

Bill Coppel Young Writers' Award 2011

Winner, 11-12 years category

Broken Dream by Niall Gifford

Suvarrow is a dream. Suvarrow is a small atoll in the Cook Islands; and one of the least disturbed specs on our planet. During my family's sailing trip around the Pacific Ocean, we visited Suvarrow. But some things can turn Suvarrow from a dream to a dump.

The atoll's pristine waters have all sizes, shapes and colors of beautiful coral. In fifty meters of water clarity you can easily see countless species of tropical fish, including sharks. On shore, palm trees have lots of birds and below on the sand, crabs scurry. The only residents on Suvarrow are two park rangers six months of each year. James and Apii were the two rangers during our visit.

When we went to shore, we were surprised to see piles of garbage on the beach. We heard that James and Apii frequently collect garbage. We even saw a pile of fishing buoys as high as two cars! So my family and other sailors organized a walk to collect the trash. By the end we were hot, sweaty and dirty. I felt frustrated that people don't care about the environment. After just a few hours we had bags full of debris: bottles, shoes, plastics chairs, hard hats, fishing buoys, dolls and even a GPS transponder. Not one piece of rubbish came from Suvarrow. There were some items that were so large that we couldn't move them, like the rusty metal freezer. To be honest, the garbage was also interesting.

A toy doll, where did it come from? Perhaps young girl was playing on the dock in Brisbane and dropped it in the water? Maybe the workman's hard hat was accidentally bumped off of an oil rig near the American coast. Could the plastic chairs have come from a ferry boat in Indonesia, swept off during a storm? Perhaps the fishing buoys were

holding up a net off the coast of Mexico. It could be that one of the shoes belonged to a Bondi Beach walker. Who knows where the GPS transponder came from, maybe a sunken fishing trawler? On Suvarrow lots of things washed up, some from long ago.

In the late 1800s a skeleton was found, along with several Spanish pieces of eight, a musket ball and some nails. One theory says it's a 16th century Spanish sailor; and another says it's one of the mutinous crew from HMS *Bounty*. Whether garbage or gold, humans sure leave a mess.

But Suvarrow is a spec in the ocean, so it makes me wonder how much garbage is out there. Just like a net, a startling amount of floating debris is caught by the atoll day after day. But so far garbage doesn't turn Suvarrow upside down; the flora and fauna still thrive.

Suvarrow is a like window with a small crack. Through it I can see raw beauty, vivid colors and dramatic weather. The crack clouds it. Human impact can kill the coral; and if the coral dies the whole underwater ecosystem collapses. Like a tower of blocks, take out the bottom block and the others will collapse. Think about it.

Let's say you leave a plastic bottle on the ground. You think it's just one plastic bottle; it's not going to make a difference. When everyone thinks that, then that is the problem. And when it rains after a big weekend in Tunks Park, so many plastic bottles float past my boat and out of Sydney Harbor, on their way to a beach on Suvarrow. And the crack gets a little bigger.