

# **Mahalo, Honu (Thank You, Turtle)**

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Grade 6



When I awoke for the first time in my life, I was cramped inside a small area. I pushed with all my might, and finally broke through the egg. My eyes hurt from the bright sun. I soon realized I wasn't alone with my siblings waking up. I was surprised to see how many brothers and sisters I had. No matter how many times I counted, I still counted five baby turtles, including me. I was a little slow trudging along to the shore, probably because I haven't crawled at any other point in my life. Within a couple minutes I was trailing behind my siblings. I looked ahead and saw a *very* large crab attempting to snatch one of my sisters. I sprinted up and grabbed my sister's back flippers. I pulled with all my might and the crab lost his grip and fell backwards. He scuttled away quickly, leaving us to our business. My siblings turned to me, and the sister I had saved hugged me tightly and said, "Mahalo, Honu." I suddenly liked the way that phrase sounded even though there was a strong possibility that Honu, which means turtle, wasn't going to be my name.

Not much longer we were swimming out into the clear blue Pacific Ocean. I noticed a deep-water sponge, somehow in shallow water, sitting on a rock. A human had already cut it probably. I made a mental note inside my head to ask my mom about it later. "What did you find?" I heard a familiar voice beside me. It was my brother, looking curiously at the sponge. "It's a sponge," I told him. "So, uh, I'm Simian, and that's Hekili, Alike, and Gigi." He informed me, pointing to my sibling all sitting on my father's back. "My name is La'iku," I began, but before either of us could say another word our mother swam by swinging us up on top of her green-brown shell. "Hold on

tight my keiki's (babies)" she said to us. As we swam over the drop off I began to feel frightened. I could tell my brother was a bit nervous too. Ahead I noticed a current forming in the water with many honu's (turtles) big and small riding it until they had reached their destination. She swam right for the beginning and all I could feel was a force pulling us. I closed my eyes afraid of what was coming next. Very few moments later I felt my brother tugging my flipper. "Open your eyes, it's a lot of fun," he said. Since I trusted my own brother I opened my eyes. The water was clearer, we were not going too fast, and beside us, my father was swimming with my other siblings on his back. The three of them waved to me. I waved back with my free hand. "Hey," Hoku yelled, "She's got a da kine," I gave a little chuckle and explained what I was holding "It's a deep-water sponge," I looked to the side hoping my brother would be there. I was apparently wrong. I searched the shell frantically. "Where's Simian?" I asked. "Isn't he up there?" my mother asked, craning her head to look. I looked again, and found him standing on the edge of the shell, prepared to jump off. Before I could stop him he jumped and landed safely on my father's back with my other siblings. I watched quietly as they took turns jumping back and forth. Not much later I heard someone talking, but I couldn't hear. "Guys, did you hear me?" my father said. "No," we all answered simultaneously. "I said to stay on one shell because we're leaving the current" he repeated, his voice more stern than it had been. My eyelids started drooping and I was tired from all the excitement. Next thing I knew I was asleep.

My eyes were still closed but I heard voices. "Wake up! Wake up!" I heard Alika yelling. I felt her shaking me and I opened my eyelids very slightly. Gigi asked, "Is she dead?" so I opened my eyelids all the way. I could feel that I wasn't on my mother's

back but rather on a stone. I looked around. We were inside a tall cave where the water only covered halfway. I searched the cave for my mother and found her and my father sliding down a mound of sand coming from the area upstairs. "Mom, where are we?" I asked. "We're home. Do you like it?" she replied. "No I mean, where in the world are we?" I said. The whole room was quiet as the rest of the keiki honu's (or the baby turtles) listened, waiting for an answer. "We're in Honolulu, the capital city of all the Hawaiiin islands," my mom announced. At that moment my brother Simian yelled from upstairs "I call this bed!" he was sitting on top of an old piece of cloth that was located at the farthest end on the left side of the room. Immediately everyone else raced upstairs and sat on a piece of cloth. By the time I was upstairs all but one of the sheets of cloth were taken. The only remaining one was left on the far ride side of the cave, making me parallel to my brother. "You guys want any coconuts?" my mother asked. "Yes, Please!" we all responded simultaneously and we all swam down to the lower level and grabbed a piece of coconut. I ate mine slowly, enjoying every little bit of the sweet coconut milk. By the time I had finished the sky was beginning to get darken. I headed to the upper level of the cave and went to my corner. My siblings followed, dozing right off to sleep. However, I just couldn't fall to sleep. When I finally did it wasn't for very long. I heard a strange noise and went to the bottom of the cave. The sea was pitch black and I couldn't see anything so I checked the top of the pali (cliff) and found a Manu, which is a species of bird, choking. There was a ring of plastic around his neck and it seemed to be the cause of the problem. I grabbed a sharp rock sitting nearby and cut the plastic off from around his neck. His breathing evened and he looked up at me. "Mahalo, Honu." The bird was about my age, maybe a bit older. His feathers were soaked from the nalu's

(waves) crashing against the pali. "What's your name?" I asked him. "Omea. What's yours?" he responded. "La'iku," I remarked. The sun rose just a little bit over the horizon making the blue-green water sparkle. "Well, I have to get back home," I told him, and crawled to the edge of the cliff. "Wait!" he shrieked, "Where do you live?" I turned my head to look at him. "In that cave down there," I answered, pointing down to my home. With that I jumped, diving headfirst into the water. I tried to sneak up the sand mound when I had arrived home but Simian woke up. "La'iku, where were you?" he hissed. "Nowhere," I lied. "Were you trying to figure out who was hollering?" he asked with a sly smile. "How did you know?" I questioned. He just shrugged and slid down the large pile of sand. By that time, our parents were waking up. I followed Simian to the lower level of the cave, and grabbed a chunk of coconut for breakfast. I hungrily enjoyed it, lapping up every last drop of the milk. By the time the rest of my siblings were awake the sun was already high in the sky. I decided to search the cave to see if I could track down anything interesting. I climbed up the sand mound and tried to see if there was a third floor. All I found was a small opening in the roof. I squeezed through it to see where it led me and I suddenly found myself on the roof. It was a large area and looked very similar to a lanai (deck). "Hey guys, come up here!" I exclaimed, sticking my head through the hole. All the other young turtles filed on to the lanai, and even with all of them on the lanai we still had more than enough room. "Let's make the rooftop into a real deck! We can get some flowers and something to sit on..." Gigi declared, but at that moment my siblings and I ran off in different directions. Hekili and I jumped into the water and swam to shore to find some seaglass or seashells to decorate the lanai. I found a conch shell and my brother found *tons* of seaglass. We hauled all of our

treasure back to the cave and squished them through the hole. By the time we finished the sun was starting to set so we all decided we would take a nap until dinner. We laid down on more rags of shirts, found by Gigi, and slowly drifted off to sleep.

Months started to pass and nothing interesting really happened until the sharks started coming. One of them tried to snatch my mother in the dead of the night. Just like when I had met Omea, I woke up to the sound of someone screaming. I rushed down the sand pile to find a white tip shark trying to grab my mother. I grabbed one of our last coconuts and chucked it out very far into the dark water, hoping the shark would eat the piece of fruit instead. Luckily, my plan worked. "Mahalo, Honu," my mother panted, hugging me tightly.

Eventually it came the time to move out but I had nowhere to go. It would be hard to live in a nest with Omea so I asked him for some options. "I'm going to go visit some of my relatives. Would you like to come with me?" he asked, looking a bit nervous. "Sure," I answered. "Where do your relatives live?" He looked away and replied "The Prince William Sound in Alaska," he cringed while he listened to my response. "Alaska!?" I shouted. "So, do you still want to join me?" he questioned jokingly. Since I can never say no I had to agree.

We left the next morning, just as the sun was coming up, and we arrived when the sun was starting to set. I strongly disliked the cold water, and tried to go in it very rarely. I enjoyed meeting Omea's family who didn't live in a nest. I met an otter which I noticed swimming around nearly every hour of every day. "What are you doing here?" asked the sea otter. He had come up behind me, munching on a piece of seaweed. "I'm visiting some birds that live here," I told him. "Do you know what day it is today?" he asked. "No,

but I know the year is 1989,” I admitted. “Today is March 24. The only way I know this is by listening in on fishermen’s conversation,” he told me. Omea flew into the water just before a boat started spilling oil into the water. I reacted quickly, having heard stories about oil and how it effects marine life. I grabbed the otter and Omea and swam as fast as I could until we reached the shore. Although we were coated with the oil, I was glad the three of us were still alive. A group of fishermen noticed us while we were trying to catch our breath so they put us in cages and stacked us up in the back of a pickup truck. I felt tired after swimming so far and so fast and I fell asleep like always.

When I woke up I was inside a room with metal walls and big tank of fish. A woman with brunette hair pulled back into a ponytail took me out of the cage and over to a bucket of water. Her nametag read Paulette. She started cleaning me and it felt very refreshing to be in warm water. “Now what were you doing in the Prince William Sound?” Paulette questioned. “I was visiting some birds that live up here,” I responded, but I’m sure she couldn’t understand me. I was placed in a large tank with many other marine mammals, but no sea turtles. I found the sea otter who I had been talking to before the oil spill swimming in a circle. “You saved my life!” he exclaimed, and gave me a hug. I soon thought of my siblings and how much they love me. I thought of Hekili, Alike, Simian, Gigi, and all their smiling faces. I started crying just thinking about them. The otter looked at me and murmured “Mahalo, Honu.”

The End