



Nadine Levin

“**I**N ANOTHER LIFE I MUST HAVE LIVED IN THE OLD WEST. I HAVE ALWAYS LOVED THE WEST—IT’S just in my heart and soul,” says photographer Nadine Levin as she tries to explain how it is that “a nice little Jewish girl from Washington, D.C.” ended up “a *Guns* junkie with a thing for stagecoaches and all things Western.”

Blame it on *Bonanza* (“I grew up watching it when all the other girls were playing with Barbie”) or *Black Beauty* (“I always, always wanted a black horse”), but for Levin, there was no escaping a full-on obsession with the Western lifestyle. A board member of the National Cowboy & Western Heritage Museum and co-sponsor with her husband, Alan, of the Traditional Cowboy Arts Association, she wouldn’t have it any other way. The couple live in a big ranch home with a huge log porch built by the guys who do the Cabela’s stores, have filled it with an amazing collection of Western art, and keep their horses in their Western barn (in that hunter-jumper neck of the woods, it’s the only major Western one around). So it was only natural that when Levin discovered photography, she started shooting the people and places that exemplify her Western passion.

When she’s not doing her darnedest to live the Western lifestyle on the couple’s 24-acre spread 40 minutes outside of the nation’s capital, Levin’s probably out on a ranch somewhere in the actual West—recently, the Stuart Ranch in Oklahoma and the OH Ranch outside Calgary, Alberta—photographing the landscapes, animals, and cowhands that move her. Whether she’s shooting infrared or traditional, whether she’s driving around massive ranches in a pickup or is horseback with a camera strapped across her, Levin is out looking for “natural” things.

“To me, mountains are nature at its finest. They are majestic. The Canadian Rockies blow me away. Mountains incorporate all of nature: streams, rocks, trees—the whole nine yards. Cowboys are natural. They’re not sitting there worried if their jeans are pressed. They are out there doing their job—they need to get it done. If you’re taking pictures of them, fine—they won’t come back and say, ‘Oh, you got me being bucked off.’ They don’t care. They are grounded and natural people. Cowboys and kids—they’re natural creatures.”

It goes without saying that animals are, too, and Levin’s drawn to them just as naturally. “Horses are magnificent animals, with their muscles rippling when they’re running or the light catching their manes and tails. Cattle are stupid, but they’re fun to photograph, especially in conjunction with horses and cowboys. All animals are photogenic and beautiful.”

It might be a breathtaking bison out on the range or a Welch Cattle Company family branding—what compels Levin is the idea that she’s capturing a specific moment in time, a moment that has the ability to convey something that will move others the way it moves her.

“What I strive for as an artist,” she says, “is to do work that evokes emotion in people. Maybe it’s peace because they long to be in that spot. Maybe it’s hate because they dislike brandings. Joy, peace, wonder, whatever—I want them to feel something!”

“...To me, that’s the mark of art. Beyond the ability to evoke emotion is the fact that photography captures a time and place in history that will never occur again. The challenge is to choose those moments that are inspiring enough or worthy of preserving and presenting.”

—D.J.

See *Light, Landscape and Livestock: The Photography of Nadine Levin at the National Cowgirl Museum and Hall of Fame in Fort Worth, Texas, March 4–mid-June*. www.nadinelevinphotography.com, www.cowgirl.net

OPPOSITE: *Scene From the O-H.*