

Corey (far right), dressed in his school uniform, leans on a pile of books that represent his favorite subjects. (Right) The Karaka family photo. Corey is the oldest of six sons. (Below) One of the oldest buildings on the campus of his school.

REACHING FOR THE TOP

BY JANET THOMAS
Church Magazines

Trying new things and new subjects helps Corey grow in areas that surprised him.

Australian Corey Karaka knows that each challenge, change, or opportunity can help you grow.

Corey Karaka grew up in a suburb of Sydney, Australia, where, as the oldest of six brothers, he grew up like many typical Australian boys. He played rugby, soccer, basketball, and learned to swim. In fact, he quickly became a good enough swimmer to make it to the national swimming championships at the age of 12, qualifying a year early. As a boy, Corey thought he actually might want to make swimming his career, but then a whole world full of choices started coming his

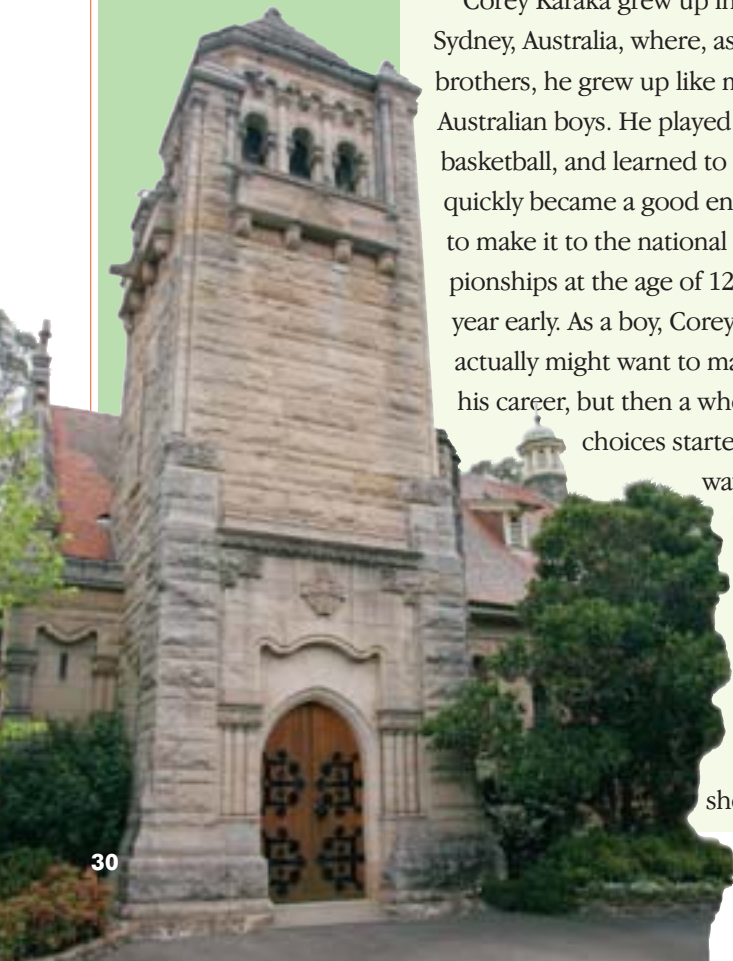
way, and he began taking advantage of some great opportunities.

Taking New Opportunities

First was his short opera career.



Opera? Why would a boy who loved sports want anything to do with opera? But Sydney, after all, has one of the most famous opera houses in the world. And Corey just happened to have a grandmother who had been an opera singer. She taught her grandson (in fact, she teaches music lessons to all her grandchildren) to sing while he was still a boy soprano. Corey auditioned and was hired to sing with Opera Australia. He remembers it as a fun time, going to rehearsals and dressing up in makeup and costumes. Corey says, "It wasn't an intense experience for children. There are scenes





At one time Corey thought he would pursue championship swimming, but after he was accepted to The King's School, he concentrated on academics and music—and seminary.



where you come in as part of the chorus. It's a shame that my voice broke, but it was a good experience." Plus, his mother, Caragh, says, "He put away the money he earned for a mission and university."

Just as he was ready to enter high school, another opportunity presented itself, one Corey was more than prepared for. He was a great swimmer. He had a good singing voice, and his grades were excellent.

Why not try for admission to one of the most prestigious preparatory schools in New South Wales? He also had a little luck on his side. "I applied for a scholarship at King's School. I took a test and performed a piece of music. At first there were no scholarships available at all, but at the school they

thought they would have me do the tests and offer me a scholarship for the next year. On the day that I did my tests and performed, another person was offered a scholarship and withdrew. I took his place. I was at King's School the next four years." As it turned out, he was also the only Latter-day Saint student attending there.

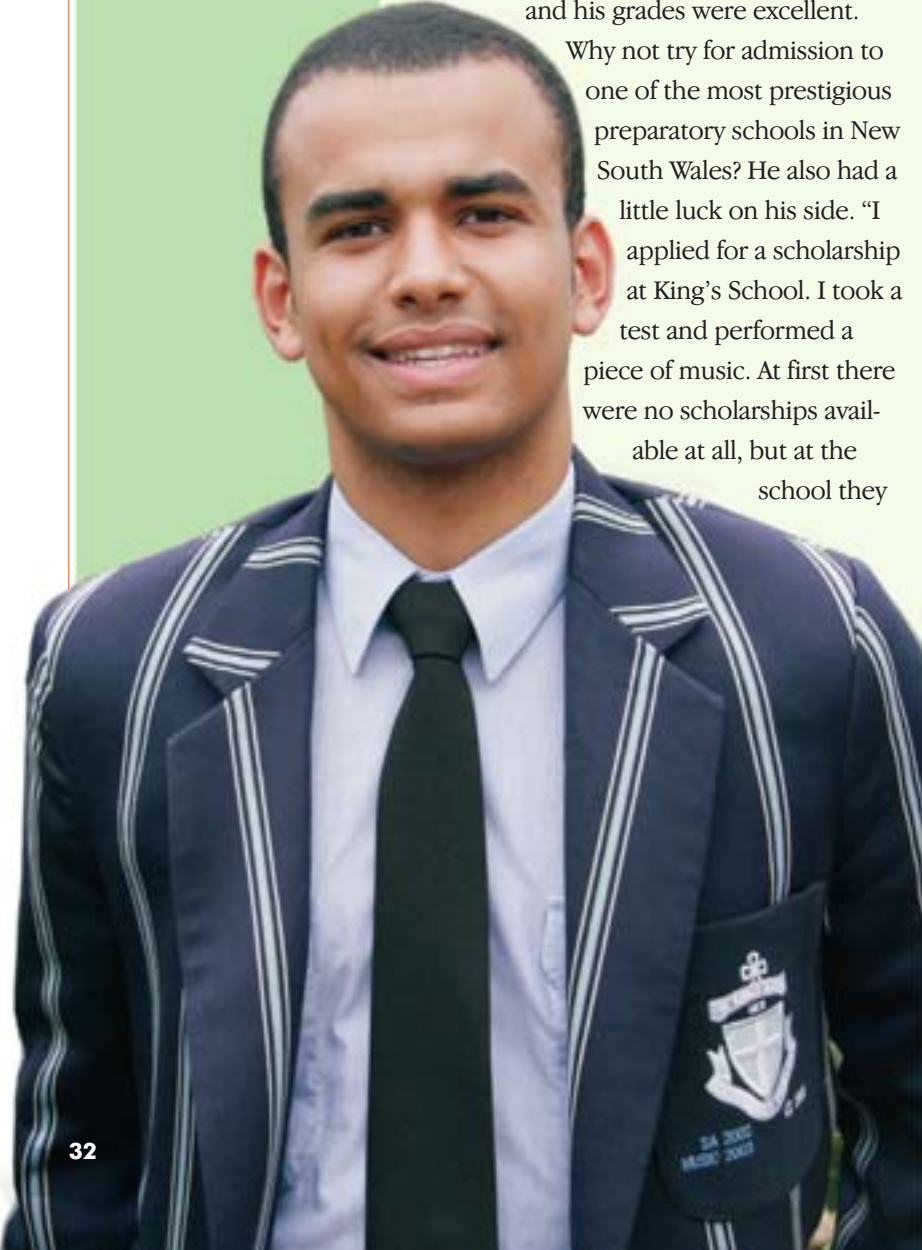
In school Corey loved the sciences and maths at first. But an English teacher changed Corey's mind as to his favorite subjects. Ever since, he has loved literature and history. He now easily admits to liking some of the oldest literature ever written in English like *Beowulf* and the works of Chaucer.

Making Hard Choices

Even though Corey was constantly busy with his academic studies and activities such as debate and drama, he made the choice to attend early morning seminary. He knew he would have to give up something, and that something was swimming. By then he knew he wanted to focus on academics, and that made dropping swimming much easier. Seminary, on the other hand, was too valuable. Corey says, "I've known all my life that I would take seminary. It is very helpful in understanding the scriptures. If you study the scriptures every day, you come to a better understanding of what they are all about."

From his seminary study, Corey now has a favorite passage of scripture. "It's when Jesus approaches a Samaritan woman at a well. She's rather taken aback by His approaching her. But what He teaches her is a simple affirmation of how one can gain one's testimony. Her experience wasn't full of drama or revelations. It was incredibly simple and beautiful yet deep and profound. 'Jesus answered and said unto her, Whosoever drinketh of this water shall thirst again:

'But whosoever drinketh of the water that



I shall give him shall never thirst; but the water that I shall give him shall be in him a well of water springing up into everlasting life' (John 4:13-14).

"The living water is the gospel. It's a deep hope for eternal happiness. It's an everlasting hope for eternal life and to be with God and to be with one's family in an eternal and celestial kingdom. I think that scripture, that passage, best expresses that hope."

Corey's introduction to scripture study came from his grandfather. He remembers going to visit him. Each morning at breakfast, his grandfather had them read scriptures together. "I used to dislike it," says Corey. "But now I realize that doing it is essential to strengthen one's testimony. My grandfather was an incredible example of adhering to the gospel and to Christ. I respect him so much for that."

As Number One

Corey has now graduated from King's School. At the conclusion of his studies there, he was named Dux (pronounced like ducks), meaning he is the top scholar in his class, like a valedictorian.

It was not a goal Corey set for himself but one he achieved by focusing on the subjects he enjoyed.

In fact, that's some good advice Corey has for doing well in school. "I guess you just have to focus your energy on the things you like. When I do that, I'm more motivated and willing to put in more time." But as Corey has proven, if you are willing to try new things and new subjects, your interests can expand and grow into areas that may surprise you as they have him.

Corey has an excellent example about trying something new. When his stake announced they were going to have a pioneer trek, he thought he wouldn't go.

He couldn't imagine walking around in 19th-century-style clothing, pushing a heavy cart with all his gear in it. But as the time for the trek came, Corey found himself wanting to try. He says, "The experience was incredibly beneficial because it gave me an insight into what the pioneers had to go through. My understanding was broadened. It was hard, but it showed me that perseverance is necessary to gain a great testimony. I think you have to experience some pressure and difficulty in order for that testimony to be tested and then become strong."

Corey doesn't limit himself or his interests. As a result, he keeps reaching for the top at home, at school, and in living the gospel. **NE**

