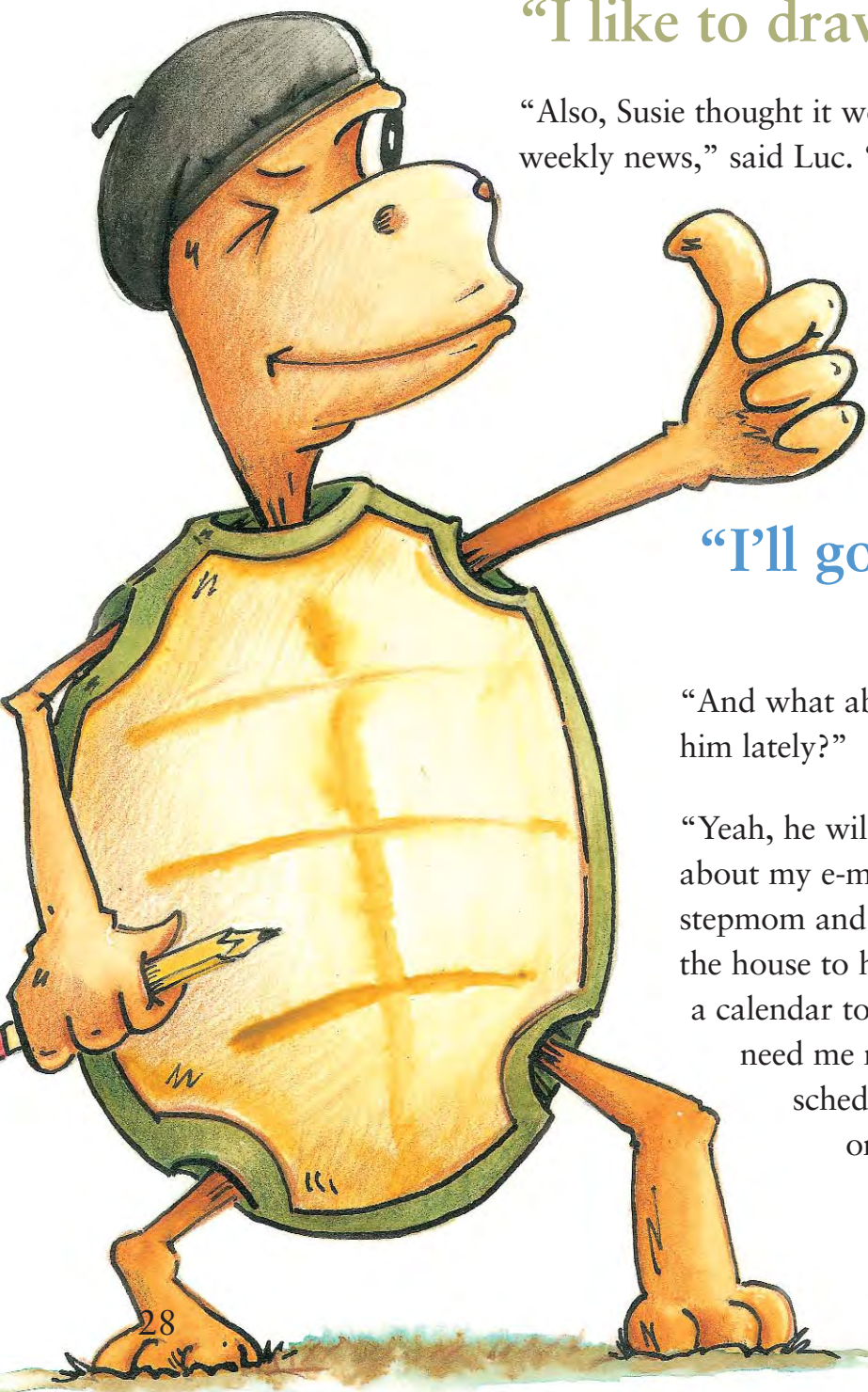
“We are also thinking about setting up a website so we can exchange more information,” continued Luc. “My friend Jacob is an awesome artist. He says he can make a poster to represent our group and put it on our website.

**There are so many things we could share with each other.**

We could do blogs and videos and even do interviews with military people and ask them what kinds of jobs they do in the Forces.”







**“I like to draw,”** said Tommy Turtle. “I could help you too.”

“Also, Susie thought it would be a great idea for each community to post their weekly news,” said Luc. “That way we would all feel connected to each other.”

“Well, you have certainly been busy, Luc,” said Iris with a smile. “Perhaps you should get some more help. I think the Military Family Resource Centre on your base would like to get involved with this project. The Military Family Resource Centre could help oversee the project, provide facilities, and help you set up the website.”

**“I’ll go ask them if  
they can help us,”** said Luc.

“And what about your dad, Luc?” asked Iris. “Have you heard from him lately?”

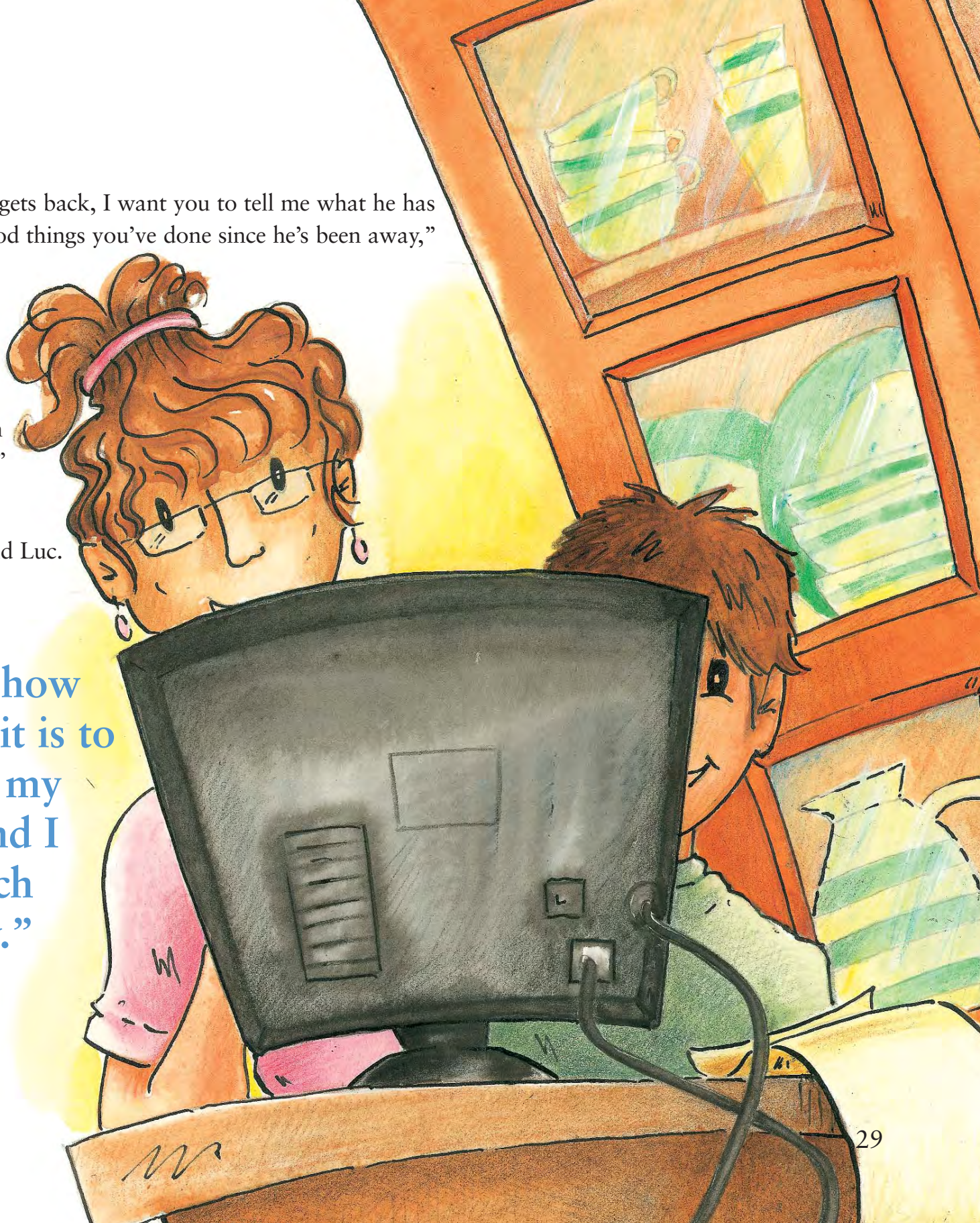
“Yeah, he will be home in a few weeks,” said Luc. “I want to tell him about my e-mail project. I hope he will be proud of me. Also, my stepmom and I have worked out a new schedule of jobs I can do around the house to help get us settled into our new home. And we have created a calendar together that shows when dad is away and when she might need me more. I feel more responsible and helpful now, but my schedule still gives me lots of time to see my friends and work on Project KLT.”



“Well, when your dad gets back, I want you to tell me what he has to say about all the good things you’ve done since he’s been away,” said Iris. “You should really try to talk with him and tell him how you were feeling when you first moved to this base. It is good for him to know your feelings,” Iris explained.

“You’re right, Iris,” said Luc.

“You have taught me how important it is to talk about my feelings, and I feel so much better now.”





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now was falling but Iris and all the Riverbank animals were cozy and warm in their homes. Iris and a few of the animals were meeting to discuss preparations for the winter activities they did every year. There was the annual skating party, which was followed by a bonfire with hot chocolate and marshmallows. They also held an annual carol-singing party, and they made food baskets to deliver to animals less fortunate than those on the Riverbank.

**“Have you heard from Luc?”** asked Sky Eagle. “I was flying over the base yesterday and I saw some military people arriving home. Maybe Luc’s dad has come home.”

**“I’m sure Luc will come and tell us all the latest news as soon as he can,”** said Iris.









Luc's dad had arrived home, and after dinner he went to see Luc in his room. "I hear that you've been helping out around the house after school," he told Luc, "and I want to thank you for your help. You are making it easier for me to do my job."

"You're welcome, dad," said Luc. "Hey, can I show you something else I've been doing?"

**"Sure son, let's see it,"** Luc's dad said.

So Luc sat down at his desk and showed his dad all the e-mails he had received from kids in other Canadian Forces communities. He told his dad about his plan to make this project a really good tool to connect kids who have parents in the military.

Luc's dad sat down and read all the e-mails, and he realized that it had been hard for Luc to make the move to their new home. He realized that the family needed to talk more regularly with each other about things that were happening in their lives.

"Luc, I would like us to have more talks about what is going on in the family," said Luc's dad, "so we can all help each other out when we are feeling stressed and alone. I didn't realize you were so

anxious and lonely when we first moved here, and I wish I knew how you were feeling. I will make sure we talk to each other and e-mail more often to let each other know our feelings. I think your e-mail project is a fantastic way for kids to share how they feel about being in a military family."





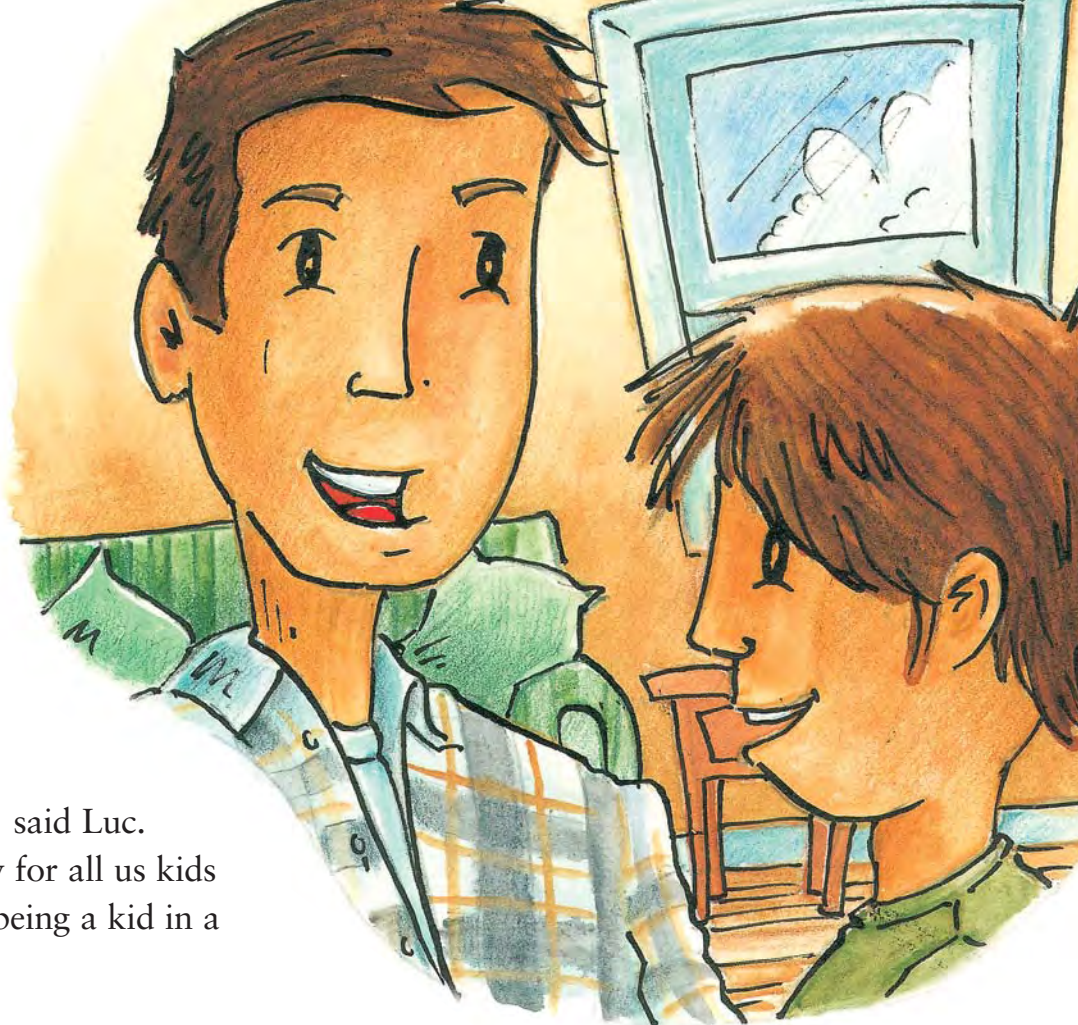
“Luc, I may even be able to help out with your project, if you want me to,” his father continued. “As part of my training, I visit many military bases across Canada. I could deliver some of your letters and talk to kids there about Project KLT. And when I am deployed overseas, I could take your letters with me and see if children in other countries would want to join your project, so they could learn about Canadian kids in military families.”

**“That’s a great idea, dad,”** said Luc.

“I have so many ideas to make this project a way for all us kids to support each other. I’m beginning to feel that being a kid in a military family is really special.”

“And your stepmom and I think we should sign up for the pre-deployment course at the Military Family Resource Centre,” Luc’s dad added. “We would like you to come with us. We can help keep our family healthy if we learn how to deal with these changes by talking about our feelings with each other.”

**“I’d like to go with you on that course,”** said Luc.





Near the end of winter, there was a terrible snowstorm. Iris and her friends were enjoying their monthly book club meeting when suddenly there was loud knock at Iris's door.

**“Now who would be out in this snowstorm?”** asked Ottie.

Iris shuffled to the door and pulled it open. A gust of wind blew a pile of snow into the cave—along with Luc.

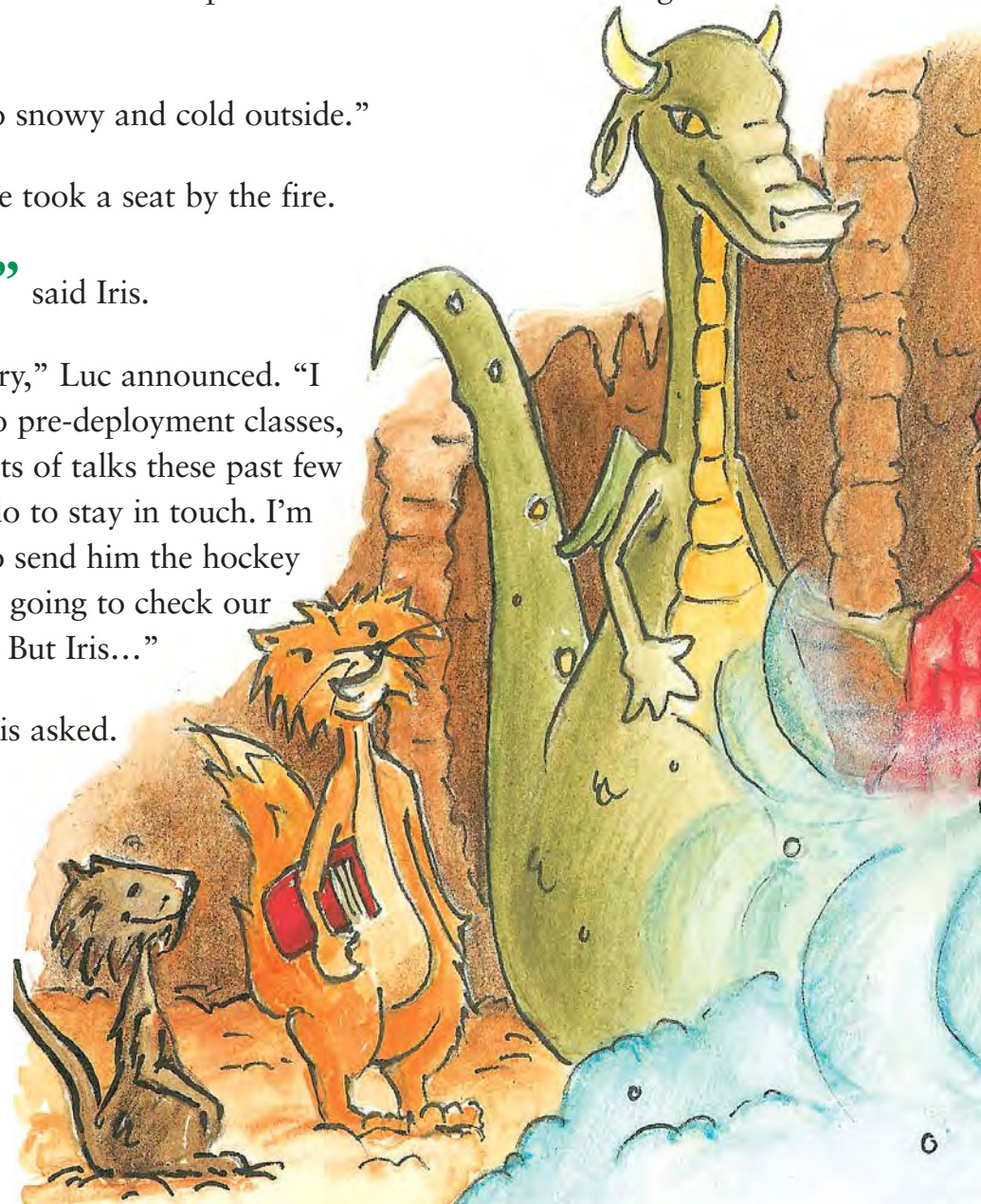
“Luc, what are you doing here?” asked Iris. “It is so snowy and cold outside.”

“I couldn't wait to tell you my news,” said Luc as he took a seat by the fire.

**“I can't wait to hear,”** said Iris.

“My dad is going away next week to another country,” Luc announced. “I am a little nervous, but our family has been going to pre-deployment classes, and I think I'm prepared. My dad and I have had lots of talks these past few weeks, and he has given me a list of things we can do to stay in touch. I'm going to e-mail him, and every week he wants me to send him the hockey scores for teams we've been following together. He's going to check our Project KLT website too, and get all the latest news. But Iris...”

**“...what is it, Luc?”** Iris asked.





**“It is great to have my dad to talk to,”** said Luc.  
**“and I’m really going to miss him when he’s away.”**

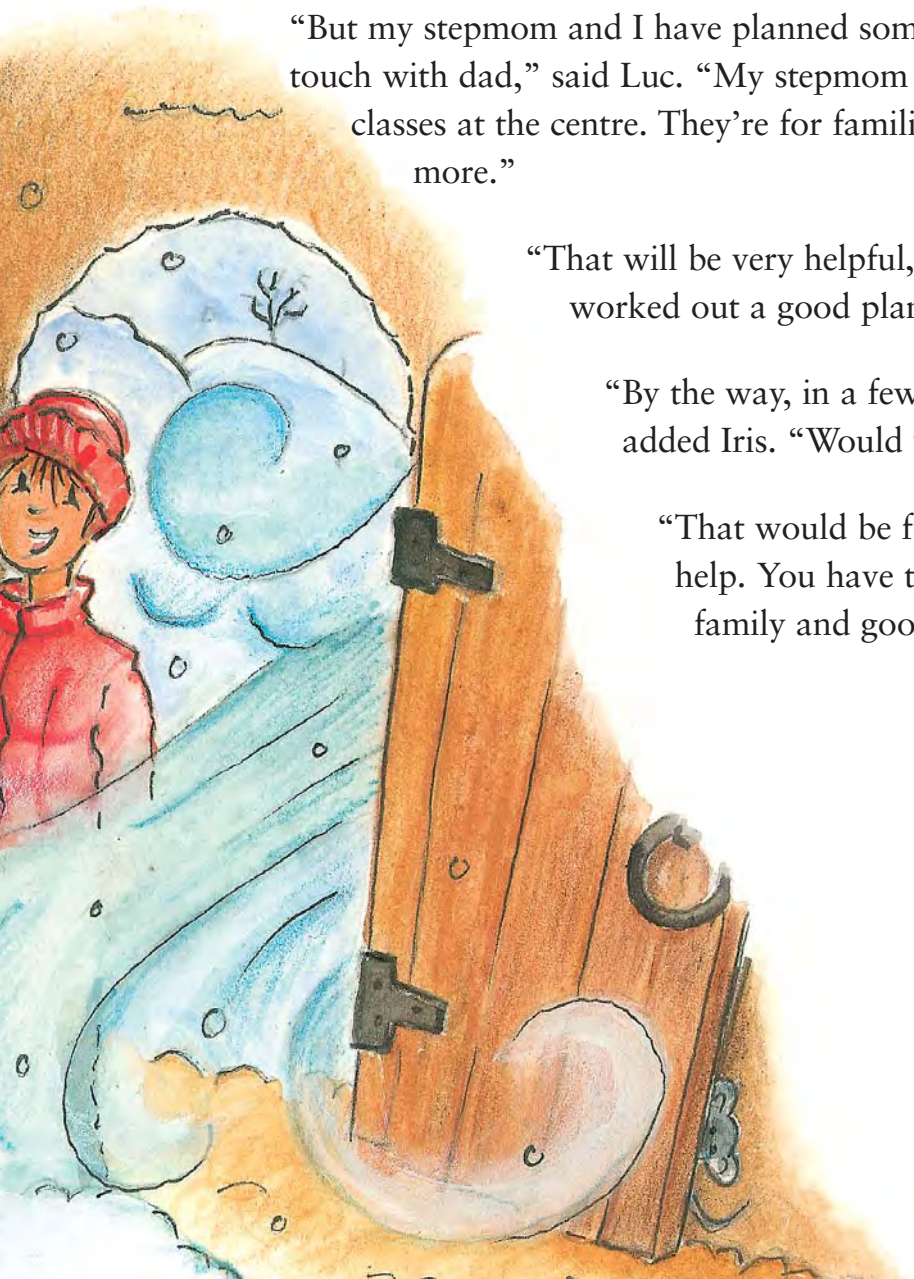
“I know you are Luc,” said Iris. “I know you are.”

“But my stepmom and I have planned some fun things to do together, and some ways to keep in touch with dad,” said Luc. “My stepmom and I are also going to continue to go to the deployment classes at the centre. They’re for families with a family member who’s away for several months or more.”

“That will be very helpful, Luc,” said Iris. “It sounds like you and your stepmom have worked out a good plan for when your dad is away.”

“By the way, in a few weeks we are having our final hockey game of the winter,” added Iris. “Would you like to come and play with us?”

“That would be fun,” said Luc. “I will come by. And Iris, thanks for your help. You have taught me how good it is to talk about my worries with my family and good friends.”







A few weeks later, Iris and the Riverbank animals had just started their hockey game when Ottie saw Luc coming along the riverbank path.

**“Hey Luc!”** Ottie called out.  
“Come and join my team!”

“Okay, Ottie,” said Luc. “Let me get my skates on first.”

Luc and the Riverbank animals enjoyed a wild game of hockey. At the end, Iris suggested they sit by the bonfire and have some hot soup she had made.

“Well Luc,” said Iris.  
“How are you managing with your dad gone?”



“I’m glad my family did all the courses together and talked to each other about our feelings before my dad left,” said Luc. “It has made it much easier now that he’s gone away to work. My stepmom and I often mention how much we miss him, but we have been sending him lots of letters and e-mails and other things to show him what we’ve been doing. I’m keeping a journal that I send him with what I do each day, and I can attach pictures from the digital camera my stepmom gave me.”

**“That’s a great idea,”** said Ottie. “He can see all the good things that you are doing while he’s away.”

“Oh yeah, and my stepmom and I go to a movie each week, and then we send dad an e-mail about what we thought of the movie. It’s our special movie night together. We talk a lot and she always tries to understand how I’m feeling. We laugh a lot about things too.”

“How is your e-mail project?” asked Iris. “You should share these ideas with your friends, and they can share ways they keep in touch with their parents when they’re away.”

“We could start a list of ways we keep in touch with our parents,” said Luc, “and ask other kids to add their ideas to it. That’s a great idea. I better get home and start making my list to send out to my Project KLT friends.”

“Bye now, Luc,” waved Iris. “Thanks for the hockey game.”



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t was a bright sunny day down by the riverbank, and Iris was very busy with her spring cleaning. She had brought all her rugs and curtains outside to clean them.

“Hi Iris,” said Ottie as he swam up to the riverbank. “What a beautiful spring day. I’ve just been swimming up and down the river all morning.”

“It is a perfect day,” Iris agreed. “I wonder what Luc is up to. We haven’t seen him lately.”

“Oh, I saw him this morning at the soccer field,” said Ottie. “He was playing with a group of kids. He has made a lot of new friends since he moved here. I waved at him as I swam by.”

**“Look—here he comes now!”** said Iris.

“Hi Luc, what news do you have for us?” asked Iris. “How is Project: Kids, Let’s Talk going?”

**“Great, Iris,”** said Luc. “Susie and I have gotten lots of kids to join our program on most of the bases, and the Military Family Resource Centre at our base is helping me set up our website and monitor it for us. But what is really great is that we have been given a room at the Centre with computers and printers and all sorts of neat things. We call it the HQ room—which stands for ‘headquarters’—and we can decorate it any way we like.”



“Can I help?” said Madeleine Frog. “I love to decorate.”

“I was thinking that we set it up like a real Canadian Forces headquarters,” said Luc. “We could have maps on the wall where all the Canadian Forces communities are, and bulletin boards with all the latest news from each community. I have several new friends on my base that want to help me, and kids on other bases could set up their own headquarters too.”

“That is exciting news,” said Iris. “Your program is helping kids adjust to the military family lifestyle, and also showing them how special it can be.”

“But best of all,” Iris said, “you have learned how important it is for families to find a way to communicate with each other in order to keep everybody healthy and strong. I’m sure your dad and stepmom are very proud of you, Luc.”

“They are, Iris,” said Luc. “My dad e-mailed me the other day and told me he was so proud of my work on Project: Kids, Let’s Talk. He said learning to talk to each other and express our feelings is very important.”

“Well, we Riverbank animals are all very proud of you too, Luc,” said Iris. “Do you have time for a quick game of water soccer? It is such a beautiful day!”





## Pertinent Information for Parents and Caregivers Related to Military Deployment:

**Message from Director Military Family Services (with excerpts from Road to Mental Readiness, a Canadian Forces Health Services project)**  
**[www.familyforce.ca](http://www.familyforce.ca)**

Deployment is a fact of military life.

“Deployment is the assignment of military personnel to unaccompanied tours of duty. Throughout their careers Canadian Forces personnel are required to serve away from their families for a variety of reasons for varying lengths of time. The term ‘deployment’ usually brings to mind Peacekeeping, although military troops are ‘deployed’ at other times as well — for operations and exercises, both domestic and abroad.” (Source: Preparing for Deployment Stress, DND. A publication of the Directorate of Medical Policy 2000. January 2000. A-MD-007-144/JD-005)

For most CF personnel, the opportunity to deploy around the world, making a difference in lives of others, is what prompted their desire to join the military in the first place. However, for many families, managing deployments can be particularly challenging – extended separations, increased workloads, anxiety over the safety of their loved one, and managing transition and reintegration issues upon completion of the tour – all amount to increased stress.

It is helpful to use the analogy of a highway to illustrate the different phases of the deployment cycle. There is the pre-deployment phase (with many separations and reunions represented by a multitude of on and off ramps), the deployment phase (where CF member and his/her family travel separate roads, each with its own challenges) and the reunion phase (where all must merge back together on the same road), and the follow-up phase (that allows for maintenance of the vehicle following the long journey).

Imagine your family is driving on a highway. While you are driving at a cruising speed, you learn that the military member will be deployed abroad in a couple of months. You may have never driven this highway or this may be the third or fourth time for you. You know it may be a long and bumpy ride! Of course you have an idea of the itinerary (timing, training, holiday, etc.) but you have no control over the road conditions: weather forecast, traffic jams, accidents, road construction, detours, etc. To get to the destination, you will need some maps (information) and vehicle maintenance (tools). The military member will also require information and tools – and some of this information will be similar to what you are receiving and other information will be unique to their role in the mission.

This analogy illustrates the importance of regular checks and maintenance in preparation for and all along the drive.



The **pre-deployment phase** places additional demands on the family members such as the training for the mission and the administrative tasks in preparation for the absence. Every time the military member goes on training, he/she is taking an off ramp to drive on a different road while the family continues on the highway. You will both need to adjust your driving speed every time he/she takes the off ramp and when the military member merges back onto the family highway. It is easy to understand that the road conditions on the two highways are different; while on training the member is psychologically no longer in the family vehicle as he/she is focused on the mission while the family focuses on their own mission at home. Each reunification requires some effort and adjustment. At the same time, the number of things that need to be taken care of in preparation for the absence might take all of you on a roller coaster of emotions and will most certainly require quite a bit of energy. Some of the things that need to be looked at include: the legal documents - will, power of attorney - financial issues, fixing the house or car, etc. Parents of single personnel may also experience a level of burden depending on their involvement in the preparation phase.

The second section is the **deployment phase**, which is the deployment or the absence and includes the HLTA. Families and deployed military members are now driving on different highways with different road conditions. After a period of recovery and reorganization, family members find their own driving speed and a sense of self-confidence. Nevertheless, during this lengthy drive they will face "daily hassles" that will necessitate some adaptation. The family might also encounter more demanding situations like a sick family member that will most likely increase your stress and require more of your energy. The HLTA, even if it is a joyful time, also requires family adjustment that may increase both the CF members' and the family members' stress levels. In order to drive as smoothly as possible the family car will need regular simple maintenance checks and, depending on the road conditions, it might require a few major maintenance checks. In other words, the family will need to increase their self-care strategies to protect their health and well-being.

The last section of the deployment highway is the **reintegration phase**. Most families go through a normal and necessary adjustment period while they re-establish family ties and return to a regular routine. Think about it - after driving the car for a couple of months it will require quite a bit of adjustment to share the wheel again. To help you cope during the transition period, try to rely on the coping strategies you had put in place during the absence.

Fortunately, there are many resources that can help families to cope with the challenges and thrive during the deployment experience



## Supporting Young Children During Deployments

Researchers have found that children with parents who are deployed tend to worry more and be afraid and sad. During deployment, a child may feel their world is less safe and predictable. Children may fear that the parent or other loved family member who is deployed may die. Even if no close family member is affected, they may still feel unsafe.

- Very young children may show fear or upset at being separated from their parent. Infants (12 months and younger) may react to changes in their schedule, physical environment, or the caretaker's mood. They may be uninterested, refuse to eat, or even lose weight.
- Toddlers (1-3 years) may sulk, cry, throw temper tantrums, or not sleep well if their caretaker is having problems or is not available.
- Preschoolers (3-6 years) might think their parent was deployed because "I was bad." They may react with toileting issues, thumb sucking, sleep problems, clinginess, and separation anxiety. They may also be touchy, depressed, aggressive, or complain about aches and pains.
- Very often, preschool and school-age children also worry about the safety of the parent at home.
- School age children (6-12 years) may perform more poorly in school. They may become moody, aggressive, or whiny. They may get stomach aches, headaches, etc.

Adapted from "*Children Coping with Deployment by Road to Mental Readiness*".

### Here are some tips to support young children through the deployment:

**Talking about the mission/absence.** There is no specific time to discuss the mission and the absence of a parent. You know your children. Decide when is the best time to talk about it but avoid waiting until the last minute so they can have time to get used to the idea and answer questions he/she might have. Grandparents and parents can team up to support the children. Discuss the subject matter together.

**Expressing feelings.** Ask the child what s/he thinks about the mission and discuss feelings. Children may express mixed feelings: excited, happy, denial, worried, scared or angry. Acknowledge all feelings whether positive or negative. It is important to reassure them and to explain how things are going to take place. They might refuse to discuss their feelings. If they are older ask them if they have someone else that they can talk to. Go over their resources with them. They can talk to an adult they trust or friends. If they are young and do not want to talk about it, try to let them



express their feelings through games and drawings. If they ask questions about the danger of the mission try to answer them as clearly and calmly as possible. Keep in mind that it is normal in the context of a long separation to have some fears. You can help the children identify what they can do to reduce their fears. Tell them to check with you what they hear outside the house (news, rumours, etc.).

We cannot protect our children from all that is bad. Yet we can learn to talk to our children about war. Use language that is easy to understand and does not hide the truth. Protect children from needless worries and concerns. Provide them with a sense of security and safety. Children should be assured that everything is being done to bring their loved one home safely and to protect families at home.

**Children are part of the solution.** Try to involve the children by asking them how they can help during the absence; make them part of the solution. However remember to not over-burden them with “parent/adult” responsibilities. Children have their own developmental milestones they need to meet (making friends, learning social skills, school) and if they are focussed on adult roles and responsibilities, they will not be able to meet these.

**Staying in touch with absent parent.** Discuss how they plan to stay in touch. Ideas include letters, pictures, drawings, cards, audio/video cassettes, encourage other ideas they might come up with.

**Parenting.** You are already doing your best in parenting your children. Understand this transition may require additional rules and consequences. State them clearly and explain the reason for putting them in place (before the departure or during absence) and when possible implement gradually the changes into the children’s routine. Expect the children to test the limits. If children experience persistent problematic behaviour changes seek advice from the staff at the MFRC. Don’t wait. The MFRC provides tools to support the parent and children (parental coaching, children’s support group and one to one counselling). Finally, just continue to love them – in the end that is what is important.



## Further Helpful Information:

### **Canadian Forces Family Covenant - ([www.familyforce.ca](http://www.familyforce.ca))**

We recognize the important role families play in enabling the operational effectiveness of the Canadian Forces and we acknowledge the unique nature of military life. We honour the inherent resilience of families and we pay tribute to the sacrifices of families made in support of Canada.

We pledge to work in partnership with the families and the communities in which they live. We commit to enhancing military life.

### **Director Military Family Services - ([www.cfpsa.com](http://www.cfpsa.com))**

Director of Military Family Services (DMFS) is responsible for the management of the Military Family Services Program (MFSP) on behalf of the Department of National Defence (DND) and the Canadian Forces (CF).

DMFS exists to resource, promote and sustain the excellence, relevance and accountability of the MFSP. Specifically, it is DMFS's responsibility to:

- Provide resources that contribute to the success of Canadian/Military Family Resource Centres (C/MFRCs).
- Provide professional advice and technical guidance to stakeholders regarding the MFSP.
- Create, implement and promote MFSP policies and services.
- Oversee and enhance the resources and performance of the MFSP.



### **Military Family Services Program - ([www.familyforce.ca](http://www.familyforce.ca))**

The Military Family Services Program (MFSP) promotes and facilitates community-based services which strengthen CF families and communities. The Program is designed to help families manage the unique stresses of the CF lifestyle through personal, family and community development.

The MFSP has mandated services that are grouped into four categories.

1. **Personal Development and Community Integration:** Since mobility is an inherent part of the military lifestyle, the MFSP helps families integrate into their new communities, enhances quality of life, and promotes and supports personal, family and community development.



Mandated service components in this category:

- Welcome and Community Orientation
- Information and Referral
- Employment and Education Assistance
- Personal Growth and Development
- Second Language Services

2. Child/Youth Development and Parenting Support: Positive parenting and support for the care and development of children and youth contribute to the health and well-being of families and communities. The MFSP supports parents in their caregiving role, and provides opportunities for the healthy development of children and youth.

Mandated service components in this category:

- Activities and Initiatives for Children and Youth
- Parent/Caregiver Education and Support
- Emergency Child Care
- Emergency Respite Child Care
- Casual Child Care

3. Family Separation and Reunion: The operational and training requirements of the Canadian Forces (CF) often result in the absence of the CF member from his/her family. Associated increased risk factors for CF members may heighten family concerns and anxieties. The MFSP provides information, outreach and support to these families.

Mandated service component in this category:

- Outreach, Information, Support and Assistance to CF Family Members



4. Prevention, Support and Intervention: Individual and family well-being has a significant impact on military readiness. The emphasis of the MFSP is to strengthen the existing capacity of individuals and families through primary preventative services.

Mandated service components in this category:

- Education and Prevention
- Self-Help Groups
- Assessment and Referral
- Short-Term Intervention and Crisis Support

**Canadian /Military Family Resource Centres - ([www.familyforce.ca](http://www.familyforce.ca))**

Canadian/Military Family Resource Centres (C/MFRCs) are committed to enriching the lives of individuals and families in Canadian Forces (CF) communities through positive action, education and support. They provide relevant programs and services that empower and encourage strong, independent individuals and families within the CF.

C/MFRCs encourage and facilitate the voluntary participation of CF families, particularly spouses, in all facets of their operations – from program planning and delivery to organization governance and leadership.

The engagement and participation of families in activities and decisions that facilitate the well-being of a community lie at the centre of successful community development efforts. They are also at the heart of the Military Family Services Program (MFSP). The model chosen for the delivery of military family services was one of family support and community development.

In Canada, MFRCs are incorporated, not-for-profit organizations. They work in partnership with the local Commanding Officer (CO), but are third-party corporations that exist and operate independent of the formal Department of National Defence and CF organizational structure. MFRCs are governed by elected Boards of Directors.

In Europe and the United States, CMFRCs cannot be provincially incorporated with a not-for-profit status and therefore are not third-party organizations. As a result, CMFRCs are within the local CF command structure and report to the delegated CF authority for the MFSP in theatre. Appointed volunteer Advisory Committees support the local CMFRC, but members of the Advisory Committee are not responsible or accountable for governing the organization.



C/MFRCs deliver the MFSP with the funds received from Director Military Family Services, and often raise funds locally to expand their suite of available services. In addition to being responsible for the delivery of the MFSP, C/MFRCs are also responsive and accountable to the communities they serve.



**Family Information Line (FIL ) – (1-800-866-4546/www.familyforce.ca)**

When you need information or have questions, bilingual FIL counsellors can provide you with answers and offer confidential, personal, support and referral services to your unique circumstances.



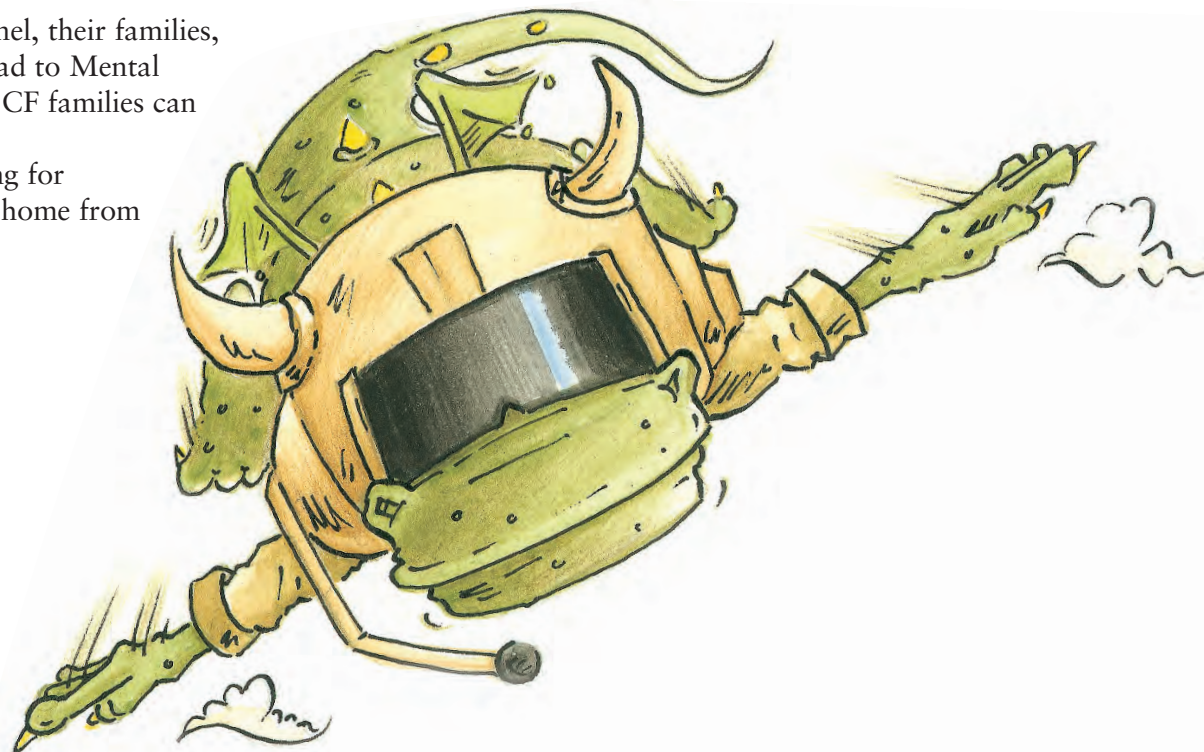
**Familyforce.ca – (www.familyforce.ca)**

FamilyForce.ca is a single point of entry web site for all military families to virtually access Canadian/Military Family Resource Centres (C/MFRCs) and to obtain consistent, standardized national resources and information.

**Road to Mental Readiness (R2MR) – (www.familyforce.ca)**

Road to Mental Readiness (R2MR) is a Canadian Forces mental health education training package that includes a series of briefings/modules addressing each stage of the deployment cycle for military personnel and their families. While not referred to explicitly as ‘resilience training’, the curriculum does intend to increase both short term performance effectiveness as well as long term mental health outcomes for soldiers and their families. It aims to prepare CF personnel, leaders and their families to identify and meet the challenges related to deployed operations and geographical family separation.

R2MR is a CF website created to provide CF personnel, their families, and service providers with information about the Road to Mental Readiness Deployment Education Training Program. CF families can access the R2MR website through familyforce: [www.familyforce.ca](http://www.familyforce.ca). Whether your family is preparing for deployment or preparing for your loved one's return home from deployment, you'll find what you need here.







Luc's dad sat down and read all the e-mails, and he realized that it had been hard for Luc to make the move to their new home. He realized that the family needed to talk more regularly with each other about things that were happening in their lives.

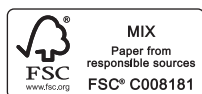
"Luc, I would like us to have more talks about what is going on in the family," said Luc's dad, "so we can all help each other out when we are feeling stressed and alone. .... I will make sure we talk to each other and e-mail more often to let each other know our feelings."

## Author-Gayle Grass

Gayle Grass is the author and publisher of the Iris the Dragon Children's Book Series. Her decision to write illustrated children's books came from the sincere belief that this medium could be used to educate and break down the stigma and fears surrounding emotional, behavioural and neurodevelopmental conditions and encourage a dialogue between children and their caregivers. The Iris the Dragon Series recognize the importance of family, school and community in promoting the potential of every child and youth, regardless of their mental health challenge. Today, Gayle lives with her husband and family on a hobby farm near Perth, Ontario.

## Illustrator-Graham Ross

A graduate of the illustration program at Sheridan College in Ontario, Graham began his career as a book designer for Canadian publisher McClelland & Stewart. He then returned to his hometown of Ottawa to work as senior designer for a local firm. It was in Ottawa that Graham began his freelance illustration and graphic design career. Through his career Graham has completed illustrations for such publishers as Scholastic Canada, Orca Book Publishers and Meadowside Books of the United Kingdom, as well as the Canadian government. He lives in Merrickville, Ontario with a circus star family: his juggling wife, a helldriver daughter, a canine cannonball, and a black squirrel who doesn't realize squirrels live outdoors.



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