

The



Marjorie Kinnan Rawlings Society

Newsletter

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President's Letter: Memories of Marjorie

I recently received the most marvelous letter from Victoria Freeman, a lifetime member. Victoria is a writer, gardener, retired teacher, and former owner of the oldest B&B in Jacksonville. We thank her for generously giving us permission to publish parts of her letter. You will all be interested in what she writes about MKR:

"My basic connection to Marjorie began in 1972 when I was hired as an English teacher at the Episcopal High School of Jacksonville. I was handed *The Yearling* and told it was required reading for all seventh graders. And so it went for the thirty years I taught at Episcopal.

"I always started the book in April and finished with a Yearling Day trip to the McCormick ranch. The kids were instructed to bring an authentic food item from the book and for years I had venison stew, cornbread and greens. (Toward the end, too many mommies reverted to Publix fried chicken.)

"Next stop on the Marjorie trail happened inadvertently when I purchased the House on Cherry Street B&B as a retirement project. Phil May called me and asked if he could have a meeting of the Rawlings Society on my porch. I said I was honored but asked him why the B&B. He explained that the house had been owned by his father's law partner John Crawford and that he had often walked with his dad Phil May Sr. down to Cherry Street for a conference. Occasionally Marjorie was in town and she came with them. I was enchanted. To think that Marjorie had actually been in my home made me rethink some of my B&B breakfasts. I began cooking out of her cookbook and placing some of her books in the four bedrooms. I introduced some folks from India to Marjorie and created one devotee from Montreal.

"Meanwhile, I read as many biographies as I could about Marjorie and presented her work several times at local churches."

— VICTORIA FREEMAN

Thank you, Victoria, for being such a wonderful advocate for Marjorie and her work and for introducing them to so many people. If any of our other members have reminiscences of Marjorie, we would love to hear them.

Paul Dunn, President
Marjorie Kinnan Rawlings Society



Phil May Jr. with park ranger Sally Morrison and Marjorie Kinnan Rawlings's good friend Dessie Smith Prescott.

Editor's note: Philip S. May Sr. served as Marjorie Kinnan Rawlings's attorney from 1935 until her death in 1953. His son, Philip S. May Jr., founded the Marjorie Kinnan Rawlings Society in 1987 and served as its first president.



The Creek Almanac

Looking Back

Palm Harbor Celebrates Rawlings

The Palm Harbor Library devoted much of August to Marjorie Kinnan Rawlings, with programs exploring her life, her friends, and the Florida landscape she loved.

The Society, with support from the Phil S. May Jr. Memorial Fund, sponsored an August 5 kickoff program featuring author and Florida historian Rick Kilby, who spoke on “Joy Postle: The Art of the Florida Wild.” Postle (1894–1989), an artist and nature lover who spent years in rural Marion County, shared Rawlings’s fascination with a Florida far removed from the tourist-postcard image.

“Both Postle and Marjorie Kinnan Rawlings rejected ‘postcard’ versions of Florida, choosing instead to find beauty in cypress swamps and pine scrubs,” Kilby notes. “Rawlings and Postle were truly birds of a feather, each finding her own version of paradise in the Florida wilds.”

The month continued with a library book club discussion of *South Moon Under*, a cooking program featuring a recipe from the *Cross Creek Cookbook*, and two workshops in which participants created tin dioramas inspired by Old Florida ecosystems. A Community Photography Project also encouraged participants to document remnants of Old Florida in Pinellas County and around the state.

– Peter Cannon



The artist Joy Postle shared Marjorie Kinnan Rawlings’s fascination with a Florida far removed from the tourist-postcard image. (Courtesy Rick Kilby)



Peter Cannon (left) with Rick Kilby, who spoke on “Joy Postle: The Art of the Florida Wild.”



Librarian Maryjane Hyatt shows off copies of *Cross Creek* and the *Cross Creek Cookbook* at the Palm Harbor Library in August.



Workshop participants created tin dioramas inspired by Old Florida ecosystem at the Palm Harbor Library’s August programs linked to Marjorie Kinnan Rawlings.



(The Creek Almanac Continued from page 2)

Happy 130th Birthday, Marjorie!

Marjorie Kinnan Rawlings's 130th birthday brought friends old and new to Cross Creek on August 8 for the annual celebration at the Marjorie Kinnan Rawlings Historic State Park.

Homemade mango ice cream, chocolate and vanilla cupcakes, music and entertainment were part of the festivities. Another attraction was the gleaming, restored 1940 Oldsmobile, similar to the one Rawlings owned, on display beside her Cross Creek home.

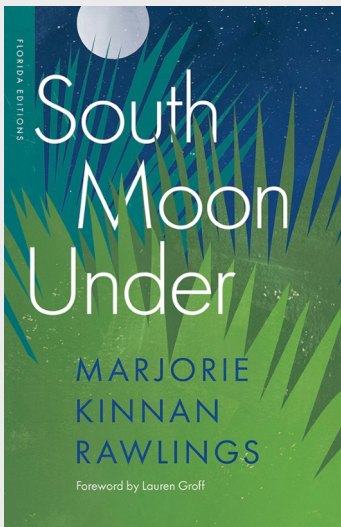
"The party gets bigger every year," writes Society trustee Margaret Harris. "Seeing old and new friends was wonderful. The music and entertainment was great. Thank you to the MKR Society and Cross Creek Park rangers and volunteers for planning the party every year. I am looking forward to the 2027 MKR birthday party. I always bring a car pool of friends to show off Cross Creek."



Ann Kennedy (left) and Margaret Harris at the MKR 130th birthday celebration on August 8 at the Marjorie Kinnan Rawlings Historic State Park, Cross Creek.

Coming Up

A New *South Moon Under*



A new edition of Marjorie Kinnan Rawlings's *South Moon Under* will make its debut in Gainesville on Friday, October 16, with a celebration at The Lynx bookstore.

Published by University Press of Florida, the new Florida Edition includes a foreword by acclaimed Florida novelist Lauren Groff. At the October 16th event, Groff will join University Press of Florida acquisitions editor Carlynn Crosby and the Rawlings Society's Florence Turcotte for a discussion of the novel and Rawlings's literary and cultural legacy.

Originally published in 1933, *South Moon Under* was Rawlings's first novel and a finalist for the Pulitzer Prize. Set in Florida's Big Scrub, it follows generations of the Lantry family and the hard lives they fashioned from the scrub country that Rawlings was learning to know so intimately.

The Society is co-hosting the launch with University Press of Florida and The Lynx. The free program begins at **6 p.m. Friday, Oct. 16**, at The Lynx, 601 S. Main St., Gainesville. Copies of the new edition will be available for purchase.

⇒ **Next trustee meetings:** Saturday, **October 17**, Island Grove.
Saturday, **January 23**, Gainesville.

⇒ **Thirty-Eighth Annual Conference:** May 7 – 8, 2027, at the University of Florida-affiliated Hilton Conference Center in Gainesville.

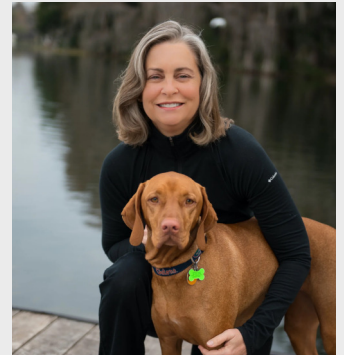


Society Notes

Lessons from the Marjories

Former Rawlings Society executive director Leslie Kemp Poole is writing an occasional series for *The Marjorie* that considers the legacies of three formidable Florida women: Marjorie Kinnan Rawlings, Marjorie Harris Carr, and Marjory Stoneman Douglas.

In her latest essay, “The Sorrow of the Scrub,” Poole returns to *The Yearling* and to Ora Baxter, whose seeming hardness she understood differently when she reread the novel as an adult and a mother. “As a young reader, I viewed Ora Baxter as a dark, unemotional woman,” Poole writes. “But as an adult, as a mother, I get it.”



Leslie Kemp Poole

The essay also draws on Kathylyne Walkup Sheppard’s presentation at the Society’s 2026 conference about the hardships endured by families of Florida’s Big Scrub.

Leslie is an associate professor of environmental studies at Rollins College in Winter Park and the author of books including *Saving Florida: Women’s Fight for the Environment in the Twentieth Century* and *Tracing Florida Journeys: Explorers, Travelers, and Landscapes Then and Now*.

Read “Lessons from the Marjories” at TheMarjorie.org.

Marjorie and Zora Could Share a Bench

Friends in life, Marjorie Kinnan Rawlings and Zora Neale Hurston may someday sit together again—this time in bronze. A proposed St. Augustine “Park Bench History” project includes a life-size dual installation honoring the two writers and friends. The project, inspired by a Frederick Douglass bench unveiled in the Plaza de la Constitución earlier this year, would place historical figures on benches around the city. The Rawlings-Hurston proposal was among a group of prospective installations presented to the St. Augustine City Commission in June. Funding, location, and an installation date have not yet been announced.

Remembering Jim Stephens

The Rawlings Society mourns the loss of longtime member and Rawlings scholar Jim Stephens, whose knowledge, stories, and contributions enriched the Society for many years. Jim died in July at 89, and we will remember his life and his important work preserving the Rawlings legacy more fully in our Winter newsletter.

In Memory of Lee Townsend



Dorsey Lee Townsend, Jr.

The Rawlings Society extends its sympathy to our longtime member Donna Green-Townsend on the death of her husband, Dorsey Lee “Lee” Townsend Jr., who died August 11 at their home in Cross Creek. Lee, 71, retired in 2020 after serving as a park ranger at the Marjorie Kinnan Rawlings Historic State Park, where he was known for sharing his deep knowledge of the Creek and its history with visitors. His connection to Rawlings reached back another generation: his father, Dorsey Lee Townsend Sr., worked for Rawlings and was among the Townsend family members portrayed in *Cross Creek*. Lee was known to some as the “**Honorary Mayor of Cross Creek**,” his obituary notes. He and Donna were married for 40 years.



Remembering the Extraordinary Sally B.

Long before Sara Janise “Sally” Baskin Hooker became a nurse, mother, grandmother, trustee of the Marjorie Kinnan Rawlings Society, and a keeper of Florida stories, she was the only child growing up at Marineland, in the days when it was one of Florida’s premier tourist destinations. Her father, Thomas Baskin, managed the motel there after World War II, and Sally had what she later called “free range of Marineland (with my mother’s spies).” She swam with dolphins, collected fish for the tanks, and occasionally found herself in the background when a movie, documentary, or advertising photo shoot was under way. It was an extraordinary childhood, though to Sally it was simply home.

A Dolphin Confidante

Born in Ocala in 1942, Sally moved with her parents to Marineland, eighteen miles south of St. Augustine, when she was three years old. In a 2022 interview later published in *The Marjorie Kinnan Rawlings Journal of Florida Literature*, she remembered the iconic attraction’s motel, restaurant, beach, and aquarium as one great playground.



Sally grew up at Marineland, with Nelly the dolphin as her confidante and swimming buddy.



Sally feeds a dolphin at Marineland. Originally called Marine Studios, the attraction was founded to film underwater scenes for movies.

A young dolphin named Nellie became a particular friend. Sally had a special way of patting the side of the tank so Nellie would come to her, and the two would swim laps together while Sally confided the troubles of adolescence. Nellie would become Marineland’s best-known resident; born on Feb. 27, 1953, she lived there her entire life and became the oldest dolphin in human care in the United States when she died in 2014. For Sally, though, Nellie was simply the friend who “heard all my secrets.”

Celebrities also passed through Marineland and the Dolphin Restaurant, managed by Sally’s uncle, Norton Baskin. To young Sally, they were simply part of the stream of people who appeared in the place she called home. Interviewed by St. Augustine historian David Nolan in 2021, Sally recalled that Rawlings would sometimes telephone Sally’s mother with the request, “Can you clean Sally up?” That meant getting the child out of a bathing suit or shorts and into a sundress so Aunt Marjorie could introduce her to a guest at the Dolphin Restaurant, where she liked to entertain. Among them, Sally later learned, were Ernest Hemingway and Eleanor Roosevelt.



Sally at the MKR Society’s Conference in St. Augustine in 2023.



A young Sally shows off her catch in the Atlantic surf by Marineland.

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"Aunt Margie"

For Sally, however, Marjorie Kinnan Rawlings was not first a celebrated writer. "She was just my Aunt Margie," she remembered. At Rawlings's oceanfront home at Crescent Beach, Sally would visit her aunt after church, bringing flowers and a copy of *The New York Times*. Rawlings might be resting in bed, surrounded by the elegant things that fascinated a young girl. Sally would put on one of her aunt's bed jackets and slippers and climb up beside her. The two told stories to each other — as Sally described to David Nolan, they would "talk trash and swap lies."

From visits to Cross Creek, Sally had other memories: sand spurs in her clothes, ducks and chickens in the yard, oranges and cookies, and naps on her aunt's red fainting couch while the adults played cards. Only years later did Sally fully understand who Aunt Margie had been, or how valuable her own memories were.



A woman of many talents, Sally Baskin Hooker sent delightful Florida-themed sketches with her membership renewals to the Society, Anne Pierce recalls.



Longtime friends Shirley Thompson (left) and Sally Baskin Hooker stand before N.C. Wyeth's *The Dance of the Whooping Cranes* at the Cici and Hyatt Brown Museum of Art during a Society conference outing on March 31, 2017. The painting was created for the 1939 illustrated edition of *The Yearling* after Wyeth visited Rawlings and the Florida scrub.

Keeper of the Stories

After Rawlings died in 1953, Norton Baskin made a lasting impression on his young niece. Sally remembered him gathering nieces and nephews together and making clear that being related to a famous writer was no achievement of their own. For years afterward, she was reluctant to speak publicly about Rawlings.

That changed after her uncle's death. Following Norton Baskin's funeral, David Nolan urged Sally to talk about what she knew. She had not only known Rawlings personally, he told her, but possessed firsthand knowledge of early Marineland that few people still had.

Eventually Sally embraced that role. She spoke about Rawlings and Florida history, participated in Rawlings Society programs, and developed a "Cracker Woman" character that she took into schools, particularly to fourth- and fifth-graders studying Florida history. She also helped return Rawlings-related objects to Cross Creek, including jewelry and a bed that had left the family years earlier.

Her family remembers that impulse to preserve and share stories as central to who Sally was. "Short story long" was one of her favorite ways to begin a response to a question, and what followed, they wrote, was rarely short but always worth hearing.

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A Life of Her Own

When Sally died July 17 at age 83, she had lived a life that was much larger than her connection to Rawlings. She spent her career caring for children as a pediatric nurse and later a school nurse. At St. Augustine High School, surfers learned to check the board outside her clinic for the morning surf report before deciding whether class or the beach looked more inviting.



Sally with husband Jim

She was a longtime Girl Scout leader, a devoted Florida Gators fan, and a traveler who shared adventures with her husband, James C. “Jim” Hooker Jr., during their 60 years of marriage. Family was at the center of her life: in addition to Jim, she is survived by three children, including Rawlings Society trustee Ginger Hooker Mower, and by eleven grandchildren, ten great-grandchildren, and a great-great-grandson.

For members of the Rawlings Society, Sally’s death means the loss of one of the increasingly rare people who remembered Marjorie Kinnan Rawlings not as a literary figure but as a living presence—an aunt who brought dresses, took a child to the circus, pulled sand spurs from small legs, and loved a good story.

But Sally’s own story deserves to be remembered in its own right: a Florida child of Marineland who grew into a nurse, traveler, storyteller, and generous keeper of the past. In sharing what she remembered, she helped make Florida history personal—the way she had experienced it all along.

The Baskin Family and Marjorie

Norton Sanford Baskin, born in Union Springs, Alabama, in 1901, made a career in the hotel business, working in Atlanta, Valdosta, Georgia, and Lake Worth before coming to Ocala in 1933 to manage the Marion Hotel. There he met Marjorie Kinnan Rawlings. They married in 1941 and later operated the Castle Warden Hotel in St. Augustine. Norton’s younger brother, Thomas, Sally Baskin Hooker’s father, also worked in hotel management; Sally recalled that when her family first moved to Florida at Norton’s suggestion, her parents managed an Ocala motel that housed Army Air Forces flight trainees from Dunnellon Army Air Field during World War II.

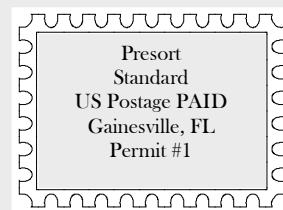
Although married, both Norton Baskin and Rawlings maintained strong professional identities of their own: she continued to return to Cross Creek to write, while he pursued his career in hotels and restaurants. The couple also made a home at Rawlings’s beach house at Crescent Beach, near Marineland, where he managed its Dolphin Restaurant at a time when Marineland was one of Florida’s premier tourist attractions. He also helped bring Sally’s family there. When Marineland sought someone to manage additional facilities, Norton recommended his brother Thomas, Sally’s father. Sally subsequently grew up at Marineland, surrounded by dolphins, visitors, filmmakers, and the writers and celebrities who gathered around her uncle and “Aunt Margie.”

After Rawlings’s death in 1953, Norton remained deeply interested in preserving her legacy. Decades later, when Philip S. May Jr. proposed forming an organization devoted to Rawlings, Norton encouraged the idea. The Marjorie Kinnan Rawlings Society held its first official meeting in 1987.

Note: on the photos: Special thanks to Ginger Hooker Mower for the photos used in the tribute to her mother, Sally Baskin Hooker, and to Anne Pierce for the sketch by Sally that was sent to Anne with one of Sally’s membership renewals. Thanks, too, to Peter Cannon, Rick Kilby, and Margaret Harris for images used in this issue.



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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**