



How Lerato the eagle survived and learned to thrive

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Theme: *Overcoming the hardships of growing up in a single-parent family and persevering*

Appropriate age group: *All age groups*



Granny Lerato is quite an old eagle but she's still strong and she can still fly a long way. Lerato means love and charity in seSotho, one of the languages spoken in South Africa. Sometimes she perches on a rock high in the mountains and thinks about when she was young and the many lessons she has learned in her life.

This is Granny Lerato's story....

Baby Lerato was born in a nest high in the mountains. The nest was made of sticks and branches – a strong and sturdy nest to keep the family safe. It was lined with soft feathers to make it cosy. There were other eagle families living in the mountains, each with their own nest on their own rock.



Lerato's father and mother were both good hunters so her tummy was always full. They took turns to hunt for food but Mother often stayed with her. Lerato loved to snuggle under her mother's cosy, warm wing. Sometimes she peeped out to look at the beautiful valley below but it was so far down it made her feel dizzy!

One evening, Lerato's mother said: "I wonder where your Father is. He hasn't been home all day. I'm really hungry but I don't want to leave you here alone." Lerato's tummy was rumbling from hunger too. She and her mother waited all night but her Father didn't come back. Where was he? Was he hurt? Was he living on a different mountain? Lerato and her mother didn't know and they were very, very worried. Mother Eagle reminded Lerato of a motto that she often used: "Sometimes we need to strive to survive."

The next morning Mother said: "Lerato, we can't wait any longer. I need to go and hunt for food. But don't worry – maybe your Father will come back while I'm gone or maybe I'll find him. You be good and stay in the nest. Just don't go to the edge of the rock.

You might fall off and you don't know how to fly!"

Lerato felt scared when her mother flew off and left her all alone. Time went slowly and she got more and more hungry and more and more worried. The sun got hotter and hotter and there was no shade in the nest. Lerato remembered her mother's words. "Be good and stay in the nest. Just don't go to the edge of the rock." But it was really, really hot so she got out of the nest very carefully to look for shade. There was no shade on the rock – no shade at all. So she went back to the nest and put her head under her wing, trying to hide from the sun.

Lerato waited and waited and she got more and more hungry and more and more scared. Maybe her Father would never ever come back – and maybe her Mother would never come back either.

After a long time her Mother came home carrying a small mouse. Lerato gobbled up the mouse and then she wanted to snuggle under her Mother's wing out of the sun but there was no time for that. Her Mother had to leave right away to look for more food. Lerato was left alone again and she felt really, really lonely. "I'm so hot and so hungry and so scared I think I'm going to die. I'll never even learn to fly before I die." But her Mother always came back with a little food – a lizard or a snake or a mouse.

This went on day after day. Father never came back so Mother had to work double shift to feed Lerato. She had to do Father's share of the work as well. Lerato was growing fast and learning to fly so she needed lots of good food. Mother did her best but there were many days when Lerato went hungry.

Mother didn't complain but she got really thin and she was always tired. Lerato was worried but she was too young to know how to help. Mother often told her "Never never ever give up. No matter how hard things seem to be, we'll keep on going, one day at a time."

The nest was a big mess. Some of the sticks fell out and the feathers floated away in the wind. The nest wasn't strong any more and Lerato didn't feel safe. But Mother had no time and no energy to fix the nest. The other young eagles started teasing Lerato about her untidy nest. They laughed at her and her Mother and their laughter echoed all the way down the valley. Lerato felt as if these echoes were cutting deep into her heart.

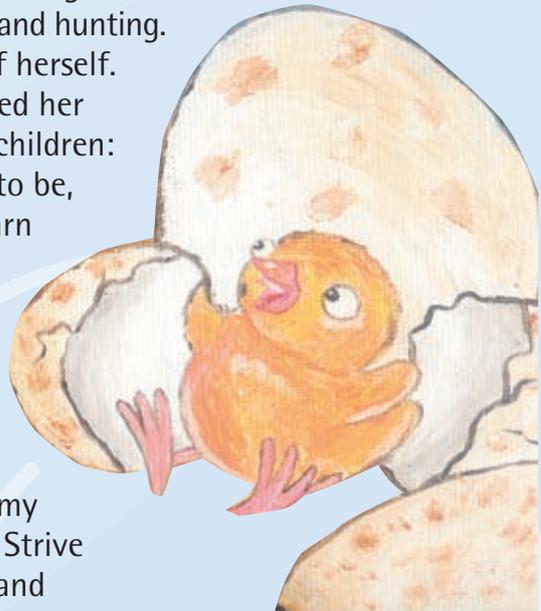
She felt ashamed and embarrassed that her nest was different but helpless to change it in any way.

One night there was a terrible thunderstorm with lots of wind. The nest was blown away but Mother stayed calm. She said: "We must fly down the mountain to find a more sheltered place. Follow me and you'll be fine." But in the storm they lost each other. Lerato tried her best to fly, but her wings were not strong enough to battle the strong wind. The wind threw her about and dumped her onto the ground. Lerato spent the night wet and shivering on a strange rock. She was very scared but remembered the motto her Mother had taught her: "Strive to survive." This comforted her a little. Mother found her early the next morning and hugged her, helped her clean her feathers and gave her some food. But soon Mother needed to fly off again to hunt for food and to find sticks to build a new nest on the new rock.

Lerato didn't like the new place. There were lots of other families living nearby and there was a troop of baboons in the mountain. It was noisy and Lerato didn't feel safe. But she was happy because Mother came home more often and brought more food. Some nights, Mother and Lerato sat next to each other on their new rock and talked. Mother often said: "Lerato, things are difficult for us now, but you and I will never ever give up. We will always strive to survive." And she would give Lerato a special hug.

As Lerato grew up, she became really good at flying and hunting. She was brave and strong and she could take care of herself. When she had her own family she always remembered her mother's words. She told her children and her grandchildren: "Strive to survive. No matter how hard things seem to be, never give up! Keep on going, one day at a time. Learn to overcome the struggles, don't let them overcome you."

But there came a time when Granny Lerato sat high in the mountain, thinking about life. She said to herself, "The motto my Mother taught me was good. It helped us to cope in difficult times. Of course I want to survive but I really want to make more of my life. I want to THRIVE so in future my motto will be: Strive to thrive. That is the motto I will teach my children and grandchildren." That is the story of how little Lerato grew up to be Thriving Granny Lerato.



? Possible discussion points:

- *What challenges do people face in your community?*
- *How can we support them?*