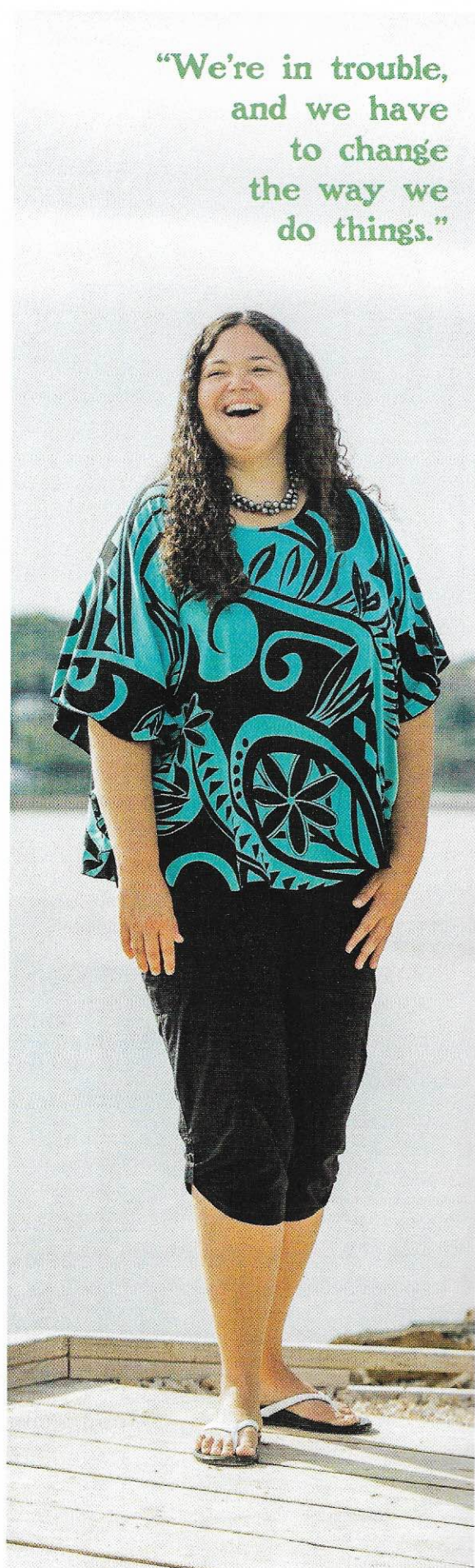
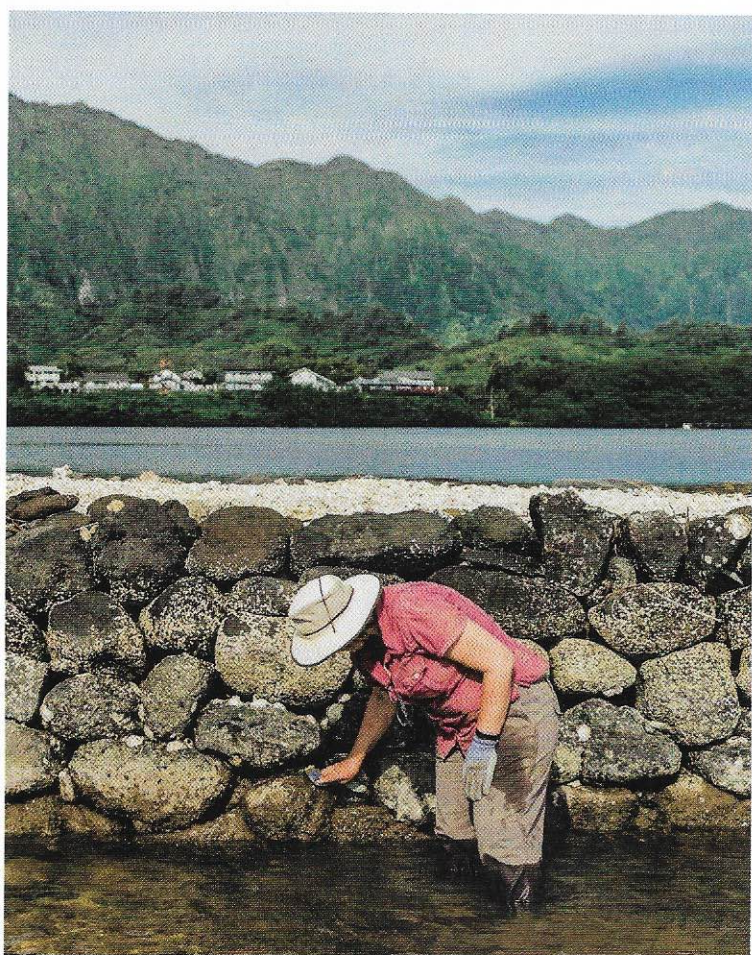




"We're in trouble,
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Rhiannon Tereari'i Chandler-Iao

Waterkeeper

IN HAWAI'I AND IN POLYNESIA, DIFFERENT FAMILIES HAVE FAMILY GUARDIANS. THE MO'O ARE THE GUARDIANS OF WATER — IT'S OUR FAMILY AUMAKUA.

They are typically stationed next to water bodies or adjacent to areas in the near-shore water or fish ponds, where they were the protectors of the area. They were ensuring the pono (righteous) fishing had the right management — not overtaking or over-harvesting things that would lead to destruction in the community. We all need Mo'o now more than ever. We need Mo'o to be watching the waters. I don't think I'm the waterkeeper; I think that I'm a waterkeeper. It would be my dream that every single person on this island and in the state of Hawai'i feels they're a waterkeeper, too. That they have that kuleana, that drive or responsibility, to want to take care of the resources for themselves.

Being a waterkeeper is unique in that you still get to work with the community, but you get to work with the community now through the lens of the law and things like the Clean Water Act. We want clean water: fishable, swimmable, drinkable water.

We're in trouble, and we have to change the way we do things. We can't keep business as usual. In the end, we're not helping our economy by not addressing these problems. Tourism is our economic driver. Therefore, we have to take care of our near-shore water so that people will want to come here.

Native oysters filter water to improve water clarity and quality. They are a tool to use nature to help nature. We are bringing them back and benefitting from this amazing animal's ability to filter the water.

When I Googled "Hawaiian oyster," the first thing that popped up was the University of Hawai'i at Hilo. Dr. Maria Haws is the director of the Aquaculture Center at UH, and I saw a slideshow presentation about different types of oysters like the native oyster and the black-lipped pearl oyster, and I was

like, "This is it! These are the ones we want!" I was overjoyed to know that they had been reproduced already. That they had been cultured, tested, and grow trials had already been completed.

Oysters are not the silver bullet that will answer all of our problems, but they are the thing that could turn the tide.

Ala Wai canal is definitely the most urban waterway in Honolulu. I wish that we could clean the entire distance with oysters, but it's only going to be up to a point. The focal point is the harbor itself, because that's where the water is entering into the swimming areas. If we could get a concentration of oysters going to reduce the pollutants that are coming off the boats in the harbor and the ones that are entering this fishing and swimming area, then we're going to reduce the level of impact to the people. But more than that, the harbor is also very visible, so it's about people thinking, "Hey, what's that? Oh, oysters! What are the oysters doing? Oh, the water's polluted! Why is the water polluted?" The water is polluted because we're not taking care of what we do on land, and what we do on land is affecting the water.

Remember that what we do to the water with our chemicals and our pesticides — all the pollution ends up in the nearshore area. And that's the fish that we eat. It's not caring about the planet anymore like it's a fun thing to do. It's really caring about humanity. Like, do we want to make it? And if we do, we have to start caring.

If every person could do something about the way that our environment has gone in the last hundred years and at least try to slow it, if not turn it around, we would all be in a better place. ◉