

WORK  
IN  
**PROGRESS**

BY ANU YAGI

# WORK IN PROGRESS

## 1. TENACITY, STATE, ZIP

INTRODUCTION-ISH

... FISH**STORY**

PROLOGUE-ISH

... WATER SHARES **THE SHAPE OF TIME**

CHAPTER 1

... THE **BRIDGE** [DRAFT 2-ISH]

CHAPTER 2

... THE **BECOMING** [TK]

CHAPTER 3

... THE **BLESSING** [TK]

CHAPTER 4

... THE **BEGINNING** [TK]

## 2. THINK LIKE A STONE [TK]

# FISHSTORY

*[A kinda long-winded context/intro before reading da Prologue-ish,  
4.1.2022, Iao Theater, Wailuku]*

Oxford dictionary says that a “fish story” is an “incredible or far-fetched story”; an idiom from sports-fishers’ tendency to exaggerate the size of their catch.

But in the case of the tiny *o’opu*’s mighty journey from wild sea to far up-rivers’ pristine pools, that’s a rather *inverse* fish story. A profound tale in the smallest of packages.

So, when ST\*BA asked me to write about the multidisciplinary art that’s coming from these storytelling projects (in particular, the new mural and contemporary dance work that came of Uncle Clifford’s analogy of the “tenacity of the *o’opu*”)—well it was *a lot* to unpack.

It began with last summer’s storytelling workshops, which resulted in recorded intergenerational interviews, then Akaku’s distillation for DIY StoryCorps, then the call-to-artists... Then allll the ways those stories can inspire art of different mediums: like the animations we’re going to meet tonight, Cory’s mural, and the Adaptations Dance Theater work (and maybe even this longshort story thingy).

Trying fo’ write about all dat stuffs—it’s been like trying to hold water. And what should have been a nice, normal 1,000-word piece of objective journalism has, um, taken on a life of its own. Three weeks after the unveiling of the mural and dance work, what I’ve instead got dis ukubillion-word, four-chapter, work-in-progress, longshort story thingy.

Even though I didn't finish (never mind not give them what they asked for) ST\*BA has been kind enough to invite me to read an excerpt tonight.

I've never really read in front of an audience like this before... And I tend to think of writing as a form of visual art, meant to be perceived on the page... So thanks for hanging in there with me while I try :)

**[MAHALO]**

// *Some parts I cut that night because of time li' dat //*

// For context—because ST\*BA is all about *building community through art*—I hoped to contribute to the story of “the tenacity of the o’opu” through the lens of introducing a new human to our art-filled community and watching these new works come to life. //

// Which reminds me that I’d like to share totally personal plug for the ST\*BA website. If you have not explored that site yet, berah, grab your snorkel and your fins and dive in ‘cause it is an enchanting sea cave of insight and robust resources to explore the processes of these projects.

For example, you can spock da project pages and watch the recorded artist-and community consultation meetings—which were wonderful to listen to. Some of them are just under an hour each. That sounds like a lot (and at first it felt voyeuristic listening to someone else’s meetings) but then you see what’s happening and you’re like: *Oh, wow. Cool.* And you’re hooked!

The website is a neat window into the depth of processes for the art itself. But moreover, the additional stories brought forth really stoked in me an alohaful understanding of this place and the people of this place—in a way that I don’t know how I could have gained otherwise.

I urge you to check it out for yourself; because it will give you something that all the writing in the world couldn’t—you’ve just gotta dive in and check ‘em go check. //

# WATER SHARES

## THE SHAPE OF TIME

Between the banks of the river Wailuku, I bathe in a shallow pool. I am not alone. A child swims in my womb, ontogeny recapitulating phylogeny (ish). And a tiny young goby fish, born in the sea, climbs a waterfall in her patient journey of connectivity.

*Hello, O'opu friend. Teach me a story?*

I watch to listen. The *o'opu* climbs. Just an inch of fish, yet a powerhouse. She suction against torrents of water, time, slime, and all-odds. I watch to listen. The *o'opu* climbs. Time quickens in its passing. The expanding universe is somehow speeding-up. Stars turn overhead, known but unseen by me amidst the bright blue. How long has it been? An hour? An eternity? There is only this moment; past and future coalesce in this breath. My lungs, the *o'opu's* gills, and my womb-child somewhere in between. I watch to listen. The *o'opu* climbs. My heart hears:

*Water shares the shape of Time. We are beings made-of and moving amidst it.*

Between banks of the river of Time, I scoop of a deep pool. Some trickles back and rebecomes the flow to the sea, some makes it to my mouth and becomes me. I am not alone. Everyone is here. Creatures of Time incarnate. We drink. We think. We create. We eliminate. Eventually the water of our flesh will seep into the soil, will rise into the mists, and our ever-rebecoming bodies will again be rain and river and aquifer and ocean. The Time of our lives melts back into the formless dimensions accessible only through others' perceptions. If anything of our now-lives survives, it isn't in cells—it's in *mo'olelo*.

The *o'opu* climbs. I watch to listen. And in silence learn to speak.

*Hello, Friend. Teach me a story?*

# THEBRIDGE

*[DRAFT 1.1 abridged and amended just in case needed to read aloud past da Prologue-ish (but nevah need to)...*

*Some of the latter sections are not meant to be like dis, but I was rushing fo' squish-in some ideas meant for later chapters...]*

The breeze is at our backs as we cross the bridge. Up and over the concrete chasm that casts our sacred Wailuku River. Ritual pause to regard the water. Pure valley air, *pau hana* exhaust dichotomy. Daddy and Mommy-me, we push our brand-new baby along a well-worn path. Toward the heart of Wailuku Town we stroll(er), our familiar world made fresh through her eyes.

"This is a bridge," I explain in singsong whilst cars whiz by. "But *you* are a bridge, too. Our bridge into the future. Just as we are your bridges into pasts."

I marvel at her *'ano*. Just a baby, yet full of features from so many loved ones, some long gone. Grandma's nose is no longer her own, and I wonder from whom and how far-back this nose goes. Funny how I can peer into the past by looking at the face of the future, this flesh-and-blood time machine.

"You're a baby now, but you will be a girl, a woman, a kupuna, an ancestor," says Daddy to daughter. She is six months old, but we try to talk-story as if she were 6 or 16 or 60... 600... 6,000; knowing that she will be all these ages and then some. I try to think of her as both an eternal soul given new skin and a new life made of primordial molecules. *Water, mostly.*

"Did A Dinosaur Drink This Water?" is one of our favorite keiki books. Fittingly the author's surname is Wells, and he takes readers on a wholesome romp through our planet's hydrologic cycle, cleaning and recycling the same water for billions of years. Enter modern pollution, and the book expectedly closes with a plea to humanity to care for its most precious resource.

This dovetails well with another beloved book, "We Are Water Protectors," a dreamily illustrated gem from our Ojibwe brethren. "We come from water," reads a cherished page. "It nourished us inside of our mother's body. As it nourishes us here on Mother Earth. Water is sacred... Water is *alive*."

Stories are alive, too. And to feed them, we need to read them. Since the night she was born, we've read-aloud a lot. Piles of kids' books, of course, but also passages from whatever novel or online article that I happen to be nosing. From the latter we learn that humans split atoms but cannot manufacture water. And that all of Earth's water may be even older than the Sun! There are several big hypotheses, but new evidence suggests that Earth's water could have been delivered by the same interplanetary collision that created our Moon. I rather like this theory, as there is poetry and (literal) gravity in how the Moon and Earth's water—including the *wai* within us—remain connected.

It is good to know the stories of the wide world and beyond, but it is essential to know the stories of our home. Because we are the homes of stories. So, we share with our baby the many centuries-old hydrologic cycle *oli*, that poses the question "*Aia i hea ka wai a Kane?*" We listen to voice of a beloved mentor speak of "the tenacity of the *o'opu*." We listen to the voice of real-life water protector, reminding us to not merely survive, but thrive.



And, I tell her of our mythical water protectors, *mo'o*, our Hawaiian dragons. I tell her how *mo'o* is the root word for processes precious to us: *mo'okuauhau*, genealogy; *mo'opuna*, grandchild; *mo'olelo*, story. I tell her how in Hawai'i nei we have no alligators, no large water monitor lizards, no dinosaur bones eroding from the mountainsides, but the memory of these things traveled *with* our ancestors; and the lessons they teach live *in* us as we keep the stories—and this water—*alive*.

Water that dinosaurs drank. Water that is older than the sun. Water that is within and connects us all.

Ritual pause to regard the water. Up and over the concrete channel that casts our sacred Wailuku river. The breeze is at our backs as we cross the bridge, and push our brand new baby along this well-worn path. Toward the heart of Wailuku Town we stroll, our familiar world made fresh through her eyes.

**[MAHALO]**

## THEBECOMING

*[TKTKTK This chapter is about our many family strolls to watch the mural come to life—from blank wall to watching Cory work.]*

... Cory's face is uncannily familiar, though I'm quite sure we're strangers. Stranger still, his *'ano* has a curious timelessness. Am I meeting a *kanaka* from the year 300 or 3,000? And in the way you can recognize a Waterman by their sea-eyes, judging by Cory's *maka*, I'd peg him as a Seer. Apropos for an artist. I instinctively have a deep sense of trust in him as a *kahu* and creator of Hawaiian imagery. ...

## THEBLESSING

*[TKTKTK This chapter is about the mural blessing and the Adaptations Dance Theater performance... Especially how neat it was that they focused on Uncle Clifford's mana'o of listening, then gained the bulk of their inspiration by listening to the community consultations. Cool!]*

TK WORDS ABOUT IDEAS ...

## THEBEGINNING

*[TKTKTK This chapter loops back to the Storytelling Workshops with Kumu Leleihua, which preceded the interviews and art.]*

TK WORDS ABOUT IDEAS...