

MARJORY STONEMAN DOUGLAS

Everglades Hero

Have you ever thought about what being a hero really means? Does it mean being a superhero with a cape and having superhuman strength? Or is there more to being a hero? Marjory Stoneman Douglas didn't look like you might imagine a hero to be. She stood just over five feet tall and wore a floppy hat, not a cape. But make no mistake, she is an Everglades superhero. Her passion and hard work for the Everglades continues to be a rallying force for everyone who loves the Everglades and knows how important it is to our lives.

Marjory certainly didn't grow up thinking she would be a hero for the Everglades. She didn't even grow up in Florida. She was born April 7, 1890 in Minneapolis, Minnesota and grew up in Massachusetts. She first came to Florida when she was 4 years old. One of her only memories of that visit was picking an orange from a tree. As Marjory grew up, she discovered what she loved to do and that was writing. Writing was to become one of Marjory's superpowers.

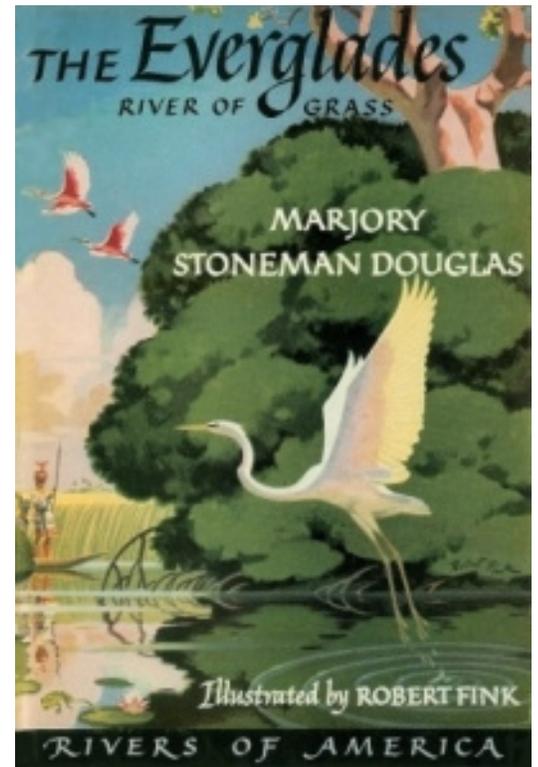


Marjory Stoneman Douglas sits at her desk in her Coconut Grove home in 1985. (State Archives of Florida)

She didn't return to Florida until she was grown up, at the age of 25 in 1915. She began working as a reporter at The Miami Herald newspaper. In 1928, Ernest Coe, a semi-retired landscape architect, and David Fairchild, a famous tropical-plant scientist, organized an association to gather public support and persuade decision-makers to create a national park to preserve a portion of the Everglades. They recruited Marjory to join their group and write supportive

newspaper and magazine articles. Over the next decade, she began visiting the Everglades with her friends. She eased into a relationship with the Everglades as one does with a lifelong friend. In addition to her work on the park association, she spent time fishing and bird watching and used the Everglades as a setting in her short stories.

Early into the 1940s, Marjory left the newspaper to become a freelance writer. She was approached by a publisher to write a book about the Miami River. Because of her personal experiences in the Everglades and what she had learned from others, she had a different idea for a book. She told him she wanted to write about the Everglades instead and he agreed. She spent five years researching what was known about the ecology, hydrology, and history of the Everglades. The result of all her hard work was the book, ***The Everglades: River of Grass*** which begins with the words,



“There are no other Everglades in the world. They are, they have always been, one of the unique regions of the earth; remote, never wholly known.”

With her beautiful words, she painted a picture of the Everglades as a wonderfully complex mosaic of abundant and diverse plant and animal life, all sustained by the flow of water from the Kissimmee River to Lake Okeechobee to the River of Grass. For her readers, Marjory had redefined the Everglades as a beautiful, vast river instead of a worthless swamp. ***The Everglades: River of Grass*** was a call to action to protect this American treasure and it made ordinary citizens and politicians alike take notice.

For 20 years Marjory and her friends worked tirelessly to advocate for the creation of Everglades National Park. Their hard work and determination paid off and the Park was dedicated in 1947. ***The Everglades: River of Grass*** was published the same year. The first books printed sold out in a month. Marjory went on to write many books and stories, but none as monumental as ***The Everglades: River of Grass*** which is still seen today as one of the most important environmental books ever written.

But true heroes like Marjory can never rest as long as there is still work to be done. Over the next decades, the Everglades continued to be threatened by man-made changes to the natural flow of the River of Grass. Marjory continued to be a passionate spokesperson for preserving the health of this ecosystem that exists nowhere else on Earth. When she was 78 years old, she formed an environmental organization to fight against projects and proposals that would damage the Everglades. She was still fighting for the Everglades when she died at the age of 108 in 1998.

Marjory Stoneman Douglas was a journalist, author, public speaker, and environmentalist. She was a hero who knew that the fight to preserve and restore the Everglades would take a very long time, but her conviction, courage, and determination never wavered. She forever changed how people think about the Everglades.

There is no other Everglades in the world, and it still needs heroes like Marjory. If Marjory were still here, she would surely ask you if you would like to be an Everglades hero, too. You can help to carry on Marjory's legacy by speaking up for the Everglades. Share with family and friends what you know about the Everglades and why it is so unique and important. April 7th would be a great day to get started – that's Everglades Day and also Marjory's birthday.



State Library and Archives of Florida.