

## *Beginnings: The Early Love Letters of Marjorie Kinnan Rawlings, 1918-1923*

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The papers of Marjorie Kinnan Rawlings, left to the University of Florida by her will, have long been a treasure of the Libraries. Upon transfer of the papers, however, a request was made that the correspondence between Rawlings and first husband Charles be sealed until his death and that of her second husband, Norton Baskin. Following Mr. Baskin's death in 1997, these letters were opened, an inventory compiled, and the correspondence is now available for use by researchers. They are the principal, primary source for the story of Charles and Marjorie's courtship and for a brief period of their marriage.

Correspondence between Charles and Marjorie chronicles two periods of separation. The first was the summer and fall of 1918, after both had left the University of Wisconsin and while he was in service during World War I. The second time was in 1922-23, while Charles and Marjorie, then married, were separated because of his long business trips. Following graduation, Charles spent most of the summer in Madison, which was also Marjorie's home. In August, Charles returned to his hometown of Rochester and attempted to enlist in the Army. Initially rejected because of a *twisty leg* resulting

from an automobile accident, he apparently pulled strings with his local draft board and was accepted.

As bad luck would have it, his induction coincided with the time that Marjorie, on her way east to try to start a literary career in New York, was to stop in Rochester and visit the Rawlings family. The future looked bright: Marjorie would be in New York and Charles would be at Camp Upton, a mere two hours away, on Long Island. Two hours became two months as their plans for reunion were repeatedly foiled due to an influenza quarantine imposed upon the camp.

The letters from these two months and the ones that followed are filled with the euphoria of love and the misery of separation. They are also filled with the difficulties of Marjorie's finding a job and her initial unhappiness while working as a clerk for the YWCA. The letters reflect the tensions of military service, the fear of influenza, and family relations. Whereas Charles's parents adored Marjorie to the point that she feared suffocation, Marjorie's mother, Ida Kinnan, detested Charles.

Charles and Marjorie argued frequently, but made up quickly. The most intense blowup occurred late in October, 1918 when Charles announced that although the quarantine was lifted, he would still not come to the city for two weeks. Marjorie took this as an act of rejection and fueled by examples of *cynicism* in Charles's recent letters, and other grievances, she wrote an intensely angry letter, which, in turn, deeply hurt Charles. The relationship seemed terminated, but again love prevailed. Charles apparently managed to get to New York the following weekend, a little sooner than expected.

Charles's wartime participation was short. The Armistice was signed in November and by the first week in December, he was discharged and back in Rochester. The plan that developed was that he would stay in Rochester until Christmas, when Marjorie would come to visit, and together they would return to New York where Charles was to seek his own career.

They did so and were married the following May. By 1922, however, they were living in Rochester with Charles's parents, something that Marjorie had feared



*Marjorie and Charles Rawlings shortly after their marriage.*

