

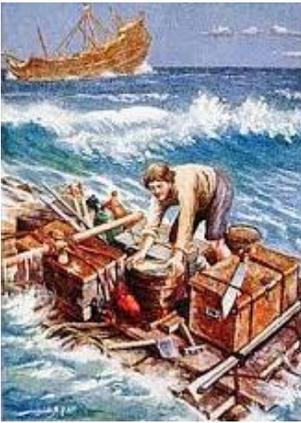
## The Real Lord of the Flies

For centuries people have been fascinated by the idea of being stranded alone on an island and having to learn how to adapt and survive. Many fictitious stories have been told on this theme. However, one writer, Rutger Bregman, was determined to find a true story of survival on a deserted island, and he discovered this amazing story about a group of school boys from Tonga.

### Before you read the story

🔗 Below there are four illustrations of events from *Robinson Crusoe*. Can you find the following words and phrases from the text in the pictures below?

the horizon   a compass   crashing surf   to drift   supplies   a raft   a rudder  
a hulking mass of rock jutting up   hoist the sail   hollowed out tree trunks   a shipwreck



🔗 Match the words on the right with the definitions on the left:

Makeshift	wood that is floating on the sea or brought onto the beach by the sea
Marooned	things that have been saved from a ship, or from a fire, destroyed building, etc.
Roster	a list of people's names with the jobs they have been given to do
Salvaged	left in a place from which you cannot escape
Driftwood	temporary and of low quality, but used because of a sudden need

🔗 Make one short sentence using each of the words above describing a situation that could occur in *The Lord of the Flies*

### Suggestion for reading the text:

As you read the text, highlight or underline any words or phrases you aren't familiar with. After you've finished reading the whole text, look back again at the words you've highlighted and try to work out meaning from the context, then check using a dictionary or asking your teacher.

## The Real Lord of the Flies

When a group of schoolboys were **marooned** on an island in 1965, it turned out very differently from William Golding's bestseller, writes Rutger Bregman

The real *Lord of the Flies*, began in June 1965. The central characters were six boys – Sione, Stephen, Kolo, David, Luke and Mano – all pupils at a strict Catholic boarding school in Nuku'alofa. The oldest was 16, the youngest 13, and they had one main thing in common: they were bored witless. So they came up with a plan to escape: to Fiji, some 500 miles away, or even all the way to New Zealand.

There was only one obstacle. None of them owned a boat, so they decided to “borrow” one from Mr Taniela Uhila, a fisherman they all disliked. The boys took little time to prepare for the voyage. Two sacks of bananas, a few coconuts and a small gas burner were all the **supplies** they packed. It didn't occur to any of them to bring a map, let alone a compass.

No one noticed the small craft leaving the harbour that evening. Skies were fair; only a mild breeze ruffled the calm sea. But that night the boys made a grave error. They fell asleep. A few hours later they awoke to water crashing down over their heads. It was dark. They **hoisted the sail**, which the wind promptly tore to shreds. Next to break was the **rudder**. “We **drifted** for eight days,” Mano told me. “Without food. Without water.” The boys tried catching fish. They managed to collect some rainwater in hollowed-out coconut shells and shared it equally between them, each taking a sip in the morning and another in the evening.

Then, on the eighth day, they spied a miracle on **the horizon**. A small island, to be precise. Not a tropical paradise with waving palm trees and sandy beaches, but **a hulking mass of rock, jutting up** more than a thousand feet out of the ocean. These days, 'Ata is considered uninhabitable. But “by the time we arrived,” Captain Peter Warner [who discovered and rescued the boys] wrote in his memoirs, “the boys had set up a small commune with food garden, **hollowed-out tree trunks** to store rainwater, a gymnasium with curious weights, a badminton court, chicken pens and a permanent fire, all from handiwork, an old knife blade and much determination.” While the boys in *Lord of the Flies* come to blows over the fire, those in this real-life version tended their flame so it never went out, for more than a year.



Mr Peter Warner, third from left, with his crew in 1968, including the survivors from 'Ata.  
Photograph: Fairfax Media Archives/via Getty Images

The kids agreed to work in teams of two, drawing up a **strict roster** for garden, kitchen and guard duty. Sometimes they quarrelled, but whenever that happened they solved it by imposing a time-out. Their days began and ended with song and prayer. Kolo fashioned **a makeshift** guitar from a piece of **driftwood**, half a coconut shell and six steel wires **salvaged** from their wrecked boat – an

instrument Peter has kept all these years – and played it to help lift their spirits. And their spirits needed lifting. All summer long it hardly rained, driving the boys frantic with thirst. They tried constructing a **raft** in order to leave the island, but it fell apart in the **crashing surf**.

Worst of all, Stephen slipped one day, fell off a cliff and broke his leg. The other boys picked their way down after him and then helped him back up to the top. They set his leg using sticks and leaves. “Don’t worry,” Sione joked. “We’ll do your work, while you lie there like King Taufa’ahau Tupou himself!”

They survived initially on fish, coconuts, tame birds (they drank the blood as well as eating the meat); seabird eggs were sucked dry. Later, when they got to the top of the island, they found an ancient volcanic crater, where people had lived a century before. There the boys discovered wild taro, bananas and chickens (which had been reproducing for the 100 years since the last Tongans had left).

They were finally rescued on Sunday 11 September 1966. The local physician later expressed astonishment at their muscled physiques and Stephen’s perfectly healed leg. But this wasn’t the end of the boys’ little adventure, because, when they arrived back in Nuku’alofa police boarded Peter’s boat, arrested the boys and threw them in jail. Mr Taniela Uhila, whose sailing boat the boys had “borrowed” 15 months earlier, was still furious, and he’d decided to press charges.

Fortunately for the boys, Peter came up with a plan. It occurred to him that the story of their **shipwreck** was perfect Hollywood material. And being his father’s corporate accountant, Peter managed the company’s film rights and knew people in TV. So from Tonga, he called up the manager of Channel 7 in Sydney. “You can have the Australian rights,” he told them. “Give me the world rights.” Next, Peter paid Mr Uhila £150 for his old boat, and got the boys released on condition that they would cooperate with the movie. A few days later, a team from Channel 7 arrived.

*This text is an extract taken from a book review article in the Guardian newspaper – here is the full article:*

<https://www.theguardian.com/books/2020/may/09/the-real-lord-of-the-flies-what-happened-when-six-boys-were-shipwrecked-for-15-months>

## Discussion

- 🗨️ What is the difference between this story and William Golding’s *Lord of the Flies*?
- 🗨️ How did the boys manage to survive as a group? What qualities and skills did they have/learn?
- 🗨️ How do you think this experience might have impacted their lives afterwards? Think about positives and negatives.
- 🗨️ Do you think you would have survived this experience if you’d been stranded with a group of your school friends?