



An Anthropologist's Arrival: A Memoir

Ruth M. Underhill

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Ruth M. Underhill (1883–1984) was one of the twentieth century's legendary anthropologists, forged in the same crucible as Franz Boas, Ruth Benedict, and Margaret Mead. After decades of trying to escape her Victorian roots, Underhill took on a new adventure at the age of forty-six, when she entered Columbia University as a doctoral student of anthropology. Celebrated now as one of America's pioneering anthropologists, Underhill reveals her life's journey in frank, tender, unvarnished revelations that form the basis of *An Anthropologist's Arrival*. This memoir, edited by Chip Colwell-Chanthaphonh and Stephen E. Nash, is based on unpublished archives, including an unfinished autobiography and interviews conducted prior to her death, held by the Denver Museum of Nature & Science.

In brutally honest words, Underhill describes her uneven passage through life, beginning with a searing portrait of the Victorian restraints on women and her struggle to break free from her Quaker family's privileged but tightly laced control. Tenderly and with humor she describes her transformation from a struggling "sweet girl" to wife and then divorcée. Professionally she became a welfare worker, a novelist, a frustrated bureaucrat at the Bureau of Indian Affairs, a professor at the University of Denver, and finally an anthropologist of distinction.

Her witty memoir reveals the creativity and tenacity that pushed the bounds of ethnography, particularly through her focus on the lives of women, for whom she served as a role model, entering a working retirement that lasted until she was nearly 101 years old.

No quotation serves to express Ruth Underhill's adventurous view better than a line from her own poetry: "Life is not paid for. Life is lived. Now come."

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