

FIELD NOTE 0000013

September 11, 2026

Field Notes from the Mabuhay Stories Experiment Beyond the Story Score.

KEEP UMPHING

BECAUSE SOMETIMES SOMEBODY'S SINGULAR WITNESS IS ALL WE HAVE TO HELP US OVERCOME OUR OWN HUMPH UNTIL ANOTHER UMPH OF AN ENCOUNTER WITH YET ANOTHER OTHER COMES ALONG TO HELP US COMPLETE OUR OWN TRANSOM AS OUR OWN

There's a wonderfully strange moment in the Acts of the Apostles.

A man named Stephen is surrounded by people who are very unhappy with him.

Unhappy enough to kill him.

And in the middle of all that, Stephen says he sees something.

He says he sees Heaven opened.

He says he sees the Son of Man standing at the right hand of God.

And that distinction matters.

Stephen says he sees it.

The people around him aren't described as seeing what Stephen sees.

They encounter Stephen saying he sees it.

Humph.

THE WAY OF THE SEER

Sometimes somebody sees something we don't.

Sometimes somebody hears something we don't.

Sometimes somebody experiences something we cannot independently experience for ourselves.

And then that creature tells us.

That's witness.

It isn't the same thing as giving us the original encounter.

The seer can say:

I beheld.

The rest of us receive:

This creature says they beheld.

And suddenly there's a wonderfully uncomfortable bit of space between us.

A little *Ma*.

We can believe.

Disbelieve.

Wonder.

Question.

Listen.

Walk away.

Come back later.

Or simply say:

Humph.

The witness can offer the encounter.

The witness cannot make us have it.

STEPHEN BECAME THE THRESHOLD

That day, Stephen wasn't merely standing beside a threshold.

For a little while, another steward became the threshold.

Violence stood on one side.

An opened Heaven—according to Stephen—stood on the other.

And Stephen stood between them.

The people around him didn't cross.

They covered their ears.

They rushed him.

They dragged him away.

They threw stones.

And the witnesses laid their coats at the feet of a young man named Saul.

There was precious little human Mercy circulating in that crowd.

Yet Stephen, while being killed, asked that what they were doing not be held against them.

He couldn't make his tormentors cross the threshold.

He simply refused to close it from his side.

Even as the stones fell.

AND ONE OF THE COAT HOLDERS SAID HUMPH

Or something rather more consequential than that.

Saul didn't apparently walk away from Stephen's death transformed into Paul.

Quite the opposite.

The Story kept going.

So did Saul.

And for a while Saul continued moving in very much the wrong direction for the people whose Story he had just witnessed.

Whatever Stephen's witness did or didn't do inside him, we aren't given access to that interior space.

And perhaps that matters, too.

Because we shouldn't manufacture causality simply because we can see two golden threads lying near one another.

Stephen witnessed.

Saul was there.

Saul continued persecuting.

And later Saul had an encounter of his own.

A rather substantial one.

Apparently this particular coat holder needed a little extra—

Umph.

SOMETIMES WE NEED A LITTLE UMPH TO GET PAST OUR HUMPH

That may be one of the more useful things a Story Steward can remember.

Not every Story lands.

Not every witness persuades.

Not every listener understands.

Not every creature is ready.

And sometimes the perfectly reasonable response to somebody else's Perpetual Enigma of Grace™ is:

Humph.

You saw what?

You heard what?

You think that means what?

Humph.

That doesn't necessarily mean the encounter failed.

Maybe the Story simply arrived before another encounter that will help the creature receive it differently.

Maybe another storyteller will tell it.

Maybe another experience will illuminate it.

Maybe ten years or tens of years will pass.

Maybe nothing whatsoever will happen that we can observe.

We don't know.

That's part of the *Ma*, too.

THE STORYTELLER DOESN'T CONTROL THE UMPH

This is important.

The Story Steward isn't responsible for manufacturing Damascus Road Encounters.

Thanks be to Elohim!

That would be exhausting.

And probably dangerous.

Our work is considerably smaller.

Receive the Story.

Keep the Story safe.

Tell the Story well.

Leave room for Wonder.

Then let the encounter be an encounter.

Because the Umph may not come from us.

Stephen didn't finish convincing Saul.

He didn't have to.

The Story traveled anyway.

WHICH IS WHY WE KEEP READING ALOUD

A Story preserved silently is still a Story.

But something peculiar happens when one creature reads it to another.

Witness becomes encounter again.

A voice enters a room.

Another creature listens.

Maybe somebody laughs.

Maybe a child interrupts.

Maybe an elder remembers something.

Maybe somebody disagrees.

Maybe the storyteller hears the words differently because of the person sitting across the table.

Maybe somebody colors the horse green or red or yellow or brown...

Or scarlet or black or ochre or peach

Or ruby or olive or violet or fawn

Or lilac or gold or chocolate or mauve

Or cream or crimson or silver or rose

Or azure or lemon or russet or grey

Or purple or white or pink or orange

Or red or yellow or green or brown or blue

Or perhaps all of the technicolor listed above And then some.

Maybe somebody who arrived with an enormous Humph leaves with a slightly smaller one.

Maybe nothing seems to happen at all.

And occasionally—perhaps—some creature receives exactly that little bit of Umph—that one last Perpetual Enigma of Grace they needed—to make another encounter generative toward our main purpose:

To Help Mercy Abound.

We cannot know beforehand which encounter will be which.

So we keep reading.

AND SOMETIMES THE STORY STEWARD NEEDS THE UMPH

Which brings us back to the two Field Notes immediately before this one.

Perhaps we're all a little lonely.

Perhaps encounters can leave us a little less so.

And sometimes the creature who normally tends the threshold needs a Mulligan.

Sometimes the storyteller needs somebody else to pick up the Story.

Sometimes the holder needs holding.

Sometimes the reader needs to be read to.

Hold you folks this steward, for today, this steward needs the holding, too.

So somebody else takes the book.

Somebody else keeps the Story moving.

Somebody else supplies a little Umph.

And the steward gets to sit among the creatures for whom the Story was being kept all along.

THAT'S HOW THE STORY TRAVELS

Encounter.

Witness.

Unknowing.

Response.

Another encounter.

Another witness.

Another Humph.

Perhaps another Umph.

And another Story offered across another threshold.

We don't have to complete the chain.

We probably couldn't if we tried.

We simply keep making places where the next encounter can happen.

That's what Story Stewards do.

Until, for today, they need somebody else to do it for them, too.

Then somebody else reads.

SO KEEP UMPHING

Read the Story.

Read it aloud.

Keep those little Perpetual Enigmas of Grace flowing.

Tell somebody what you beheld.

Listen when somebody tells you what they beheld.

Don't confuse their witness with your own seeing.

Don't confuse your uncertainty with nothingness.

Don't demand that every Humph become an Umph before everybody goes home.

Leave some room.

Leave some *Ma*.

Leave room for Wonder.

And when another creature needs another encounter—

offer one.

Perhaps that's enough.

Perhaps that's how Stories survive.

Perhaps that's how communities survive.

And perhaps, every once in a while, it even helps one of the creatures we love stay around long enough to encounter something they couldn't yet behold.

We cannot promise that.

But we can keep the door open.
We can keep another chair nearby.
We can keep another ball on the tee.
We can keep another enigmatic butterscotch at hand.
And we can keep another Story ready to be read.
Because we don't know which encounter will matter.
Or to whom.
Or when.
Or whether the creature receiving the Umph this time—might be us.

Mabuhay, My Friends!

May you live long.
May you prosper.
May you behold what you're given to behold.
May you faithfully witness what is yours to tell.
May you leave room for what you cannot yet know.
And may you have enough humility to say **Humph** when Humph is all you have—
and enough Grace to receive a little **Umph** when it arrives.
So that together—
as receiving givers, Story Stewards, threshold keepers, listeners, readers, coat holders,
occasional Mulligan takers, and creatures who sometimes simply need holding—
May we all—

Help Mercy Abound.

Right on the streets where we live.

Even as we keep reading, listening, wondering, tending the liminal spaces with encounter and wobbling our way together toward...

4EVER!