Laura Thompson, *Beyond the Dream: A Search for Meaning.* MARC Monograph Series, no. 2. [Mangilao]: Micronesian Area Research Center, University of Guam, 1991.

Reviewed by Leonard Mason, University of Hawaii

A truly remarkable person-- Laura Thompson! In this deeply moving autobiography she recounts in detail both personal and professional experiences, from her childhood in Honolulu in the early part of this century until her eventual return to her birthplace to write this work in

her retirement years. Her life goal has been to help people wherever they live on this Earth. Her learning through countless field studies of the functional relationship between culture and nature and of the way in which peoples adapt to changing social and physical environments has given her the basis for proposing remedies for the global concerns of humanity about overpopulation and deteriorating resources.

Thompson grew up in a conservative, disciplined, Episcopalian household. Her father, William Thompson, an Englishman, migrated to America as a young adult and ended up in Honolulu. Valuing American freedoms, he adopted U.S. citizenship in 1898. Her mother, Maud Balch, a Californian, met him on a visit to Honolulu a few years later. They married in San Francisco and returned to Honolulu, establishing a permanent home in the Punchbowl area above the city. Laura, born in 1905, was the younger of two daughters. The household included a Hawaiian nanny and a Japanese handyman. Punchbowl was a racially mixed neighborhood. Thus, Laura learned early to understand and to accept cultural differences. After a year in a one-teacher private school in Punchbowl, Laura enrolled in prestigious Punahou School. She continued there until completion of her secondary education, enjoying an intellectual independence in contrast to her home environment. Piano lessons stirred an early interest in music, but this gave way to a fondness for writing when she became editor of the school's weekly newspaper in her senior year.

After graduation from Punahou, she entered Mills College in Oakland, California. Propelled by a humanitarian concern to help people, she earned a bachelor of arts degree in sociology and economics. Local field trips introduced her to the depression of needy persons in institutional care. A month-long workshop in New York City, as a junior, involved her in visits to the city's slums; the poverty and crime she observed deepened her commitment to a goal of social and cultural understanding. She completed her studies at Mills in three and a half years, and in 1926 she returned to the family household in Honolulu.

She gained hands-on experience as a field-worker at the Shriners Hospital for Crippled Children. Her assignments brought her into close touch with the families of physically handicapped children, who reflected the broad range of Hawaii's ethnic and economic diversity. Although she acquired greater sensitivity to human needs as a social worker, she soon realized the necessity for a more comprehensive approach to present-day social problems. A return to academic studies seemed to be the answer.

An interview with Kenneth Emory at the Bishop Museum suggested

that anthropology was the field most likely to satisfy her search for a deeper understanding of humankind in a changing world. He recommended Harvard University and off she went to Cambridge, aided by a Bishop Museum scholarship. She enrolled at Radcliffe, a nearby women's college, which allowed her to study under Harvard's famed anthropologists, including Roland Dixon who taught her about peoples in the Island Pacific. Although she greatly respected the strong emphasis on fieldwork and museum research at Harvard, she rebelled at the department's discrimination against female students and left after one year to return to Honolulu.

In 1929, as an assistant ethnologist at the Bishop Museum, she spent six months studying the Hornbostel archaeological collection from Guam and the northern Mariana Islands. The museum's Pacific Islands focus and its strength in field research, together with the opportunity to work with Pacific anthropologists, left an indelible impression on her studies in cultural ecology.

Later that year, she enrolled at the University of California at Berkeley to complete her graduate work in anthropology. Even though the UCB department favored American Indian ethnology, Thompson devoted much time to the Pacific. It was at Berkeley that she experienced the transition in theoretical anthropology from a "culture traits/complexes" emphasis to the "functionalism" of field researchers like Malinowski and Thurnwald, an approach to culture as a process by which an ethnic group constantly adapts to changes in the social and physical environment.

It was also at Berkeley that she became involved with Bernhard Tueting, a German citizen, who tutored her to meet the German-language requirement for the doctor of philosophy degree. After she completed graduate studies in 1933, the two were married. They departed in that same year for fieldwork in Fiji, Thompson's first venture into the South Pacific.

They traveled by ship to Suva and explored the interior of Viti Levu while waiting two months for transport to the southern Lau Islands to the east. There they established a base on Kambara Island for the next eight months. They island-hopped by outrigger canoe to other islands in the Lau group to broaden the context of the primary research on Kambara. Laura was especially interested in interisland trading. Her UCB doctoral dissertation had been based on library research about traditional trade in southeastern New Guinea. The Fiji research was aided by a Bishop Museum grant to collect handcrafted artifacts. Laura and Bernhard observed local subsistence practices, ceremonial exchanges,

"black" magic, and the conflict between British/Western culture and the indigenous way of life. This field experience convinced her that direct personal contact with the people being studied was essential to good ethnology, and she began her lifetime search for the meaning behind their overt behavior.

In the summer of 1934, Laura returned to Honolulu to write up her field notes. Bernhard went directly home to his family estate in northwestern Germany. She joined him in the fall and found herself involved in another field study--the rural countryfolk of an Old Saxon village north of Osnabrück. She came to appreciate even more the strong ecological tie between humankind and the natural environment as evidenced in this farming community. She also marveled at the cultural integrity of these villagers when they were threatened by the Nazi propaganda of that decade.

In 1935 her husband suffered a nervous breakdown and they went to Berlin for psychiatric help. She did some library research at the Museum für Volkerkunde and renewed an earlier acquaintance with Professor Richard Thurnwald, a Pacific Islands specialist who had long been her model of professional anthropology. In Berlin, she came to wonder about the success of Nazism in the urban setting in contrast to its rejection in rural Lower Saxony.

The trauma of Nazism and the abusive behavior of her mentally troubled husband plunged Thompson into deep depression that finally led to divorce and a return to Honolulu in 1938. While recovering from the Germany experience, she revised her manuscript on southern Lau ethnography and worked hard to complete her first publication, *Fijian Frontier* (Shanghai, 1939). The latter was her initial attempt to engage in the emerging field of applied anthropology, as she used her southern Lau material to critique the British colonial administration in Fiji. Later that year, she accepted an offer from the U.S. naval governor of Guam, in the Mariana Islands, to serve as his consultant on native affairs.

Her Guam assignment was a six-month field study of the native Chamorro population, their daily life, land use customs, changing economy, schooling, cultural values, and local government under American military rule since 1899, when Guam was ceded to the United States after the Spanish-American War. Her observations were intended to help the Naval Administration better understand the problems faced by the Chamorro community.

Thompson was stationed in Agana, Guam's capital, but she soon set up field headquarters in Merizo, a village at the island's southern end,

There she was assisted by two helpful Chamorro men in learning the language and initiating contact with local families. She had fruitful discussions with the naval governor and his staff as her work progressed. A two-month leave to travel on a Navy supply ship to cities in the Philippines, China, and Japan proved valuable in providing a more global outlook on social and economic problems. While on Guam she had become much concerned about the potential threat of a foreign takeover, as she observed visits to Guam by Japanese fishing boats from Saipan in the northern Mariana Islands, which Japan had ruled since World War I.

Thompson returned to Honolulu in 1939 and invested the next two years in writing her second book, *Guam and Its People* (New York, 1941). She also sought to learn more about Hawaiian culture with aid from the Bishop Museum staff, including Mary Kawena Pukui. Early in 1941 she traveled to the mainland United States to attend the first meeting of the Society for Applied Anthropology, which she had helped to found. In the nation's capital, she talked with federal officials about her conviction that a Japanese attack involving the United States was imminent. She got little audience.

However, the Washington trip did result in an introduction to John Collier, commissioner of Indian affairs. He had lobbied, since the 1920s for liberation of tribal Indian groups from restrictive federal regulations. During the Roosevelt administration, Collier accepted an offer to become commissioner in order to implement his plan for an "Indian New Deal." In 1941 he set up the Indian Personality, Education, and Administration Project in cooperation with the Committee on Human Development at the University of Chicago, where Laura was studying at the time. The project was intended to determine by social science methods the effects of New Deal policies on selected Indian reservations. He asked Thompson to head up the project, as a professional who was committed to "action research."

As project coordinator, Thompson worked with anthropologists and psychologists in a multidisciplinary approach. Beginning in 1942, the team conducted field studies on the Hopi, Papago, Zuni, Navaho, and Dakota Sioux reservations. Team members eventually authored books on their respective tribal assignments; Thompson's publications concentrated on the Hopi. Working closely with Collier on the project, she found that they had many interests in common; they married in 1943. After the Indian project ended in 1947, Collier left the Indian Service to teach at the City College of New York; their married life lost its appeal and later they divorced. She continued to write books and articles

expressing her views about human needs, and taught as a full professor in a number of term assignments in colleges across the country.

Thompson now wanted to extend her field studies from the tropic and temperate climatic zones to better appreciate the relation of ethnic lifeways to natural environments. So in 1952 she headed north to Iceland, just below the Arctic Circle. She combined library research on the historical background of Icelanders with field observations of their present lifestyle, values, and adaptation to the rigors of the subarctic habitat. She was ably assisted by a prominent Icelandic woman about her age, who guided her around the island and introduced her to local family households. Thus Laura finally ended her lifelong search for a "genuine living democracy" where a people over the years had achieved a strategy for survival by their "perceptiveness, industry, perseverance, and grit." She concluded, from all of her field experience, that local groups of people, each in their own way, draw from nature what is needed to develop a uniquely patterned culture and group personality adapted to changing circumstances.

Continuing to write and to teach, Thompson found new enrichment of her personal life in 1963 through marriage with a long-time friend, a relationship that dated back to their shared high school years at Punahou. Sam Duker, of Dutch parentage, had majored in education and psychology as a graduate student and was *now* a professor of education at Brooklyn College in New York City. They lived in Brooklyn and managed to build a rich personal relationship despite Sam's Old World conservatism and Laura's dedicated liberalism. While he was busy teaching, she had time to review her many field studies, which she summarized in *The Secret of Culture: Nine Community Studies* (New York, 1969).

In the early 1970s, after Duker's retirement, the couple moved to northeastern New Jersey, near the Hudson River, Duker died in 1978. Thompson then moved to a condominium at Hilton Head Island, South Carolina. Early in the 1980s, she returned to Honolulu where she now lives in restful retirement. Her autobiography, with its profound message about humanity and the environment, represents her ultimate attempt to "help people" as she shares what she has learned from her lifelong search for the meaning of human life.

In this chronological review of her life, Thompson interposes a number of enlightening vignettes of people she came to know, which readers will surely appreciate. Included also are thirty-six photographs of family and friends. A recommendation in this regard is that pictures of her fieldwork settings might well have been added, to document the geo-

graphic breadth of her studies and to demonstrate the ecological differences of human habitation. Similarly, large-scale map inserts would have been helpful to readers not familiar with the sites of her field research. And, finally, for a writer as productive as Thompson has been, an autobiography might be expected to have a complete list of her publications--books, articles, and reports--many of which are cited in her notes but not always easy to identify if a reader wishes to pursue the subject in library collections.

The basic message in Thompson's presentation for future action is best conveyed, in my opinion, by a quotation in one of her last chapters, "Beyond the Dream." She writes, "Our hopes lie . . . in supporting forms of large scale organization, population planning, birth control and natural resources conservation based on apparently incompatible cultural differences between nations and between ethnic groups within states" (p. 135).