



Lady Vini's

Big Pacific
Adventure

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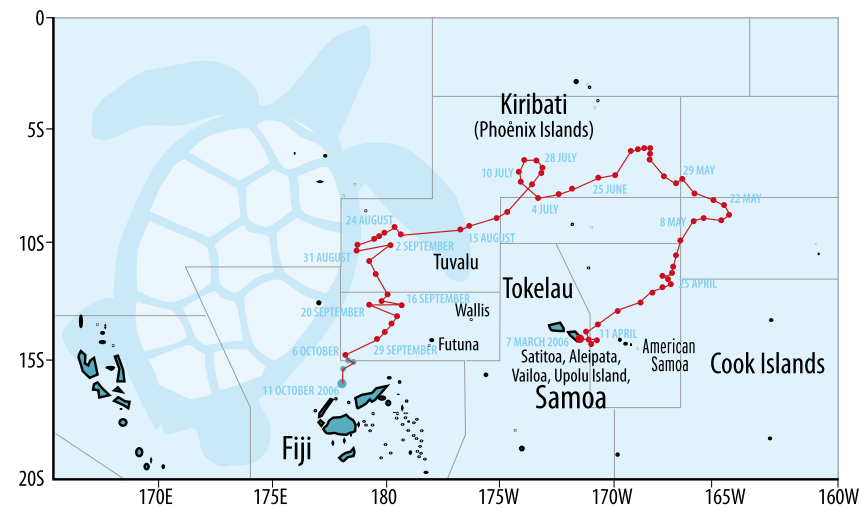
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From 7 March 2006, Lady Vini, a hawksbill turtle, travelled a distance of 4,743km across the Pacific. Averaged over 228 days, her speed was almost one kilometre per hour.



Our story begins on a lovely afternoon in Samoa. Lady Vini, a beautiful hawksbill turtle, had laid her eggs on the beach and was now looking for food in the coral reef. She had just found a tasty looking sea sponge when, all of a sudden, she felt herself being pulled backwards in the water.

Lady Vini used her strong flippers but could not get away. Before she knew it she was out of the water and upside down on a boat.

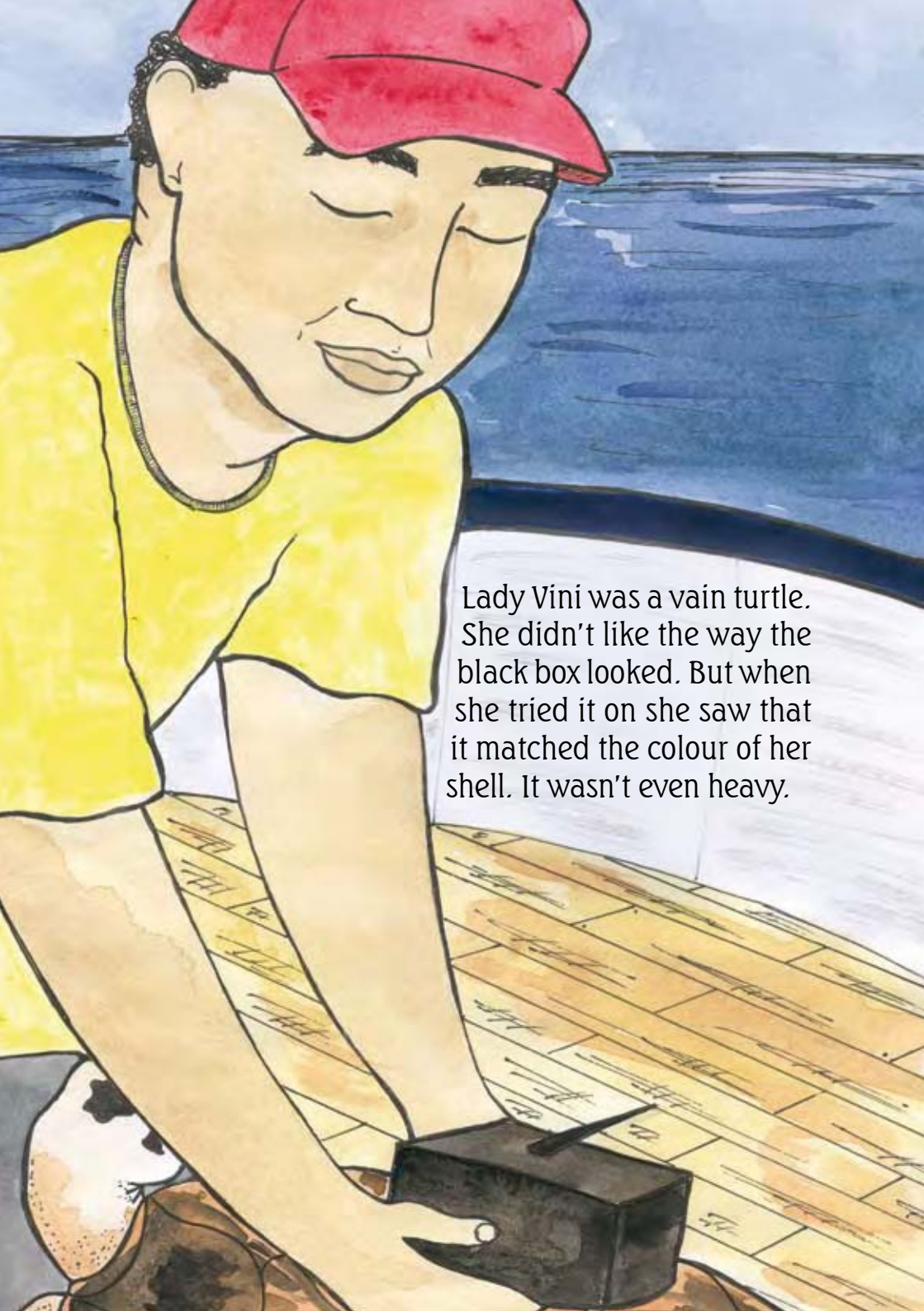
Lady Vini was so cross that she just couldn't speak. From upside down all she could see were different size human toes and the wooden deck of a boat. Lady Vini became scared as she had heard that humans eat turtles. So she lay very still and shut her eyes tightly, hoping the people would go away.



Instead, the people very gently turned Lady Vini onto her stomach. They covered her with some wet *lavalavas* so she wouldn't get too hot. Then a man sat next to her and started to talk softly.

The man said that the people were friends of the turtles. He said that all of the turtles in the Pacific needed her help. Many turtles were in danger of becoming extinct – just like the dinosaurs. The people wanted to help the turtles but they needed to learn more about them.


Lady Vini could help the people by wearing a black box on her shell. The box was called a “transmitter or satellite tag”. It would send the story of Lady Vini's travels in a beam to a satellite in the sky and back to the people on earth. It would be glued on to her shell, so it wouldn't hurt. One day, it would just fall off, and then Lady Vini's work would be done.




Lady Vini was a vain turtle. She didn't like the way the black box looked. But when she tried it on she saw that it matched the colour of her shell. It wasn't even heavy.

Lady Vini lay on the boat for a while thinking about what the man had said. She knew that her family was small. Many of her cousins had disappeared. When she was small she had been told stories about other turtles which had been killed in their journeys through the Pacific. This would be a way for Lady Vini to help her family. And she could have an adventure!

After attaching the black box to her shell, the people helped Lady Vini back into the sea. With a small splash she felt the warm ocean and was happy to be back in the water. As she looked at her shell she realised the black box looked like a fin. 'It might keep the sharks away!' she laughed, shaking her shell proudly.



Lady Vini was so busy admiring herself that she didn't realise she'd swum the wrong way. She didn't know where she was but kept swimming, hoping to be back home soon.



Growing hungry, Lady Vini wanted to find a coral reef but could only see some sea grass. Sighing she decided to see what she could eat there. With her head buried in the grass, Lady Vini couldn't hear anything, but she could feel a tap, tap, tap on her shell.

Turning around Lady Vini was surprised to see another turtle with a black box on its shell. This turtle looked very different to Lady Vini.

"Talofa lava," said Lady Vini politely.

"Malo", said the other turtle. "What are you doing here? Don't you only eat in the coral?"

"Well, ioe", said Lady Vini who didn't want to admit she was lost. "I thought I would try something different!", she said. "My name's Lady Vini," she said with a smile.

"Miss Lina," said the other turtle. "But sea grass is for green turtles. Not hawksbills."

"Yes, we're different, " she said. "But, hey! I see we're also the same!", as she pointed to the black box on the green turtle's shell. "You're helping other turtles too!", Lady Vini said. "I'm just about to set out on my big adventure to see how many other turtles I will meet – will you come too?", she asked Miss Lina.

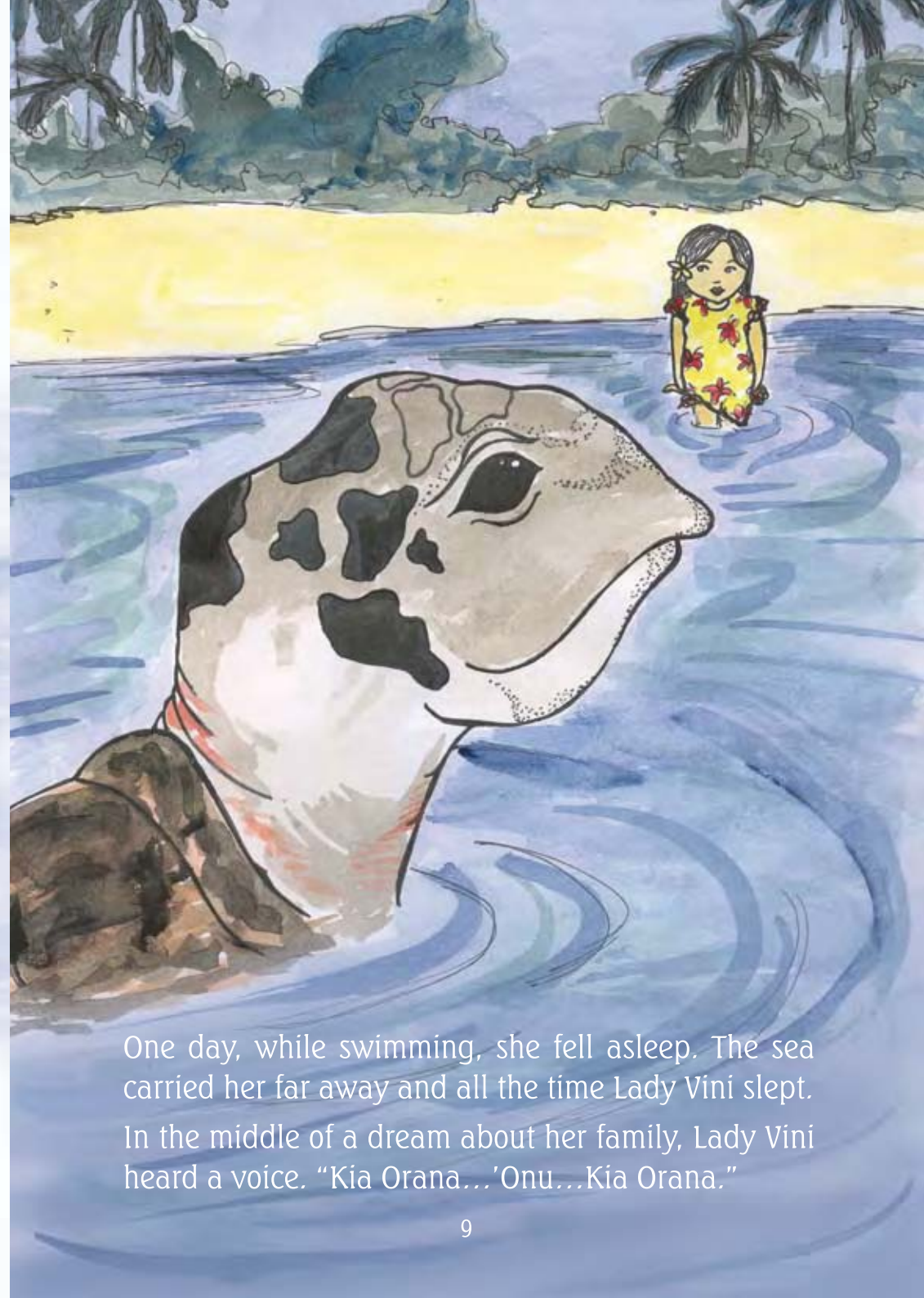
"One day I will travel," Miss Lina sighed, "but for now, I'm going to stay here with the other green turtles. I'm too young for such a big adventure".

Lady Vini smiled. She knew that she had to be brave, and swim through the Pacific alone. She spent a few days with Miss Lina before deciding to start her journey. There were a lot of places to see and she needed the rest.

One day, she met a school of tuna that told her that she was heading towards American Samoa. Lady Vini wanted to go further, so the tuna told her that a place called Tokelau wasn't really that far away.



Lady Vini swam for one whole month. Tokelau was further away than the fish had said! She was not used to swimming so far and was very, very tired.



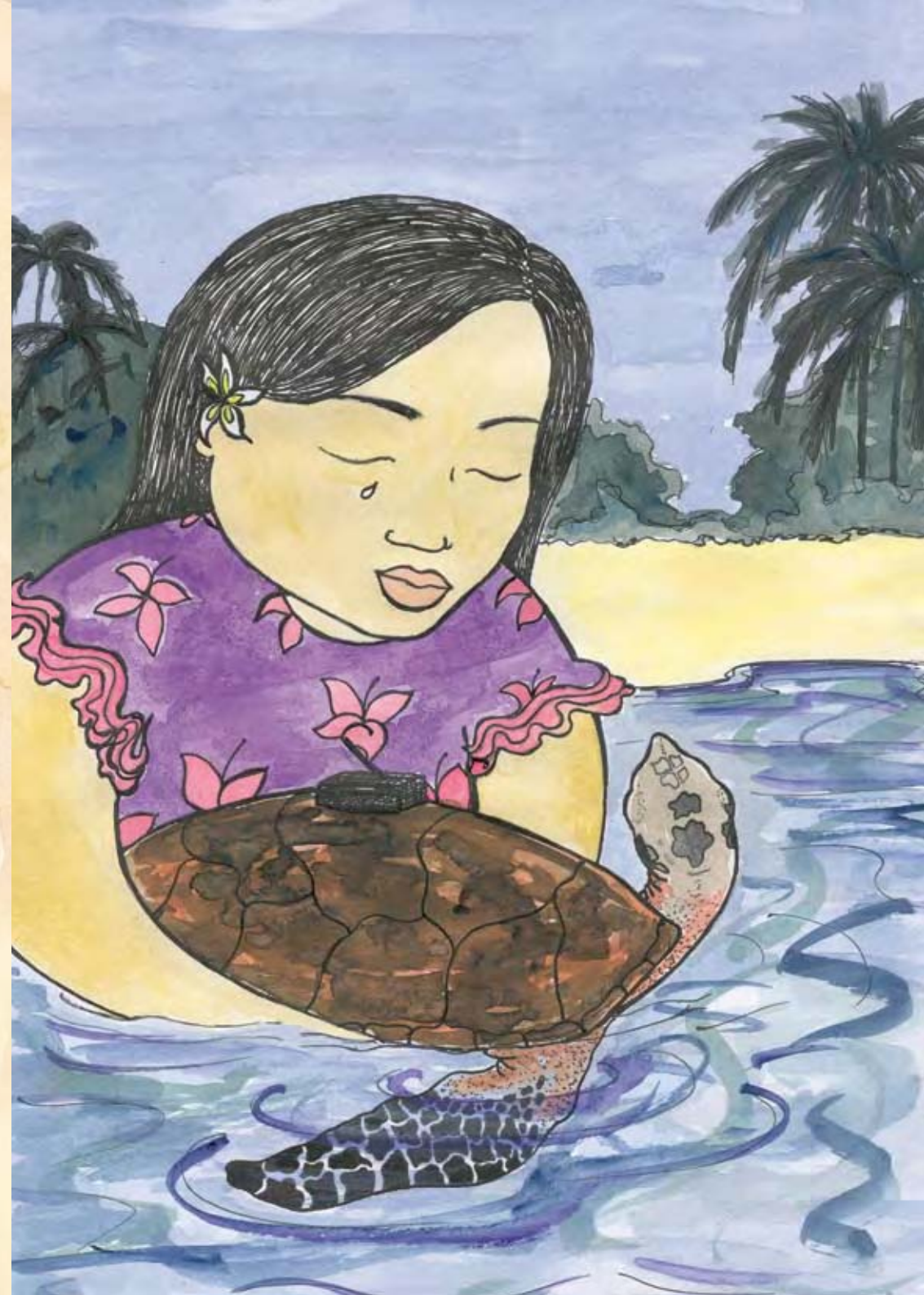
One day, while swimming, she fell asleep. The sea carried her far away and all the time Lady Vini slept. In the middle of a dream about her family, Lady Vini heard a voice. "Kia Orana... Onu... Kia Orana."

Lady Vini opened her eyes. A small girl was talking to her. Lady Vini didn't know where she was but the girl looked friendly and she smiled when she saw Lady Vini looking at her.

The girl called Lady Vini "Onu" and brought her food every day. The girl liked to tell Lady Vini stories about the islands she had traveled to. They were called the Cook Islands but the one the girl lived on was named Rakahanga.

The girl kept Lady Vini a secret but one day her mother followed her to the beach. The girl's mother told her that she could not keep Lady Vini because turtles belonged to the sea and shouldn't be people's pets. The girl was very sad to say goodbye to Lady Vini and cried when Lady Vini swam away.

Lady Vini was also sad to say goodbye to the girl. But she knew she had more work to do. So far she had only traveled to two places and Lady Vini wanted to go to learn more about the beautiful Pacific islands and see how many other turtles she would meet.



Lady Vini decided to swim North for a while longer. She was having a good time seeing new places and meeting new creatures. And everywhere she traveled, the black box was sending messages to the satellite and back to the people. One day, when she was near the waters of Kiribati, a terrible thing happened! Lady Vini was swimming with another school of fish when she, and her new friends, were caught in a big net. Lady Vini felt herself pulled out of the water and up into the air.

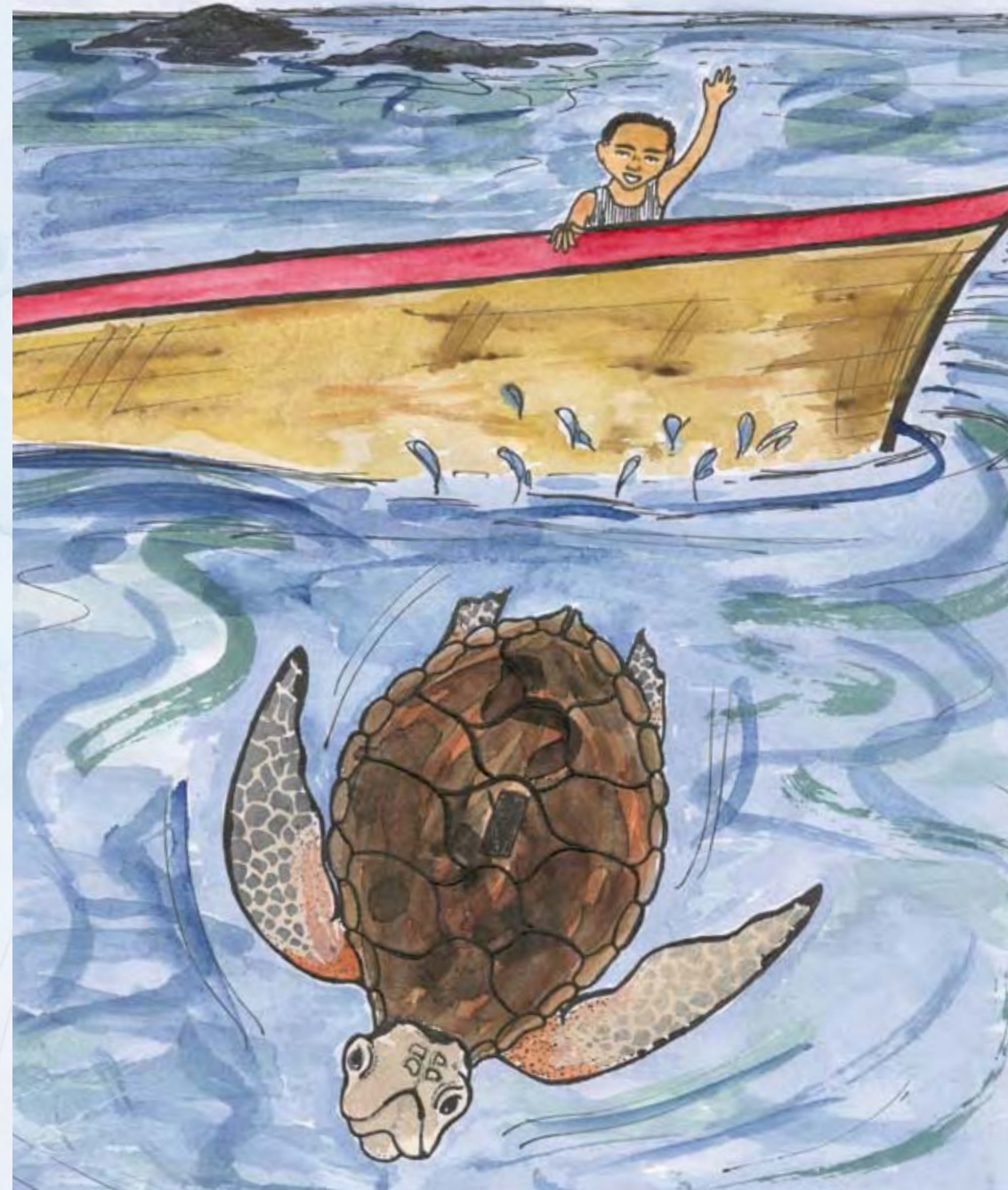
“On! On!”

Lady Vini looked through the net to see many men pointing at her and calling her “On”. The men talked about what they could do with Lady Vini – it all sounded scary! They let her out of the net and were surprised to see the black box on her back.

A small boy ran to one of the men and shook his arm. Lady Vini listened as the boy told his father what he had learned in school the week before. The boy’s teacher had said that there were turtles from Samoa that had boxes put on their backs and that they should be let go if they were caught.

The boy’s father was the captain of the boat. The father did not want to upset his son so he made the other men put Lady Vini back in the water.

They threw her over the edge of the boat and she landed with a large splash!



Lady Vini was happy that the boy and his father had let her go. She was learning that there were lots of good people who wanted to help the turtles. And she was learning that she had different names.

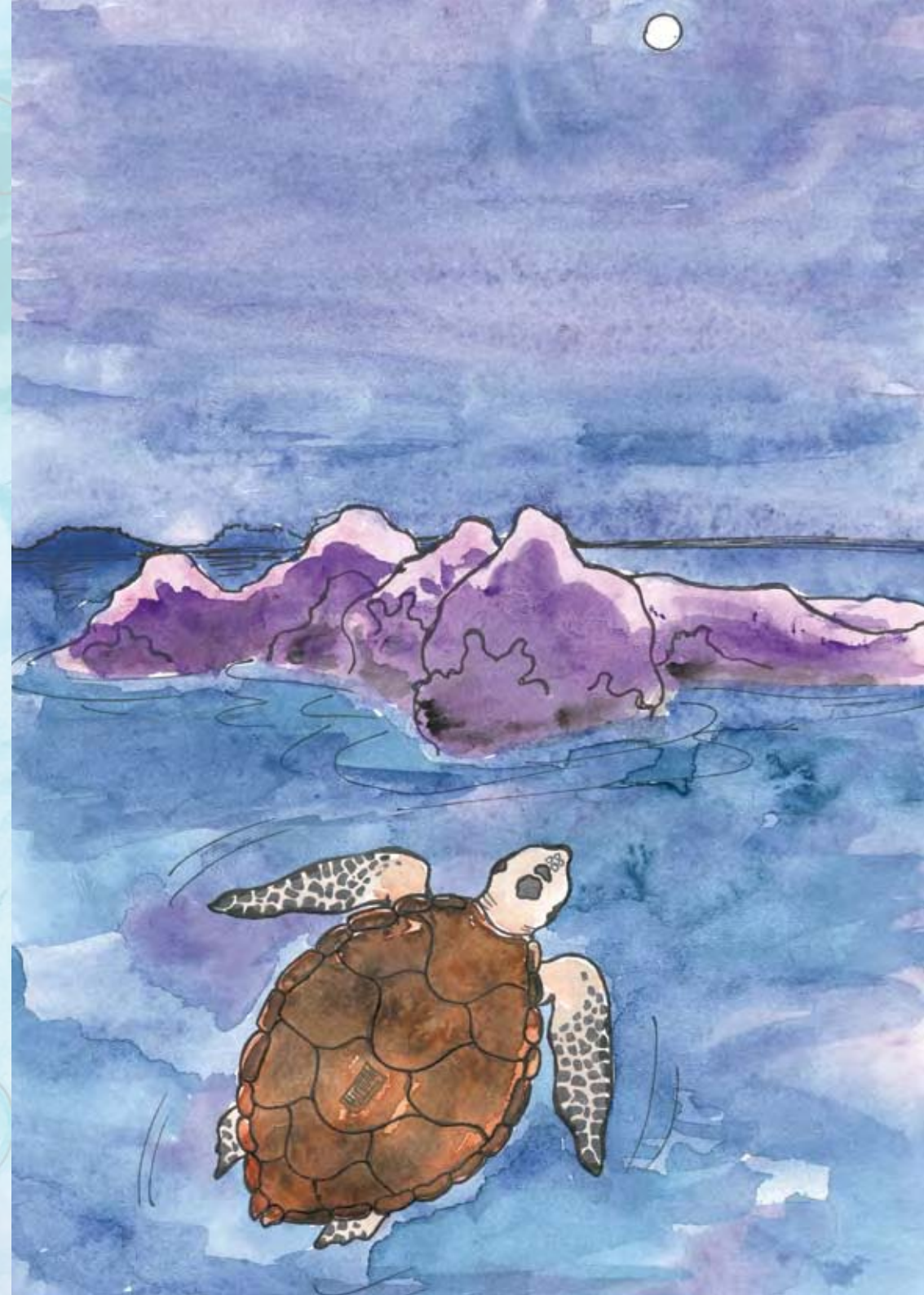
“Laumei” in Samoa.

“Onu” in the Cook Islands.

“On” in Kiribati.

Lady Vini thought about this as she swam through the sea. She swam south from Kiribati, through the waters of Tuvalu. She had met lots of people and lots of fish but not many turtles. This made Lady Vini sad.

She missed her family and her home. After a few months of swimming, the weather was getting cooler and Lady Vini wanted to find a place to rest. Eventually Lady Vini found some rocks in the middle of the ocean. She slowly climbed them to look at the moon. She knew her family would be looking at the same moon.





It was a dark night but the moon was bright and high in the sky.

“Bonjour” said a deep voice from across the rocks. Lady Vini was so shocked she nearly fell off the rocks.

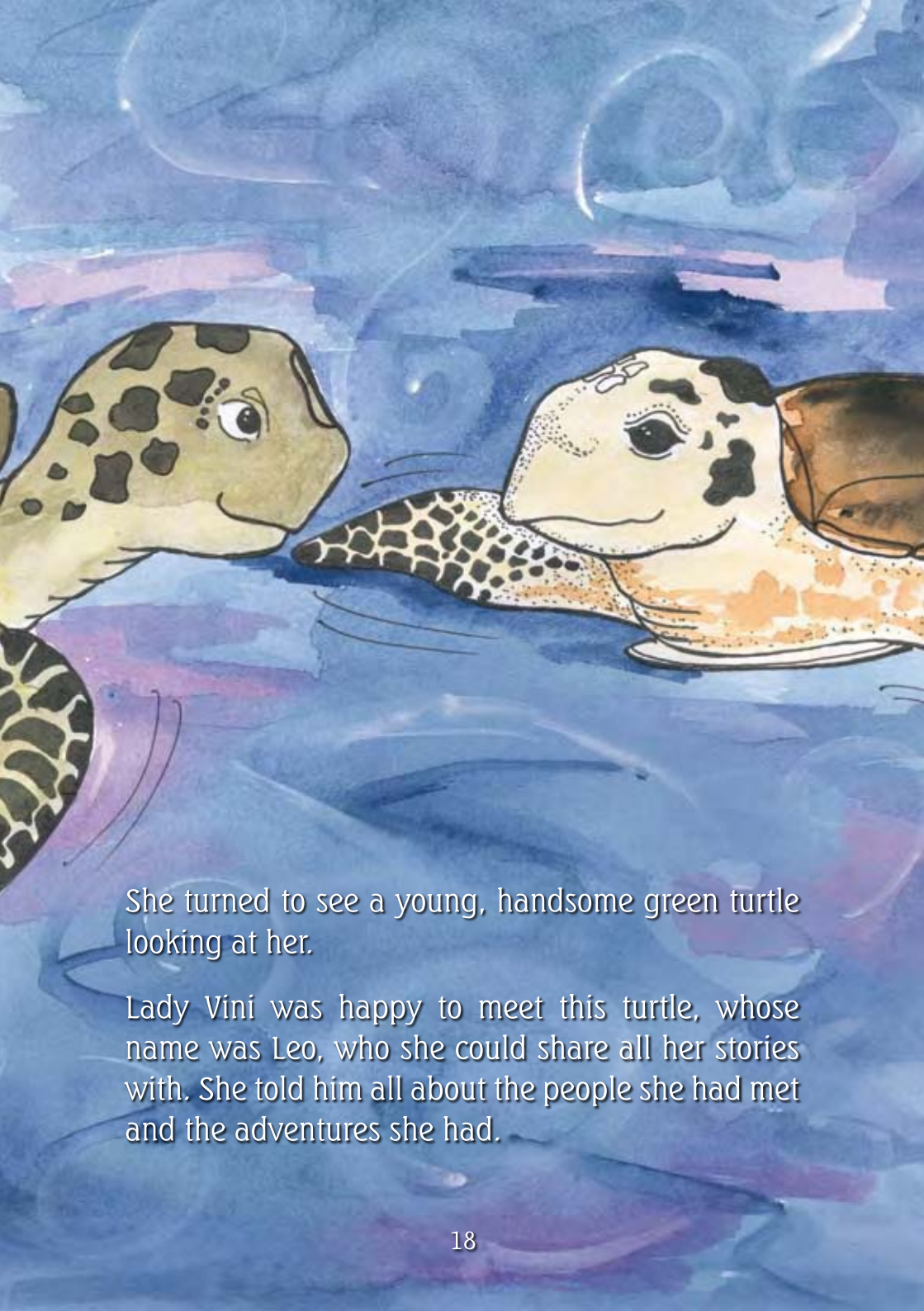
“Malo e lelei,” said the old loggerhead turtle when Lady Vini did not reply.

Lady Vini was surprised to see another turtle. And she didn’t realise she had traveled that far South from Kiribati. “Ah, am I in Tonga?”, she asked.

“Tonga? Non!”, said the old turtle. “We also greet with Malo e lelei in Wallis & Futuna.”

‘Wallis & Futuna!’, thought Lady Vini. So she wasn’t that far from Kiribati after all! The old turtle wanted to tell Lady Vini lots of stories about turtles in his part of the water. She listened to his adventures and travels across the ocean. She learnt about the many beautiful animals he had seen, and thought about what she might see on her adventure.

While she was dreaming, she heard a voice behind her, “Hey there!”.



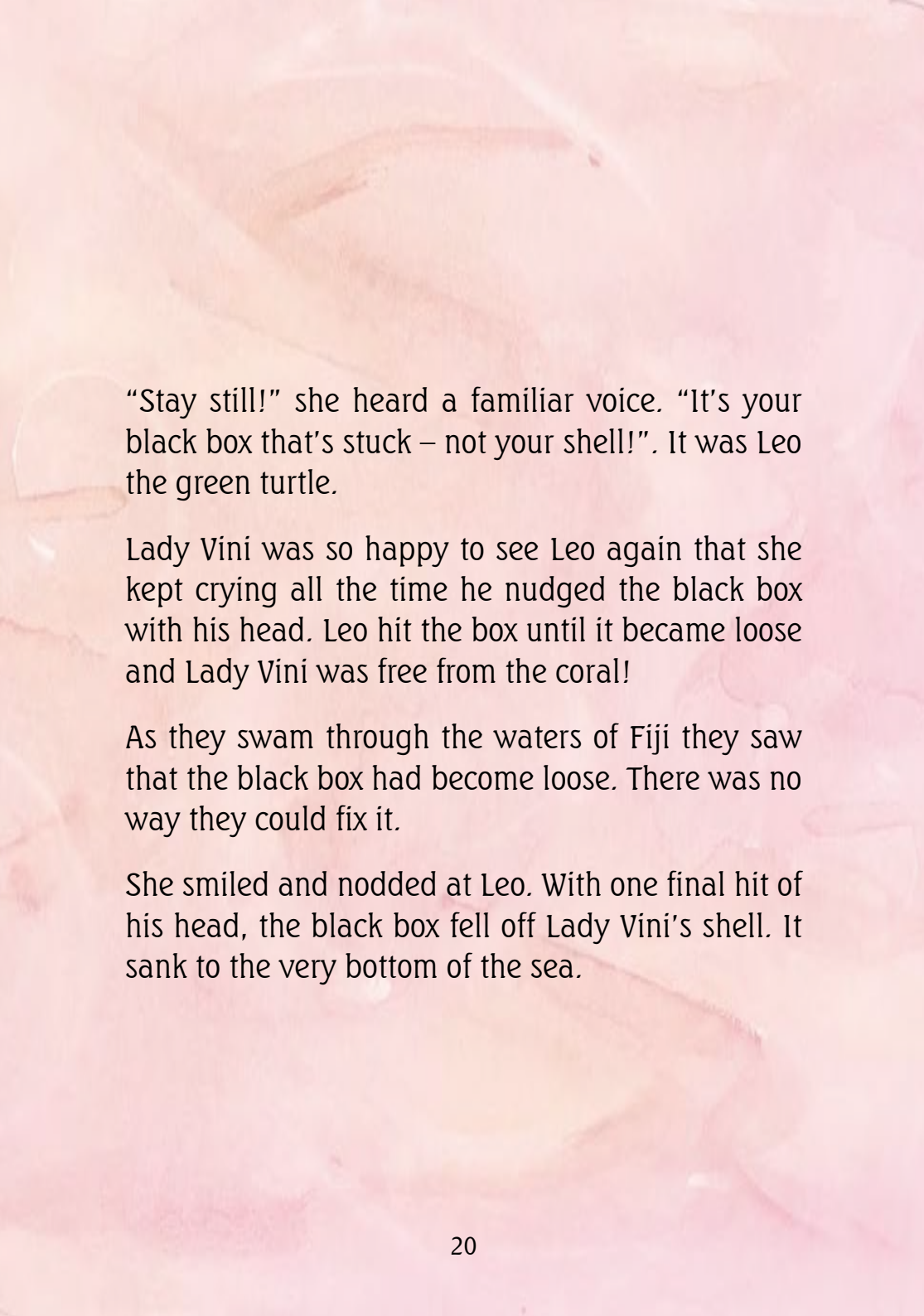
She turned to see a young, handsome green turtle looking at her.

Lady Vini was happy to meet this turtle, whose name was Leo, who she could share all her stories with. She told him all about the people she had met and the adventures she had.

Lady Vini and Leo spent a lot of time together in the waters of Wallis & Futuna, and they became very good friends. She was very happy but, one day, she remembered her special role. It was time to set off again.

Lady Vini wanted Leo to travel with her but she was too shy to ask. One day, when Leo was still asleep, she quietly swam away. She decided to swim towards Fiji.

As Lady Vini was leaving the waters of Vanua Levu in Fiji, she stopped for lunch in the coral reefs. As she tried to leave she realised her shell was stuck in the coral. "Oh no!" exclaimed Lady Vini, struggling to get free. This had never happened to her before. She wriggled and wriggled but couldn't get out. Lady Vini started to cry as she thought about never going home.

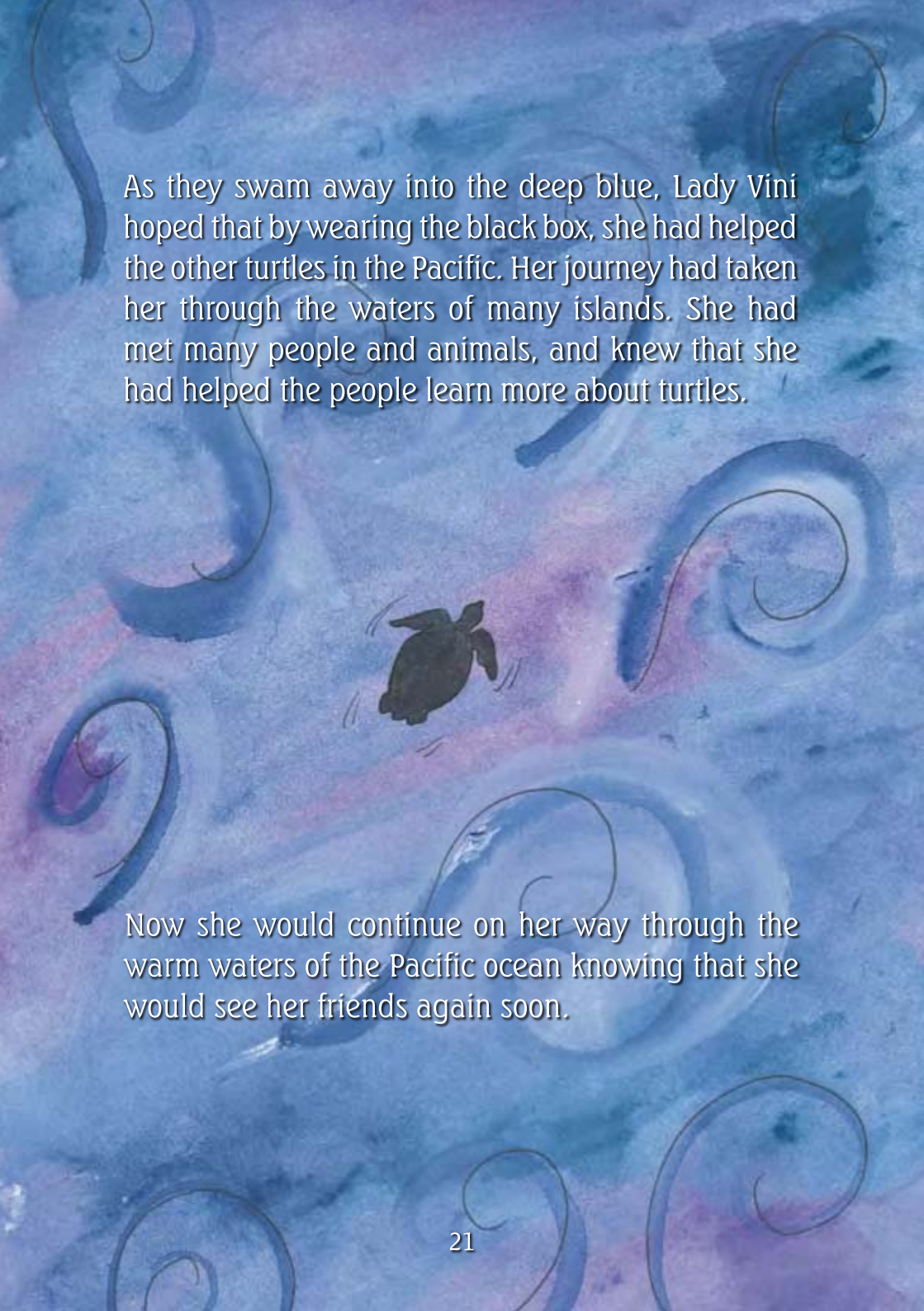


“Stay still!” she heard a familiar voice. “It’s your black box that’s stuck – not your shell!”. It was Leo the green turtle.

Lady Vini was so happy to see Leo again that she kept crying all the time he nudged the black box with his head. Leo hit the box until it became loose and Lady Vini was free from the coral!

As they swam through the waters of Fiji they saw that the black box had become loose. There was no way they could fix it.

She smiled and nodded at Leo. With one final hit of his head, the black box fell off Lady Vini’s shell. It sank to the very bottom of the sea.



As they swam away into the deep blue, Lady Vini hoped that by wearing the black box, she had helped the other turtles in the Pacific. Her journey had taken her through the waters of many islands. She had met many people and animals, and knew that she had helped the people learn more about turtles.

Now she would continue on her way through the warm waters of the Pacific ocean knowing that she would see her friends again soon.

Following the journeys of Pacific sea turtles: the story of Lady Vini

Turtles are the ocean's great travellers. From the moment they hatch, sea turtles spend their entire lives navigating through the sea, stopping to feed and nest in their preferred spots. However, their ongoing journey is now threatened. The number of sea turtles is seriously declining risking the future survival of these ancient creatures.

As six of the seven known species of sea turtles are found in the Pacific, we need to have a better understanding of their paths through the Pacific Ocean to help us save these creatures from extinction.

On 6 March 2006, a nesting hawksbill turtle named Lady Vini was attached with a special tag, called a satellite tag, to help us follow her journey through the ocean. The tag relays signals to a satellite which helps pinpoint her exact location in the ocean.

She was released from Satitooa Aleipata on the island of Upolu in Samoa by a team of people from different organisations working together to save sea turtles in the Pacific.

Over seven months, the team watched Lady Vini travel through the waters of seven different Pacific countries and territories including Samoa, American Samoa, Cook Islands, Kiribati, Tuvalu and Wallis & Futuna, finally arriving in Fiji in October 2006.











Her journey from Samoa to Fiji was 4,500km, and while we are no longer able to track her movements, her travels provided us with important information about the paths of turtles in the Pacific.

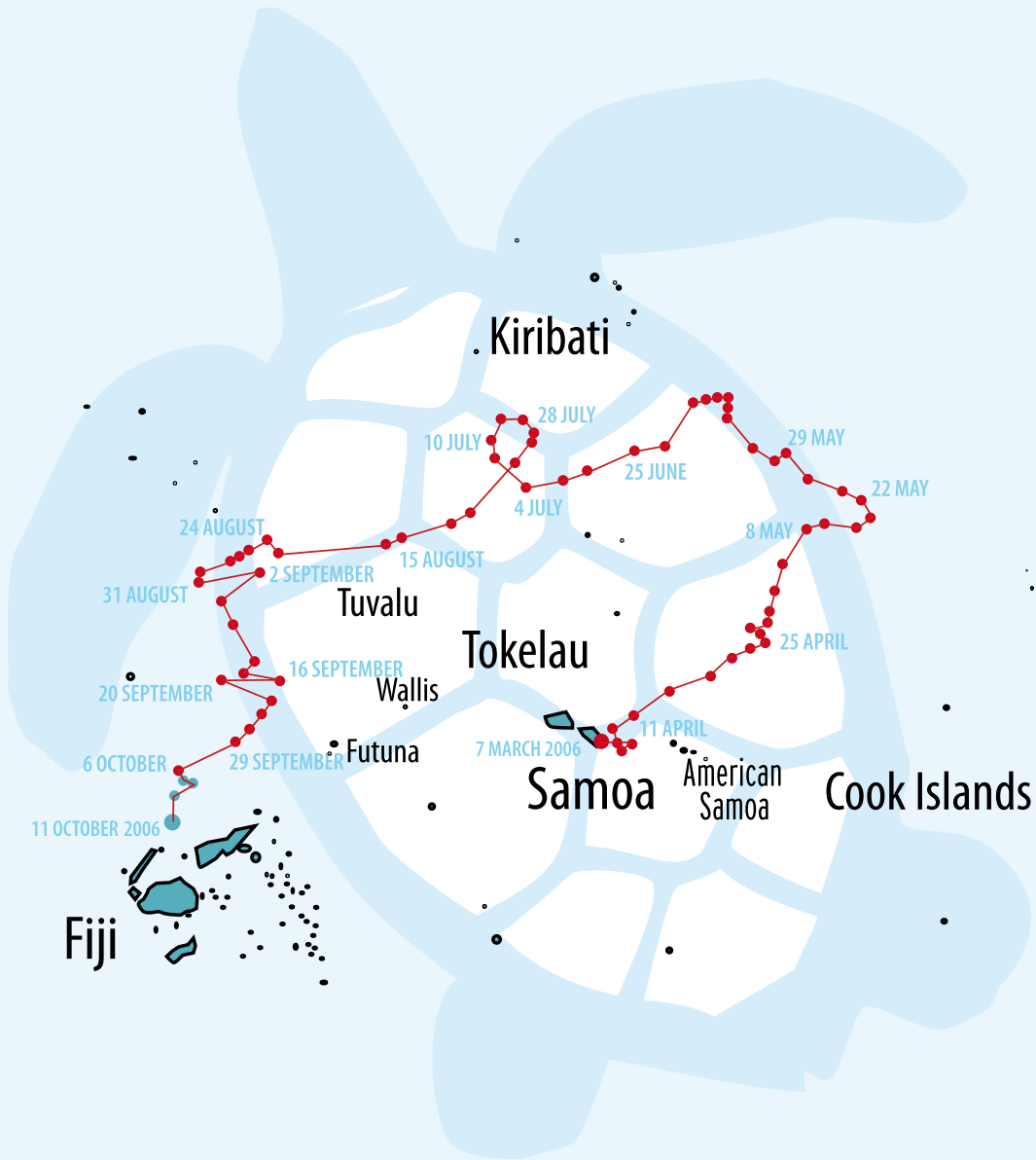
Lady Vini's journey was a key highlight of the Pacific Year of the Sea Turtle, a regional campaign to promote community, national and regional co-operation to conserve sea turtles. Five more turtles have been attached with these special tags that will help us track their journeys to increase our understanding of their patterns and habits and highlight what we can do to ensure their future journeys.

Lady Vini's Team included: the Secretariat of the Pacific Regional Environment Programme (SPREP), the Samoan Ministry of Natural Resources and Environment (MNRE) and the National Marine Fisheries Service's Marine Turtle Research Program, Hawaii.

Six of the seven known species of sea turtle live in the Pacific Ocean; the green, hawksbill, loggerhead, leatherback, olive ridley and the flatback. Sadly, five of these species are threatened with extinction.

By following the simple steps below we can all play a part in preserving our endangered Pacific sea turtles. With your help, their future can be protected.

-  *Do not disturb turtles if you see them on the beach*
-  *Do not keep baby turtles as pets*
-  *Do not dig up eggs*
-  *Encourage people to know and obey national laws that conserve turtles*
-  *Reduce lights on beaches during nesting season*
-  *Take your own reusable bag to the shop*
-  *Say no to plastic bags!*
-  *Dispose of rubbish properly*
-  *Organise a rubbish collection on your local beach*
-  *Talk to your family and friends about sea turtle conservation*



Kiribati

Tuvalu

Tokelau

Samoa

American Samoa

Cook Islands

Fiji

24 AUGUST

31 AUGUST

20 SEPTEMBER

6 OCTOBER

11 OCTOBER 2006

2 SEPTEMBER

24 AUGUST

16 SEPTEMBER

29 SEPTEMBER

Wallis

Futuna

15 AUGUST

10 JULY

4 JULY

25 JUNE

7 MARCH 2006

25 JUNE

8 MAY

29 MAY

25 APRIL

22 MAY

11 APRIL

28 JULY