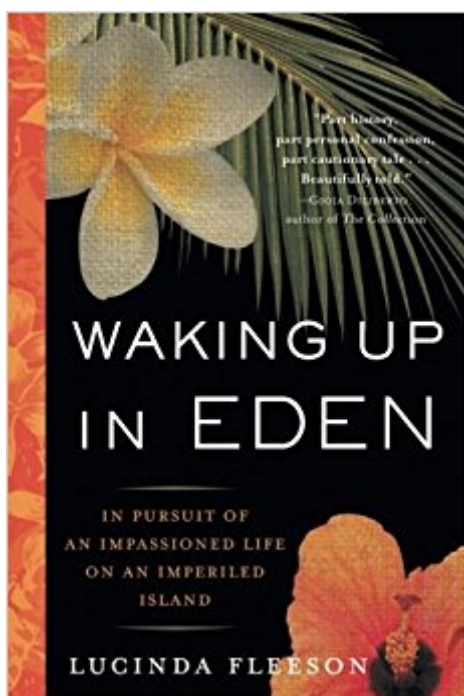


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# Waking Up In Eden: In Pursuit Of An Impassioned Life On An Imperiled Island



## 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.

## Book Information

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## Customer Reviews

An admitted news junkie, journalist Fleeson imagined she would die in the Philadelphia Inquirer's newsroom with a half-written story in her computer. But as the newspaper business began its cataclysmic shift in the late 1990s, she started to feel stymied and leapt at a fund-raising job with

Hawaii's National Tropical Botanical Garden. Arriving on the island of Kauai, she discovered that Hawaii's native plants were becoming extinct at an alarming rate, with two-thirds in danger of disappearing by the end of the current century. Fleeson delves into conservation efforts—the history of the garden's benefactors, two gay men with a passion for exotic plants and even more salacious parties during the years after WWII. She spotlights a full-time bartender who attempts to cultivate rare plants with basic greenhouse equipment. Finally, she shadows Kauai's own Orchid Thief: the Robin Hood of Hawaii known for picking endangered plants in national forests and turning them into prized specimens on his own preserve. An artful and lively tale of flora and fauna illustrates their complexities and serves as a reminder of the need to nurture both. (July) Copyright © Reed Business Information, a division of Reed Elsevier Inc. All rights reserved.

Fleeson could see the handwriting on the wall: big changes were coming to the metro newspaper where she'd worked hard to build a solid career, and it seemed wise to get out while the getting was good. Fleeing to Kauai to become the chief fund-raiser for the beleaguered National Tropical Botanic Garden, she found herself plunked down in the middle of paradise, which turned out to be not quite the utopian sanctuary one would imagine. Her boss was a mercurial whirling dervish of ego and ambition, her accommodations were rustic and remote, and the island's fragile habitat was more threatened than she ever imagined. Confronted with overwhelming evidence of the alarming rate of plant extinction caused by nonnative species invading Kauai, Fleeson becomes a tireless champion of its salvation. As she delves deep into the island's history and ventures far into its delicate ecosystem, Fleeson undertakes her own personal and professional salvation, a spirited and daring pilgrimage that is both revelatory and enlightening. --Carol Haggas

I didn't intend to read this book. Looking for Kauai guidebooks to plan an upcoming trip, I downloaded the Kindle-edition sample. Intending to skim, I found the language so lovely and clear that I couldn't pass it by. By the end of the sample I felt like I'd cracked open an adventure story; I quickly bought the rest. It was hard to put it down over the following day, and I stayed up all night finishing it. The story -- and it is more than memoir -- flows like warm but sparkling water. The writing is beautiful; the word choices are especially fascinating. I'm a ballroom dance fan and I felt the awe I do when watching masterful dancing. Ms. Fleeson is a journalist, and although this book is not journalism, it's written with the clarity of great reportage. The story has intrigue, humor and even sex. The main characters are interesting, passionate people with curious minds and refreshing and often funny personalities. Several are inspiring. As the author moves the story forward, she weaves

these people into a compelling and engrossing tale. The book is as much about these others as it is about Ms. Fleeson. A gardening theme runs through the book, but it's more a venue and a talisman than a topic. The saga of native-plant extinction is part of the backdrop, as is a bit of history about the peopling of Hawaii and some observations on the current culture. I'm realizing that there was a surprising amount of material in this small book. This book is an engaging, enjoyable adventure, a lovely read, and I'm sure I'll find it memorable. I'm happy to have stumbled upon it. I'd like to thank Ms. Fleeson for writing it.

Lucinda Fleeson's provided us with a luscious memoir. Here we see a skilled and thoughtful reporter craft a complex narrative, weave it into the gardens of her life and work. She steps away from the Philadelphia Inquirer at the moment the newspaper (along with many throughout the country) are shifting from reportage to, well what? What have newspapers become? Gone, many. Light, many others. Not news, sad to say. On a chance invitation, she relocates to a remote Hawaiian island and takes the job of fund raiser for the National Tropical Botanical Gardens [...]. At first, resented as an outsider by her staff and garden employees, she eventually wins their support and becomes an energetic partner to the Garden's entrepreneurial director. She takes over a dilapidated remote plantation cottage and turns it into a single woman's paradise. Each adventure presented is taken up, researched, recorded and now we are the beneficiaries of that reportage: Hawaiian WWII and Red Cross efforts, the Pansy Craze in the Chicago region during the 1930s, botanizing and field collecting and preserving endangered Hawaiian flora, restoration of plantation cottages, outrigger canoe competition and history, and most of all the real work -- intrigue, vision, joy, angst, stupidity, -- of running a nationally recognized botanical garden. Lucinda Fleeson's memoir joins the sparse ranks of women's memoirs that don't end with marriage or the birth of their first child. She leaves us in mid-life -- single, strong, going on to another stage of her life and work. She leaves us wanting to read the next book she writes, not matter what the subject.

interesting read if you are a gardener

When I ran across this book about Kauai at an online book club (Suzanne Beecher's), I had to give it a try. I consider Kauai a little piece of Paradise. And I'm so glad I got a copy from , because reading it was like a visit to that special place. It was not only an intimate account of this beautiful island, but also a wonderful lesson in living the "life examined." Following Lucinda Fleeson's whim to accept a job there in a botanical garden, the reader is led on a wonderful learning adventure about

our history as a people and even the state of the planet. I loved the way Lucinda gained self knowledge by opening herself up to other people and cultures. Her friendship with the Garden's director, Dr. William Klein, sets the drama of the book when she joins him as fund raiser. She is good at her job, and Dr. Klein's big dreams for the place provide excitement. This book is so well written and so well researched that it is an absolute pleasure to read. I can't wait to visit Kauai again and discover the Garden for myself.

When my review copy of "Waking Up in Eden" arrived from the publisher, I took one look at it and thought, "oh, another female-midlife-crisis memoir." I didn't think about it again until weeks later. I was leaving for a weekend getaway and needed a paperback to bring along. I picked up Lucinda Fleeson's book and practically couldn't put it down for the next 48 hours. What a lovely memoir. Mesmerizing. Her personal narrative of navigating a creatively fulfilling life is balanced with a journalist's unrelenting efforts to report on Kauai's horticultural world, past and present. As a garden writer, I swallowed it, inhaled it, and imagined the Kauai she described. I visited the island once, 25 years ago. But I feel like Lucinda gave me a personally-guided tour in the pages of "Waking Up." It was a tour I never would have discovered on a vacation visit.

I never finished this book and now it is in the pile of books to go to a book sale. I lost interest before too long. It just wasn't the well written interesting tale I had been led to believe.

Great book. I give it as a birthday gift to people who like Hawaii and/or tropical plants.

I really enjoyed this book on many levels- a great story of personal evolution; a wonderful account of the biological history of the island; fun subplots about the Allertons and the Robinsons and their legacy there. I recommend this book to anyone anywhere, but do not visit Kauai without it!

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