

The Surfer Girl



When she was little, Lucy never dreamed she would become a professional surfer. She was too obsessed with horseback riding to think of much else. All her toys were horse-related. Her walls were covered with horse posters. When she got home from school, the first thing she did was run to the stable, where her parents kept Barnie, her stallion.

Over time, though, the work of keeping a horse started to wear her down. Cleaning the stable, brushing Barnie every day, shoveling hay—it was a lot of work. The summers were especially hard. Temperatures in Mt. Pleasant, South Carolina could reach upwards of 100 degrees.

“Who should be expected to wear jodhpurs and a riding helmet on a 100-degree day?” she asked her mother one time.

“Not me,” her mother replied. “I’m thankful I get to wear a skirt and a tank-top!”

Lucy’s mind was made up one day in August. She was trotting with Barnie around an obstacle course, preparing to perform some jumps. All of a sudden, a hedgehog came bounding across the ground. Spooked by the animal, Barnie rose onto his hind legs and sent Lucy tumbling into the dirt.

“That’s it!” Lucy thought as she dusted herself off. “I am officially done with horseback riding.”

She resolved to spend the rest of the summer at the beach. She would later recall this as the moment that set her future in motion.

For years, Lucy had been so consumed with horses that she hadn’t noticed how popular surfing was among her friends. Surfing, she realized, was the thing to do. By age 10, half the boys she knew had their own surfboards. Many of the girls had picked it up, too.

That Christmas, she asked her parents for her own board.

But she quickly realized that surfing is not easy. Watching her friends and their surf videos, it looked pretty straightforward. A wave comes, and you paddle into it. Then you stand up and ride the wave in. Anyway, South Carolina was not Hawaii. The waves rarely got bigger than 3 or 4 feet in height.

Once you got into the water, things were not so simple. Waves moved a lot faster than she thought. Often, the entire wave broke at the same time. This prevented you from actually riding it. Instead, she discovered, it crashed right on top of you, sending you and your board flying.

She was discouraged at first. She would never be as good as the pro surfers whose videos she watched at her friends' houses. By now, her friends had a few years of experience on her. As Lucy got tossed around in the surf, they were up and riding waves. They gave each other high fives on the beach. She tried not to get angry at the sight of it.

Still, Lucy was athletic—and determined. If I can learn how to balance atop a sprinting horse, she thought, I can learn how to ride a piece of fiberglass on a wave!

And so she kept at it. Since her house was just a 10-minute walk from the beach, she started surfing before school. As soon as the bell rang at 2 p.m., Lucy jumped on her bike and pedaled back out to the water, her surfboard tucked under her arm.

She improved rapidly. Her friends took notice. Two years after she got her first board, Lucy was already performing moves they had never tried. When hurricanes off the coast increased the size of the waves, her girlfriends tended to stay on the beach. They watched the older boys surf instead.

Not Lucy.

“Why are you guys just sitting here?” she’d ask them before rushing into the water. “Look at the size of those waves!”

Before long, Lucy was winning local surf contests. The Eastern Surfing Association hosted competitions up and down the coast. In recent years, they had paid more attention to girls. After all, surfing was popular. And there were few things cooler than a talented surfer girl. Big-name surf companies were always on the hunt for new talent to feature in their videos and advertisements. When a team manager saw Lucy at a contest in Jacksonville Beach, Florida, she signed her up on the spot.

Other companies followed. By 14, Lucy was sponsored by several surf brands. She got so much free clothing that she gave most of it away to friends. They were grateful. Many of them had gazed longingly at the same shorts, bathing suits and sandals at the mall, where the items cost as much as \$70 apiece. And now they were getting them for free!

One of the perks of being a sponsored surfer, Lucy discovered, is that companies pay you to travel to beaches around the world. In return, they ask that you allow photographers to shoot pictures of you. True, they usually required you to wear a bikini, too. But what else were you going to wear on the southern coast of France, or the white-sand beaches of the Maldives Islands?

The constant travel posed a problem, however. Lucy had to withdraw from school. She couldn't show up to class five days a week and still travel to Tahiti on a moment's notice. So, her parents hired a tutor. To keep up with her assignments, she got used to studying calculus and chemistry textbooks on international flights. She'd surf all morning, take a study break for lunch, surf again, and then hit the books after dinner. Despite not being in the classroom, she managed to get good grades. She even got a few As here and there.

But the stress of life on the road took a toll on her.

"I know I shouldn't be complaining," she emailed her friend Denise one night from a hotel in Indonesia. "I get sent to the most beautiful places on the planet every month. And I get to do what I love: surfing every day, all day! But once you've seen 10 white-sand beaches with crystal clear water and perfect waves, they all start to blend together. I never used to understand why people who grew up on tropical islands in the Caribbean wanted to move to cities like Los Angeles or New York. They're living in tropical paradise! Why would they want to live amidst the dirt and grime of the city? But now I sort of know what they mean."

Traveling around the globe, Lucy started to miss her friends. While she was away in Bali or Australia, her girlfriends began to date boys. They joined the field hockey, basketball and lacrosse teams. They started to learn to drive and went shopping for jeans at the mall. Lucy still sent them her extra boxes of clothing, of course. But as they got older, they weren't as interested in wearing surf-related items all the time.

By the time she turned 16, Lucy's surf career was soaring. She placed in the top 10 in the junior division of the Association of Surfing Professionals, the highest achievement for female surfers under 21. In a few more years, she would be allowed to qualify for the professional tour. The "Pro Tour," as it was called, was as far as you could go as a surfer. Only 17 girls around the world were able to compete at such a high level. Lucy still wanted to be among them.

Her heroine was a girl named Carlita Meroni. A beautiful Floridian surfer with blonde hair and amazing surf style, Carlita had qualified for the Pro Tour at age 19. She was now 23, and had appeared on the covers of magazines like *Surfer* and *Transworld Surf*. When Lucy realized that she and Carlita would be surfing at the same contest in Puerto Rico that summer, she decided to say hello.

The waves on contest day were intimidating, to say the least. A sharp reef lay just six feet underwater. If you fell, you were likely to get scraped up. Lucy competed in her junior heats. But she surfed scared. She wound up placing sixth overall. When the Pro sessions began, she made her way to the water's edge to watch Carlita.

She had never seen a girl so fearless in the water. During the men's events, some of the guys paddled back in, claiming the waves were too rough.

"I'd rather not lose an arm on that reef," one of them said, as he walked up the beach with his board.

But Carlita stayed out. She caught huge wave after huge wave. And she did it with style, snapping her board against the lip of the wave. The spectators on the beach gasped in amazement.

That night, the contest organizers held a bonfire on the beach for all the surfers. Carlita, as usual, was swarmed by admirers.

"How were you not terrified in that surf?" one of them asked her. "I didn't even want to paddle out."

Carlita laughed. She seemed flattered by the attention.

As the night wore on, though, she distanced herself from the group. Lucy, who had been eyeing at her all night, watched as Carlita made her way to the edge of the water. Seeing her opportunity, she pounced.

"Carlita?" Lucy said, as she approached.

"Oh, hey," Carlita said, a bit startled. "How's it going? You're Lucy, right?"

Lucy blushed. Carlita knew who she was!

"Yeah, that's me all right," she said, and quickly changed the subject. "You were really amazing out there today. I mean, I'm sure everyone's been telling you that. But you're just, like, my favorite surfer of all time. I felt I should tell you that."

Carlita smiled and looked out at the waves. “Thanks,” she said, and stood there silently for a while. Then she said, “How old are you, by the way?”

“Sixteen,” Lucy said.

“Wow,” Carlita said. “I remember being 16. That was the year I quit school to surf full-time. Which seemed like a good idea at the time.”

“What do you mean?” Lucy said, growing nervous.

“Well, it’s a big deal to leave your hometown, your friends and your family at such a young age. I’ve had a blast as a professional surfer. I’ve traveled all over the world and met so many amazing people. But sometimes, I think I would have been happier as a regular girl, hanging out with my friends back in Florida.”

Lucy sympathized completely. She felt as if she were talking to her older self.

“I know exactly what you mean,” she said. “We live the most amazing life. I feel guilty for complaining. But I’m not really sure who I am anymore. I wish I could spend more time back home.”

Thinking about her friends and family back home in South Carolina, Lucy suddenly began to cry.

“Oh, sweetie,” Carlita said, pulling Lucy in for a hug. “I’m sorry if I upset you. I’m just in a strange mood today. Those huge waves out there today must have got me thinking.”

“Yeah, they were pretty huge,” Lucy said, sniffing.

“You know, the one consolation is that we’re all in this together,” Carlita said. “The other girls on tour are like my family now. We’re competitive, but we also support each other through everything. They’re always there for me, and I’m always there for them.”

“I guess I have to start making more friends in the surf world,” Lucy said.

“Well, you’ve got one right here,” she said.

“Really?” Lucy said, brightening. “You’ll be my friend?”

“Of course!” Carlita said. “Let’s get back to the barbecue. I know some girls I think you should meet.”

Name: _____ Date: _____

1. What activity does Lucy start after horseback riding?

- A surfing
- B sailing
- C biking
- D motorcycling

2. What event in the story makes Lucy switch from horseback riding to surfing?

- A Lucy meets Carlita Meroni.
- B Lucy falls off a horse.
- C Lucy sees a surf video.
- D Lucy gets tossed around in the surf.

3. Lucy wants to be part of the surfing "Pro Tour." Traveling around the world to surf makes Lucy miss her friends at home.

What can be concluded from this information?

- A Lucy hates surfing.
- B Lucy has mixed feelings about surfing.
- C Lucy does not want to become a professional surfer.
- D Lucy is excited about meeting Carlita Meroni.

4. Why does Lucy feel like she is talking to her older self when speaking with Carlita Meroni?

- A Carlita is almost the same age as Lucy.
- B Carlita and Lucy look a lot alike.
- C Carlita is a beautiful Floridian surfer with blonde hair and an amazing surf style.
- D Carlita has been through what Lucy is going through now.

5. What is a theme of this story?

- A how too much money can ruin a person's life if he or she is not careful
- B the importance of protecting oceans and ocean life from pollution
- C the difference between being happy and being successful at something
- D the difficulty of raising a family while working at a full-time job

6. Read the following sentences: "She resolved to spend the rest of the summer at the beach. She would later recall this as the moment that **set her future in motion.**"

What does the phrase "**set her future in motion**" mean?

- A made her decide on a job that involved driving
- B had a big impact on her life afterward
- C caused her to act like a grown-up
- D made her wonder where she would live

7. Choose the answer that best completes the sentence below.

Lucy likes some things about being a surfer _____ dislikes others.

- A so
- B specifically
- C first
- D yet

8. Why does Lucy say that she should not be complaining when talking to Denise?

9. Why does Lucy cry when talking to Carlita?

10. Should Lucy continue touring the world to surf or go back home to live with her friends and family? Support your answer with information from the passage.
