

Pacific Promises

A story from the leaders of tomorrow

A Special Edition of
Tok Blong Pasifik



Written by Stephanie Peter and Deyna Marsh
Illustrated by Natalie Christensen

Pacific Promises: A story from the leaders of tomorrow

A Special Edition of Tok Blong Pasifik
Volume 6, Issue 2

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Pacific Promises:

A story from the leaders of tomorrow

A Special Edition of Tok Blong Pasifik, Tok Blong Pasifik
Volume 6, Issue 2

Written by
Stephanie Peter
and
Deyna Marsh

This book is dedicated to those who encouraged us to dream big and to the little ones who inspire our creativity: Tia-Moana, Natalie, Olivia, and Elijah.



Pacific Peoples' Partnership is a Canadian Non-Governmental Organization dedicated to working in partnership with people of the South Pacific and First Peoples of Canada to promote rights-based sustainable development models that empower communities while respecting traditional knowledge, cultural integrity and the ecosystems upon which they depend.

Tok Blong Pasifik has been published since 1982 by Pacific Peoples' Partnership to promote awareness of issues of importance to Pacific Islanders.

Lilah rode her bicycle down to the beach past the canoe shed. She stopped at the edge of the water and watched the waves crash against the shore. She unzipped her backpack and pulled out an old green bottle containing a sheet of paper and for the fourth time that day, she re-read her letter.

June 21, 2003

Hello Pacific Ocean,

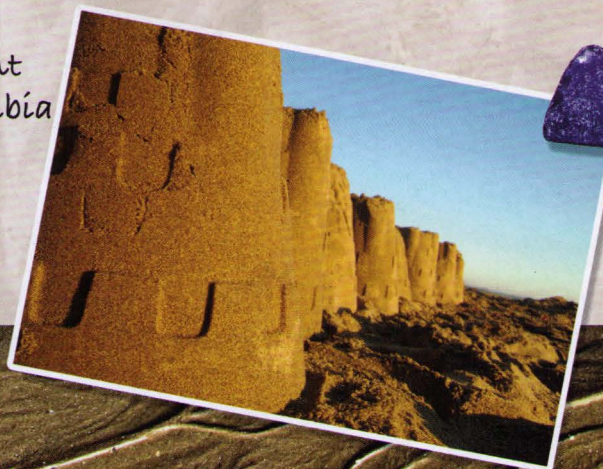
My name is Lilah, short for Delilah. I come from a tribe called Cowichan on Vancouver Island. I'm eleven years old and I just finished grade 5. Every day after school, I like to sit on the beach with my little brother and my Si'lu, while my mom and dad have canoe pulling practice. Si'lu is what I call my grandma. It sounds like you're saying seat-la. My brother likes to make sand castles while we wait for Mom and Dad but I like to watch the waves and draw pictures of the canoe pullers. Sometimes I find things on the beach like beads and pieces of glass from broken bottles.

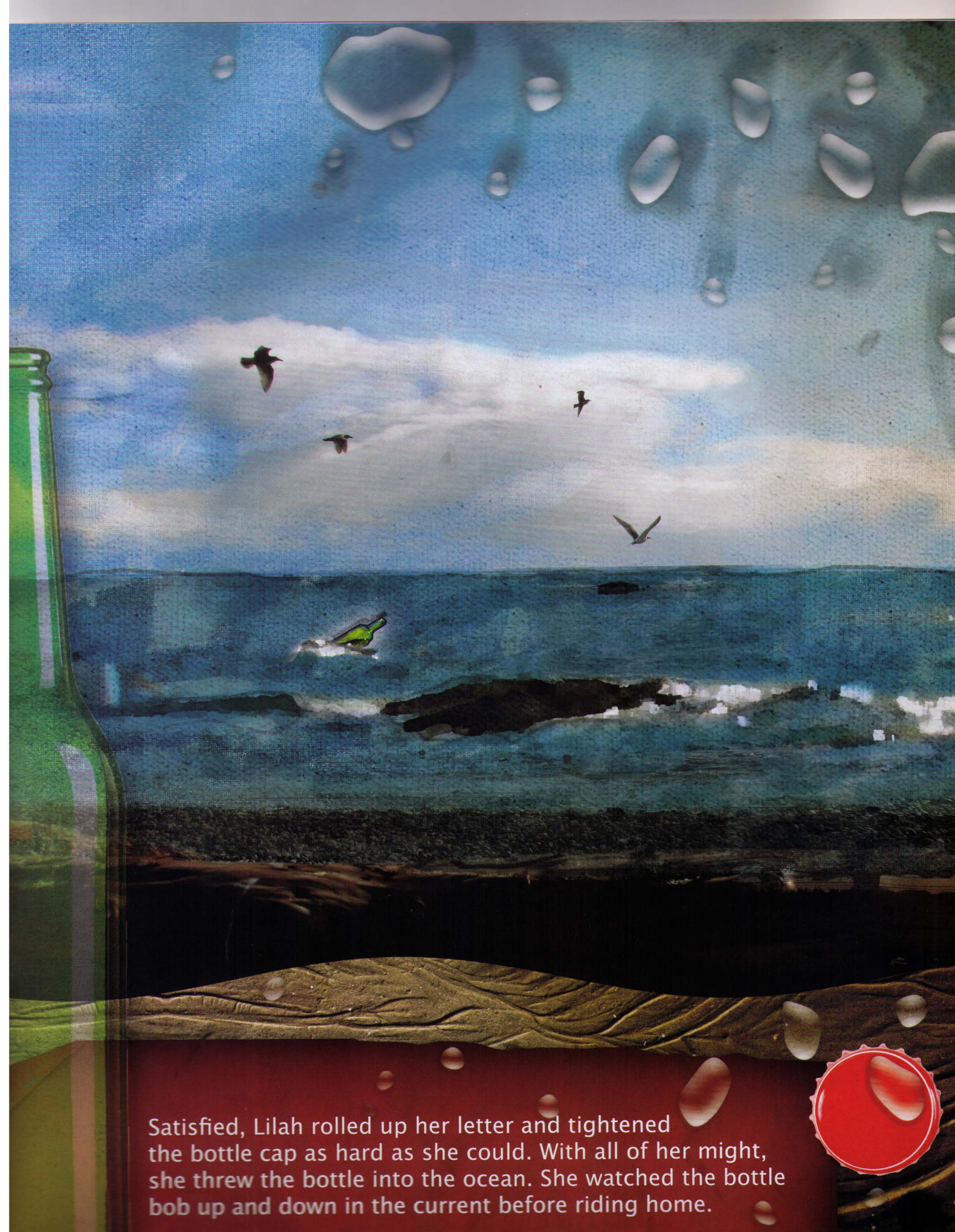
Si'lu told me that a long time ago, her grandparents used to travel by canoe up and down the coast like they do for Tribal Journeys - that's when a whole bunch of canoes go down the coast and camp in different villages. Now, my parents and older cousins just have races with each other. I'm not very good at sitting in a canoe. One time, I flipped over and got really wet. My mom won't let me try again until I'm older so I can't go on Tribal Journeys this summer even though I really want to. I'm sending this letter because I hope it will float down the coast and someone will find it. If you find my letter, can you please write to me?

Yours truly,

Lilah Brown

5550 Cowichan Crescent
Duncan, British Columbia
V9L 3X1





Satisfied, Lilah rolled up her letter and tightened the bottle cap as hard as she could. With all of her might, she threw the bottle into the ocean. She watched the bottle bob up and down in the current before riding home.



Months passed and Lilah forgot about her letter in a bottle.

One day on an island called Rarotonga in the South Pacific, Tia-Moana was with her parents and their friends picking up rubbish on the beach. She reached down and picked up a green bottle, she nearly put it in her recycling bag when she noticed Lilah's letter inside. She unscrewed the rusty cap and started reading the letter, she called out, "Hey Mum! Where's Vancouver Island?"

"Hmmm, that must be close to Vancouver in Canada, why?" her mother asked.

Tia-Moana explained, "Well, I found this letter in a bottle lying here on the beach. It's from this girl named Lilah in Canada. Can I write her a letter?"

Tia-Moana's mom looked at Lilah's letter and replied. "Sure. Why not. She seems like a very interesting girl and to think her home is next to the same ocean.

As soon as she got home Tia-Moana took some paper and a pen to the beach in front of her house and began to write. Waves crashed over the reef while paddlers in an outrigger canoe practised offshore. When she was done Tia-Moana went with her mom to the post office and asked for the nicest stamp they had. She licked it and slipped it into the mail to Canada.



G. Drummond



Rarotonga is far away so it took months before the letter reached Lilah on Vancouver Island. One day she came home from school and her dad passed the envelope to her. "Who do you know in the Cook Islands?" he asked.

"Ummm, nobody. Where are the Cook Islands anyway?" Lilah mumbled.

"What a beautiful stamp though..." She opened the envelope and began to read Tia-Moana's letter:

May 8, 2004

Kia Orana Lilah!

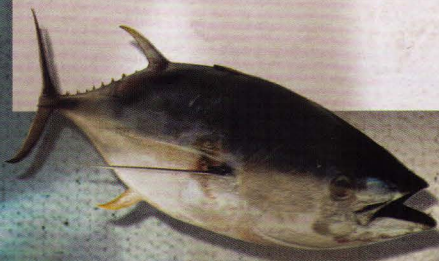
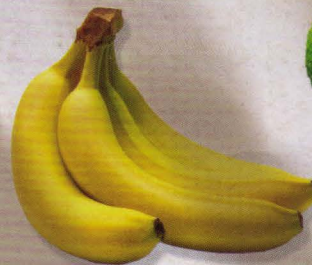
Kia Orana. That's how we say 'Greetings' in our language. I found your message in a bottle while I was picking up rubbish on the beach for Earth Day. My name is Tia-Moana. My papa helped my parents choose my name; it means Promise of the Ocean in Maori. I live in Tupapa Village on Rarotonga in the Cook Islands.

Do you have Earth Day in Canada? Even if you don't I would love to visit your village, it sounds very exciting. My island home is interesting too. My family and I live near the beach. In fact my whole village is located right next to the sea. Can you imagine how my friends and I spend afternoons and weekends? We can collect our fish from the sea since travelling to shops is quite far and also expensive.

My favourite foods are fish, taro, bananas, breadfruit and especially mangos. My papa tells me stories about the mango season but in recent years the seasons and fruiting patterns have changed. I enjoy sitting and talking to my papa about the old days.

You can write to me again if you want. I'd love to know about your favourite foods. Do you lot have mango trees too?

Kia Manuia
Tia-Moana Raita
P.O. Box 857
Tupapa Village, Rarotonga
Cook Islands,
South Pacific



Excited, Lilah quickly wrote to her new friend. She wrote:

June 30, 2004

Kia orana Tia-Moana,

You have such an interesting name. I never imagined my message in a bottle would reach you in the Cook Islands, I'm so happy you decided to write back to me. The picture in your letter was so beautiful. Are the Cook Islands near Hawaii? Si'lu told me that a long time ago, some Hawaiians paddled all the way to Vancouver Island after they had a natural disaster on their island. She said my cousin, Calvin, is the descendant of the Hawaiians who married Cowichan people.

I've never heard of taro or breadfruit before. We don't have mango trees here but after I read your letter, my dad let me buy some mangoes at the grocery store. I was only allowed to buy two mangoes because Dad said that tropical fruit is more expensive than fruit that grows in Canada and it also has to travel a long way to get to Canada from where you live. They were so juicy and sweet. We only have apple trees in our backyard but we get lots of berries in the summertime.

I like fish too. My dad has a smokehouse and we usually dry our salmon there, but sometimes my mom and my aunties will put it in jars so we can eat it for lunch as sandwiches. Lately, we haven't been getting as much salmon as we usually do. Dad said that the water is getting too warm for the fish and there's too much pollution.

Lilah

P.S. In Canada,
we have Earth Day
in April.



As the girls exchanged letters, their friendship grew. Even though they lived far away from each other, they found that they had a lot in common. They both spent time at the beach and they both enjoyed exploring nature. As time passed, their letters continued to arrive every couple of weeks, until Lilah received this letter from Tia-Moana.

February 16, 2005

Kia Orana Lilah!

Sorry I haven't written in a month. My island was hit by cyclones one after the other. It was scary because my village was flooded and we had to move to higher ground. Some of the house roofs got blown off and we lost a bunch of our crops too.

Today in class we had a special guest speaker from the National Environment Service. Her name is Mii Matamaki and she talked about climate change. She said climate change means changes in the normal weather patterns over a long time. She also said there are some bad changes that are happening that are affecting us. She said that the cyclones weren't actually caused by climate change but that the changes might make cyclones worse. I don't like that idea. We also went on a field trip into the lagoon. We saw 'bleached' white coral.

Coral provides food and shelter for our marine life. Healthy coral is beautiful and colourful like the fish that swim around it. It also provides my village protection from those big waves. I learnt that if the climate temperature increases by only 2 degrees Celsius then that could be bad for our coral reef ecosystem.

That really interested me so I have been out to look for other examples of the changes. I asked my mom and dad and grandparents to show me some of the things that have changed since they were my age. So far they showed me some major beach erosion on the other side of my village where the sea is creeping in and flooding around some of the houses. The health nurse in my village also told us that mosquito diseases like dengue fever will increase. I've had dengue fever before and I was sick for weeks.

Do you have anything in Canada like this?

Tia-Moana



March 27, 2005

Dear Tia-Moana,


I'm sorry to hear about what's happening on your island. I didn't know that coral reefs protect islands from cyclones. I looked them up in the library. They are so beautiful! I can't believe they are dying! We don't have dengue fever here but my auntie works in our Health Centre and she said that they have been busy planning for West Nile Virus because of climate change too.

We just started learning about global warming at school. My teacher says that with climate change, our cedar trees won't get as much water as they need so we probably won't have them when I get older. That's kind of scary because my parents just said I could go with them to collect cedar bark and cedar roots for my Si'lu to weave baskets.

I feel worried about you and your family and I hope you are going to be okay. Is there anything I can do to help?

Lilah





April 28, 2005

Dear Lilah,

Our village chief has decided to move our whole village inland because some of our houses have fallen into the sea. If we move farther away from the sea, we won't be affected by floods anymore. Everyone in the village is in shock. Especially the old people. My papa is sad because he was born and raised here and so was his papa. I'm so sad to be leaving the beach behind.

Us kids have been listening at the village meetings and my whole island is preparing to do lots of actions like:

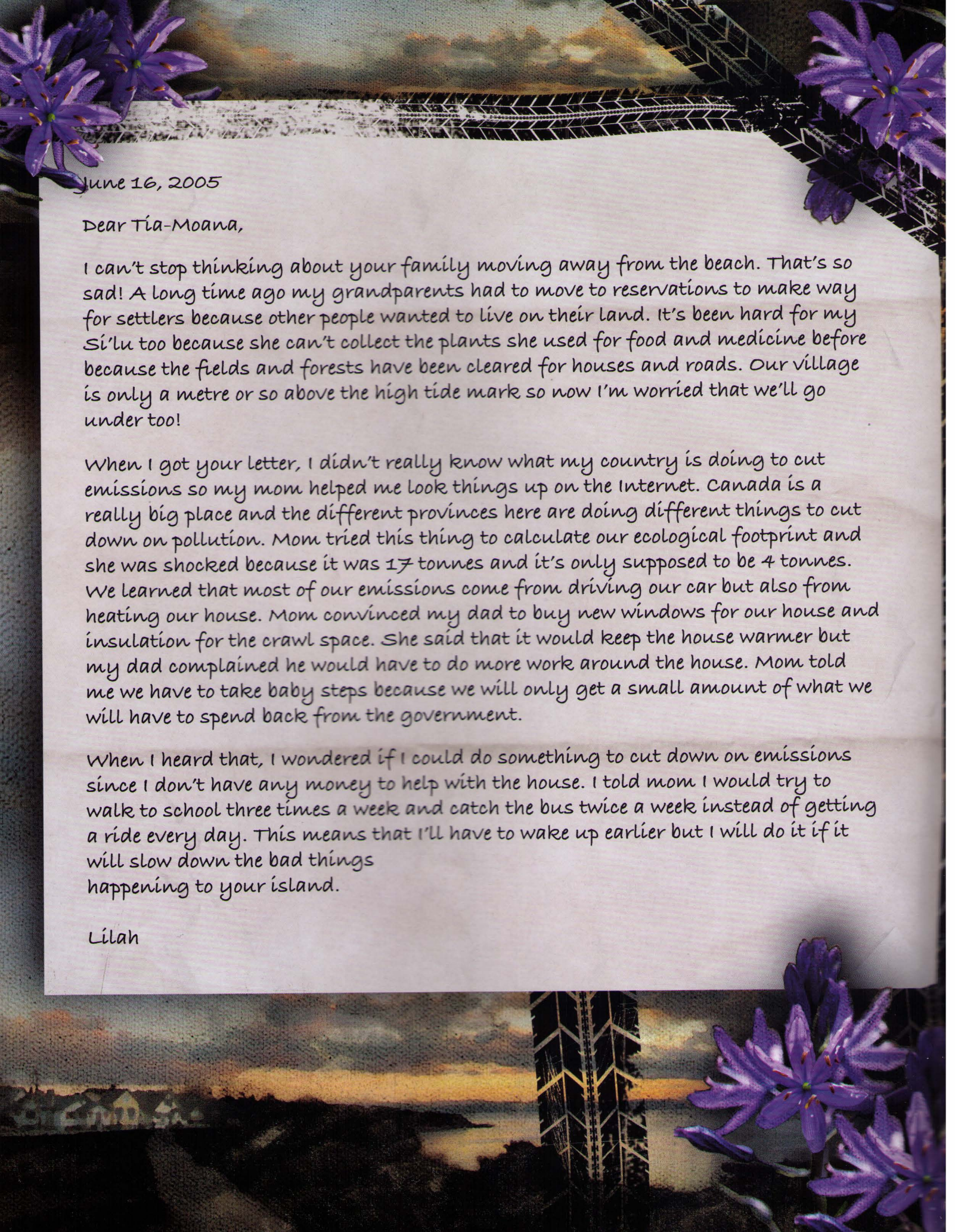
- reserving forest land
- conserving water because of the droughts and sometimes our water is salty
- building large water tanks to collect more rainwater
- continuous cleaning to destroy mosquito breeding areas
- moving our crops more inland because of the salt water and flooding where it is now

Next week our chief is going to a big world climate change meeting to ask the bigger countries to stop their nasty emissions. My dad said that this is all the smoke from lots of burning, cars and planes, and huge factories.

Is your country going to cut emissions too?

Tia-Moana



The page is decorated with purple lilies in the corners and a large feathered arrow pointing right across the top. The text is written on a white piece of paper.

June 16, 2005

Dear Tia-Moana,

I can't stop thinking about your family moving away from the beach. That's so sad! A long time ago my grandparents had to move to reservations to make way for settlers because other people wanted to live on their land. It's been hard for my Si'lu too because she can't collect the plants she used for food and medicine before because the fields and forests have been cleared for houses and roads. Our village is only a metre or so above the high tide mark so now I'm worried that we'll go under too!

When I got your letter, I didn't really know what my country is doing to cut emissions so my mom helped me look things up on the Internet. Canada is a really big place and the different provinces here are doing different things to cut down on pollution. Mom tried this thing to calculate our ecological footprint and she was shocked because it was 17 tonnes and it's only supposed to be 4 tonnes. We learned that most of our emissions come from driving our car but also from heating our house. Mom convinced my dad to buy new windows for our house and insulation for the crawl space. She said that it would keep the house warmer but my dad complained he would have to do more work around the house. Mom told me we have to take baby steps because we will only get a small amount of what we will have to spend back from the government.

When I heard that, I wondered if I could do something to cut down on emissions since I don't have any money to help with the house. I told mom I would try to walk to school three times a week and catch the bus twice a week instead of getting a ride every day. This means that I'll have to wake up earlier but I will do it if it will slow down the bad things happening to your island.

Lilah



June 21, 2005

Kia Orana. Tia-Moana,

I couldn't wait to tell you about this presentation I went to at our Elder's Centre. My parents let me stay home from school to go to the Elder's Luncheon with Si'lu. A woman named Sheila Watt-Cloutier came to our community to talk about climate change! She lives far away from me in a place called Iqaluit up in the Arctic. She travels around helping people learn more about climate change and what it means for the Inuit people. Have you ever heard of the Inuit? They used to be called Eskimos, but they prefer the name Inuit. She said we are "guardians of the environment" and that we need to take action on climate change because the sea-ice season is a lot shorter than it used to be and this is not good for polar bears. She pointed at me and said that when I grow up there might not be any more polar bear habitat left and my children might only see them in books or in zoos!

I asked her what we could do and she told us the best thing is to call and write letters to our local and national government officials and ask them to take action on climate change. I haven't started mine yet but I was wondering, is there anything you think I should say?

Lilah

P.S.

Here's a picture of me when I was a baby taken by my Si'lu next to the elder's building in front of our council chambers. It's made of red cedar, the most important cultural and economic tree for us here on the Pacific Coast. At the climate change presentation they told us that cedars are sensitive to temperature and moisture so could be the first to die off. My Si'lu says she can tell the trees are under stress. It makes me very sad to think that these beautiful trees that give so much will disappear.



July 26, 2005

Kia Orana Lilah

I have read about Eskimos before, Sorry I mean Inuit. A while ago, there was a film crew on the island doing interviews with people about climate change for a project called, "Many Small Voices". They told me that they were travelling all around the world doing interviews and I think they did interviews with Inuit people too.

That's a cool idea to write to the government. They need to hear from us before it's too late. The National Environment Service is actually holding a poetry & short story competition on climate change to celebrate Environment Week and I am going to participate. I will write about what I know and also about what I have learnt from you about your country. I will send you a copy once I've finished it. I'm so excited! There is also a dance competition that I am thinking about joining. I love dancing 'tamure' and I am thinking about 'protecting our environment' as my theme. Do you dance?

That's great to hear about what you will be doing like walking to school three times a week. My friends and I catch the bus to school every day. But I've always wanted my own motorbike when I'm old enough to drive. Maybe that dream can wait until I'm a lot older.

Some university students came to our village the other day to do some research for a climate change adaptation project. I helped them by showing them around and answering some questions. I'm going to go to university too so that I can help other communities. But for now, I'm happy here learning from my papa. Who knows? Maybe one day we'll meet at university.

Tia-Moana

Unameoqper suscipit

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Sincerely,
Tia-Moana Unameoqper



August 26, 2005

Dear Tia-Moana,

You dance too? Every week my mom and dad drive to Cowichan (it's one hour north from here) and we practice with my other grandpa, Qwul-she-mut. He teaches us songs about tzinquaw (the thunderbird) and kwunus (the killerwhale). The songs are so beautiful and they tell stories about our history.

I want to go to university too. I think I would like to study Geography. That would be so cool if we could go to the same school. I've finished my letter to the Minister of Environment and mailed it last week.

Lilah



PRESORTED
FIRST CLASS



Two months later, Lilah and her parents were surprised to receive the following letter:

October 16, 2005

Dear Lilah,



Thank you for your letter about climate change impacts in your community and in the Cook Islands. In April 2006, we will be sponsoring an international youth forum for future environmental leaders. A copy of your letter was forwarded to the organizers of the youth forum and they would like to know if you would consider being a representative at the forum. Please contact Kimberly Young, Youth Forum Coordinator, by telephone at 1-250-381-4131 before February 28, 2006. Feel free to reverse the charges. For more information, you can also visit our website at: www.climatechange.pacificpeoplespartnership.org.

Sincerely,

Glenn Raynor
Secretary for Minister of Environment

CORRESPONDENCE

November 5, 2005

Dear Tia-Moana,

I have the most exciting news! There is going to be an International Youth Forum for Future Environmental Leaders here in Canada this fall! The forum will be in Montreal. They want me to give a presentation because I wrote a letter to the Minister of Environment about climate change in Canada and in the Cook Islands. I told them that I couldn't do it without you. I gave them your mailing address so you'll probably be getting a letter from them soon too. This is so exciting! Write me back as soon as you can. I can't wait to hear from you!

Lilah



December 4, 2006

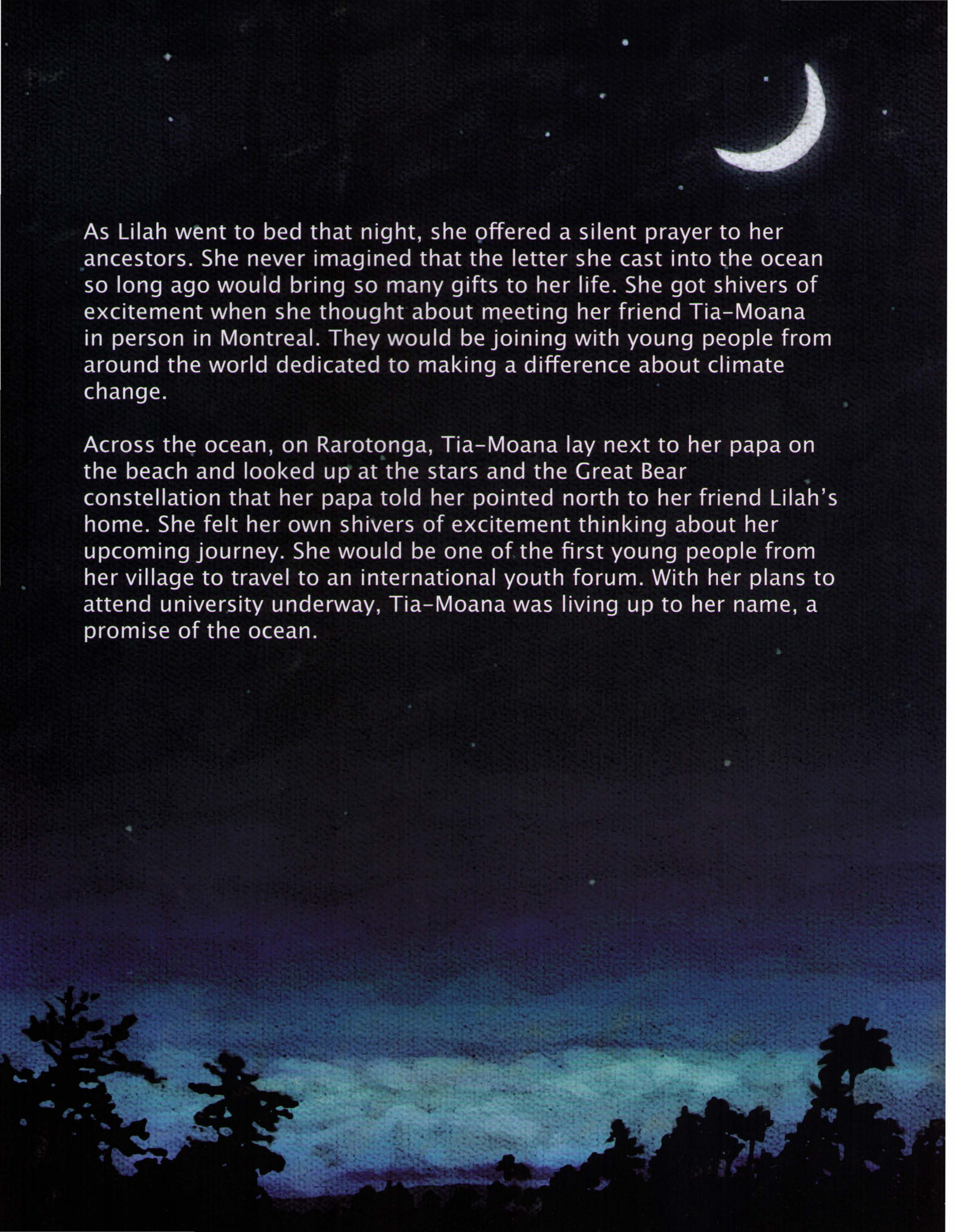
Dear Lilah

I have just received my invitation letter to also attend the youth forum and I've asked my parents and they're very excited for me to go. I can't wait to finally meet you in person! I hear there is also a much bigger Climate Change meeting there so I will be travelling with some of the people from the National Environment Service that made a presentation a couple of years ago. I will bring all your letters, my entry for the Environment Week competition (did I tell you I won first prize in my category?) and some traditional island gifts for you.

Can you believe how far we've come since I found your first letter in the bottle? This is definitely a story to tell the world! I'm off to tell my papa about my trip to Canada. I will write again soon when I find out when I will be travelling to Montreal. Do you think that I will get to see snow?

Kia Manuia,



A night sky with a crescent moon and stars. The moon is in the upper right corner, and several stars are scattered across the dark blue and black sky. The bottom of the image shows a dark silhouette of trees and foliage against a lighter, hazy blue background.

As Lilah went to bed that night, she offered a silent prayer to her ancestors. She never imagined that the letter she cast into the ocean so long ago would bring so many gifts to her life. She got shivers of excitement when she thought about meeting her friend Tia-Moana in person in Montreal. They would be joining with young people from around the world dedicated to making a difference about climate change.

Across the ocean, on Rarotonga, Tia-Moana lay next to her papa on the beach and looked up at the stars and the Great Bear constellation that her papa told her pointed north to her friend Lilah's home. She felt her own shivers of excitement thinking about her upcoming journey. She would be one of the first young people from her village to travel to an international youth forum. With her plans to attend university underway, Tia-Moana was living up to her name, a promise of the ocean.

About the Authors

Stephanie Peter

Stephanie belongs to Cowichan Tribes with ancestry from several Coast Salish communities on Vancouver Island including Songhees and Tsartlip. She holds the ancestral name of *Saleliye'naat*. In 2002, Stephanie was sent by Pacific Peoples' Partnership to participate in a six-month internship with the Cook Islands National Environment Service in Rarotonga where she met her friend, Deyna Marsh. Upon her return from the South Pacific, Stephanie completed a degree from the University of Victoria with a double major in Anthropology and Geography. Since then Stephanie has balanced the demands of working for her community on environmental and cultural initiatives that promote sustainable development and language revitalization and raising two daughters, Natalie and Olivia. Inspired by her family, Stephanie co-authored, **Sara's Sunflower**, a children's storybook about sharing and protecting special places in 2006 and she is currently recording a collection of original children's songs in *Hul'q'umi'num'*, the language spoken in Cowichan.

Deyna Kiriata Marsh

Deyna was born in New Zealand and raised on Rarotonga, the capital island of the Cook Islands in the South Pacific. Deyna is a self-described "Maori fruit-salad"; her father's ancestors hailed from the New Zealand Maori *Tuwharetoa* and *Ngaphui* tribes and her mother's ancestors were from the Cook Islands tribes of *Mauke* and Rarotonga. Deyna attended the University of the South Pacific in 2001-2003 based at the Fiji Campus where she graduated with a double major in Geography and Land Management. While in Fiji, she spent many weeks in coastal villages around the Fiji Islands and saw first-hand the plight of the people and their vulnerable coastal villages to the effects of climate change. Since completing her degree, Deyna has been working for the Education Unit of the Cook Islands National Environment Service. When Deyna is not busy collating a booklet of children's climate change poems (*purua*) or developing environmental education materials, she brings her daughter, Tia-Moana, to Cook Islands dance class.

Natalie Christensen

Natalie Christensen is a Graphic Designer living in Victoria, British Columbia. When she is not designing she is at the beach enjoying the ocean air with her son Elijah and her husband Brent.

