

Torty, the Lucky Tortoise

by David Chadwick



This true story was told to David by Torty's owner, Beth.

During the First World War, a young man named Stewart was a **stretcher-bearer** in the New Zealand Army. He moved sick and wounded soldiers from the **battlefields** to places that were safe. One of these places was the port of Salonika in Greece. While he was there, he made an unusual friend ...

The First World War

The First World War began in 1914 and took place mainly in Europe. It was called a "world" war because a lot of countries became involved. New Zealand soldiers went to fight on the same side as Great Britain. More than 18 000 New Zealanders lost their lives, and over 40 000 were wounded. The war ended in November 1918.



There were many wild tortoises around Salonika. One day, Stewart saw a tortoise crossing a track.



As he watched, he was horrified to see the tortoise run over by a gun carriage.



Stewart thought the tortoise would be squashed flat - but amazingly, it wasn't!



Luckily the ground was soft.

The tortoise had two deep **grooves** in its shell and had lost some toes and a small piece of its shell, but it was still alive.



Stewart asked the local people about the tortoise. They thought that it was over one hundred years old. They told Stewart what kinds of food tortoises like to eat.



Stewart decided to look after the tortoise until it was well again. He called it Tarty.



When Stewart was about to return to New Zealand, Tarty went into **hibernation**. Stewart had grown fond of Tarty, so he decided to take the hibernating tortoise home with him.

Stewart put Tarty in his army bag. When Tarty woke up, five months later, they were in New Zealand!



Torty's Adventures in New Zealand

Torty lived for many years with Stewart and his family in Dunedin. The war was over, but Torty's adventures were not.

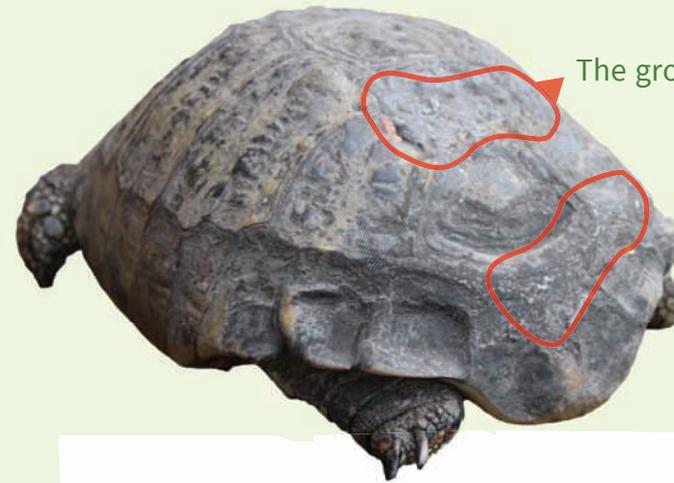
One year, Torty decided to hibernate under some leaves that had been put in a pile to burn. Nobody knew that Torty was under the pile until the leaves were set on fire. Luckily, as her hiding place became hotter, Torty woke up and scuttled out to safety.

Another time, she was stolen from the family's front garden. The people who stole Torty sold her to a circus. Stewart told the police that Torty was missing. A policeman found her when he took his son to see the circus.



The policeman saw the marks on her shell, so he knew the tortoise was Torty. Stewart and his family were very happy to get their tortoise back.

When Stewart died, his son Neil and daughter-in-law Beth took over caring for Torty. The tortoise had another close call when she climbed through a hole in the fence. She wandered into the sand dunes and became lost. It was very hot, and she had no water. When she was found a few days later, she was nearly dead.



The grooves on Torty's shell

Torty lost some toes on her back foot.



Now Torty is probably around two hundred years old. She lives with Beth near Napier. A **reptile** expert who lives nearby owns a male tortoise called Boomerang. Recently, Torty went to stay with Boomerang. When Torty came home, she laid some eggs. Maybe they will hatch, and Torty will become a mother at the ripe old age of two hundred!

Torty likes company. Sometimes children come to see her. They talk to her and give her dandelion flowers and leaves to eat. Beth also takes Torty to visit schools. She tells students about tortoises and about Torty's amazing life.





Torty and Hibernation

Every year of her long life, Torty has hibernated for about five months over winter. Hibernation helps her save energy when it's cold and there's not much food around. When Torty hibernates, it's as if she has gone into a deep sleep. Her body temperature falls, she doesn't move, and she doesn't need to eat, drink, or go to the toilet. When spring arrives, Torty wakes up again. Although winter in Greece is from November to January, Torty quickly **adapted** to the New Zealand seasons and began hibernating during our winter.



Glossary

adapted – changed to suit the place where it lives

battlefields – places where armies fight each other

grooves – long, narrow cuts

hibernation – when an animal or plant becomes inactive (not moving) for a time, usually over winter

reptiles – a group of animals that includes snakes, lizards, tortoises, and turtles

stretcher-bearer – a soldier who carries wounded soldiers to where they can get medical help

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Curriculum learning area	English (Reading) Level 2 — Ideas: Show some understanding of ideas within, across, and beyond texts. Level 2 — Structure: Show some understanding of text structures. Science Level 2 — Life processes: Recognise that all living things have certain requirements so they can stay alive.
Reading year level	Year 3
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