



# Marjorie Kinnan Rawlings Society Newsletter



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### Marjorie Kinnan Rawlings Society Newsletter

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### Jim Stephen's Tribute to Phyllis Hansen (continued from page 2)

As a trained limnologist, she understood all her surroundings, and frequented the woods and shoreline to observe and photograph all that she could. Sometimes we traipsed the area together, either walking or riding my old Jeep. It never seemed to bother her to get spider webs in her hair, or to tear a sleeve as I passed too close to palmetto fans, tree limbs, or hanging vines. Although I am a horticulturist, Phyllis taught me a lot about the names of native plants and especially birds. Our favorite bird was the eagle, which nested on both our properties. As to be expected, the deer gave us the most joy. When on her part of the hammock, they were hers, and were mine when on my side. Together we were saddened at the loss of any of our animal "friends." She was in tears when I had to tell her that a hurricane had blown down her eagle-nest-tree; however, she was overjoyed to see that the pair still perched in the nearby remaining pines over the following years. To our delight, the little doe that greeted her to the hammock gave birth to twin fawns. Sadly, we found one of their mangled bodies right near her house, apparently killed by a bob-cat. I reminded her that bob-cats were just as welcome in the hammock as the deer. Raccoons turned over her flower pots and ate her cat-food, and wild hogs rooted up her drive-way, so she was not overly keen on them. The noise of air boats distressed her, but she accepted it as part of the local culture.

For me, one of the happiest times was when she joined our Rawlings farm group. These were happy days for her as well, and she devoted much energy and time to various projects and activities of both the farm and the Society. She believed in getting things done and as President of the Farm, ruled with a firm hand. If she asked for a newsletter article, you gave her one—and on time, or you heard from her! If you missed a meeting, she wanted to know why. We all know about her love and devotion to her Rawlings School students. She considered her work with them as her crowning achievement. But I will remember her most for loving and appreciating the Cross Creek hammock with me, and for sharing the songs of the eagles, owls, sand-hill cranes, and red-birds, along with the sounds of the wind and rain blowing across Orange Lake. You finally reached a stream that you could not cross, Dear Phyllis, but because you are not alone, you can cross that one, too. Happy journey, dear friend—I'll tend the hammock until we meet again!

Hamaca Jim (1-19-11)

**Editor's Note:** If anyone wishes to contribute to Phyllis Hansen's mission at the Marjorie Kinnan Rawlings Elementary School, please make donations in her name to the M. K. Rawlings Elementary School 3500 NE 15th Street Gainesville, FL 32609. Your donation will help to fund the yearly fourth grade field trip to the Marjorie Kinnan Rawlings Farm at Cross Creek.

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**Renew Your Membership now! Your expiration date is on your label below.** Life \$1,000, Sponsor \$100, Sustaining \$50, Family \$40, Individual \$30.

## President's Letter

Greetings fellow Rawlings Society Members:

I am rather at a loss for words as I sit to write my final presidential letter for the Rawlings Society newsletter. I am very much looking forward to our upcoming meeting in Deland. The program will provide us with yet another great set of events to edify and to entertain. It will, as always, be a wonderful time! Yet I feel great sadness knowing that our fellow Society member Phyllis Hansen will not be with us at this meeting. Like many of you, I will miss her as a friend, and the Society will miss her tireless efforts and advocacy of Rawlings's legacy. I am sure the same is true for the Friends of the Farm. I know I can speak for everyone when I wish Phyllis's family my most heartfelt condolences, and I hope that in their grief they may find that most divine peace that passes all human understanding.

We are approaching an important moment in the history of the Rawlings Society. Perhaps the source for this portentous emotion stems from the inches of snow remaining on the ground here in the mountains, or from the recent events in Tucson, or from the dire financial circumstances of the domestic violence shelter for which I serve as board president, or from the deep concern I have for Carol and David Grantges, Buddy Bass, and all the other members of the Society who struggle with ill-health, or perhaps it results from the imminent passing of my own time as the president of the Society and as the co-editor of the *Journal of Florida Literature* (a position I must yield because of my own struggle with time).

But the sense of coming change does not leave me without hope, for as Thomas Carlyle once said, "the world is a place of Hope." Flo Turcotte will take on the presidency of the Society this April in Deland. Flo is a wonderful person and a capable scholar who will bring new energy and focus to the leadership of our group. I know she will be terrific, and as a group we need to let Flo know the direction we would like to take. Various efforts in seeking new members taken on by Shirley Thompson, Sandra Birnhak, and others also suggest that there is plenty of interest in Rawlings to keep the ship of her legacy afloat and her community of aficionados thriving.

So I look to our gathering in Deland, where we will discuss the future as we enjoy the present and remember the past. These eighteen inches of snow will surely melt, for the answer to Shelley's immortal question—"If Winter comes, can Spring be far behind?"—is yes. April is on the way, and I can't wait to see you all. Please take care and travel safely and don't forget to make those reservations and to register early!! With very best wishes for the coming Spring,

Dr. Brent Kinser, MKR President

### Trustees Meeting

Saturday, January 22, 11 am

The Yearling Restaurant  
Cross Creek



#### SPECIAL DATES

- January 22, 11 am  
Trustees Meeting,  
Yearling Restaurant
- February 27  
Friends of MKR  
Farm's Scrub Walk
- April 14  
Trustees Meeting,  
DeLand
- April 15-16, 2011  
XXIV Annual MKR  
Conference,  
DeLand, FL

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**MKR Officers**

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**XXIV Annual Marjorie Kinnan Rawlings Conference  
DeLand, Florida, April 15-16, 2010**

The next Marjorie Kinnan Rawlings conference will take place in the lovely college town of DeLand. Sessions will be held across from Stetson University at the Museum of Florida Art, 600 North Woodland Boulevard, DeLand 32720 (<http://www.museumoffloridaart.org/>) Highlights of the conference include the following:

- Keynote Speaker: Professor John Lowe, Louisiana State University
- Banquet Speaker: Gary Monroe, author of *The Highwaymen*
- Luncheon Speaker: Jackson Walker, painter of iconic Floridians
- Tour of the St. Johns River led by Bill Dreggors
- Papers on gender in *The Yearling*, hunting in Rawlings's works, Marjorie Stoneman Douglas, among others.

**Conference Hotel**

The Society hotel is the University Inn, 644 North Woodland Boulevard, DeLand 32720. Phone: (386) 734-5711 or 1-800-345-8991. (<http://www.universityinnland.com>). The hotel is conveniently located a few steps from the Museum of Florida Art. The Society has reserved nearly all the rooms in the hotel. The hotel is delightful, with rooms located around a pool and near a cheery breakfast room. Rates are \$65 per night (\$73.13 all-inclusive). Please call now and make your reservations. The cut-off date is April 1.

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**In Memoriam  
Phyllis Hansen (1921-2011)**

Longtime MKR Society trustee Phyllis Hansen died suddenly at her home in Cross Creek on January 7. Her neighbor and close friend, Jim Stephens, wrote the following moving tribute to her:

**My friend Phyllis**

Around Thanksgiving in 1996, as I walked out of my Cross Creek hammock, I noticed a new survey marker at my corner. My curiosity piqued, I followed a line of markers west to Snow's Landing (where Marjorie found her grove man Snow Slater living in primitive fashion years ago), and came upon a casually dressed lady bent over a copy of Haase's

*Cracker Classic Architecture*, opened on the hood of her little pick-up.

She introduced herself as Phyllis Hansen—the new owner of this property—and showed me the drawing of her intended new home. To both of our delights, her choice was "The Old Settler's House," which was my grandfather Will Stephens's house in Hardee County. That co-incidence and the fact that we would be neighbors and joint stewards of this gorgeous hammock certainly broke the ice and led to fourteen years of a warm relationship. As we talked, we became aware of a yearling doe standing watching us only a few steps away. It appeared friendly and unafraid, so Phyllis spoke to it in a soft and endearing manner. It never ran away, seemingly choosing to stay near us. That is how we all met—Phyllis, the deer, and I. She was not sure of her property lines, so I agreed to show them to her the next day. I was concerned that a woman in her mid-seventies might not be comfortable trudging through the hammock's tangle of grapevines, smilax, and thick underbrush, threatened by ticks, chiggers, and the possibility of rattlers. But Phyllis Hansen was undaunted, and was on my heels all the way. This hammock was to be her home by choice, with everything it had to offer. In a spirit and manner similar to that of Marjorie Rawlings, Phyllis wanted to experience all of Cross Creek—the good and the bad—and experience it she did! She quickly fell in love with the animals, the birds, the land, Orange Lake, and especially all the trees and plants. [continued page 4]



**Conference Keynote Speaker, Dr. John Lowe**

Dr. John Wharton Lowe is the Robert Penn Warren Distinguished Professor of English and Comparative Literature at Louisiana State University. He has received innumerable honors and awards, most recently the MELUS Lifetime Achievement Award for outstanding contributions to the field of Ethnic American Literature in 2008 and a National Endowment for the Humanities Research Fellowship, 2008-2009. He is the author of *Jump at the Sun: Zora Neale Hurston's Cosmic Comedy*. His current work includes *Calypto Magnolia: The Caribbean Side of the South*, currently under consideration by the University of North Carolina Press and *Faulkner's Fraternal Fury: Sibling Rivalry, Racial Kinship, and Democracy*, under contract at LSU Press. Dr. Lowe has published work on Marjorie Kinnan Rawlings, including "The Construction and Deconstruction of Masculinity in *The Yearling*," which is excerpted below. He has served on the Editorial Board of *The Marjorie Kinnan Rawlings Journal of Florida Literature* since 2007. He will be the keynote speaker at the next Rawlings Conference in DeLand, April 15. Below is an excerpt of one of Dr. Lowe's articles on Rawlings.

**From "The Construction and Deconstruction of Masculinity in *The Yearling*."**

A few years ago some of the most elderly members of the international audience tuning in for the Academy Awards must have had a small shock. As the camera panned over a large assembly of former Oscar winners, it stopped for a moment on a rather dumpy-looking man who was revealed to be the same Claude Jarman who won best supporting actor for his portrayal of the young boy in the film version of *The Yearling*. Jody, it appears, had indeed survived the death of his fawn and become a man.

Most people, if they know the tale at all, have it from the movie--the book after all, we think, was for children. It is true author Marjorie Kinnan Rawlings wrote the story (published in 1938) in some part "for boys" on the suggestion of her editor, Maxwell Perkins (1); as a result of this decision, the profanity she had used in her earlier work *South Moon Under* (1933) was taken out. Increasingly, however, Rawlings came to see that the story as it developed was taking its own form, and it eventually became a book about how boys must become men. Her earlier description of the book as depicting a "brief and tragic idyll of boyhood" had become something more ambitious.

This has always been an inhibiting factor in terms of both the book's and its author's reputation. Although there was for a while a vogue for Rawlings's 1942 memoir *Cross Creek* (again, mainly because of the movie version), Rawlings has suffered a long decline from the period of her popularity. She was not included in the recent *Norton Anthology of Southern Literature*, and even though Rawlings repeatedly focuses on both sides of gender issues, she is not a presence in the recent groundbreaking work on gender in Southern literature edited by Susan V. Donaldson and Anne Goodwyn Jones, *Haunted Bodies: Gender and Southern Texts* (2).

I am unable to go into the myriad ways in which Rawlings has much to say to us about contemporary issues here; she could and should be taught, for instance, not only in courses on Southern, women's, and American literature but also in classes dealing with environmental issues, the proletarian novel, folklore, and the short story. Perhaps one reason, however, that she has not been taught in women's studies classes is that her focus on gender in her major novels is usually on males. Her masterwork is paradigmatic in this respect and has much to contribute to the burgeoning new discussion on the construction of masculinity.

*The Yearling* presents a quite complex study of this process, which gets set in motion through Jody's relation with his father, Penny, but also with his hardened mother, Ora, with other boys, with his backwoods neighbors, and with Nature itself. Many of the modes of characterization prove markedly Freudian and have an erotic subtext. Further, Rawlings was shrewd enough to see the pitfalls and problems in the stereotypes of masculinity she considers here and provided an antidote of types by limning the quite unusual but highly satisfactory, approaches to masculinity fashioned by Penny, and then later, his son. Rawlings thus employs a kind of statement and then erasure, a process that proves highly ironic and illustrative. In one scene, for instance, Penny and Jody will demonstrate and sometimes discuss modes of masculine behavior that involve toughening, stoicism, bravery, and silence. On the other hand, these scenes are always balanced by ensuing ones that provide for the development of sympathy, loyalty, spirituality, gentleness, and respect. Rawlings, more so than any other woman writer of her time, appears to understand the ambiguous nature of American manhood—how the world insists on one quality one minute and its opposite the next. Jody learns from his father how to navigate successfully between these needs, although the final lesson is that a harsh world dictates an early end to the wondrous elements of childhood for those bound by poverty.

[from *The Mississippi Quarterly* 57.2 (2004): 231]