

Oral History Cover Sheet

Name: Nina Leopold Bradley

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Location of Interview: Aldo Leopold Center, Madison Wisconsin

Interviewer: Mark Madison and Steve Laubach

Most Important Projects: The Aldo Leopold Foundation

Brief Summary of Interview: Nina talks about moving back home to the shack and staying there while she and her husband, Charlie Bradley, were building their home. She talks about the Aldo Leopold Foundation and a little about the Sand County Foundation. She talks about the mission of the Foundation, having students working for them as interns and researchers on the property, the health of the property, how the property has changed, threats to the property and visions for the future.

Mark: And usually we just begin by saying today is October 29, 2009 and we are at the Aldo Leopold Center with Nina Leopold Bradley and Steve Laubach and Mark Madison and we're doing an oral history and thank you so we don't forget to say that a head of time. And Nina I know you guys came out here in 1975 is that correct? [Sounds like something falling, Mark laughing]

Nina: Shall I put them downstairs?

Mark: They're probably be okay.

Nina: You sure?

Mark: Yea, yea don't worry about it. It adds a little flavor to it but you've probably, the family was probably involved in discussions early on with the Leopold Memorial Reserve. Maybe you could tell us a little about that.

Nina: Starker was sort of at the helm at this and his idea was to give the shack and the area to the University of Wisconsin for research or what, however they could use it.

Mark: Right.

Nina: Uh then three or four of the nieces and nephews got together and said "No, no thank you, we don't want to do that" so at that point they decided on establishing a foundation. Anne Ross was...helped with, Anne Ross and Ronald Maddox helped us form the Foundation.

Mark: Okay.

Nina: And um...let's see, from there on, can I jump from there?

Mark: Of course, of course.

Nina: Um my husband, Charlie Bradley, was a geologist and taught at Montana State University and after we were married he said “I want to retire early enough so we can do a major project.” Well two of his major projects failed so I said to him “How would like to retire at the shack”? End of conservation. So we did, so we moved here Charlie and I lived at the shack while we built this house. We cut down a few trees that we had planted to use in the construction.

Mark: Oh neat.

Nina: And at that point, I think that that Aldo Leopold Foundation was established. At the same time there was the LR Head Foundation, which of course was Reed Coleman’s foundation.

Mark: Yea.

Nina: And somewhere along the way, I can’t remember what year it was, they changed the name from the LR Head Foundation to the Sand County Foundation.

Mark: When you guys came out here to retire, did you have some visions about things you might be doing on the landscape?

Nina: I think Charlie probably did.

Mark: Okay.

Nina: Um but once we got settled then the idea came, why don’t we have students working not just as interns but as researchers and it turned out that we had, I don’t know maybe something like 30, 35 studies. We were learning more and more about a very small piece of land, so we studied the hydrology since Charlie was the hydrologist; we had a student up studying soils um of course many, many others. Um on every Monday night we had seminars at the shack. And I think one of things that is missed, as we were

growing into all this, was what absolute fun we were having; we were having simply a great time. We would have Monday night seminars, a speaker and everyone would bring his musical instruments. So I remember one night it started to rain at the end of the seminar so we all moved into the shack, there was Baird Callicott had his bass fiddle, um we had a violin, Jim Bachuber has his violin, we had a dulcimer several guitaris and of course Charlie played wonderful guitar; and we sang and that whole shack was just vibrating. But on top of this, we were beginning to understand the whole land mechanism as we studied as these various aspects. So it was a time of great happiness and joy, which is not just science it was just a wonderful way of life.

Mark: We'll come back to the students in a minute, but it did remind me of one question that I meant to ask you. How was it coming back to this landscape, were you a young child so how did it change and I mean I know you'd come back and visit it and so but to come back and live here is quite different.

Nina: Of course we came back regularly on vacations and so did the whole family, everybody came back. Um but the land was beginning to show some health, I remember dad had burned fire strips through the prairie to protect the shack and he then realized that these strips were the places where the prairie was doing the best. Of course at the same time John Curtis was working on the use of fire and prairie restoration so all together it really began to make sense. Um I can remember the early days where dad would be planting prairie plots 'bout five by five feet and he'd take the sod off and put in a few prairie seeds and for years he had these rectangular plots, I can tell you exactly where they were. I remember one time um, Carl was taking taxonomy from, I'm trying to think of the professor's name on the medicine cabinet, they were collecting prairie species. Well at the same time dad was planting everything he could, one day he had planted *Solidago rigida* and Carl came along, of course not realizing that dad had planted it, collected it into his part of his class, there was lots of humor out of this.

Mark: Must have made you feel good to see the trees grown up...

Nina: Oh the trees...

Mark: ...which you used here and then.

Nina: And of course when we built this house we decided, we'll thin the trees and so it's fundamentally logs because I'm a botanist and this side of the house is rock cuz Charlie was a geologist.

Mark: That's great.

Steve: You mentioned that Starker was at the helm with some of the early decisions, what about your mother, did she correspond with...

Nina: It was Starker and mother. Mother was less involved academically but she was certainly involved in everything that went on.

Steve: In terms of some of the early decisions about the property.

Nina: That's right and after dad died, mother kept coming up to the shack with friends of hers from Madison. And on a regular basis she just kept coming, in fact one year she even planted some white pine trees.

Mark: That's great.

Nina: And so.

Mark: Did she show some of the concerns of Reed and the other people about the type of development that was...

Nina: No that happened quite a bit after mother was gone. I'm very glad to say that she did not experience that. But I remember when the Colemans used to come and visit

while we were at the shack and Mrs. Coleman was always very pristine and beautifully dressed and of course we were just living on very little so we'd see the Coleman's drive up and we children would all go up in the tree house and spend the day until the Colemans left. Also we have some pictures of dad and Mr. Coleman tending a fire and we always realized this must have been over at the Coleman cabin cuz they're cooking steaks.

[Laughing taking place]

Nina: We never got...we had kidney stew, this is kind of irrelevant.

Mark: But it's good that's why we do oral histories. If we just wanted boring, written things about Leopold...Steve do you have any more questions about the early years before I...

Steve: No that was, that was it for now.

Mark: How did you find the students that came out here for research projects?

Nina: You know I'm really not sure Mark, I know that we, we I think started on the Madison campus and asked for students to write proposals for projects. And then we would go over them and select. Charlie funded some of the projects and the Sand County Foundation funded some of the projects. And I think we may have gotten some grants, I'm not sure. But then we would go over the proposals and just select from those and we got proposals from many, many places eventually it spread, the word finally spread.

Mark: Did that become part of the Sand County Foundation's mission then to do, to make this a research plot type area?

Nina: I think it was a joint decision, I think it evolved I don't think it just happened overnight. Uh...I just, my memory not's all that clear.

Mark: This was a long time ago too.

Nina: At 92 years old it's getting very fuzzy.

Mark: No worries. But one thing you mentioned they were doing hydrology and probably botany and wildlife studies did the studies then impact how the landscape was managed? Were you able to take that science?

Nina: Oh specifically, absolutely. There was one interesting thing that Charlie did that I think was kind of fun. Dad always told us that the water that came out of our pump at the shack was probably filtered river water. Well after Charlie's hydrology studies, he realized that all of the ground water was sloping toward the river so the water from our pump, which was fairly, fairly close to the river, was probably ground water that had come from higher levels and not from the river. So this is the kind of thing that we gradually learned and it made it very, very exciting.

Mark: Oh yea, yea. What about the wildlife management, did you, did they began to do studies at that point on the deer population and some of that?

Nina: You know Mark I can't remember all that clearly, I don't think there was deer irruption that early. I think there may have been wolves still around, I don't know. Um but I think the deer irruption may have happened in the 80's.

Mark: Okay, well then you probably recall some of the botanical studies that were done out here since that was your area of expertise. Do you recall any of those that were done in this period, just to give people a sense of the type of research that was going on.

Nina: Mark, (unclear) I can't pull any out...

Mark: (Laughing) Okay.

Nina: All these reports downstairs. I know Rick Knight and his wife did studies on gold finches. We had one request for uh, a study of King Fishers but we didn't feel that we had enough King Fishers nesting so we, that was turned down. Um but a lot of them were bird studies.

Mark: Was it tricky getting the land owners to agree to having these research studies to happen on their property?

Nina: I don't think so, really, cuz there was the Colemans and the Sand County Foundation, The Leopolds and the Leopold Foundation, Frank Terbilcox and Russ Van Hoosen. I'm not sure Russ Van Hoosen was a part of the Reserve, do you know Steve?

Steve: I don't, I don't know that. I'm not sure.

Nina: But of course Frank was hired...

Steve: Right.

Nina: ...as manager and uh he, of course his land was immediately incorporated.

Mark: Do you have some questions from this period?

Steve: Um, not off the top of my head.

Mark: Okay. (Laughing) Let me just read through a few of these that we had. Did um, Frank was doing some of the management out here, my under...

Nina: Yes.

Mark: ...standing is. Did uh, how did you guys work together with Frank to decide what the management...

Nina: We always worked very well with Frank. Um with hindsight, we, I think we did a few mistakes I think, um digging a few ponds in the big marsh was a mistake cuz as soon as you disturbed the soil you get invasions of invasive species like reed canary grass and I wouldn't mention that to Frank now...

Mark: No.

Nina: ...but um, but I think that we should of pretty well left that. The big meadow, the big wetland in front of the shack, a local farmer always mowed that and it kept the Aspen down. Now we have a real problem with these big islands of Aspen coming up. But Frank was always very inventive and very understanding and worked hard, uh burned all by himself, he burned these whole prairie areas; I think it was quite remarkable.

Mark: When you and Charlie came back out here, um how did you envision this landscape, developing?

Nina: Well, of course it's all flood plain.

Mark: Yea.

Nina: Um....how did we envision...

Mark: You can take time to think about this too. We need to pepper you with...

Nina: I think our, our aim was to have a more complete understanding of the whole land mechanism, how everything worked together. And that was the basis for our graduate student studies. So it was pretty exciting, stage by stage.

Mark: Now when we talked with Reed, he did talk about a little about being uh inspired in early years by the land ethic and having a pragmatic more than a philosophical um action oriented part of that. Uh what part of your father's legacy, since you can't do everything in one parcel, did you wanna do on the reserve?

Nina: Well I think uh understanding land health was fundamental to, to the land ethic and by understanding it you learn how to use it but certainly it was fundamental to everything that we did.

Mark: Is it, what have you done to make it healthier today than when the Reserve was started in '65?

Nina: You mean what are we doing today?

Mark: Yea, I mean has it, is it healthier, is the landscape, the overall landscape that's part of the Reserve healthier?

Nina: Oh my goodness yes. Um when dad bought the property in 1935 it was destroyed landscape, this was before um artificial fertilizers. And the houses in the whole neighborhood were decrepit and falling down. The landscape was bare and the farmers were having a tough time. I think as soon as artificial fertilizers were developed, things picked up. But of course the greatest problem we have right now in our management is invasive species and our student interns that are working at least three quarters of their time trying to figure out how to get rid of invasive species.

Mark: Let's talk about invasives a little cuz it's an area of interest of yours and lets push it back as far as we can. Did your father ever comment on invasives when you guys were here?

Nina: Not that I know of Mark. Um, it was really before invasive species were a serious threat, I think.

Mark: So when did you guys first start to notice invasives playing a role on the property?

Nina: I would say '80's.

Mark: And what were some of the species that were becoming problematic by the '80's?

Nina: (Unclear) I don't think we had garlic mustard or weed canary grass then. I'm not sure I can answer that Mark.

Mark: Okay, but it was in the '80's it became an issue and now it's the primary management issue out here. Is it, what is today, is it the...

Nina: It's garlic mustard and weed canary grass and I look at this Pampas grass that people are growing all along the highways and in front of their houses. I think it's dense, it could be very, very invasive. One day someone said to me "Oh yea Nina, I know where you live. You've got Pampas grass around your mailbox." Not so. It's another one that I think could become invasive.

Mark: Yea. Now when you guys originally came back, Reed mentioned you wanted to live right near the shack, we were talking a bit. Tell us a little about that.

Nina: Yea, dad had always said that he wanted to build up on the sand hill.

Mark: Right.

Nina: And I was with him when he planted some pines and he said "This is where you're going to build" so when Charlie and I came back, this is what we had planned and Reed was right, he said "Do not build too close to the shack" I think that would

have ruined it. So we both looked around the Reserve, we then thought about the clay hill, that would be a good place and Reed didn't like that either. So then we found this great big open grown white oak, which is out here, which is an indication that this was oak savanna and we thought that was pretty nice so Reed owned the land, he still owns the land and so we built here. And Reed was right on target, it would have been a mistake to build too near the shack.

Steve: A few names have come up as, between talking with you and Reed, that there's Howard and Frank and Reed and the Van Hoosens and the Turners. Can you tell us a little bit of what it was like coming back and entering into that network of relationships in terms of, you know, decisions about the Reserve and managing that.

Nina: Well, you know for the first almost 15 years, we all blended beautifully. And I, my memory is so bad I can't quite figure out when things started to explode but Reed was very sympathetic with what we were doing and uh we got along just fine and then things blew apart. Charlie was on Reed's board and it, philosophically we seemed to be polar and I can't tell you exactly why.

Steve: You could focus on that period when things were going well, first.

Nina: And they did go well.

Steve: And he mentioned, we ask you, did you have formal meetings or someone was taking minutes or any recollections you have about interactions in terms of how decisions were made.

Nina: Except that Charlie was on Reed's board and he was understanding with what was going on.

Steve: Yea.

Nina: But I was not.

Steve: Right. And I'm curious about the role the Van Hoosens and the Turners or how, you know...

Nina: The Turners we didn't know very well. Mrs. Turner was very, very old um and the Van Hoosens we didn't see very often. Did Reed talk about them at all?

Steve: He just mentioned that they were a tough sell at the beginning to explain the concept of a Reserve, to convince them that it wasn't duck hunters from Chicago; um so to get them on board.

Nina: And did we, I don't think we ever got them on board. Did Reed think so?

Steve: It didn't seem like they were as actively involved as Howard and Frank and Reed but as part of the landowners, I guess to at least in terms of delineating the boundaries of the Reserve, there was some agreement there.

Nina: And I was not, I'm not aware of that.

Steve: Okay.

Mark: Nina, you must have had a somewhat unique role in the Reserve as a Leopold heir. Did ah, when decisions were being made or groups were gathering um did you feel like you were called upon or wanted to suggest what your father might have...

Nina: Not particularly but with Charlie on Reed's board we felt a good connection there.

Mark: And now Charlie started writing reports when you guys moved out here too, right, quarterly reports about the research?

Nina: Yea, by the way, you might want to see Charlie's journals, they're very complete. And Steve anytime you want to come up and spend the day, they're very entertaining also and they're lots of fun.

Steve: Um. Uh huh.

Nina: But one of the things that affected my life, I guess, almost the most, was dad's maintaining phenological records, the arrival of birds and the first blooming of plants and all the natural events of the season. And as Dad kept records from '35 to '48, so when Charlie and I moved back we kept records from '76 to the present. And we have published one paper on it and we're getting ready to publish a second one. But it just becomes a part of your life, recognizing what plants are in bloom; all of a sudden you know the landscape a lot more intimately. It's kind of interesting to me that my, that my preemie baby whom that I've had for about 20 years, is now the number one Phenologist around here. She knows every plant, she recognizes every bird song and I'll get a call, phone call from her saying "Guess what I say today" you know, so we have, it's sort of a game. But it's also, it just makes you a part of the seasonal events.

Mark: Are those records still being kept now...

Nina: Oh yes.

Mark: ...the biological records.

Nina: Oh yes, we're getting ready.

Steve: Right on the kitchen table there.

Mark: I didn't notice that coming in.

Nina: You know we keep track of about 325 events and you know it's not an exact science but when you have a record as big as that you can sort of measure changes. To me, it's a kind of monitoring of the climate change and we've really learned a lot I think as a result.

Mark: Because the Reserve has been kind of informal, um in organizational structure, as Steve and I found out every time we ask for minutes taken, "No," but it means we have to ask the participants, what do you think the mission is of the Leopold Reserve? I mean...

Nina: Well I think it is learning to understand the land ethic and what it involves. As dad said, you don't learn it all of a sudden; it is a evolution so you start learning about land health and land relationships and to me that has, that is the land ethic.

Mark: What would you like to see it do in the future, do you have any visions or ambitions for the Reserve in the future?

Nina: Well maintaining land turns out to be a BIG, BIG project, you don't just let it happen. For example, fire has got to be used um you've got to (unclear) as you know work on the invasive species. It's a big job managing that, uh formerly we had predators and no human impediments, that the land took care of itself but now it's a big job.

Mark: To just manage it more effectively, would you like to see it grow or would you like to see more researchers or the public come out more. I'm just curious what you're vision, cuz it's gonna be different than Reed and Frank and Howard; everybody's got a different vision.

Nina: That's right.

Mark: And you guys have kind of melded it in interesting so I'm curious. You know if you looked here 20 years from now, what would, what would be happening on this site?

Nina: Um I would like to have the message on a more national basis. And we may get to that point uh depending on, funding is always fundamental and always very difficult but we do have some ideas in mind that of, at least one other person, so that we would have dual leadership, Buddy would take care of what everything that's he's doing now plus in the colleges, the really top notch person that could be working on a more national level. That's my dream.

Mark: Yea...No, that's good dream. But when you say working on a more national level, do you envision them speaking nationally or setting up reserves in other states or what do you think.

Nina: Perhaps using the Leopold Reserve as a model of how you can reconnect with the land. Um, of course, my theme is that we have too many people, we have population problems everywhere, we're running out of water; it's really a population problem in my opinion. And how can you think about ethics when your kid hasn't a drink of water, so it's a very big problem.

Mark: I realize this is speculative, but what do you think your dad would like or dislike about the Reserve if he could see what it is today?

Nina: I just think so many times I'm glad he doesn't have to be here to witness some of the things that are going on like invasive species, like our fallout with Reed Coleman. It was very hard on Charlie and it would have been on dad. This is kind of crazy but philosophically our families are quite different; Tom Coleman financed Joe McCarthy, Charlie's grandfather financed Bob LaFollette. I mean it's quite different.

Mark: Yea.

Nina: And I can't...

Steve: But they were able to find that middle ground, like your father and Tom...

Nina: That's right and they did, and they did better than we did.

Mark: Obviously they, socially and politically quite different, I've sensed that and I would have known that anyway.

Nina: Quite, quite different.

Mark: So what do you think they did find the common ground on, um environmentally cuz often times people say "Well that reflects environmental values too." Where did they find that common ground?

Nina: Well I think learning more and more about a small piece of land. I've never heard Reed express this, but I think that must have been his value system as it was for us.

Mark: I can tell you right now, Reed spoke very um...positively and fondly of what you guys did out here, I mean he says, you know, clearly the science began when you and Charlie came out here and he had always hoped it would be managed more scientifically and that was really and he had the same story you did about putting the house here, you know, you were very amenable and, you know, and now that the shack has become just a shrine for conservationists that turned out really well. So I mean he um, he's telling the same story basically...

Nina: Well I'm glad to hear that.

Mark: ...and very positively too. I mean he loves the science and really it wasn't being scientifically managed or studied until you and Charlie came out here, is pretty much what Reed told us so a lot of this is um, the same story. And he actually did not mention any fall out. (Laughing)

Nina: Didn't he now.

Mark: Not really uh you know, he didn't um so he was...

Nina: You know, incidentally, have to tell you when Charlie and I moved here, we lived in the shack for about six months while we were getting this house built. And we realized that the shack was in terrible shape, it was moldy and coming apart so we hired a bunch of carpenters to restore the shack. So we pull off the siding and the bunks fell in, everything was connected to everything else just like in the natural system; it was a mess. Then putting it all back together that, was just painful so we finally got it all back together and apparently the carpenters built a plywood shell and then we put the siding on it. Well just as we got it finished my sister Stella came to visit and she could see the cross section at the door was plywood and plastic and she started to cry cuz she didn't like plywood, she didn't like plastic (laughing), but anyway, we did rebuild, fortunately. Then a few years later I was having our chimney cleaned out and so I said to the guy "Would you go down to the shack and clean that chimney out?"

Steve: The famous chimney.

Nina: He came back in about five minutes, he said "Do not build another fire in that chimney, it's a mess" so then we had to rebuild the chimney and there of course the chimney had layers and layers of bricks, remember, that the smut, the fireplace always smoked so dad kept building higher and higher chimneys. So he did put layers in but it doesn't look like it used to but at least it's safe.

Steve: Right.

Mark: How was it to live in the shack for six months, I mean...

Nina: You know it was almost the happiest time of my life, we loved it. We had one change of clothes, we had a box with ice in it and life was so simple, we had the guitar and oh we just loved it until it got 30 below. Then we went from one motel to another all

around trying to find a place to perch so finally Charlie said “Look, just, let’s get the carpenters to finish the bedroom and we’re move in” so we moved in at about 15 below zero and were glad to have a place to perch.

Steve: I actually wanted to come back to this time period, um so you mentioned Starker was kind of calling some of the shots and when you came back I assume you took over a leadership role. What about the other siblings at that point uh, in terms of their involvement...

Nina: They were all, all completely involved, you know whenever we had a vacation where did we come but at the shack so Luna, Carl and Stella, everybody came back to this area. Um and Starker, as you know, really is the one who got things moving so he was president of the board and Luna was president of our board.

Steve: Oh this is in the ‘80’s when the Foundation (unclear).

Nina: And then Carl then Stella so they were very much involved.

Steve: Right.

Nina: And of course Starker was teaching uh wildlife ecology, Luna was a hydrologist, Carl was a botanist so everybody was involved.

Steve: And so the Leopold family maintained ownership of that property right by the shack but the Colemans, the Sand County Foundation owned everything around it , cuz you said you had, Reed had to approve where you located this house.

Nina: Well just, it was subtle. No dad bought, first he bought 80 acres but he eventually bought 250 acres so we owned more than just the little bit around the shack. Then when Charlie and I moved here uh...the 40 acres adjacent to us here came up for sale or at least Litscher said he would sell it to us and Reed said “I’ll buy it and then you buy it from

me.” So, just to be polite we said “Fine.” But he put a, when we bought it from him, he put a hinge on it saying that it could not be inherited or some damn thing, I don’t know.

Steve: Right.

Nina: But anyway, then Charlie bought this 40 acres so, and Reed just now bought the Litscher farm which is on the other side of [Highway] T.

Steve: Right.

Nina: So it’s sort of a gradual process.

Steve: And then I have another question, um can you talk about the impact of the interstate on, the land here cuz you saw that whole process.

Nina: Now this happened while we were all elsewhere. It was, it happened after dad was gone and all of us were living elsewhere but you remember dad said “My own farm was selected for it’s lack of goodness and it’s lack of highway” and here we have this I-90, this sound of I-90 just is terrible, constant.

Steve: And how has it affected, just the, or has it affected the land on the Reserve.

Nina: Well just in the sound I would say.

Steve: Okay.

Nina: And the proximity, it’s just a shame. Had one of us been here we would have fought it. But that’s another thing I’m glad dad didn’t have to listen the traffic.

Mark: Do you have any other questions?

Steve: I don't.

Mark: And the last question is always, is there something you like to say about the Reserve or this place that you didn't get a chance to cuz we stupidly didn't ask that question.

Nina: Yea I just wish that it had ended with a more favorable feeling um I think the hardest part of Charlie's life was when he and Reed fell apart. And I can't tell you any of those details, they're kind of fuzzy in my mind but it's a wonderful example of learning how the land functions and making it a part of your life, that's my own little individual thought.

Mark: That's perfect. Well Nina I can't thank you enough for taking the time to do this, that was...

Nina: It's very limited.

End of Tape