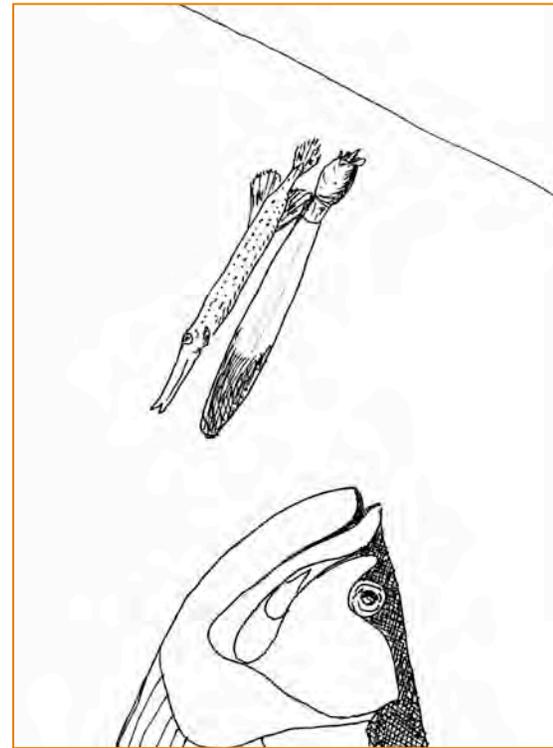
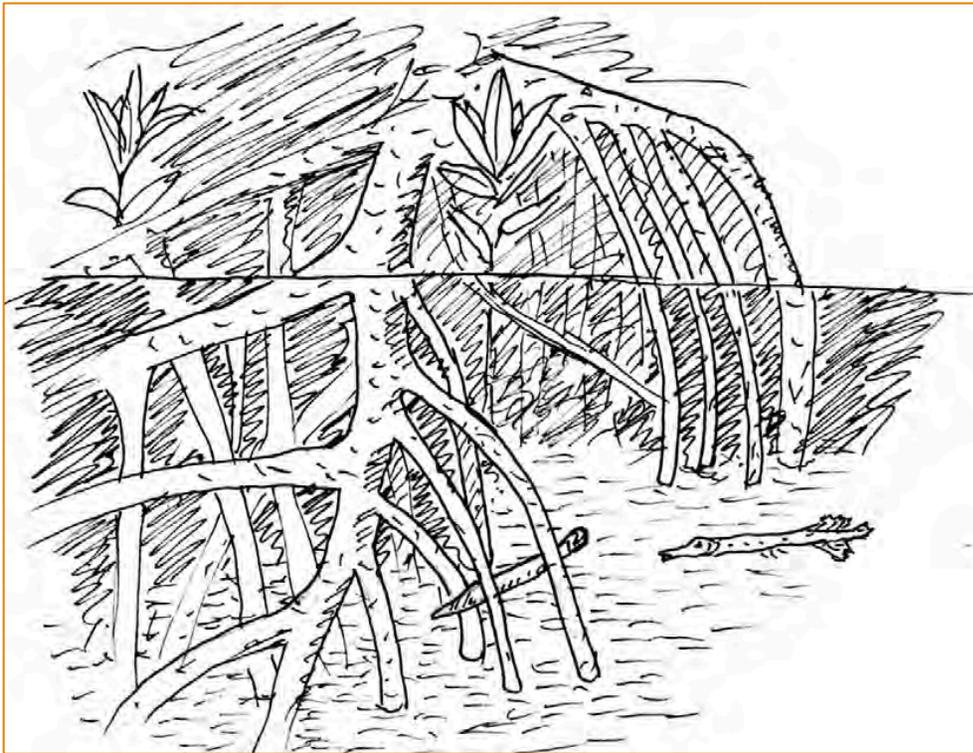


The Baby Trumpet Fish and the Mangrove Tree Seed



Story by Stuart Baum
Illustrations by Zoë Baum

Kim van Vaardegem was leading a kayak tour through the mangrove forest in Bonaire, Netherlands. Bonaire is a small island near the top of South America, far south of Florida.



Mangrove trees grow in the water, mostly, so if you want to see them you also need to be in the water, which is why Kim was leading a kayak tour.

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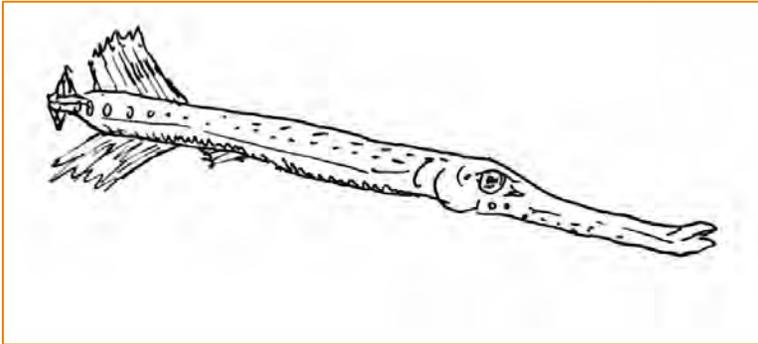
*Here is a drawing of a mangrove tree.
Notice that its roots are in the water.*

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There were four other kayaks. Two had two young couples in them. The third had a Dad and a young daughter. And the Mom was paddling solo in the fourth. No need to wonder about who is in which kayak. As far

as the humans in the story go, you only need to know that Kim was leading the kayak tour and there was a smart little girl also on the tour.

Kim was explaining why mangrove forests are so important to Bonaire and the people in the other kayaks were listening. Also listening was a small trumpet fish.



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*Here is a drawing of the baby trumpet fish.
She is one of the two heroes of our story.*

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Kim was explaining how the mangrove roots protected the fish babies while they were growing up.

"The mangrove roots are great places for the baby fish to hide from predators, like sharks or tarpons or turtles. Without this safe place to grow, the baby fish would be gobbled up and there would be no adult fish and no more baby fish. Without these mangrove trees, all the fish you like watching in the reefs around Bonaire would be gone ... eaten by sharks and tarpons and other bigger fish."

The trumpet fish knew to stay inside the roots and away from the tarpons and sharks and the other large and hungry fish.

Kim continued, "When the baby fish get big enough, they need more food than can be found in the mangrove forest, though, so they make the dangerous trip to the reef." Kim looked at the daughter and asked, "Why is the trip from the mangrove forest to the reef so dangerous?"

The little girl answered, "Because they have to swim through the tarpons and the sharks to get to the reef."

"Correct!" said Kim. The daughter was proud she got the right answer. The Dad and Mom were also proud.

The trumpet fish had been looking forward to the trip to the reef, but she was no longer as excited. She had to swim through the tarpons and sharks and turtles - all who were waiting for her to go past the roots and, perhaps, past their sharp teeth and into their bellies.

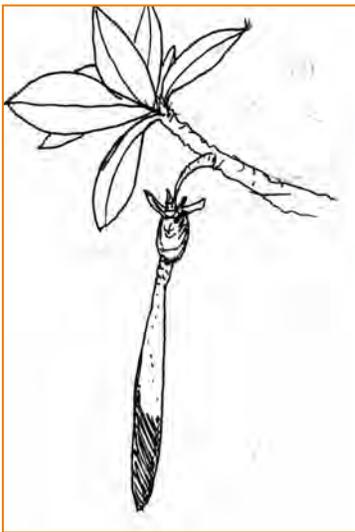
Then Kim said something that really scared the trumpet fish. "As you look through the roots of the mangrove trees, you will see thousands and thousands of fish babies because (and this is the part that really scared our trumpet fish) only one in 10,000 of these babies make it to the reef alive." Kim wiggled the fingers on both her hands many, many times and then stopped and showed a single finger. "Only one in ten thousand!"

The people in the kayak gasped. Kim added, as comfort, her single finger still pointing forward, "But that one in ten thousand is enough to produce the next generation of babies and keep the reefs full of fish ... so long as we protect the mangrove trees so their roots can protect the fish babies."

This was comforting to the people in the kayaks, who paddled away, looking down into the water and through the roots to the tens of thousands of fish babies on one side of the roots and the larger fish on the other side.

This was not comforting to the trumpet fish, who was one of the ten thousand fish it would take for a single fish to make it to the reef alive. Though she was young and though she was a fish, she could do math and she decided, that very moment, to never leave the mangrove forest.

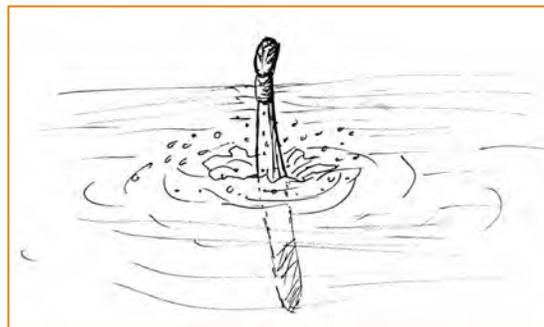
Now we follow the kayaks to the next part of the tour where Kim is showing the other kayakers a mangrove tree seed.



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Here is a drawing of the mangrove tree seed, hanging from a mangrove tree.

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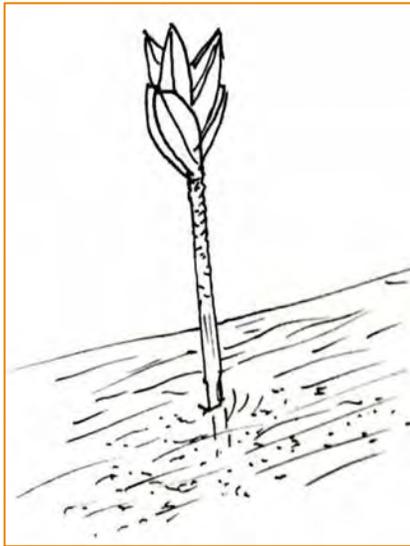


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And here is a drawing of a mangrove tree seed falling from the tree into the water. This mangrove tree seed is the other hero of our story.

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Kim explained, "These seeds drop into the water and float. They can travel only a short distance or as far as another island or even Florida, before they sink into the mud and start to grow another mangrove tree."



Kim pointed to a tiny tree just a few feet away. "This one didn't get too far," she said. "And someday, it will grow to be a big mangrove tree with roots that protect the island and the baby fish."

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Here is a drawing of a baby mangrove tree.

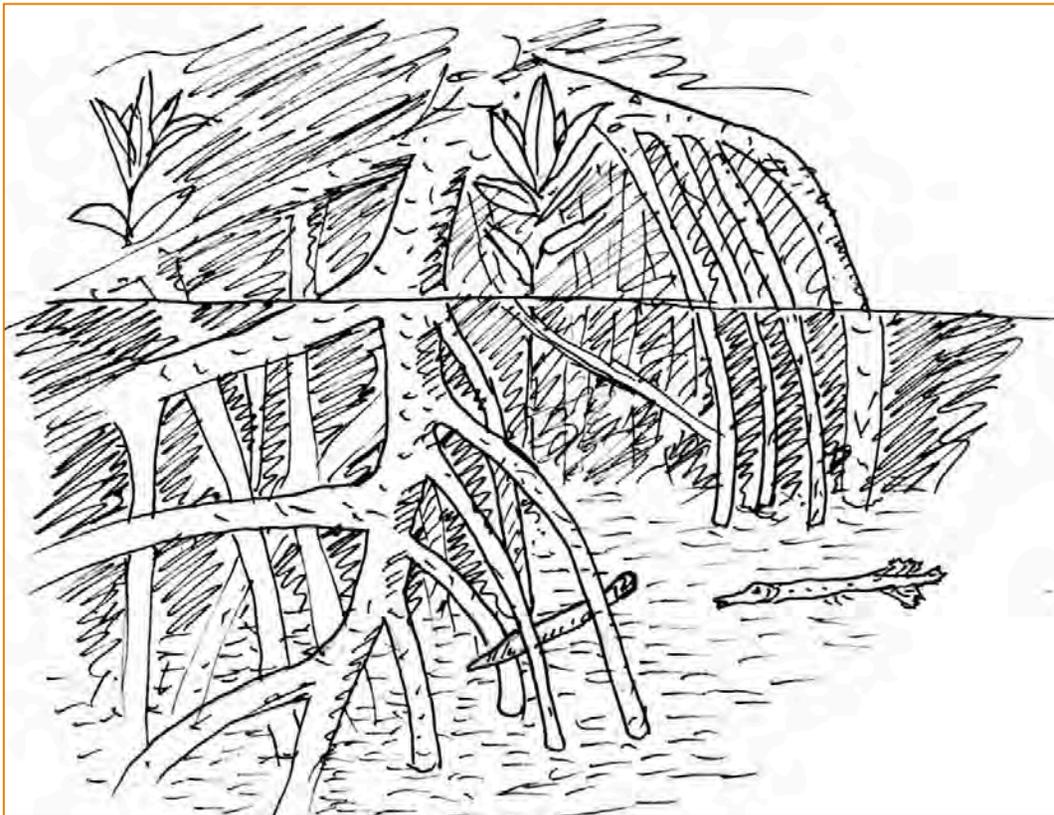
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The daughter raised her hand to ask a question. "Does it take ten thousand mangrove seeds to get past the tarpons and sharks?" As you can imagine, our mangrove tree seed was listening very closely to the answer.

Kim shook her head, "Nope. The tarpons and sharks and turtles do not eat mangrove seeds. So if the little seed can make it to another island, or Florida, and find nice rich mud like we have here, it can grow up to become a beautiful mangrove tree.

The mangrove seed was very happy to learn this. It wanted to travel to another island. In fact, it decided then and there, that it would travel to Florida.

The kayakers paddled away, but the mangrove seed stayed where it was. Why didn't it start its long journey to Florida right away? It was stuck behind two mangrove tree roots, which made it very sad.



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Here is a drawing of the mangrove tree seed stuck behind two roots.

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Now, exactly what you expect to happen, happened.

Just at that moment, our first hero, the baby trumpet fish, was swimming by our second hero, the baby mangrove seed. The mangrove seed saw the trumpet fish and called out, "Hey, trumpet fish, can you unstuck me please?"

The trumpet fish was confused. "Why would you want to be unstuck? You are safe where you are and if I free you, you will float out into the open water, where the tarpons and turtles and sharks will eat you."

The mangrove seed explained, "The tarpons and turtles and sharks don't eat mangrove seeds. So, if I get free, I can travel to Florida and grow up to become a beautiful big mangrove tree."

"Lucky you," said the trumpet fish. "You can stay here and grow or float out there and grow, but I can't do either. If I stay, I will run out of food. And if I leave, I will become food for a tarpon, shark or turtle."

This made the mangrove seed extra sad.

The trumpet fish added, "But I will free you, and wish you luck on your journey."

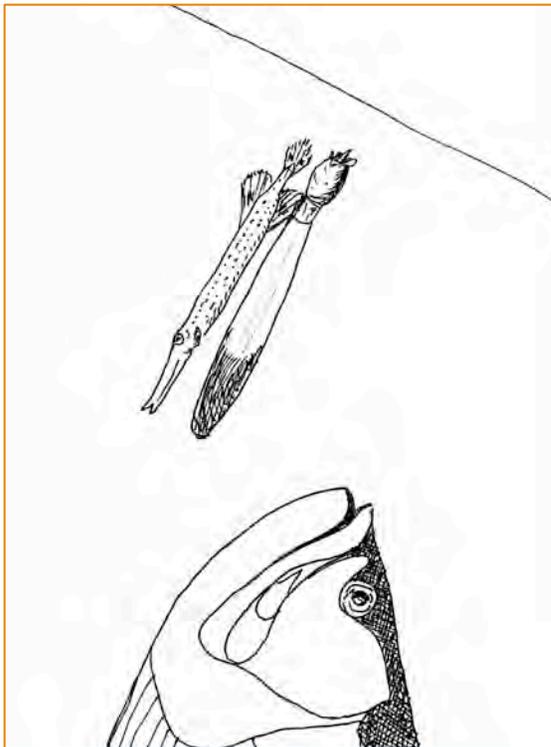
The baby trumpet fish swam over to the mangrove seed and nudged it ever so gently past the two roots that had trapped it. The baby mangrove seed started to float away.

The trumpet fish was pleased she had freed the mangrove seed, but sad she wasn't able to go, too.

The mangrove seed was happy to be freed, but sad for the trumpet fish.

"Wait!" yelled the mangrove seed. "What if you hide next to me? The tarpons, sharks and turtles will see a mangrove seed and keep going."

This sounded like a great idea to the trumpet fish. A somewhat scary idea, to be sure, but also the best chance the trumpet fish would get to reach the reef in safety.



So the trumpet fish swam next to the mangrove seed and, once there, pretended to be another mangrove tree seed. She tried not to wiggle even the slightest bit. It's hard, but if you are afraid of being eaten, I am sure that you, too, could manage it.

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Here is a drawing of our two heroes side-by-side. You can tell that it's a trumpet fish lying next to a mangrove seed, but you are not a hungry fish.

The question is... Did this trick fool the tarpons, sharks and turtles?

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Our two heroes floated past a turtle ... who didn't even glance at them and kept paddling by.

They floated over a shark... who looked at them, very briefly, but also kept swimming by.

They floated right above a tarpon, who looked right at them with its beady tarpon eyes and followed them very slowly with its jaws, full of sharp teeth, wide open ... and ... and ... and ... turned and swam away. Phew!

Side by side, the trumpet fish staying as still as a, well, as a mangrove tree seed, our two heroes slowly floated all the way across the lake and out into the ocean.

When they got to the reef, the trumpet fish swam a happy circle around the mangrove seed and said, "Thank you, thank you, thank you! Without your great ideas, I would have certainly been eaten by that tarpon."

The mangrove seed quickly said, "Thank you, trumpet fish. Without you, I would have been stuck in those roots and would not have the chance to float to Florida."

The trumpet fish swam another happy circle around the mangrove seed and then said, "And, again, I wish you luck on your journey. I am sure you will get there and grow to be a big, beautiful and happy mangrove tree, with lots of roots to protect ten of thousands of fish babies from whatever fish are trying to eat them up in Florida."

The tide started to drag the mangrove seed farther out to sea, so it quickly yelled, "Goodbye, trumpet fish! Have a happy life and make lots of baby trumpet fish!"

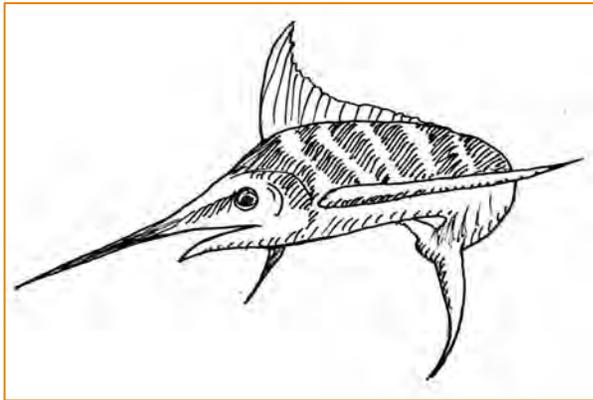
But the trumpet fish did not hear this. She had already swum down to the beautiful reef to begin living her happy life with plenty of other trumpet fish friends.

Not Yet The End.

Epilogue:

The trumpet fish is now many years old. She has lived a happy life and had many baby trumpet fish, just as the mangrove seed wished.

One day, the trumpet fish bumped into a large fish with a pointy nose. It was a marlin.



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Here is a drawing of a marlin. He is not one of the heroes of this story, but very well might be a hero of the next story.
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The marlin asked, "Where am I?"

"In Bonaire," said the trumpet fish.

"Then I've swum a long way!" the marlin declared.

"Where did you come from?" asked the trumpet fish.

"Florida," explained the marlin. "It's far north of here." (Which both you and the trumpet fish know.)

The marlin started to swim away, but the trumpet fish yelled, "Wait!"

The marlin swam back.

The trumpet fish asked, "Are you planning to go back there soon?"

"Yes," said the marlin. "Very soon."

The trumpet fish smiled. "Will you take me with you when you go back? I'd like to visit an old friend who lives in Florida."

The End.



Kim van Vaardegem is a real person and, at the time of this story's writing, led kayak tours through Bonaire's mangrove forest for the [Mangrove Info Center](#). Kim agreed to be part of this story.

Any technical errors within her quotes are almost certainly mine.

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