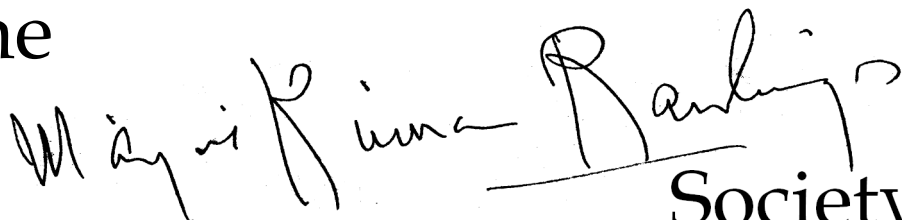


The



Society Newsletter

Volume XXVII, Number 1

Marjorie Kinnan Rawlings Society Newsletter

November 2022

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President's Letter

I didn't want to leave home. But David, my husband, wanted to evacuate as Hurricane Ian crept toward St. Augustine. Admittedly, our house is about 100 paces from an Intracoastal waterfront. And we're only 7 feet above sea level. We also have tall oak trees hanging over the new metal roof. The warning signs were all there.

But there were the chickens and lovebirds to consider. They share an aviary out back. They were all unusually quiet as the bands of rain began to arrive. The hurricane lilies knew, too—their orange frilly blossoms were bending in the first swirls of wind. In storms past, neighbors' chickens had drowned, trees had split open roofs, water had flooded the four homes at the end of our cul-de-sac.

So the next morning before dawn, I went out with a small blanket to nab three sleepy chickens from their roost, one by one, and put them in a metal dog crate filling the backseat. The lovebirds I caught with a butterfly net, and somehow their cage fit on the backseat, too. With plenty of bird feed and a few changes of clothes, we headed for the Florida interior. Gainesville relatives offered a room, for both humans and feathered family.

As it turned out, ours was a relatively mild hurricane experience compared to the violent seven-day storm the Baxter family encountered in *The Yearling*—or "the monstropolous beast" endured by Janie and her friends in Zora Neale Hurston's *Their Eyes Were Watching God*. And David and I did not have to huddle in a closet as did our 94-year-old friend—literary scholar Evelyn Hively—with her daughter while Hurricane Ian roared through Venice, Florida. The natural world can still provide a reckoning.

After three days, we returned home with our traveling bird show. Our roof was intact, and our yard was miraculously free of every bit of storm debris. The broken limbs and shredded bushes were all raked to the curb in a long waist-high pile by my sister and her husband. Thank the goodness that is family. I wish such support for everyone in southwest Florida.

Of course, an entirely different kind of "beast" that threatens homes is real estate demolition and development. Here in St. Augustine, we fear losing the Rev. Dr. Martin Luther King beach house, and the Zora Neale Hurston House has just gone up for sale.

With each passing day, I increasingly appreciate the Streeter family members who have weathered the challenges to preserve Marjorie Kinnan Rawlings' home here in Crescent Beach, and the Friends of the Marjorie Kinnan Rawlings Farm who care so devotedly for her home in Cross Creek. I hope you fared well through Hurricane Ian's wrath and feel fully supported.

My Florida Best, Darien Andreu



ON THE SECRET RIVER

by Anne Bellissimo

Generations of children have read *The Secret River* by Marjorie Kinnan Rawlings, but that popularity raises a question: What did Rawlings read when she was young?

The question is particularly pertinent because *The Secret River* is an American fairy tale about Calpurnia, an African-American girl in north Florida on the cusp of adolescence, who saves her community from starvation by finding a river full of fish. After catching enough to feed her family and town, she outsmarts three apex predators, an owl, a panther and a bear, and returns home safely.

Its posthumous publication in 1955 (Rawlings died in 1953) marks the start of the modern civil rights era. It was the year that Emmett Till was murdered in Mississippi and Rosa Parks refused to give up her seat on a bus in Montgomery, Alabama.

The story is timeless in its treatment of race and gender. Other plot devices often found in European fairy tales are not found in *The Secret River*: there is no wicked stepmother, for example. Mother Albirtha, a character who could be construed as a witch in traditional tales, is a positive rendition of an old woman who answers Calpurnia's questions.

Although any attempt to compile a reading list for young Marjorie is mainly guesswork, there is one hint in a letter Rawlings wrote to her editor Maxwell Perkins in April of 1947 shortly before Perkins' unexpected death:

I did not use any trace of Negro dialect for two reasons. I wanted to give a complete dignity to all the Negroes in the story, with no 'Uncle Remus' or 'Little Black Sambo' sort of stuff with its humorous often depreciatory effect.

(*The Secret River* would be shelved after Perkins' death only to be published after Rawlings' demise.)

A third book that can be added to *Uncle Remus* and *Little Black Sambo* that Rawlings almost certainly read is *Uncle Tom's Cabin* (1852), which was the second bestselling book of the 19th century following the Bible.

Uncle Tom's Cabin, which is still considered a giant of American protest literature because of its antislavery theme, had the unexpected side effect of promoting stereotypical characters such as Uncle Tom, who came to represent a servile Black man, and Topsy, a scatterbrained young Black woman. Although the Uncle Tom stereotype is connected with the Black protest movement of the 1960s, the Topsy trope would appear in music hall comedy throughout the 1920s and would show up again in the 1939 movie *Gone with the Wind*. The character Prissy played by actress Butterfly McQueen was described by McQueen as lazy, stupid and backward. These are the undercurrents which could be ascribed to Topsy in *Uncle Tom's Cabin*.

Rawlings' storytelling talent uses small worlds--such as African-American Calpurnia's hero's journey in *The Secret River*-- to illustrate larger themes such as maturity and imagination.

Her reaction to the stories of her youth shows her ability to change her own attitude toward race and mirror American social change.

Anne Bellissimo is the new Secretary for the Marjorie Kinnan Rawlings Society succeeding long-serving Pam Davis. She lives in Largo, FL, and contributed the article "A Different Look at Rawlings's *The Secret River*" to the 2021-2022 issue of *The Marjorie Kinnan Rawlings Journal of Florida Literature*.



HISTORY: ALREADY PRECOCIOUS AT FIVE YEARS OLD

On May 25, 1902, *The Washington Times* ran an article titled "A Few Of The Pretty Toddlers":

Marjorie Kinnan

One of the sweet youngsters who is universally loved is Marjorie Kinnan, the daughter of Mr. and Mrs. Arthur F. Kinnan. Her father is a special examiner in the Patent Office, where he has been employed for a number of years. Marjorie's plump cheeks and pretty curls, coupled with her shy nature, attract the attention of all who see her. She does not thrust herself upon you, but after becoming thoroughly acquainted, she chatters like a magpie.

On one occasion she called to see a little friend and finding her not at home remained to talk with the mother. "If you ever get sick," she said with much earnestness, "you let me know and I will come to see you and bring you some cookies. My mama makes awfully nice cookies."

"My birthday is coming soon," she continued with animation. "And I am going to have a real party - a party at night like big people - and I am going to stay up for it."



ENCOURAGING THE NEXT GENERATION

Deborah Dickey has sponsored a student membership to the Marjorie Kinnan Rawlings Society. It has been accepted by Presleigh Johnson, Flagler College Public History Major & English Minor.

Darien Andreu sponsored a student membership to Sarah Beth Moody, Flagler College English - Creative Writing Major & Coastal Environmental Science Minor.

Anne Pierce sends this interesting note:

My name is Linda Temple. I take care of Elaine Bradbury and Claire Koshar's landscaping. Claire gave me Roselle seeds a few years back and they ask me to grow them every year for them. They have me addicted to the fruit. We make tea, jam and Florida cranberry sauce every year. They came up from rogue seeds this year. I think the MKR Society would be proud.



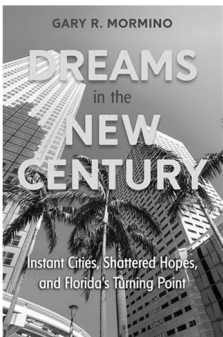


"It Changed My Life"



The endlessly fascinating Florida Humanities magazine, *FORUM*, Summer 2022, ran this item from Gary Mormino, who will give the Rawlings Society Plenary Address at our annual conference, April 27-29, 2023.

"In 1980-81, I was teaching at the University of South Florida and was awarded a Fulbright professorship at the Università de Roma. While teaching in Rome, I fell in love with Florida. During that year, headlines of race riots and the exodus of the Marielitos made me realize that the greatest storyline in my life was happening back at home: a thousand newcomers daily, wetlands transformed into shopping centers and an assault on our coast line.

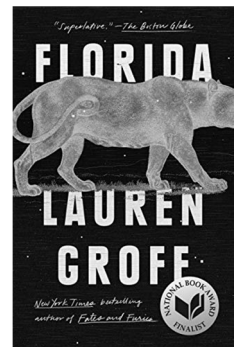


"But it was not the blaring headlines that left me curious about my adopted state, it was a novel. Every morning before class, I read a chapter of Marjorie Kinnan Rawlings' *The Yearling*. I fell in love with a lost Florida. If I were elected governor of Florida, I would require every new Floridian to read *The Yearling*. Failure would result in a whipping by the Forresters, the roughneck Crackers in the book, who would also loot your liquor cabinet. *The Yearling* is pure Floridian. It's set in the 1870s in today's Ocala National Forest, in an austere yet enchanting landscape that serves as a character. For Floridians afflicted by COVID and melancholia, the novel, with its bittersweet coming-of-age ending, serves as a spring tonic in darker times."



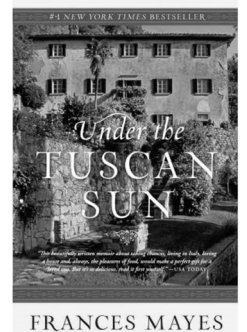
The same issue of the wonderful *FORUM* magazine also ran this comment from an interview with Lauren Groff, author of *Florida*, a collection of short stories, and her latest novel *Matrix*:

"Marjorie Kinnan Rawlings' *The Yearling* taught me how to love Florida when I was struggling to do so at first. Zora Neale Hurston's *Their Eyes Were Watching God* has stayed with me for 30 years."



Garden and Gun magazine ran this answer from Frances Mayes, author of the best-selling book *Under the Tuscan Sun*:

What are some of your own favorite books about home and place? There are thousands of inspiring home design books, but few about the meaning of home. I loved *Cross Creek* by Marjorie Kinnan Rawlings, who wrote *The Yearling*. Her cracker house in North Florida had a presence. I made a pilgrimage to see it.





A SPECIAL BOOK: WHAT STORIES IT COULD TELL

Cross Creek. It was a green book. Hard cloth cover, well worn. It was in my Uncle Jim's Navy war locker in my grandparents' basement. Of course, my brother and I were not to go into it, probably being 5 and 6 years old but we did. At least from my earliest memories, the chest and book were there. Amongst numerous patches, metals and other memorabilia was this book named *Cross Creek*. Inside the cover was a handwritten note saying, "survived Lexington disaster at sea, May 8, 1942 James R. Peters." Also inside the cover was a note from the *Navy Times* about his actions getting the book, after an abandon ship order. He's quoted saying, "I hadn't finished it and it's a swell book."

Buried in the pages were letters from a Marjorie Kinnan Rawlings, which I found curious because she was the author of the book. Somehow a Fritz Ryan read the article in the *Navy Times* and sent it to Marjorie Rawlings.

There was also a stack of old newspapers in the basement next to the locker. Only years later did I realize they were the morning, afternoon and evening editions from every newspaper in Detroit at the time. They covered the next couple of weeks after May 9th. My grandparents were searching the names of those killed in the battle and the sinking of their son's ship.

I knew some of his stories, especially the ones regarding the Battle of the Coral Sea. As the *Lexington*, an aircraft carrier, was sinking and on fire, the abandon ship order was given. As the sailors raced to the side ropes, my uncle ran down through the smoke to his locker and grabbed this particular book. A destroyer picked him up with other life raft survivors. The book made the rounds for the next couple of weeks.

He would mesmerize us with stories of the explosions and the sick bays with badly burned sailors. The planes were crash landing on the deck, only to be pushed overboard so other planes could land. He was a Chief Petty Officer, a signalman guiding the returning planes to land as well as directing their takeoff. This was while being attacked with bombs, torpedoes and machine gunfire from Japanese airplanes. They had taken off from their aircraft carriers out of sight and miles away.

I'm not sure when I eventually read *Cross Creek*, perhaps after my grandparents passed and I inherited the chest. But what a book, what writing, and what a spell it cast. I understand why my uncle went back to get it. In the middle of the chaos, carnage and loss, it gave him something. Like it did me.

Knowing no one would appreciate the book in my library, I looked for someone who might. I found the Marjorie Kinnan Rawlings Society. It is now with them at the Smathers Library in Gainesville, along with her many letters to him. While there, I was surprised to see the letters my uncle wrote her and learn about her defamation lawsuit. In *Cason vs. Baskin*, my uncle was a witness in her defense, who felt there was no defamation of Zelma Cason.

This was after the war while he was at college.

To go back to get a book in the middle of such horror is incomprehensible, in a way. That was all he left with, just a particular book. That was my Uncle Jim.

--by David Peters of Portland, Maine, a new life member of the Rawlings Society



MARK YOUR CALENDAR: ANNUAL RAWLINGS SOCIETY CONFERENCE! April 27-29, 2023

Exciting plans are being made for our Marjorie Kinnan Rawlings Conference April 27-29, 2023, in St. Augustine, FL. All sessions will be in the handsome, newly restored, historic Waterworks building at 184 San Marco Ave, made available to us by member Christina Parrish Stone, Executive Director of the St. Johns Cultural Council.

CALL FOR RAWLINGS SOCIETY CONFERENCE PRESENTATIONS

Each year the annual conference of the Marjorie Kinnan Rawlings Society presents several speakers on topics of interest to its members. Do you have a presentation you would like to make? We are always open to suggestions, and there are still a couple open slots at our next conference—scheduled for beautiful St. Augustine, FL, on April 27-29, 2023. Submit your ideas to Flo Turcotte at floturcotte@uflib.ufl.edu and/or Darien Andreu at andreude@flagler.edu

CALL FOR RAWLINGS SOCIETY SCHOLARSHIP SUBMISSIONS

Sandi Dunnivant, our new committee chair of Outreach, has designed this flyer to call for college student scholarship submissions to be awarded at our upcoming Rawlings Society Conference.
Pass the word!

MARJORIE KINNAN RAWLINGS SOCIETY
Writing Contest

Who needs money for college?

Say WHAT? How does \$500 or \$1,000 sound?

About

Marjorie Kinnan Rawlings was one of the most famous figures in Florida's 20th century literary history and author of the classics *The Yearling* (1938) and *Cross Creek* (1942). Today her voice resonates with environmental concerns. The Marjorie Kinnan Rawlings Society is sponsoring a writing contest for currently enrolled undergraduate students...\$500 and hosting the Dr. Edna Saffy Scholarship for graduate students...\$1000.

Requirements

- ✓ Submit 1500–3000 words critical essay or a piece of creative work
- ✓ Subject must be related to the works, career, or legacy of Rawlings
- ✓ Winner's are invited to present their papers at the Annual Rawlings Conference in St. Augustine, April 27th–29th, 2023.

More Information

Deadline February 1, 2023

Dr. Anne Lillis
Department of English
University of Central Florida
P. O. Box 161346
Orlando, FL 32816-1346

Submit Essays To
Anna@ucf.edu

<http://rawlingsociety.org/>



CALL FOR SUBMISSIONS

The Marjorie Kinnan Rawlings Journal of Florida Literature: Call for Papers

The editor of the JOURNAL, Anna Lillios, would like to invite submissions of critical articles that focus not only on Rawlings but also on issues that fit within the broader contexts of Florida writing, regionalism, feminism, race, eco-criticism, literature of place, domesticity, and southern culture. Papers in these more general areas should in some way connect with Rawlings and/or contemporaries of Rawlings.

In addition, the Journal welcomes submissions of short fiction and poetry, especially those works, which reflect Rawlings's own deep affection for Florida and Florida life.

Please submit an electronic copy to the editor by the January 1st deadline. All manuscripts should be no more than twenty-five double-spaced pages in length.

Dr. Anna Lillios
Department of English
University of Central Florida
P. O. Box 161346
Orlando, FL 32816-1346
Anna@ucf.edu

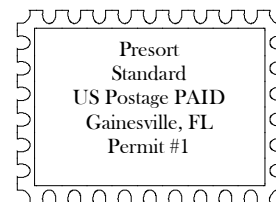
NOTE: THE DATE OF OUR NEXT TRUSTEES MEETING is Saturday, January 28, 2023, in St. Augustine, Flagler College, Ponce Hall, President's Dining Room. (details to follow)

WILL YOU SERVE?

If you're interested in serving as a Marjorie Kinnan Rawlings Society Trustee, please let us know. Trustees serve a three-year term.

The duties include, ideally, attendance at the Trustees' meeting in the fall and winter seasons, and at the annual spring Conference. Our meeting sites are a moveable feast. Trustees meet for lunch at Cross Creek's Yearling Restaurant, and other wonderful Florida locales. Trustees bring valued new energy, ideas, talents, and more.

Rawlings Society
PO Box 117005
Gainesville, FL 32611-7005



IS IT TIME TO RENEW YOUR MEMBERSHIP?

Please check your address label. The date that you see on the label is the date your dues are due.
If your membership is current, we thank you!

Membership and Conference Registration Prize

The Membership Year for the MKR Society is **July through June** corresponding with our programming, conference and publication cycle. ***Please take a good look at your mailing label to see if your renewal date has passed.*** If so, please consider renewing today using the membership form below or you can now renew on our website.

The person who signs up the most **new** members wins a FREE Registration for our next conference.

Here are some ideas to solicit members:

- Encourage friends and relatives to join;
- Give a gift of a student membership (\$15) to children, grandchildren, or other students;
- Speak to neighbors and those at your local library or historical society about joining.

Membership Application for the Marjorie Kinnan Rawlings Society

Name: _____	Student	\$15	Sponsor	\$100
	Individual	\$30	Patron	\$250
Address: _____	Family	\$40	Benefactor	\$500
	Sustaining	\$50	Life	\$1,000
City/State/Zip: _____	(Please circle membership level)			
E-mail address: _____	Mail to: Rawlings Society c/o Anne Pierce 249 Herman Drive Hawthorne, FL 32640			

To learn more about the Society and information on the annual conference, visit our website, **www.rawlingssociety.org**