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Journey into Florida's past with 'Yearling' author Marjorie Kinnan Rawlings

By HAL BOEDEKER

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In Marjorie's Wake

is a documentary that works on several levels: as a travelogue about the St. Johns River, as a salute to author Marjorie Kinnan Rawlings and as a meditation on Florida's past and future.

The hourlong program, which premieres at 9 p.m. Sunday on WPBT-Ch. 2, explores a 1933 trip Rawlings took on the St. Johns with neighbor Dessie Smith.

Retracing their journey are Leslie Poole, an adjunct professor at Rollins College, and musician Jennifer Chase. The film also incorporates reminiscences by Dessie Smith Prescott, who died at age 95 in 2002.

In a poignant and surprising moment, Poole and Chase sing *Amazing Grace* and spread Prescott's ashes on the river. Prescott's family agreed to let the moment be filmed.

"We struggled with whether we were going to include that in the program," says director Bob Giguere. "We didn't want to overplay it and have people feel we were taking advantage of the moment for the film."

But Smith provides a vital connection to the history and to Rawlings, who wrote about the trip in the Hyacinth Drift chapter of *Cross Creek*. Rawlings won the Pulitzer Prize for *The Yearling*.

"She still captures, even today, the flavor and feeling of Florida," Bill Jeter, president of the Marjorie Kinnan Rawlings Historical Society, says in the program. "She inspired a nation."

Prescott said their trip took 10 days. The filmmakers were six days on the water and one on land to reach Rawlings' home, which is a state park at Cross Creek.

Poole, a former reporter, retraced the 1933 trip with *Orlando Sentinel* food editor Heather McPherson for a 1995 article in the newspaper. Giguere credits Poole with the film's structure. Giguere and writer Bill Belleville sought a newcomer — musician Chase — as a contrast to the knowledgeable Poole.

"We wanted to tell the story through someone who didn't have the same experience as Leslie," Giguere says.

Chase supplies the film's original music. Belleville chose passages from writings by Rawlings, who died in 1953.

"If I could have, to hold forever, one brief place and time of beauty, I think I might choose the night on that high lonely bank above the St. Johns River," Rawlings wrote. "Suddenly the soft night turned silver. The moon was rising. We lay on our cots a long time, wakeful because of beauty."

On TV

Program: In Marjorie's Wake

Airs: 9 p.m. Sunday on WPBT-Ch. 2

On screen

7 p.m. Friday at the Wolfsonian FIU, 1001 Washington Ave., Miami Beach. Free; call 305-535-2644.

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