

Introduction

One can label Marjory Stoneman Douglas in several ways: defender of the Everglades, the hat lady, protector of endangered egrets and flamingos, “speechifier” (her own word) at public meetings, novelist, befriender of cats, teacher at Miami Dade Community College, newspaper reporter. Seven years ago, in editing *Nine Florida Stories by Marjory Stoneman Douglas*, I endeavored to add another title to her distinguished career: short-story writer.

At that time, many readers were pleasantly surprised to discover that Douglas had written almost four dozen short stories from 1924 to 1943, many of them published in *The Saturday Evening Post*. Although best known for her seminal work on south Florida (*The Everglades: River of Grass* [1947]), she also wrote other nonfiction (*Hurricane* [1958, 1976], *Florida: The Long Frontier* [1967], and *The Joys of Bird Watching in Florida* [1969]), three novels (*Road to the Sun* [1952], *Freedom River* [1953], and *Alligator Crossing* [1959]), two plays (*The Gallows Gate* [1931] and *The Grandfather* [n.d.]), and occasional poetry.

When I first met Ms. Douglas in 1988, her autobiography, *Marjory Stoneman Douglas: Voice of the River* (henceforth *Voice*), had just been published in 1987. In that work she explained much of her career, especially her work as a newspaper reporter in Miami and her concern over environmental problems in south Florida. When she mentioned her short stories, I went back to the early copies of the *Post* and collected some of them. Just in time for her centennial birthday, I reissued them with commentary and some drawings.

Shortly before I finished editing this collection, Ms. Douglas died at 108. While slowed down by poor eyesight and various ailments in her last

years, she was still concerned about her beloved Dade County. She saw more of Florida's history in the last century than probably any other living person. She lived that history, wrote about it, and did more to save this peninsula for future generations than perhaps any other individual. These stories, published in the first part of the century, will help Floridians and non-Floridians know more about the Miami area Douglas watched grow from a small town of some five thousand people in 1915 to the huge megalopolis it is today.

Her efforts have made many people, from ordinary citizens to government officials, understand the fragility of south Florida. If it is true that approximately nine hundred people a day move to Florida, these newcomers must be made aware of the state's environmental concerns, especially the conservation of its fresh water. Probably no other person has been as important to the environmental well-being of Florida than this little lady from Coconut Grove. She taught others about the environment through her writing, including the short stories presented here. Future generations of Floridians and visitors will have much to thank her for.

"At Home on the Marcel Waves"

Saturday Evening Post, June 14, 1924

This story from early in Douglas's writing career represents a turning point. After suffering nervous exhaustion in her reporter's job at the *Miami Herald* in 1924, she temporarily left Miami and went up to her family's home in Taunton, Massachusetts, to recover. There she decided to write short stories for the *Saturday Evening Post*, whose editor was George Harris Lorimer. But first, she set herself the task of finding out what kind of story would sell. As she explained in her autobiography:

That summer in Taunton I sat down and deliberately studied the kind of story I thought Mr. Lorimer liked. I decided he generally liked a success story with a noble main character, tangled up with a little sex and a few cuss words thrown in. A perfect opening for a Lorimer story was something like: "Hell," said the Duchess, "Take your hand off my knee." I concocted a story about a beauty parlor owned by an old gal named Augusta who'd been a stewardess on a ship. She ran her beauty parlor in nautical language.

I hesitate to admit this, but I might as well make a clean breast of it—the story was called “At Home on the Marseilles Waves.” I sent it to Mr. Hardy [her New York agent] and he sent it to Mr. Lorimer and Mr. Lorimer took it. The only thing he didn’t like was how it ended. I worked out a more melodramatic end, but that wasn’t any good, either. Finally I did something that Mr. Hardy called “more natural” and whatever it was, Mr. Lorimer accepted it. It was a great moment in my life. (*Voice*, 169–70)

Douglas changed the story from Marseilles to Marcel, but kept the “waves” in the title, which were not the maritime kind, although that would have been appropriate for the protagonist’s nautical background, but the hairdressing kind. The marcel was a deep-grooved wave made by a curling iron. This once-popular hairstyle took its name from Marcel Grateau (1852–1936), the French hairdresser who developed it.

Following are terms that may need explanation: *tea dancers* are dancers at afternoon teas, a rite that was supposed to replace the alcoholic parties forbidden by Prohibition; *petrolatum color* is a yellow color derived from petroleum; a *supercargo* is the person on a merchant ship in charge of the commercial aspects of the voyage; *Methusalem* probably refers to Methuselah, one of the Old Testament patriarchs who supposedly lived for nine hundred years; a *sea cow* is a manatee, which is an aquatic mammal that feeds primarily on vegetation in the water; *dowager landaulets* are small four-wheeled covered vehicles pulled by horses; *H.R.H. Hamlet* stands for His Royal Highness Hamlet, from Shakespeare’s *Hamlet*; a *Byronic low collar* is a type of collar associated with the English poet George Gordon, Lord Byron (1788–1824); *quinine* is an alkaloid drug used to treat malaria and other diseases; and *gimlets* are small tools with screw points used to bore holes. There was no Great Biscayne Hotel in Miami in the early 1920s, but there was a Hotel Biscayne at 334 12th Street.

“Solid Mahogany”
Saturday Evening Post, June 20, 1925

Cocolobo Key is fictional, but the setting of the story is near Key Largo, south of Miami. Two of the sites mentioned in this story, Caesar’s Creek and Caesar’s Rock, refer to sites north of Key Largo associated with an infamous pirate, Black Caesar. Legend has it that

Caesar was an African slave who escaped from a sinking slave ship, made his way to the area, and lived there from around 1705 until 1715. During that time he preyed on ships passing offshore, attracting other pirates to his hideout and causing much trouble for ships they stopped. He eventually joined the notorious pirate Blackbeard, later losing his life with him off the coast of Virginia.

Several stories have persisted about the area where this story takes place. The first story, one associated with many Florida islands, is that pirates buried treasure on the islands. This has never been proven. The second is that Black Caesar had a prison camp on nearby Elliott Key, where his prisoners were kept in stone huts and allowed to starve to death when Black Caesar joined Blackbeard. The third story is that some of Black Caesar's children stayed behind and subsisted on berries and shell-
• sh. *Black Caesar's Clan* (1922), by Albert Payson Terhune, is a novel about his descendants, who developed their own language and customs and kept inquisitive strangers away.

Mr. Watkins, the botanist in "Solid Mahogany," clearly resembles David Fairchild, a well-known botanist who traveled around the world collecting tropical plants, which he brought back to what became known as Fairchild Garden near Miami. Douglas wrote, "David Fairchild was one of the people who stimulated my interest in local flora and fauna, which in turn stimulated my interest in the Everglades" (*Voice*, 130).

The main piece of nature in this story, Jamie's tree, is mahogany: "True mahogany, as good as all the Jamaican mahogany that was ever grown—and not just for furniture—for cities." Such wood grows in tropical and semitropical areas, like southern Florida, and is valued not only for its beauty but also for its ability to resist abrasion and warping.

Following are terms that may need explanation: a *Dutch cap* is a hat, worn by Dutch children, that has points on the side; a *hammock* (sometimes spelled *hummock*) is a low mound of earth; *Pobble* is a nickname for the baby, perhaps related to *pobby*, meaning swollen, puffed up; *scintillance* means sparkling, shining brightly; and *verbena soap* is soap scented with the herb verbena.

“Goodness Gracious, Agnes”

Saturday Evening Post, October 17, 1925

The first part of this story provides a glimpse of early Miami’s party scene, which Douglas knew well from her days as society editor for the *Miami Herald*, the newspaper her father, Frank Bryant Stoneman, began in 1906. Her position on the newspaper gave her some income, the chance to write, opportunities to know the city well, and a closeness to her father. The job, however, was difficult in the summertime, when the Miami social scene died down. She eventually resigned from the paper after growing tired of the constant pressure to produce a column under a deadline.

One of the expressions in this story, “Muzzle not the ox that treadeth out the corn,” is from the Old Testament (Deut. 25:4) and means one should not hinder or harass people or animals that are doing their job correctly.

“The champion milker of the Flower State” is a reference to one of Florida’s nicknames. When Spanish explorer Ponce de Leon arrived off the Florida peninsula in 1513 during Easter season, he named the new land Pascua de Flores, the Spanish name for Easter.

There is a reference in the story to ancient times. At one point, Mr. Perkin notes, “If I’d known about the way Cato the Elder handled that Carthage affair, I could have broken the cold-storage combine two years earlier.” Cato the Elder (234–149 b.c.) was a Roman statesman who fought in the Second Punic War against Carthage in North Africa. When he returned to Carthage in his old age, he was so appalled by the Carthaginians’ customs and ways that he urged the Roman Senate to destroy Carthage once and for all, which is what happened in the Third Punic War.

The Tamiami Trail is a highway that links Tampa to Miami through the Everglades. The highway, whose name is a melding of the two cities’ names, was officially opened in 1928. Douglas knew the road well, having spent mornings with friends at the end of it watching the sunrise. Unfortunately, the highway cut the flow of water to the wetlands to the south and caused much of the Everglades to dry out, deeply affecting the weather patterns of south Florida.

The last part of this story is about a practice in the more isolated parts of Florida: a wildcat-dog fight. The strong stand Agnes takes against

the men gathered for the fight reminds one of Douglas, who has spent much of her career protecting the flora and fauna of the Everglades. As she wrote in her autobiography: “I’ve spent a great deal of time in recent years trying to protect animals from the hunters, as well as from the general stupidity of certain government officials supposedly on their side—including those who collar panthers” (*Voice*, 239).

“A River in Flood”

Saturday Evening Post, april 3, 1926

Douglas wrote “A River in Flood” during Prohibition. As Hugh knows in this story, “one bold gesture, one load of liquor from Bimini, would make them both independent.” Although many rumrunners successfully made the run to and from Bimini with contraband liquor, those caught were punished by jail and fines. “Twenty Minutes Late for Dinner” (*Nine Florida Stories*) deals with liquor smuggling in south Florida.

The setting of this story is probably the Miami River, although it is not mentioned by name. Early developers had dynamited the rapids of that river near its mouth, an act Douglas’s father thought was the beginning of the city’s growth, since it allowed ships to enter the harbor. But the dynamiting also led to the accumulation of silt and muck in Biscayne Bay, which led to the decline of its beauty.

Douglas could see the river from her room in her father’s house. When her friend Hervey Allen, author of the successful novel *Anthony Adverse*, was made editor of Rinehart and Company’s *Rivers of America* series, he asked Douglas to write a book about the Miami River as part of the series. Her reply: “Hervey, you can’t write a book about the Miami River. It’s only about an inch long” (*Voice*, 190). But on the spur of the moment, she suggested to Allen that the Miami River might be part of the Everglades, which might therefore make a more interesting book. Allen agreed, and Douglas was hooked on the topic that would consume her for the rest of her life and lead her to making a lasting contribution to the state’s conservation efforts. Her book *Everglades: River of Grass* was published in 1947, the same year the Everglades National Park was founded.

Words and phrases that may need to be explained are *skyey blanket*, which is a blanket like the sky, and *martinet*, a rigid military disciplinarian.

“The Mayor of Flamingo”
Saturday Evening Post, april 24, 1926

This story touches on the lawlessness associated with parts of south Florida, especially the Florida Keys. Pirates used to roam the waters off the keys, and it was not until Commodore David Porter led a concerted effort against them in the 1820s that the area was finally rid of them.

The violence of isolated Florida towns up until recent decades is reflected in the nickname of one of the main characters: “Two-Gun Gumbs.” In the nearby settlement of Chokoloskee Island, one of the area’s most notorious criminals, Ed Watson, was gunned down by a mob that was afraid of and disgusted with him. Peter Matthiessen wrote about that homicide in his novel *Killing Mister Watson*, and Douglas wrote about the lawlessness of the island in “By Violence” (*Nine Florida Stories*, 122–43).

Flamingo, according to Allen Morris’s *Florida Place Names*, used to be the southernmost town on the mainland of the continental United States. The local people named the settlement in 1893 after one of the distinctive birds that makes its home in the nearby Everglades. Flamingos are not native to south Florida; many of them flew there from Cuba and the Bahamas. Plume hunters decimated the flocks of flamingos so drastically that only several hundred remained in the early part of this century. Douglas wrote about the wanton slaughter of such birds in “Plumes” (*Nine Florida Stories*, 97–121).

Morris notes that one writer thought the name of the town was appropriate because of all the long-legged houses, structures that were built on stilts to protect them from the occasional floodwaters that inundate the area.

Another place mentioned in the story, Cape Sable, is on a cape that juts into the Gulf of Mexico. The word *sable* in Spanish means *saber*, and the place-name may refer to the shape of the cape, which resembles a curved cavalry sword.

A third place-name, Spanish Main, may have come from the phrase “Spanish Mainland,” which referred to the northern coast of South America. In time the name came to designate parts of the Spanish colonial empire in the Western Hemisphere from the sixteenth through the

eighteenth centuries. Because pirates preyed on ships in that area, it became associated with piracy in the minds of many, including Mr. Pinsher in this story.

Following are terms that may need explanation: a *demijohn* is a large, narrow-necked glass or bottle; *orotund* means sonorous; a *Palm Beach suit* is an elegant, white suit; and *ramping* means to move furiously or violently.

“Stepmother”

Saturday Evening Post, June 4, 1927

Like many of Douglas’s early stories, this one is about a strong woman from New England who has to cope with difficult circumstances in south Florida, which is very autobiographical in Douglas’s case: “It was her grim New England feeling that nothing was any good until it had demonstrated its ability to live through hardship.” The financial difficulties of the protagonist’s stepson are brought on partly by the inability of many buyers of the stepson’s real estate to make their payments. Douglas touched on the problem of the rampant buying-selling-buying-reselling of real estate in the area in her short story “A Bird Dog in the Hand” (*Nine Florida Stories*, 25–48).

Part of the “difficult circumstances” in this story is the aftermath of a hurricane. Miami had just experienced the 1926 hurricane that caused extensive damage and did much to end the rampant, out-of-control development of the area. Douglas went on to write a long book on the subject, *Hurricanes* (Rinehart, 1958), which was reissued in a shorter form by Mockingbird Books in 1976. Douglas believed the strict building regulations enacted by the city of Miami to help prevent widespread hurricane damage were due partly to her book and the awareness she aroused in Dade County about the effects of such storms.

The unexpected ending to the story, including Mrs. Moreton’s final treatment of her stepson and the aftermath of her night on the town, adds a dramatic denouement. It also offers a good contrast to Douglas’s less successful novels, such as *Road to the Sun* (1952), *Freedom River* (1953), and *Alligator Crossing* (1959). She felt her years of writing succinct short stories for the *Saturday Evening Post* made her more successful at writing

short fiction rather than long.

“You Got to Go—But You Don’t Have to Come Back”

Saturday Evening Post, August 26, 1933

Much of this story deals with the Coast Guard planes operated out of Miami on search-and-rescue missions. Douglas asserts that the motto of the Coast Guard and its aviation division is “You got to go, but you don’t have to come back.” This is not accurate. The motto of the Coast Guard is *Semper Paratus* (Always Ready). According to Arthur Percy’s *A History of U.S. Coast Guard Aviation*, the expression (“The rules say we have to go—but there is no rule that says we have to come back”) is “a time-honored Coast Guard adage.”

In 1932, one year before this story was published in the *Post*, the Coast Guard commissioned its air station in Miami at Dinner Key in the southeast corner of Coconut Grove as its first contemporary aviation unit. The unit, which moved to Opa Locka airport in 1965, became the busiest air-sea rescue unit in the world. Miami was the gateway to the Caribbean and South America; many inter-island ships sailed in its offshore waters; many airlines served the area; and thousands of pleasure yachts used its waters, especially the dangerous Gulf Stream.

The name of the airplane, *Aldebaran*, refers to the brightest star in the Hyades, a cluster of stars in the constellation Taurus. This name is appropriate for a Coast Guard plane since ancient astronomers thought the constellation Taurus was associated with rainy weather. Other Coast Guard planes named after stars include *Altair*, *Antares*, *Bellatrix*, and *Sirius*.

Percy’s history of Coast Guard aviation notes that “the US Coast Guard in the thirties was able to make use of one of those fascinating peacetime luxuries that are normally limited to small organizations—the naming of individual aircraft. This practice was so common that many official Coast Guard communications, and nearly all press releases and newspaper stories, referred only to the name of the aircraft.”

“High-goal Man”

Saturday Evening Post, March 9, 1933

While one can find references to New England in many of Douglas’s

short stories—the New England–sounding place-names or the references to New England values—this particular story mentions a place she knew well: Taunton, Massachusetts. After Douglas’s parents split up in 1896, when she was six, her mother took her to Taunton to live with her grandparents. Douglas spent her formative years there and maintained a love for the area her whole life. She dedicated her 1987 autobiography “To Massachusetts, with love” and usually had fond words to say about the state.

When her Aunt Fanny died in Taunton in 1938, Douglas had to return to dispose of the family’s furniture and sell the house she grew up in. Real estate was not doing well in Taunton, and it took two years to sell the house. Once it sold, she left Taunton never to return.

Following are a few facts about polo, which is a main part of the story. The game is usually played outdoors by teams of four on horseback. The field is two hundred yards wide and three hundred yards long. The match, which usually lasts about an hour, has eight periods, called “chukkers,” of seven-and-a-half or eight minutes each, with a short intermission between periods. The object of the game is to hit the ball through the opponents’ goal. The “leather” in one part of the story (“I could see Larry mount and dismount or stand around watching his groom alter a leather”) refers to the stirrup leather.

A referee, who is also on horseback, assesses penalties—which include disqualification, automatic goals, or free hits—for illegal use of the mallet, carrying the ball, or dangerous riding. The polo ponies are usually small, agile, and fast. Polo is basically a rich person’s sport.

Following are words to be explained: a *loggia* is a roofed, open gallery along the side of a building; a *tonneau* is an automobile, especially its rear part, or a cart; and a *martingale* is the strap of a horse’s harness that connects the girth to the noseband and prevents the horse from throwing back its head.

“Wind before Morning”

Saturday Evening Post, June 8, 1935

While most of Douglas’s fiction takes place in Dade and Monroe Counties, this story occurs in the Palm Beach area. As is true of others who write about Palm Beach—Theodore Pratt, Ring Lardner, and Pat Booth, for example—the residents’ rich, almost decadent lifestyle is

often lampooned. The protagonist, Marian Carleton, is one more in a long line of Douglas heroines: strong, independent women from New England who have to face difficult times in south Florida.

The Gulf Stream, which is mentioned in the story and is a major concern for boaters crossing it, is an ocean current flowing north from the Gulf of Mexico along the east coast of Florida and other southeastern states that eventually merges with the North Atlantic Drift. Navigating the waters off eastern Florida is challenging for mariners. In order to avoid the north-flowing Gulf Stream, ships usually sail south on the narrow strip of cold water between the Gulf Stream and the Florida mainland. If they veer too far to the east, they hit the Gulf Stream. If they veer too far to the west, they risk danger of shipwreck from the sandbars and reefs.

The story title may refer to both the dissolute dancers of Palm Beach's party scene ("She had heard some of them come in after dawn") and the gale forces Hatcher must have experienced ("Wind and ocean howled all about in black hours, with their unremitting, their heightened terror").

