



## MAUKA-MAKAI CONNECTION

## MO'OLELO

## SOMETIMES YOU ARE A KOA, AND SOMETIMES YOU ARE A KO'A

By Walt Keale

When we were small kids our *kūpuna* always seemed to have some kind of lesson for us to learn. But it wasn't like sitting in a classroom at school. The *kūpuna* taught us out in the open, in the *mauka* or *makai*. Usually our parents would let us know the night before the journey, "Uncle wants to take you boys out for a picnic tomorrow." The night before we could hardly sleep wondering where he might be taking us, what we might be expected to learn the next day and, most of all, how many tuna sandwiches and Kool-Aid we'd consume!

We had so many aunts and uncles who did this we now feel blessed, but back then we mostly just took it for granted. My favorite stories were the ones that my uncles and aunts had learned from Uncle Adrian, the famous Wai'anae cowboy. He was everybody's favorite subject. As a cowboy, he was able to go high up in the *mauka* (mountains). There he would visit all the *wahi kapu* or sacred places. He could also better protect sacred places that way. The things he passed on to our uncle had plenty *mana*.

Just like clockwork Uncle Alika showed up at the crack of dawn, *wāna'ao* when the sky begins to turn light and the stars begin to fade. When he showed up we knew we'd probably be getting something from the Uncle-Adrian-Archives—chee-hoo! We jumped in the car and Uncle Alika tore off. But this time the drive was really close by. We parked at the base of Kamaile Mountain. This was the shortest drive yet. It was going to be an interesting time.

Uncle Alika said to us, "Boys, try say these words...*koa* and *ko'a*. Sometimes you're the *koa*; sometimes you're the *ko'a*. The *koa* tree stands in the mountain; the *ko'a* (fishing ground) sits in the ocean. Sometimes you're the *koa* tree or warrior standing guard over the mountain forest; sometimes you're the *ko'a* that guards the fish in the ocean."





Our *kūpuna* always taught us the connection between the mountains and the sea. We need healthy, clean streams for the *lo'i* to produce the healthiest *kalo* crop. Without a healthy flow of fresh water, the *pulupulu* or *'ōpio* (small fish) cannot survive when they need it the most.

Uncle told us, “Sometimes life requires you to handle problems directly, like the warrior—charge ‘em! Sometimes you just stand back and watch, like the reef, quiet and stealthy. Someday you will have to take your stand on our land to protect the flow of life. The land will call you to join others in the *lo'i kalo*. You may stand someday down by the *makai* and help the struggling Wai’anae fishery. Sometimes you’re the *koa*; sometimes you’re the *ko’a*.”



Both places require our connection. The deeper our relationship with the land and sea, the longer we will all exist in a healthy way. Before we hit the long trail up Kamaile ridge that day to Kāne’s sacred temple, Uncle taught us something from the Kumulipo—a Hawaiian creation story. It went like this:

*He nuku, he wai; ka 'ai a ka lā'au  
O ke Akua ke komo; a o'e komo kanaka*

Through a channel, water is life for trees  
So the creator can enter the sacred places;  
Human beings cannot.

### Vocabulary

*ko'a* – fishing grounds; coral  
*koa* – native forest tree  
*kūpuna* – elder  
*makai* – toward the sea

*mana* – divine power  
*mauka* – toward the mountains  
*wahi kapu* – sacred places  
*wana'ao* – dawn

**YOUR CHALLENGE:** This story uses metaphor, which is when you compare something by saying it is something else. Find the two metaphors in this story. Draw a picture of these metaphors on another sheet of paper.