

Marina, The Tale of a Port River Mangrove



Here, close to one of the southern-most mangrove forests in the world, we find a tale. A tale of community, reciprocity and generosity. We hear about a tree that births live young, is a teeming hotel, and a larder that literally holds the community together. This is the tale of Marina, a Port River mangrove.

Deep in the temperate forested wetlands of the Port River, near the Barker Inlet, grew an old mangrove tree. The day came when its youngest and brightest child, Marina, was ready to leave the tree.

Celebrating her unfamiliar detached freedom, Marina dropped into the salty water, just a seedling. It was a high tide and she felt the warm current and seaward winds influencing her movement to the east.

Now independent and self-sufficient, she pondered and floated - what was her memory, was it collective with the other mangroves or was it hers alone? Was memory stored in the wood she would become, would it line her leaves with a resonating aura loyal to her branches only? She had heard of memories swapping plants, travelling along branches jumping from root to root and finding their way down the track to settle with ease.

All winter Marina travelled with the tides, until one especially high spring tide found her in a particularly sunny spot. As the tide receded she felt the mud in her toes and took root. She knew what to do, she remembered the organic rich soil best to grow in. Surrounded by family and friends she grew taller and stronger. Her air breathing roots heading straight to the sky, these pneumatophores forming a vast finger-like forest underneath her mangrove canopy. Hundreds of bright green leaves grew, each held a memory to collect and disperse the excess salt, before shedding, and breaking down into the soil floor amongst the aerating roots.

Marina grew older, recognising and embracing the yearly storms. She welcomed the purge, her whole self cleansed. Marina was content with the strong winds massaging her being. In fact, she was so grounded, rooted and strong, no squall would ever move her. Her presence in the ecosystem was integral to coastal stabilisation and storm protection. She was a mangrove hero.

As well as the strong weathers she began to feel coastal squeeze. Pressure from the landward side where the levy



banks and concrete introduced a fixed landscape. It felt foreign to her living and breathing self.

It was coming into the warmer months. The last of the year's big storms had cleared, and a calm came to be. Marina looked forward to the seasonal stories from the bees as her flowers blossomed. She liked being sung to. This voice was soothing, a contrast to the complicated engines that disconnected her communication.

She loved providing nectar to the bees and insects, and welcomed the exchange that followed of updated information about nearby regions and neighbours. The birds were happy in her branches and leaves, as a halophyte hotel, providing a safe and salty shelter.

In the water below the protection of her roots housed countless fish into life, and sheltered them in their early vulnerable years. Her fish hatchery as it was called was famous for tides to come.

The waterlogged anaerobic soil she grew in became a stable home for many shellfish, crabs and invertebrates. The shallow and silty soil allowed Marina and the fauna around her to thrive.

Over the years Marina birthed thousands of baby mangroves, these relatives now grow in the local estuarine environment. One particular season when the tides were strong and the wind was soft, a vibrant bright and energetic shoot grew. It grew a strong protective coating. And developed into a strong bright furry propagule, a fully formed mangrove seedling. Inside the propagule a parcel of leaves ready for the rich salty soil.

These rhythms teem through the forested wetlands and are connected to currents and tides, to seeds and roots. Marina retained one strong wish from her moment in time as a tree, to let the ancient creeks flood again with the celestial tide. As she transitioned into the next phase her energy continued. A collective energy that is now part of the thriving ecosystem and all mangrove trees. So continues the evolution of the Port River mangrove.