Meeting Hemingway

> Abstract words such as glory, honor, courage, or hallow were obscene beside the concrete names of villages, the numbers of roads, the names of rivers, the numbers of regiments and the dates. —Ernest Hemingway.
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> This work of pure fiction contains 1055 words (excluding footnotes). I wrote it for fun and no artificial intelligence was used in the writing of this story.[1]

I took a bus from Miami down highway one and over the bridges and causeways through the Keys.[2] I sat by a window on the left side of the bus, watching the scenery go by, the morning sun glinting on the water, clouds, seabirds, houses on the Keys. I got off the bus in Key West and walked to Hemingway's house. It was late morning. A black six-toed cat walked by ignoring me. I went up and knocked on the door. He was home. I told him I was a fellow writer and he welcomed me into his house. "Come in," he said. He held the door as I walked over the threshold. He invited me to sit down. I chose an upright wooden chair. He sat and we talked.

Having read all his published fiction, I knew his writing so I didn't ask him any questions about it. I didn't see Pauline anywhere. Perhaps she was off visiting friends. I didn't ask and he didn't mention it. Naturally, like everyone else, I told him how much I enjoyed his work. He asked me what I was working on. I told him. He asked me if I was reading anything. I said I had a copy of *Madame Bovary* in my rucksack. "Good," he said, "very good." Then he invited me out to his back yard.

Hemingway was a boxer in school and he had this thing about challenging his male acquaintances to boxing matches. He wanted me to put on the gloves with him. "Just for sparring," he said. I think he wanted to see if I had character.

[1] Here is the rule for writers: you can use spell check and grammar check but turn off next word prediction.
[2] https://visitfloridakeys.com/plan-your-trip/plan-book/getting-here-around/highway-that-goes-to-sea

I told him about the time when I used to be a sparring partner for a boxer in training. “We would spar in timed rounds in a boxing ring in a gym I went to. He was pretty good. If I hit him he would get mad and clobber me. He hit me hard in the nose. Blood was dripping down. He apologized profusely and said he wouldn’t do it again. The next day, we sparred again. Sparring is supposed to be pulling punches. Again, I hit him in the head, not hard. He got angry and punched me hard in the nose. Red drops of blood spotted the white canvas floor of the ring. After that, I wouldn’t spar with him anymore.”

“I don’t get mad,” Hemingway said.

“Just the same, Ernest, I won’t put on the gloves with you, but I know some kung fu, and if you want to fight empty handed, that will be all right.”

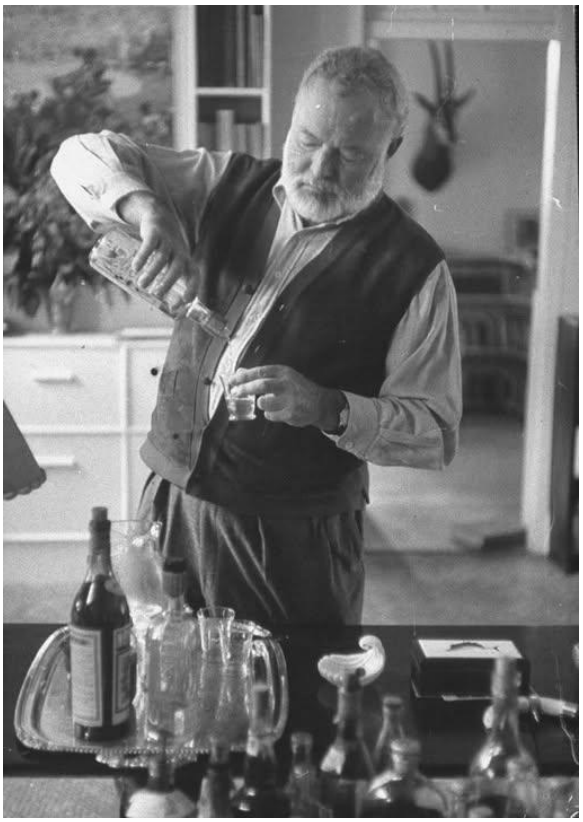
“I’m used to keeping my feet on the ground,” he said, “so I will pass on the empty hand fighting.”

I think I intimidated him. “Right. With kung fu, you can leap in the air and do some real damage with the heel of your foot. Martial artists know that the legs are much stronger than the arms for striking.”

Hemingway slapped me on the back and said, “You’re all right, Rick. Let’s go in the house and have a drink.”

We talked about fishing, hunting, women. I knew all his trout fishing stories, so I told him about the time I caught the big golden trout on a salmon egg at the fourth of the Big Five Lakes in the Sierras. “It was a deep pool in golden granite boulders. Fool’s gold sparkled in the granite. The water was clear and cold and flowed out into a small exit stream to the next lake, below. I sat on a big boulder that must have weighed a hundred tons, rounded smooth by water over the centuries and put a salmon egg from the small jar onto the hook. I put two split shot on the line, one two feet

above the hook and another one a foot above so I could cast with some authority. I crimped the split shot with needle nose pliers, which are also useful for removing hooks. I cast the line across the pool and let it sink down into the cool dark water. There was a strike and the fish tried to run but there was nowhere to go in the pool and I reeled him in with the spinning reel."



Hemingway made drinks.

Hemingway had a faint smile as he listened attentively to my story. He used only worms and flies in his stories, never a salmon egg. "I like that story," he said.

I challenged him to a game of chess. He declined, saying he wasn't much of a chess player. "Besides, I don't have a chess set," he said. I didn't mention that I had a travel set in my rucksack. He probably figured I would beat him, which I probably would have. I ended up staying overnight at Hemingway's house. He let me sleep in his guest room and in the morning he fixed us both breakfast of fried bacon and eggs.

It was time to leave. I thanked him for his hospitality. He wished me good luck with my writing and attempts at publication. We bid each other farewell and I walked back to the bus depot. I rode back to Miami where I caught an airplane to San Francisco, where even the summers are cold. I took a taxi into town and bought some blue jeans and a jacket. I stayed in the Saint Francis Hotel.[3] Jack Kerouac was speaking at the University of San Francisco[4] in the English Department, and I met him after his talk. The next day I went to City Lights Bookstore[5] where I met poets Lawrence Ferlinghetti and Allen Ginsberg. I bought a copy of *Howl* and Allen signed it for me.

I walked around the city and in Golden Gate Park. The next morning, I checked out of the hotel. Then I took a plane back to Hawai‘i where Robert Louis Stevenson, Mark Twain, and Jack London all have visited and written about their experiences.

[3] 335 Powell St.
[4] 2130 Fulton St.
[5] 261 Columbus Ave.