

# News from the Creek

Friends of the Marjorie Kinnan Rawlings Farm, Inc.

Volume 27 Number 1

Visit our website at: [www.marjoriekinnanrawlings.org](http://www.marjoriekinnanrawlings.org)

Winter Quarterly 2024

## President's Message

By Scott Spaulding

### Tom the Black Bear - Memories of the bear that played Old Slewfoot in *The Yearling*

When a stone is cast into calm water it creates a ripple, beginning slowly and then growing into multiple ripples that seem to go on forever, but eventually fade away. During her lifetime Marjorie created ripples through her writing that have never faded away. In fact, the ripples she created so many years ago are still going strong and every once in a while, make an appearance.



Dennis Morgan  
Photo by Donna Green-Townsend

I mention this because one of Marjorie's ripples brought a very interesting guest to the Marjorie Kinnan Rawlings Historic State Park during her birthday celebration back in August. As Donna Green-Townsend, Past President and current Vice-President of the Friends and I were working the event, we were approached by Dennis Morgan and his wife Carol. In his hand was a book titled, *Everglades Wildlife Barons*. After a brief introduction we learned that Dennis worked for Bill and Lester Piper, known as the wildlife barons about whom the book was written. What made his story even more interesting was the fact that the black bear that played Old Slewfoot in *The Yearling* movie in 1945 was owned by the Piper Brothers and resided at their zoo known as *The Everglades Wonder Gardens* in Bonita Springs, Florida.

To learn more about this interesting revelation, we invited Dennis and Carol to come back to the MKR Park for an on-camera interview. While sitting on the porch of the tenant house we began to learn more about this ripple which began in 1938 with the writing of Marjorie's Pulitzer Prize-winning novel, *The Yearling*. You see, it was the recent release of the documentary, *"From Novel to Movie: The Yearling in Florida,"* produced by Friends of the MKR Farm Board members, Donna Green-Townsend and Kathyne Walkup Sheppard, that caught the eye of Dennis and Carol along with the invitation to Marjorie's Birthday Celebration that brought them to the park from their home in Ocala.



Scott Spaulding, Dennis and Carol Morgan  
Photo by Donna Green-Townsend



Lester (left) and Bill Piper in 1986 at the 50<sup>th</sup> Anniversary of Everglades Wonder Gardens  
Photo courtesy of Charles LeBuff

We soon learned Dennis moved to Bonita Springs with his family in 1951 from Dayton Ohio. Dennis was just 10 years old at the time. When he turned 12, he joined the Boy Scouts of America. His troop Leader was a game warden, and among other things introduced the boys to snakes, birds and other wildlife and took the troop camping out in the cypress swamps. Dennis greatly enjoyed spending time outdoors with his troop and that is when his love and appreciation of wildlife began.

When he turned 16 a friend of his, David Piper, Lester Piper's son, recruited Dennis to work at The Wonder Gardens. To Dennis it was a chance to work with the critters that he had grown fond of during his time in the Boy Scouts. His days were filled with feeding the animals, cleaning their cages, raking, and mowing. During his time at the Wonder Gardens, Dennis worked with Charles LeBuff who would eventually write the book he showed us when we first met during Marjorie's birthday celebration.

During our interview Dennis shared some fond memories. He described the Piper brothers as *"the toughest hombres you would ever meet, not afraid of anything, alligators, crocodiles...they were Jeremiah Johnson of Bonita Springs."*

(Continued on page 3)

**MEMBERS OF THE BOARD OF DIRECTORS**

*Officers 2024*

President: Scott Spaulding  
 Vice President:  
 Donna Green-Townsend  
 Secretary: Kathleen Pagan  
 Treasurer: Anne Pierce

**CSO Board of Directors**

Donna Green-Townsend  
 Kathleen Pagan  
 Anne Pierce  
 Tom Price  
 John Schaeffer  
 Kathlyne Walkup Sheppard  
 Scott Spaulding  
 Florence Turcotte  
 Barbara Wingo  
 Ryan Worthington

**Resource Advisory Members**

Dan Cantliffe  
 Roy Hunt  
 Murray Laurie  
 Michaelyn Luttge  
 Elaine Carson Spencer  
 Jim Stephens



The Friends of the Marjorie Kinnan Rawlings Farm, Inc., would like to encourage people to become more involved in our Citizen Support Organization. If you would like to volunteer with us or become active on our Board contact us at [mkrawlingsfarm@gmail.com](mailto:mkrawlingsfarm@gmail.com).

**BTW...**

If you missed the PBS broadcast of our documentary, *From Novel to Movie: The Yearling in Florida*, you can view it online by going to [PBS.org](http://PBS.org) and in the [search bar](#) or with the [search icon](#) type in the word *Yearling*



**Meet Daniel Cook, Our New Assistant Park Manager**

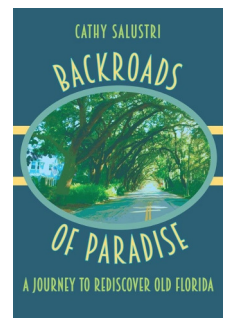
I grew up in Keystone Heights, Florida, enjoying being outdoors, studying American history, firefighting and aviation. I have many fun memories from earning Junior Ranger badges across the nation. At one point, one of my brothers and I divided up portions of the family yard into a series of parks. My earliest Florida Park Service “work” experiences came while reenacting at Olustee Battlefield Historic State Park and volunteering to help mop-up a fire at Mike Roess Gold Head Branch State Park. Several years later I took the opportunity to join the Florida Park Service District 2 PINE Team after completing a political science degree (chosen because it had the most American History related classes) and spending some time working for the Florida House of Representatives. During my time on the PINE team I visited every state park in District 2. Between stints on the PINE Team, brief positions with both the US Forest Service and Florida Forest Service provided me valuable experiences and training but lacked the chance to learn and share history with others. Eventually, I landed back home in the Florida Park Service at Gold Head where I served as Park Ranger and Burn Boss before accepting the Assistant Park Manager position here at Marjorie Kinnan Rawlings Historic State Park. My park service career so far has included five major storm cleanup details and almost 200 burns. I still love exploring our state and national parks with my family. Joy (my wife) and Junior (my year and a half old son) like to help around the farm. Junior especially enjoys seeing the “caw-caws” and “du-dus” (chickens and ducks) after visiting the playground and helps feed “CC” the farm cat some evenings.

**Upcoming Writers Talk**

Writers’ Talks at Rawlings House. Saturday, February 24<sup>th</sup>: Cathy Salustri, *Back Roads of Paradise—A Journey to Rediscover Old Florida*. Retracing routes followed by Federal Writers’ Project authors during the Great Depression, including Stetson Kennedy and Zora Neale Hurston, over the course of 5,000 miles Cathy Salustri conjures up the ultimate Florida road trip—often beautiful, sometimes bizarre, almost always exhilarating.



Meet and greet the author at 1:30pm;  
 Book talk at 2:00pm.  
 Free with regular park admission.  
 Marjorie Kinnan Rawlings Historic State Park,  
 S. County Road 325,  
 Cross Creek, FL. 32640.



(Continued from page 1)

He would later go on to tell us how Bill Piper came to Florida from Michigan. *"When Bill Piper left Wyandotte Michigan, he was nursing a bullet hole in his shoulder, and he was trying to get away from the Purple Gang whom he had an argument with just as prohibition was ending and he still had accumulated a lot of money,"* In case you have never heard of the Purple Gang, a little research on my part determined that they were a criminal mob of bootleggers and hi-jackers during the prohibition era in Michigan. Dennis continued, *"It was on his way to Florida that he stopped in Ocala and became friends with Ross Allen. I did research in old archives and found where Ross Allen's wife Virginia and Bill Piper's wife Frances bought property together where Ross Allen was making his exhibit. They bought it in the wives' names because Bill Piper didn't want to be traced. Then Ross and Bill went to South America collecting all kinds of animals. Bill worked with Ross Allen and actually that's where he got his love of wildlife, was from Ross Allen. He wound up going to Bonita Springs and settled there and eventually the other brother (Lester) came down."* Bill began collecting animals and displaying them and after a while turned his attraction into the Everglades Wonder Gardens.

Now about the bear...remember this story is about the bear? Sometime after opening the Wonder Gardens, as Dennis remembers the story being told to him, *"A guy walks in with a gunny sack that had three little bears in this gunny sack. The bears were named Tom, Dick, and Harry."* After three months it became Tom, Dick and Harriet and Tom became Slewfoot in the movie *The Yearling*.



Bill Piper giving Tom the Bear a Pepsi-Cola Photo courtesy of Charles LeBuff

Although Tom was a captive bear from a cub and was trained by Bill Piper to work in the movie, he was definitely a handful. As Dennis remembers, Bill received 27 stitches from an injury inflicted by Tom after Bill took a bottle of Pepsi cola away from him. In fact, it was Pepsi Cola that was used to prompt Tom to perform his scene during the movie. As Dennis tells it, *"During the filming of the bear scene, they knew they would only have one take, so Bill stood outside the enclosure with Tom inside and held up a bottle of Pepsi and called for Tom. So Tom came running out of the cage to get his Pepsi. At that time they released the dogs, so the bear forgot about Bill and the Pepsi because he was being chased by dogs. The bear ran right over top of Bill and knocked him down and the camera shot was just above and so that part was not in the movie, but the bear knocked him down on the way to get away from the dogs."*

Tom continued celebrity status after the movie came out as Dennis recalls, *"I wasn't there but several times they wanted the bear. When The Yearling came out, they showed it at a local drive-in movie and Charles and David Piper, which was Larry Piper's son, put him in a trailer with a cage in it so when the movie came out the public could go to the drive-in and see the movie and meet the bear."*

Dennis, who was even the daily caretaker of Tom the bear for a time, recalls a particular scary episode involving the bear when the Florida Game and Fresh Water Fish Commission wanted to include the bear for an exhibit they were having in Fort Myers. They were cautioned about not sticking fingers in the cage while moving it, but one of the game wardens who was helping had an injured finger which could not be bent. When he helped unload the cage, he accidentally stuck his finger between the metal bars and Tom took it right off.

Bill Piper died in 1989 of natural causes. His brother Lester died in 1992 following an unsuccessful heart procedure. Lester's grandson David ran the zoo for 30 more years, but eventually the Everglades Wonder Gardens was acquired by the City of Bonita Springs in 2015. It is still operated as a botanical garden and zoo proclaiming, "A cultural icon, the Wonder Gardens stands as one of the few remaining cornerstones of old Florida." The book, *Everglades Wildlife Barons*, written by Charles LeBuff is now only available at the Bonita Springs Wonder Gardens.



Photo courtesy of Charles LeBuff

So, if you would like to learn more about the adventurous and fascinating life of the Piper Brothers, be sure to check it out. LeBuff's most recent book, *A Pictorial History of Everglades Wonder Gardens, Bonita Springs, Florida* (available in bookstores (SW FL) and Amazon).



David Thomas Piper (Lester Piper's son) Photo Courtesy of Charles LeBuff

(Continued from page 3)

Well, we certainly enjoyed our visit with Dennis and Carol Morgan. We especially enjoyed learning all about another ripple in time created by Marjorie so many years ago.

Another interesting ripple which followed the recent broadcast showings of *From Novel to Movie: The Yearling in Florida* came from a phone call and email from the grandson of Melvin Long from the Tampa area. As you may recall, Melvin Long is the man who raised an orphaned deer when he was a boy in the "Big Scrub" of the Ocala National Forest and inspired Rawlings to write her novel. See more about this ripple in Donna's article on page 6.



Photo courtesy of Charles LeBuff

## 25th Annual Marjorie Kinnan Rawlings Conference, Mount Dora, FL, May 3-4, 2024

The Marjorie Kinnan Rawlings Society will hold its 25th Annual Marjorie Kinnan Rawlings Conference in Mount Dora, FL, at the Lakeside Inn on Friday, May 3, and Saturday, May 4. Information about the conference and registration may be found on the MKR Society web site: <https://rawlingssociety.org>. Featured speakers include Cynthia Barnett and Rick Kirby as well as our own Donna Green-Townsend and Kathlyne Walkup Sheppard who produced the documentary: *From Novel to Movie: The Yearling*, in Florida airing on PBS. The documentary was supported with funding from the Friends of the MKR Farm.

## Ora's Deep Lament- inspired by Marjorie Kinnan Rawlings' character Ora Baxter in *The Yearling*

<https://youtu.be/cxJaK8MsLF4?si=Mn3dnjcoOXyNAXnQ>

The Pulitzer Prize-winning novel, *The Yearling* by the late Marjorie Kinnan Rawlings, inspired this poem/song and media project by native Marion County Florida artist, Kathlyne Walkup Sheppard. In the video produced by Donna Green-Townsend, Jessie Townsend Armstrong is the vocalist accompanied by composer Sheppard on piano.

Ora's Deep Lament honors Kathlyne Walkup Sheppard's Great-Grandmother Nancy Lenora Sewell who buried five children who died from typhus in 1904. Sheppard wants to remember her Great-Grandmother's faith, love and compassion to care for others.

In *The Yearling* novel by Marjorie Kinnan Rawlings, the character, Ora Baxter, experienced the loss of several children during Florida's early history in the Florida Scrub.

Video locations included the Silver and Ocklawaha Rivers, Juniper and Silver Glen Springs and the Marjorie Kinnan Rawlings Historic State Park and the following cemeteries: Long, Gore and the Fred Tompkins Cemeteries in Marion and Alachua Counties.



## ORA'S DEEP LAMENT

Kathlyne Walkup Sheppard 23 June, 2022

*She laid her babes 'neath sandy soil  
Among the pines so tall.  
Their hands she folded o'er each breast  
Their eyelids she did close.  
A muslin shroud enfolded each  
Within the coffin crude,  
The wild Scrub flow'rs so sweet and dear  
'Twas Ora's twined bouquet.*

*One by one she buried them  
As seasons came and went.  
The little ones they did not live  
And one, he took no breath.  
Frail sickly children they was born  
To th' Savior she did plead,  
As angels hovered over them  
She sang this woeful song.*

### Chorus

*And oft she went and there did trod  
The path that sorrow made.  
Among the ferns she took her pause  
And prayed for ease of heart.  
She did recall each tiny soul  
And spake each bornin' name;  
The wild-flow-ers she laid them down,  
She laid them gently down...*

*There was no choir nor epithet,  
No life they could exalt.  
There only was one comfort known  
In this vast wilderness.  
As eagles soared high in the sky  
Above the cabin crude  
The black crow called his mournin' cry  
While the lonely Whippoorwill sang.*

*And each dark night a doe comes near  
And searches for her fawn;  
And from the Glen to Pat's Island  
'Neath black jack, pine and oak,  
Two mothers guard their sleepin' babes  
So young, so sweet, so still...  
Creation groans while swells the song  
Of Ora's deep lament.*

### Chorus

*And oft she went and there did trod  
The path that sorrow made.  
Among the ferns she took her pause  
And prayed for ease of heart.  
She did recall each tiny soul  
And spake each bornin' name;  
The wild-flow-ers she laid them down,  
She laid them gently down.*

## WHAT "ORA'S DEEP LAMENT" IS ABOUT AND HOW I WAS INSPIRED TO WRITE IT



In the process of making the documentary, *From Novel to Movie: The Yearling in Florida*, Donna Green-Townsend and I worked and shared many hours of conversation together. As more information emerged following the project's completion, our conversations triggered thoughts and musings about the experiences each of the main characters had. I thought about young Jody's angst and travails from having a pet deer whose uncontrollable wild behavior wreaked constant destruction on the garden. My mind imagined Penny Baxter's perseverance and courage as he dealt with the rattlesnake bite, the dogs and hunting old Slewfoot. Most of all though, I thought about Ora Baxter and the domestic hardship, isolation, loneliness and grief that she bore without the comfort of family, female relationships, medical or pastoral care in the deep Scrub. Her frequent visits to the family burial plot and the childrens' crudely marked graves haunted me...and then they inspired me to put pen to paper and scratch out the words that rushed tumbling from my brain.

Simultaneously, my Great-Grandmother Nancy Lenora Sewell died before I was born, but her character, courage and the stories Mother told me as a child still inspire. She was heroic in my eyes because of her dedication and devotion to family. I discovered her family's great loss and some of their graves during the documentary production process and Grandma Sewell's story and childrens' graves are an indelible imprint on my heart. The time period, the hardships and circumstances of living in the Big Scrub are so similar to the lives upon which Marjorie Kinnan Rawlings drew the inspiration to write *The Yearling*, her most memorable novel. The same strong characters and the spirit of my Great Grandmother Nancy Lenora Sewell have brought forth the lyrics and music for "Ora's Deep Lament." I must thank Donna Green-Townsend who encouraged, nudged and then patiently pushed a song from my heart, pen, and piano and made me believe it had beauty, meaning, and purpose.

# The Ripple Effect

By Donna Green-Townsend

In keeping with the “ripple theme” Scott Spaulding mentioned earlier in the newsletter, we were thrilled to receive communication last fall from Robert Melvin Long, the grandson of Melvin Long who inspired *The Yearling* story. Robert, who lives in the Tampa area, had heard about our documentary, *From Novel to Movie: The Yearling in Florida* and wanted to know how he could view it.

As you may recall, Melvin Long was the brother of Calvin Long in the “Big Scrub” in the Ocala National Forest. Calvin Long shared many Florida stories with Marjorie Rawlings back in the 1930s, including the story of a boy raising an orphaned deer. That boy was his younger brother Melvin who raised the pet deer.

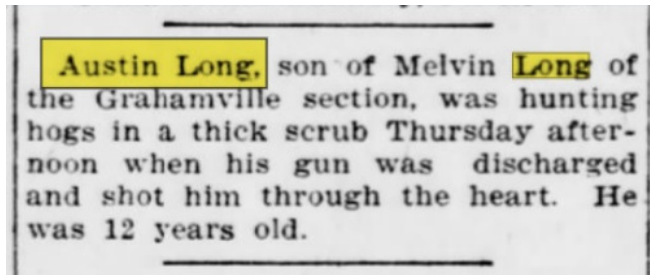


Photo courtesy of the Juniper Springs Hunt Club

Tragically and ironically, Melvin’s oldest son, Austin, died during a deer hunting trip in 1907. Robert Long shared the sad news article posted after the accident.



Melvin Long working as a hunting guide in 1909. Photo courtesy of his grandson Robert Melvin Long



Born 12/24/1891  
Died 11/13/1907

Though the newspaper article says Robert Austin Long died at the age of 12, his tombstone shows he died just before his 16th birthday.



## Photos from the John Hemingway Writer's Talk from Saturday, Nov. 4th, 2023





Goodness Snakes Alive!



Photos from the December 2nd Annual Meeting December 2, 2023 and the Holiday Event on December 9th



A Very Merry Holiday Event

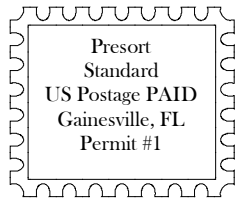


LIFETIME MEMBERS

- Gimmy and Gunter Arndt
- Judy Baker
- Kate Barnes
- Sheila Barnes
- Catherine Beazley
- Diane E. Beck
- Roger and Linda Blackburn
- Robert Blauer
- Sybil Ann Brennan
- Mary W. Bridgman
- Arden Brugger
- Dan Cantliffe
- Ginger and Kevin Carter
- Norma Davis
- Patricia Ann Davis
- Sheila Dickison
- Barbara E. DuPont
- John and Balinda Ferree
- Sue Gaintner
- Ordy Greenly
- Ronald Haase
- Robert E. Haines
- J. C. Harrell
- Judith Harris
- Candace Henderson
- Mrs. Nathan V. Hendricks, III
- Sheila Holloway
- John and Phyllis Holmgren
- Roy Hunt
- Claude and Katie Jarman
- Deanne Clark & William H. Jeter, Jr.
- Ashley Jordan
- Brenda Keith
- Mary J. Kelly
- Shirley Kiser
- Richard Knellinger, P.A.
- Angel Kwolek-Folland
- Murray Laurie
- Shirley Lucas
- Michaelyn Luttge
- Colleen, Frank and Lana Mahoney
- Janet Matthews
- Ruth Maughan
- Judith McFadden
- Mary Lisa McGaughan
- Robert D. McReynolds
- Eleanor Merritt
- Elinor N. Midgett
- W.L. Miller
- James R. Nici
- David Nolan
- Rebecca Nullier
- Spence Perry
- Marsha Dean Phelts
- Margaret Anne Pierce
- Liz Pooley
- A.L. Rhinehart
- Art & Edda Ross
- Tom and Luisa Sheer
- Martha Steward
- Angela Territo
- Shirley Thompson
- M. List Underwood, Jr.
- Pamela Lydick Whiting
- Colleen Whitlock
- Barbara Wingo

CORPORATE MEMBERS

- Blackadder Brewers (Life)
- Blue Highway Pizzeria
- Dancing Cows Ranch
- Florida Backwoods Travel.com



Friends of the Marjorie Kinnan Rawlings Farm, Inc.  
 P.O. Box 337  
 Micanopy, FL 32667-0337



**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.  
 Visit [www.marjoriekinnanrawlings.org](http://www.marjoriekinnanrawlings.org) to join or renew or you may fill out and send a check with the form below.  
 If your membership is current, we thank you!

**Mark Your Calendar!**

(updated regularly, please check website [www.marjoriekinnanrawlings.org](http://www.marjoriekinnanrawlings.org))

<b>Saturday, February 24th</b>	1:30pm	Writer's Talk— Back Roads of Paradise—A Journey to Rediscover Old Florida. Book signing at 1:30pm, Presentation at 2pm
<b>Friday/Saturday May 3-4</b>		25th Annual Marjorie Kinnan Rawlings Conference, Mount Dora, FL (See announcement on page 4)
<b>Saturday, August 10th</b>	TBA	Marjorie Kinnan Rawlings BIRTHDAY PARTY

*All events will be held at the Marjorie Kinnan Rawlings Historic State Park unless otherwise noted*

**Membership Information**

Effective September 1, 2021 new membership dues are as follows

Type	1yr	3yr	5yr	10yr	Lifetime
<b>Individual</b>	\$30	\$85	\$140	\$270	\$ 500
<b>Family</b>	\$35	\$100	\$165	\$320	\$ 600
<b>Educational</b>	\$35	\$100	\$165	\$320	\$ 600
<b>Corporate</b>	\$60	\$175	\$290	\$570	\$1,000

*Effective 9/1/2021*

Please circle type of membership and send with your check to:  
**Friends of the MKRawlings Farm, Inc.**  
 P.O. Box 337  
 Micanopy, FL 32667-0337

or visit our website at [marjoriekinnanrawlings.org](http://marjoriekinnanrawlings.org)  
 to join or renew your membership online

**Membership in the Friends of the Marjorie Kinnan Rawlings Farm, Inc.**

We invite you to join or renew your membership in the Citizen Support Organization (CSO) for the Marjorie Kinnan Rawlings Historic State Park. Friends of the Marjorie Kinnan Rawlings Farm, Inc., is a 501(c)(3) nonprofit organization. All contributions are tax deductible. A copy of the official registration and financial information may be obtained from the Florida Division of Consumer Services by calling 1-800-435-7352 (toll-free within Florida). Registration does not imply endorsement, approval, or recommendation by the State.

Name \_\_\_\_\_

Address \_\_\_\_\_

City/State/Zip \_\_\_\_\_

Phone \_\_\_\_\_

Email \_\_\_\_\_

Comments:

*\*\*Please Note: Our dues structure was updated September 2021\*\**