

KIDS CAN DIVE: The 'El Torito' Diaries

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KIDS CAN DIVE

VOYAGE OF THE EL TORITO FAMILY

DIARIES OF BRADY AND KARLA DOAK

EDITED AND ILLUSTRATED BY WADE DOAK

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The El Torito Family:

Dr. Walter Starck

The captain and owner of the underwater research ship, El Torito. An American scientist and inventor.

Janice Starck

As well as being a diver and underwater photographer, Janice is also a ballet dancer. She is an Aucklander and she married Walter at the beginning of the expedition.

Wade Doak

Wade is a New Zealander, a diver, underwater treasure hunter, author, photographer and the father of Karla and Brady.

Jan Doak

A highly-trained nurse, a very experienced scuba diver, photographer and Karla and Brady's mother.

Cliff Enger

A nineteen-year old Californian college student who joined El Torito as a volunteer crewman and studied shark jaws.

Rebekkah Lee

A seventeen year old New Zealander who met Cliff in Auckland and joined the ship later.

A keen diver and a dancing friend of Janice's.

Karla Doak

Aged nine, Karla loves reading, writing and all types of arts and crafts.

Brady Doak

Brady is eleven and loves diving and being read to by his sister.

Puggy

A French pug dog who loves chocolate and hates puppies, small children and people that she knows diving over the side of boats.

Matilda

Highly skilled at escaping from her cage, this white lab rat detests being bathed.

How It All Began

The undersea research ship, *El Torito* (means Little Bull) was anchored in Rikoriko. Rikoriko is a giant sea cave in the far north of New Zealand. On board El Torito, marine scientist Dr. Walter Starck sat cross-legged on his sofa, his wispy beard framing his knobby knees. He looked steadily at his ship's diver, Wade Doak, who had just returned from a submarine excursion with him.

"Wade, why don't you and Jan bring your kids along on my next voyage up to the tropics? We're going to be studying shark behaviour and reef life in Melanesia. We'll also be checking out some people who worship sharks as gods and we're going to visit shipwrecks from the war and villages where people still live the way they did in the Stone Age. Your kids would love it."

As a result of Dr. Starck's suggestion Brady, aged eleven, and Karla, nine, would have adventures that would affect their lives forever. But their father would only let them go on one condition: to get off school they had to keep diaries. These are the diaries that the children kept of the amazing adventures they had among the islands of Melanesia.

El Torito anchored in the huge Rikoriko Cave, Poor Knights Islands, out from Tutukaka, Northland, New Zealand.

Diaries of Brady and Karla, the ocean kids.

20 August Brady:

The first time I ever saw El Torito was on the way home from school on the school bus. To start with, I thought some floating building had arrived at Tutukaka, that's the little seaport near our home at Matapouri Beach in New Zealand. What turned out to be her stem looked like an extension of the wharf. Suddenly I realized that this white giant was El Torito, the undersea research ship I had thought and dreamt about ever since my Dad began travelling on her. It had floated in my imagination for so long and now here it was.

Mum was waiting for us to get off the bus by the Tutukaka shop. She wanted to show us the ship we were going to leave New Zealand on. I was worried that I would be disappointed when I saw inside the ship.

From the jetty it was a dazzling sight in the hot February sun. On the broad foredeck, big enough for a tennis court, was a twelve ton crane for lifting her 23 foot skiff (runabout) or the bright yellow submarine into the water. Behind these were two white steel chambers. The biggest, just in front of the wheelhouse, was a recompression chamber used for treating divers suffering from the bends.* The other was a small underwater house for divers who need to decompress. Below decks I found a spacious, air-conditioned house with a lounge, a kitchen, two bathrooms, a library, a darkroom and a complete engineering workshop. El Torito is an undersea research ship owned by the scientist Dr Walter Starck. And he has invited all my family to go on a diving expedition in the tropics. And no, I wasn't disappointed!

*When a diver goes down deep for too long the pressure of the water dissolves nitrogen from the air he breathes in his blood stream as a liquid. When he comes up this may form bubbles that

damage nerves. He could be crippled or even killed. This chamber can save a diver's life.

El Torito at Tutukaka Harbour, in Northland, New Zealand.

Above: First Leg of Our Voyage.

The Day We Left Auckland and Came North to Leigh

23 August-Karla:

Brady came rushing down stairs and said to the American anthropologist who was visiting our ship: "Gary, the engines have started up" and Gary said: "God damn it! Doesn't Walt know I haven't finished my coffee yet?"

23 August Brady:

While I lay on the toilet floor, feeling very seasick and thinking of all the things that could fall over, El Torito tossed, bumped and banged as it made its way up the coast on the first leg of her journey. Walt then decided to take shelter in a small bay about seventy miles from Auckland so we could eat tea without everything falling over onto us. I wasn't very hungry.

Out At Sea

28 August Karla:

Today there was a sign that we are nearly in the tropics. This morning I went upstairs to the wheelhouse. Through the door I saw a long stretch of beautiful smooth sea glinting in the sunlight. I felt the sun beating down on me. I grabbed a book and spent the day reading on deck.

A Day on Which the Sea Was Flat Calm and No Land Could Be Seen.

28 August Brady:

The last three days I have been feeling seasick. So has everyone else except Walt who munches chocolate in the wheelhouse but today the sea was flat calm and everyone was wearing summer clothes. It was a big thing for me to be able to stand on deck and turn in a circle and see nothing but ocean, ocean, *ocean*. I finished the book I was reading. Later on Walt let me look at the sun through the sextant, an instrument he uses to navigate. After tea I cleaned Matilda's cage. While I was doing that we let Matilda go for a run. She is a laboratory rat from the University, but really

she is our pet rat. Walt wants her for testing whether the reef fish we eat are poisonous or not. But Karla and I will probably test it on ourselves first.

Our captain navigates by shooting the sun with a sextant.

Mathew Island: Active Volcano

29 August Karla:

I was lying on the sofa talking to Mum and Janice when Walt came and told us that Mathew Island is an active volcano. I leapt off the sofa and ran up on deck. Sure enough a little trickle of smoke rose from the top of the island and there were cliffs of bright yellow sulphur.

29 August Brady:

Today we arrived at Mathew Island. It isn't really an island, it's an active volcano. When we got there a little bit of steam was coming from a vent in the top. All around the vent was yellow sulphur. Walt decided to do some fishing. No sooner had he put the rod into the water than he had a fish struggling on the end of the line. Two fish got away-then Walt got a strong hand line and we started to catch something. The first fish was a rainbow runner. The second, a huge wahoo and we had some for lunch. It was beautiful. The birds, big, jet black with v-shaped tails that flew around the island, were fantastic. They are called frigate birds or man o' war birds because they attack other birds and make them drop their fish. The younger ones are white. Frigates can't feed directly from the sea. Dad told us that for the people of Laulasi, the shark worshippers we are going to see in the Solomon Islands, the frigate bird is sacred. It's a bird of power-magic.

Mathew Island: mid-ocean volcano.

Lots More Islands–Vanuatu

30 August Karla:

Through the binoculars I saw coconut palms swaying in the wind and thatched houses. The hot tropical sun beat down on my body as I lay reading. Then a volcano island went past and it erupted right before my eyes.

30 August Brady:

Last night I slept in the wheelhouse with Cliff who was on watch so I could see the sun come up in the morning. Before I went to sleep, Cliff and I went for a walk on deck. The air was warm. When we came in again I read myself to sleep but Cliff stayed up and watched for ships. It was morning

when I woke up. I looked around for Cliff who wasn't in the wheelhouse. We have auto-pilot. I found him outside listening to music and waiting for the sun to rise. When I sat beside him he pointed at the horizon. I looked and saw that there was another island-it's name was Aneitum. It was a beautiful sight to watch as the sky grew redder and redder until a big red ball rose above the horizon getting brighter and brighter.

When we got to Aneitum the first thing I saw was that the island had bush on it. The second island was just a reef with an old wreck on it. We peered at the twisted rusting piece of metal through the binoculars for a long time. Behind the reef was a lagoon. Round the edges of the lagoon were some huts. I was still looking at the huts when Dad said "Look!" I looked just in time to see a flying fish fly about ten feet and drop into the water again. As we were leaving Aneitum I saw that there was another island in sight. Tanna was its name. And on the map I saw that there would be another island after that: Eromanga. I asked Walt when we would get to Eromanga. He said it would happen some time during the night.

Below: Cliff Enger is studying sharks:

1 September Brady:

We went to Hideaway Island near Vila and had lunch. On the way back we went through a small village and saw some cocoa plants, mango and breadfruit trees and sugar cane. When we got back Karla and I went for a swim. Cliff joined us. We swam until the sun went down. The water is like a hot bath. When I got out of the water and got some clothes on I had a look through Walt's brand new image intensifier. It had been flown in from America for his film work. I could not believe my eyes. It was pitch dark but the image intensifier turned the sun on. It's like a very big camera lens and it can amplify light 30,000 times. Looking through it at night, the room looks as if it's in daylight.

Everything is green and white. When I looked through it I saw bats flying around for the first time.

Tonight we went to the house of a famous old diving friend of Dad's called Reece Discombe and had tea. After tea we had a look at some of Reece's films about the Pentecost Island people who jump from a tower with a vine tied on their ankle. They invented bungee jumping.

El Torito alongside Discombe's swimming pool, Port Vila.

Cook's Reef

4 September Brady:

El Torito is lying over a small atoll called Cook's Reef just off a tiny island. The water is crystal clear and when you look over the side the bottom looks only two feet away. Walt had to shift the boat because the wind came up. Walt, Janice and Mum repainted Walt's wetsuit. He paints it so that it looks like a seasnake*. He has seen that sharks avoid him when he wears this wetsuit and wants to try it out some more and maybe find out why.

We had two lots of visitors from the island. They sold us some bananas and we gave them a fish.

Santo and the Sharks

5 September Brady:

We are at Santo in a bay called Palikula. Walt started the engines at two o'clock last night. We started early because El Torito was bumping against Cook Reef.

At Cook Reef, a young, submerged atoll, I had my first experience of how dangerous the sea can be. In the night we woke up to a series of loud bangs. El Torito was grinding against the reef. The current that had been holding us out had stopped running and the tide had fallen so low that we hit the reef. Luckily we didn't get stuck or we'd have had to call for help.

After tea Karla and I had one of the best swims of our lives.

5 September Karla:

Today at Palikula Bay I learnt to dive down and come up without swallowing a whole lot of water.

Walt invented the seasnake suit to repel reef sharks

6 September Brady:

We are still in Palikula Bay and I guess we will be for some time filming sharks. This morning I slept in and when I did wake up I stayed in bed and finished the book *The Guardians of The House*-it was beaut. After I had finished the book I got up and Karla and I did our schoolwork. Then Mum, Karla and I went for a swim. We went over to a pinnacle and saw a crown of thorns starfish and felt a sea cucumber*. The stars eat coral and can be a problem. When we got back Dad took some pictures and Karla and I had our first short try of an aqualung. We just took a few breaths from the mouthpiece a foot below the surface. It was strange. Later Dad explained to us all the dangers of diving with an aqualung.

Diving is a very easy thing to do until something goes wrong but if you're careful nothing will go wrong. There are four main dangers in diving. One of them is being scared of the other dangers. The other three are the bends, the narcs and an embolism. I'll start with the bends. When a person goes down deep he or she is under a lot of pressure. The pressure dissolves air into the blood stream and it becomes a liquid. Then, when the diver comes up too fast small bubbles of air form in the blood just like when you take the cap off a bottle of coke it fizzes but-there were no bubbles there before. It is the same with a diver who comes up too fast, except the bubbles form in the blood and if one of these bubbles reaches a nerve it destroys it and may paralyse the diver from the waist down. If one of these bubbles reaches the brain it will kill the person. *

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beard framing knobbly knees. He looks steadily at ship's diver, Wade Doak, just returned from a submarine trip with him. "Why don't you and Jan bring your kids along on my next voyage up to the tropics? We're going to study shark behaviour and reef life in Melanesia. We'll also be checking out some people who worship sharks as gods and we're going to visit war wrecks and Stone Age villages. Brady and Karla would love it."

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