

Corey talks to the school

A tall, blond-haired boy walks onto the stage of a school hall in Santa Barbara, California. His name is Corey Cassidy. He is sixteen years old. Something happened to him in the holidays and it gave him an idea. He is about to tell his story to the whole school. The hall is quiet now. Everybody is looking at Corey. He is looking at the school principal.

Thank you, Principal Tanner, for letting me speak to the school today about my idea to start up a group called 'Surfers for Samoa'.

Now Corey turns to face the school.

I can hear you thinking, *Samoa – where's that?* I hadn't heard of it either until I went there in November. Going to Samoa changed my life.

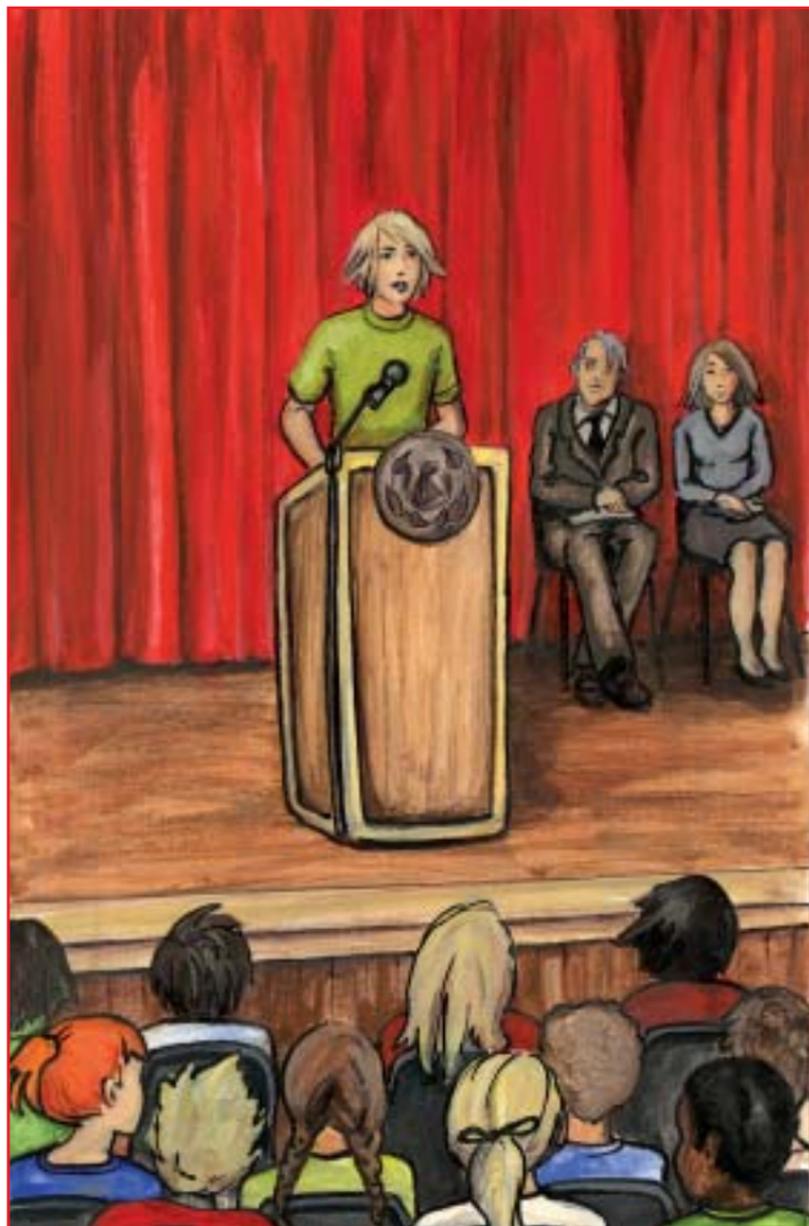
Corey stands and looks at the floor for a moment. There is silence. Corey takes a deep breath and he starts speaking again.

Most of you know that I love surfing. All I've ever wanted to do is stay around here and go surfing up and down the coast. Why go anywhere else when we get good waves here, right? So when my parents said that we were going to a small country called Samoa, I didn't want to go.

My parents are both ophthalmologists – eye doctors – and they had both volunteered to work for two weeks on the most remote island of Samoa. Samoa is in the Pacific Ocean. Now, if they'd said we were going to a remote island of Hawaii, I would have started packing my bags. I've always wanted to go surfing in Hawaii. But Samoa? I'd never heard of it. I refused to go – I even said that I didn't want to miss any school!

The whole school laughs – including the teachers. Corey smiles at Mr Tanner.

Sorry, Principal Tanner, but most people know that this



school isn't my favourite place. Anyway, I refused to go to Samoa until Mom told me that it does have good surf. She'd bought a guidebook and read how good the surf is.

So I agreed, and a few weeks later we were flying in a small plane to the remote island of Savaii. The Samoans call Savaii 'The Big Island' but you can drive around the whole island in half a day. It looked amazing from the window of the plane. It's like a kid's drawing of a tropical island. Most of the island is steep mountains that are covered in jungle. The coast has coral reefs and beaches. I could see good waves.

The airport on Savaii is tiny. We flew very close to a steep mountain, then we turned quickly and there was the airport. I thought the plane was going to crash into the palm trees before we stopped.

I couldn't wait to go surfing, but it took hours to get to our hotel. First, we went by taxi to the main town on the island. They call it a town, but it's just one long street and there are only about three stores. There were pigs and chickens and dogs running around and it was almost impossible to find the place to pick up our hire car. It was at the back of a big, open fruit market.

I was hungry and wanted a hamburger. There was just one place that sold food and it only had rice and some overcooked meat that I couldn't eat. I think it was chicken, but it tasted really bad. Then we had a long drive to our hotel.

The Vaisala Hotel is on the other side of Savaii from the town. It's easy to drive around the island because there's only one road and it goes along the coast. The rest of the island is too steep and the jungle is too thick for roads. The Samoans look after that one road very well. The people in each village look after their own part of the road.

I saw some great surf as we drove along the west coast of the island. We drove through lots of villages, and Dad had to drive slowly because children and pigs and dogs kept running out of

the jungle and onto the road. And Mom kept asking Dad to stop because she wanted to take photographs. I was tired, hot and hungry.

We got to the hotel close to sunset. It's built on a steep hill and is quite old. The hotel buildings needed painting. The hotel has its own small, sandy beach. Out past a coral reef, I could see some waves breaking.

There were other doctors and nurses there. My parents were the last people in the medical team to arrive. A big dinner was planned that night to welcome them all. We arrived just in time to get ready for dinner – so I didn't have a chance to go surfing. I did have time for a quick swim. The water was really warm. Then I stood on the beach and looked at the waves breaking on the reef a long way out.

That was when I met Tapu. He's the son of one of the hotel staff. He's about twelve years old and he speaks some English. Most people in Samoa speak a bit of English. He came up to me on the beach when I was getting out of the water.

'You like swimming?' he asked me as we watched the sunset.

'Yeah,' I said, 'but I'd rather be surfing.'

'Yeah, me too,' he said.

'You surf?' I asked.

'No,' said Tapu. 'You teach me. On your board.'

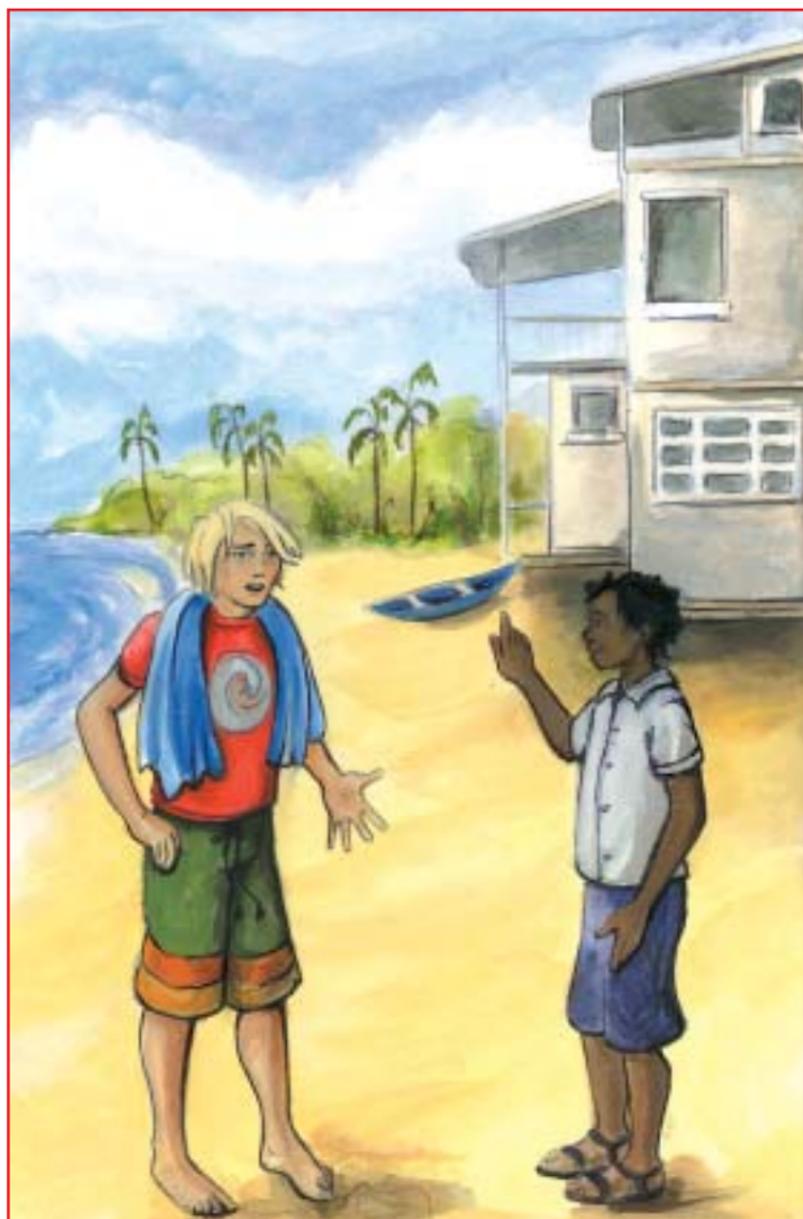
'I didn't bring my board,' I told Tapu. 'I'll use one of the hotel's boards.'

Tapu laughed. 'What boards?' he said.

I didn't want to talk to this little kid. I certainly didn't want to say that I'd teach him to surf. I just wanted to get changed and eat. So I started to walk up to my room, but he followed me.

'What boards?' he asked again.

'The hotel must have boards that the guests can use. It's a surf hotel,' I said to him.



Tapu laughed and laughed. 'Ha ha! You're funny! Can you surf in that?' Tapu pointed along the beach to a narrow, wooden boat on the sand. 'Hotel guests can use that.'

'Don't tell me there are no surfboards here!' I said.

'Okay, I won't tell you,' said Tapu. 'But it's true.'

I met up with my parents in the dining room of the hotel. There were only a few other guests there – all of them were part of the medical team. I looked at the food on the big table – everyone else was helping themselves, but it made me feel sick. There was some sort of grey vegetable wrapped in banana leaves with brown lumps over it, and some soft, grey fish. There was nothing I wanted to eat.

Then the music started. Some men in long skirts played and sang. The guitars sounded okay, but one man played a thing that looked as if it was made out of a bucket, a broom and a bit of string. They were singing songs my parents used to listen to when they were at school, but in Samoan. You know, old songs by Simon and Garfunkel. But loud, and in Samoan. Man, I hated it. 'Isn't this a surfers' hotel, Mom?' I said, angrily, as I tried to eat my dinner. 'Why are the only guests here people in the medical team?'

'It's not quite the time of year for people to come here. I asked the hotel staff. The surfing season starts soon,' Mom said nervously.

'Soon?' I said. 'Not now?'

Tapu came over to our table to pick up some plates. 'Hi!' he said. 'Yes, surfing starts soon. The winds turn soon and come from the north-west. Then the big waves come too. Now the big waves are on the south and west coasts.'

'Great!' I said, angrily. 'No surfboard, no surf – and no hamburgers. I want to go home.'