

## FOREWORD

### *Conservationist.*

What picture does the word bring to mind? For many, and for a long time, it might have suggested a standard image. Likely an older, fair-skinned, well-to-do man, in brown boots and khaki field clothes, toting a field notebook, binoculars, maybe a shotgun. And for a long time that cliché might even have held some truth—though no stereotype can hold up under closer examination of the real human life behind it. But if a generation ago we had a hackneyed idea of what a conservationist should look like and what he does . . . she does not look and act like that anymore.

In these pages Larry Nielsen assembles a conservation portrait gallery, pictures of eight disparate and remarkable lives, lived out in their different places under widely varied circumstances. Collectively they span an arc of history stretching from the modern origins of conservation in the mid-1800s to the verge of our own future, following concerns that range from forests, wildlife, and fisheries to agriculture, climate change, and economic justice. They are women and men, northerners and southerners, rural and urban, indigenous and immigrant, advantaged and challenged, professionals and citizens. They all contributed importantly to a movement that crosses generations, political boundaries, and fields of knowledge. They are

elder sisters and brothers in a cause that, more than ever, requires every kind of talent, background, perspective, and voice. And still requires, on occasion, binoculars.

Don't you wish we could gather them together in one place, and hear their voices? John Muir's tale-spinning Scottish brogue. Ding Darling's Midwestern American candor. Aldo Leopold's casual eloquence. Rachel Carson's steel and integrity. Chico Mendes' soft-spoken determination and courage. Billy Frank's persistent, defiant dignity. Wangari Maathai's inspired pragmatism. Gro Harlem Brundtland's seasoned vision. Through their voices we would also hear those of others: the families, cultures, traditions, and institutions that instilled their conservation values.

And don't you wish we could hear them in conversation *together*, trading the quieter stories behind their signature accomplishments, discussing the social cross-currents and political tensions of their times, debating different paths forward? We could, if we wanted, draw lines of connection through these lives: John Muir camping out with Theodore Roosevelt, who put Gifford Pinchot in charge of the US Forest Service; Pinchot's family founding the forestry program at Yale University, where Aldo Leopold studied; Leopold later working with Ding Darling to strengthen the US Bureau of Biological Survey, which became the US Fish and Wildlife Service, where Rachel Carson honed her communication skills . . . and so on and on. Through these individuals and countless others, conservation has grown as an ever-expanding movement, fitfully overcoming its own limitations and forging new connections. But these kindred spirits can meet only in our imagination—and in these pages.

Whether in word or image, it is not an easy task to depict such rich, complicated, and consequential lives as these people led. Larry Nielsen has given us essential portraits, describing not only the facts of their experience, but the contexts in which they made their way. All of them (indeed) changed the world by allowing the world to change them—to excite their intellects and touch their hearts. And they changed the world by reaching the hearts of others, and by linking actions and ideas. A portrait tells a story, and these stories together tell us of people, linked across time, who helped build a movement.

Yet, none of these people acted alone. All emerged themselves from a community. In some cases, a community of place—often a threatened place. In other cases, a community of interest and professional expertise. Or a community bound by a shared sense of responsibility. Each of them, in turn, fostered and expanded these communities. As their work rippled out, all left enduring legacies—among those they influenced and on the land.

And it turns out that, in the long run, these naturalists and hunters and foresters and farmers and scientists and South American rubber tappers and Native American fishers and Kenyan tree planters and international policy-makers all belong to a yet larger community. That community is defined by a common moral commitment to one's neighbors and fellow citizens, to future generations, to other living beings and the complex living systems that support us all. That is not to say that there are no differences of viewpoint or priority or strategy within the conservation community. This collective portrait shows in fact that conservationists have varied motivations, and come in many shades of political persuasion—and they always have. Communities hold together, and progress together, by testing their shared values against changing circumstances. Leaders, including those portrayed here, emerge to help guide that process in lasting and positive ways.

In the 1940s Aldo Leopold wrote, "Conservation, viewed in its entirety, is the slow and laborious unfolding of a new relationship between people and land." The "unfolding" continues. It continues by building on the accomplishments of those who came before; by confronting past shortcomings, taking in new information, expanding ethical horizons, forging new policies, and inventing new techniques; by bringing people together and making common cause with other areas of human need and endeavor.

Fundamental to all these, though, is the obligation to share the stories of the "unfolding" itself. What I especially appreciate about this book is the opportunity it provides for young people to learn a bit more about those who came before, who challenged the status quo and made change happen. Like democracy and justice—tied, in fact, to them—conservation involves continual struggle, regular setbacks, steady advances, and occasional leaps forward. We find our way forward, in part, by carrying with us the stories of those who came before.

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Who do you see when you think ahead another generation? Whoever you see, it is likely that they will look and work in ways quite different from those profiled here. But my guess is that they will, like these eight, love their places deeply. They will value the wild and the beautiful. They will have a gift for working with people. They will be both practical and visionary. They will demonstrate courage and a thirst for justice. They will be curious and creative. And, from time to time, they may well pull out their binoculars.

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