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Ruth Sawyer Correspondence

Ruth Sawyer 1906-

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SAWYER, RUTH (Mrs. Benjamin Wood)

Born Augusta, December 7, 1906

Early Friendship With

Laura E. Richards

Led Ruth Sawyer to

Write Juvenile Books

BY MINA M. TITUS

Early association of Ruth Sawyer Wood of Winslow with Laura E. Richards and her family may have laid the foundation of interest that resulted the successful books for children she has written since.

Mrs. Wood's great-aunt was Susan Sawyer, of Augusta, a close friend of Mrs. Richards, and in the Summer frequently occupied the Richards home in Gardiner while the family was at its Summer camp at Belgrade. Consequently, Ruth and her brothers were quite at home in the house whose mistress' stories later inspired her to attempt the writing of children's books herself.

In fact, her first publication is dedicated to Mrs. Richards, who gave the young writer much encouragement in her first attempts.

Oscar, the Alligator

This first book to be published is entitled, "Oscar" and is the story of a baby alligator, a much traveled alligator! For the author says that one April Fool's Day she opened a box sent by her brother from Florida and found a live alligator a foot long. "Oscar, little dreaming that he was to be immortalized for the delight of many young folks, became a very active member of the family, and it is the story of his antics that appears in this dainty little volume.

Oscar was in his heyday at the time Mrs. Wood was teaching in the Myrtle Street school and many of the school children were invited to play with him. Some of these children are mentioned by name in the book. The story which is written in letter form is supplemented by a postscript by Oscar.

Several illustrations show Oscar in his new home. These were all drawn by the author who studied art with Miss Muriel Robinson of Waterville to enable her to make use of her native talent in the illustrating of her books. These illustrations are washed in yellow and give the book a delightfully sunny appearance.

Her latest book for children from four to ten years is "Annabel" which is the really true experiences of a cat by that name, who came to make her home with the author and who still lives there. She was a stray and she wandered to Emerald's doorstep.

Annabel is not a pretty cat but children love the mischief this cat enjoys.

Slender leaves of grass hug grass green cat eyes as the decorations for the book's end leaves. Six full page pictures of the cat in action are included in this book. It is dedicated to the author's husband who is very fond of animals.

Both of these books are published under Mrs. Wood's maiden name, Ruth Sawyer, by which she has been so long known in the educational circles of Winslow and Waterville.

New Book

A new book is nearly ready for publication. It also is illustrated by the author and will probably bear the title, "Fort Western, Our Home". It is historical and should be of interest especially to Augusta readers.

In connection with her teaching Mrs. Wood has had some writing experience with Dr. Florence Hale in "The Grade Teacher".

This comparatively new author is an attractive, lively and highly entertaining person to meet. And she is an extremely busy one as well. What with her family, her house-keeping, her teaching, her writing, and taking an active part in the many organizations to which she belongs... and still she has time to devote to several interesting hobbies and assist her mother in crocheting and braiding of rugs.

Hobbyists

Mr. Wood is a radio fan and in his spare time is forever experimenting with new hookups in his radio workshop. He also collects classical and swing records. Together he and his wife carry on their combined hobbies of vegetable and flower gardening and poultry raising. They specialize in growing sweet peas and snapdragons... and Rhode Island Reds. Both are very devoted to their home.

Animal Sanctuary

Riverwood Farm out on Garland Road in Winslow is fast becoming a sanctuary for all the animals and flowers nobody loves any longer. Mrs. Wood says, "Our yard dog, Pal, is a mongrel, half Airdale and half German police. Neighbors called up to see if we would rescue him from his former owners who were going to do away with him because he barked so much...he still does!

"Last year a pupil wanted me to take a black, bob-tailed, coon kitten as they had five more. We already had seven out at our place so what was one more! Black Liberty was only a beginning.

"Next a mother called up about Red Boy, the cocker spaniel. He had begun to nip... would we take him? So he shook his way into our hearts.

"Then we rescued two little boy rabbits from Roosevelt Avenue. Snowball is white and Christopher is black and they both like cabbage!

"In school today we had animal pets for a drawing lesson. I drew the children a picture of our cocker spaniel, Red Boy, son of Bonnie Lassie."

Morning Writing

When at home a typical daily schedule for Mrs. Wood runs something like this. By six o'clock in the morning she is usually in the kitchen making donuts... oh, yes, her husband was brought up the old-fashioned way and must have his fresh, home-made donuts for breakfast... after breakfast she feeds the chickens, sees her husband off to work, and then devotes about two hours to her writing. She finds it easier to concentrate in the morning when she is rested and her mind is free from the day's disturbing interruptions. Her ideas are then more clearly defined. She says, "I find I can do my housework better in the afternoon... anyway it is always still there for me to do!" In the evening her husband is at home and there are other diversions which rule writing definitely out.



RUTH SAWYER, whose stories for children have been influenced by her youthful admiration for Laura E. Richards.



WINSLOW HOME of Ruth Sawyer and her husband, Benjamin Wood.

Mrs. Wood has given reviews of her books before the Waterville Woman's Club, Fort Halifax D. A. R., The National League of American Pen Women at the Lafayette Hotel in Portland was invited to the Children's Story Hour at the Lithgow Public Library where she read her book to an eager crowd of children and autographed many copies. She is a past president of the Central Maine Garden Club. On September 1 she was appointed horticultural chairman of the Maine Federation of Garden Clubs. The appointment has recently been confirmed by Miss Elizabeth E. Fox of Gorham, State President. Mrs. Wood will succeed Mrs. Harry Hayward of South Portland who has just completed a year's term of office. Mrs. Wood has a wide acquaintance in Augusta and vicinity having served last year as Kennebec Regional Director of the State Organization.

Autograph Collection

At present, Mrs. Wood has a bit of a hobby of collecting autographs of which she already has a great many. Among them are many famous personages such as, Shirley Temple, Laura E. Richards, Fred Allen, Gloria Swanson, Faith Baldwin, Helena Rubinstein, Mary Livingston, Jack Benny etc.

In the course of editing her book, orders for one or more copies of "Annabel" were received from, Mrs. Grace Coolidge, Mrs. Dwight Morrow, Mrs. Elinore Roosevelt, William Lyons Phelps, Bette Davis, The Duchess of Windsor, Helen Hayes, Elizabeth Arden, Katherine Cornell, Mary Ellen Chase, William H. Gannett, Mrs. Thos. A. Edison, John Clair Minot, Carl E. Milliken, Ralph E. Brewster and many others.

Ruth Sawyer Wood, the daughter of Louise Hunt and the late Herbert E. Sawyer was born in the old Patterson place so-called, on Arsenal Street in Augusta, a house which is said to be almost as old



PAL, THE WOOD'S PET, has been the subject of many of the stories for children by Ruth Sawyer Wood.

as Fort Western itself.

Ruth's father died when she was 14 years old. She has two brothers, Herbert, who is an engineer in Michigan and Richard who is manager of the Grant Store in Norwich, N. Y.

Ruth was educated in the Augusta schools including Cony High, and was graduated from Farmington State Normal School in the class of 1926. She also has spent several seasons at the University of Maine Summer school where she studied pedagogy.

For 12 years she was a teacher

in the primary grades of the Winslow and Waterville schools. Nine years in Winslow and three years in Waterville. And at present she is employed as a project work teacher at the South Grammar School in Waterville.

On Nov. 21, 1938 she was married to Benjamin T. Wood. It is an odd incident that while both Ruth Sawyer and Benjamin Wood had been employed as teachers in the Winslow schools, they became acquainted only when they chanced to go at the same time to do Summer work at the state university.

Dear Librarian,

You ordered an Annabel
two years ago. Knowing your
splendid service for schools
I thought it might be a bit
tattered by now. So may I
give you a new one to take
its place. I am now filling
in for Miss Robinson in the
Art Dept. in Waterville.

Do not bother to send
thanks at such a busy time,
but if you have such a
juvenile book as this I
would like to borrow. About
children — their talk, games,
and customs from 1800 to
1825 in New England —
Maine is what I really want
I have the history covered

I think I haven't been able
to find a good storybook
of this time here and their
talk bothers me. If you
come across such please
send to —

Ruth Sawyer blood
30 Elm Street
Waterville, Me. —
To Louise Sawyer

November 27, 1943

Mrs. Benjamin Wood
30 Elm Street
Waterville, Maine

Dear Mrs. Wood:

Your very generous offer of another copy of ANNABEL is deeply appreciated, and of course we would be delighted to have another copy. These books are in our traveling libraries, and reach children all over the state, from Kittery to Fort Kent. During her travels, Annabel has brought pleasure to many youngsters.

Your request for a book on children's talk, games and customs has been referred to our Research Librarian, who will doubtless write to you very soon. We hope that we may be able to find material that will be helpful to you. Does this indicate that you are now at work on another book? We certainly trust this may be so!

Again thank you for your kindness in wanting the State Library to have another copy of the story of your charming Annabel.

Sincerely yours

hmj

Secretary

November 29, 1943

Mrs. Benjamin Wood
30 Elm Street
c/o Louise Sawyer
Waterville, Maine

Dear Mrs. Wood:

Please accept our thanks (and the enclosed postal refund) for the new copy of ANNABEL. We are very glad to include in our traveling libraries such a delightful story.

Sincerely yours

hmj
Encl--6¢

Secretary