

ARTS & ENTERTAINMENT

on tv

A journey into Florida's past

A new documentary follows in the wake of a Marjorie Kinnan Rawlings trip.

By **HAL BOEDEKER**
SENTINEL TELEVISION CRITIC

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 hour program, which premieres at 9 tonight on WMFChannel 24, 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 overlay 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, the president of the Marjorie Kinnan Rawlings Historical Society, says in the program. "She inspired a nation."

Prescott said their trip took 10



BILL RANDOLPH

Leslie Poole (left) and Jennifer Chase follow the St. Johns River — and a journey once taken by Marjorie Kinnan Rawlings.



RAWLINGS



PRESCOTT

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 *Sentinel* reporter, retraced the 1933 trip with 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 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. "They were not friends before they started. We wanted to bring two women together and see how that experience would bond them. They are great friends."

Chase supplies the film's original music. Belleville chose pas-

sages 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."

The film comes from Equinox Documentaries, a nonprofit corporation. Poole sits on the Equinox board.

"We were looking at things to illustrate the mission of our organization: connecting people to our environment," says Giguere, who is president of Equinox. "Leslie is the one who had that experience. What better way to share it with a wide audience?"

The program has been released to Florida PBS stations. "There will be a national distribution," Giguere says. "PBS is our first option, but the deal is not signed."

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