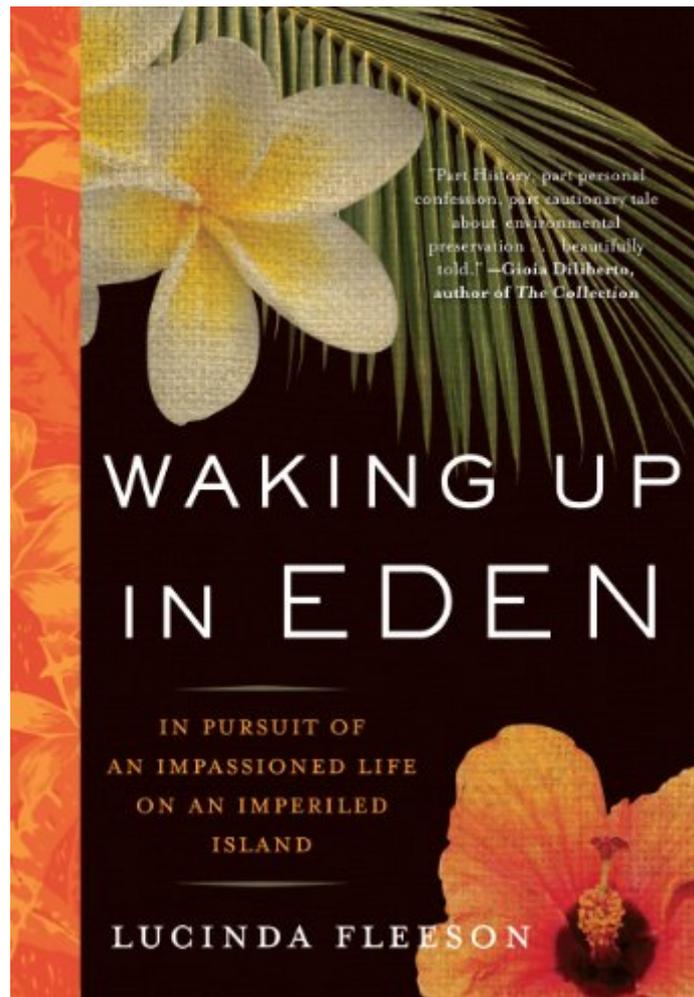


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Waking Up In Eden: In Pursuit Of An Impassioned Life On An Imperiled Island



Synopsis

Like so many of us, Lucinda Fleeson wanted to escape what had become a routine life. So, she quit her big-city job, sold her suburban house, and moved halfway across the world to the island of Kauai to work at the National Tropical Botanical Garden. Imagine a one-hundred-acre garden estate nestled amid ocean cliffs, rain forests, and secluded coves. Exotic and beautiful, yes, but as Fleeson awakens to this sensual world, exploring the island's food, beaches, and history, she encounters an endangered paradise—the Hawaii we don't see in the tourist brochures. Native plants are dying at an astonishing rate—Hawaii is called the Extinction Capital of the World—and invasive species (plants, animals, and humans) have imperiled this Garden of Eden. Fleeson accompanies a plant hunter into the rain forest to find the last of a dying species, descends into limestone caves with a paleontologist who deconstructs island history through fossil life, and shadows a botanical pioneer who propagates rare seeds, hoping to reclaim the landscape. Her grown-up adventure is a reminder of the value of choosing passion over security, individuality over convention, and the pressing need to protect the earth. And as she witnesses the island's plant renewal efforts, she sees her own life blossom again.

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Customer Reviews

I enjoyed this book very much, and would recommend it to anyone who goes to Kauai, and particularly to anyone who is interested in the National Tropical Botanical Garden (NTBG). Fleeson is a good writer and a good storyteller. She has an interesting story to tell, and I enjoyed hearing it. Yet there was something about that book that was less than completely satisfying. "Waking up in Eden" has many compelling passages and some that seem strangely dry and out of place. My copy is about 300 pages long. I think I could have made a better 225 page book from this manuscript. There are passages, one about a restaurant in Honolulu, another about a birthday luau for Japanese child, that read exactly like well written articles for the Style section in the Sunday edition of a newspaper. Unfortunately, these are exactly the kind of articles that I usually skip, and I found it odd that they somehow made their way into a book on a subject I found engaging. Other passages, notably a wonderful section on Kauai resident Keith Robinson, again read like a passage from a newspaper, but this time I wanted to hear much more about the topic, as it seemed very germane to the main themes of the book. When the passage ended, I felt as though I were left hanging. The author had my complete attention, and this was a book, not a newspaper, and so I expected more on a subject that was so central to the book. The book had two primary themes: 1) The National Botanical Garden 2) A woman's attempt to make a life in Kauai. When Fleeson stuck to these topics, I enjoyed almost everything she wrote. If anything, I wanted to hear more about the garden, and more about her struggles to build a life in the tropics.

Lucinda Fleeson's memoir "Waking Up in Eden" is no navel gazer - thank you very much - but the true adventures of a woman who, nearing middle age, woke up to smell the coffee and instead of freaking out took a giant gulp of it and got on with her life. Leaving her job at the Philadelphia Inquirer and her home with its English rose garden Fleeson moves to the Hawaiian island of Kauai and its 1000 acre tropical garden. This is a volatile and damaged isle whose natural order is fast disappearing. What is also disappearing is her youth and some of her choices. In a chatty and unselfconscious way Fleeson re-examines her heart's desire and tallies up her wins and losses, all the while packing her trekking boots. The adventure is on and soon enough it is not so much the exotic isle and its fragile flowers or even the colorful characters dedicated to saving them, but Fleeson's inherent interest in, well, everything, that makes her journey a page turner. Officially,

Fleeson job is to raise funds for the National Tropical Botanical Garden - an Eden that is in serious risk of imploding. Proposal writing and coaxing money out of rich people could sound rather dry but Fleeson is a deft writer. The people, politics and history surrounding the NTBG is intriguing enough, but its how Fleeson grabs onto her new life that swept me up. She gets her hands dirty in the island's red clay, rides horseback along its beaches, treks up mountains climbing through dense jungle, tries surfing, learns to row like hell with the Kawaikini Women's Canoe Club and before she leaves plants her own tropical garden. Along the way Fleeson introduces herself, and us, to a gaggle of interesting and passionate people and its here that we see the true depth of Ms.

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