

Northern Michigan woman was bothered by Hemingway's portrayal of her the rest of her life

John Wisely, Detroit Free Press

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Marjorie Bump (Photo: John F. Kennedy Presidential Library)

In the second decade of the 20th Century, a young lady in Northern Michigan befriended an aspiring writer who summered near her Petoskey home.

Her name was Marjorie Bump. His was Ernest Hemingway. She was 18 when he was 20. Their time together was fleeting and it's unclear if it can be properly termed a romance.

But a century later, the two remained joined forever in the pages of two Hemingway short stories, where he mentions her by name.

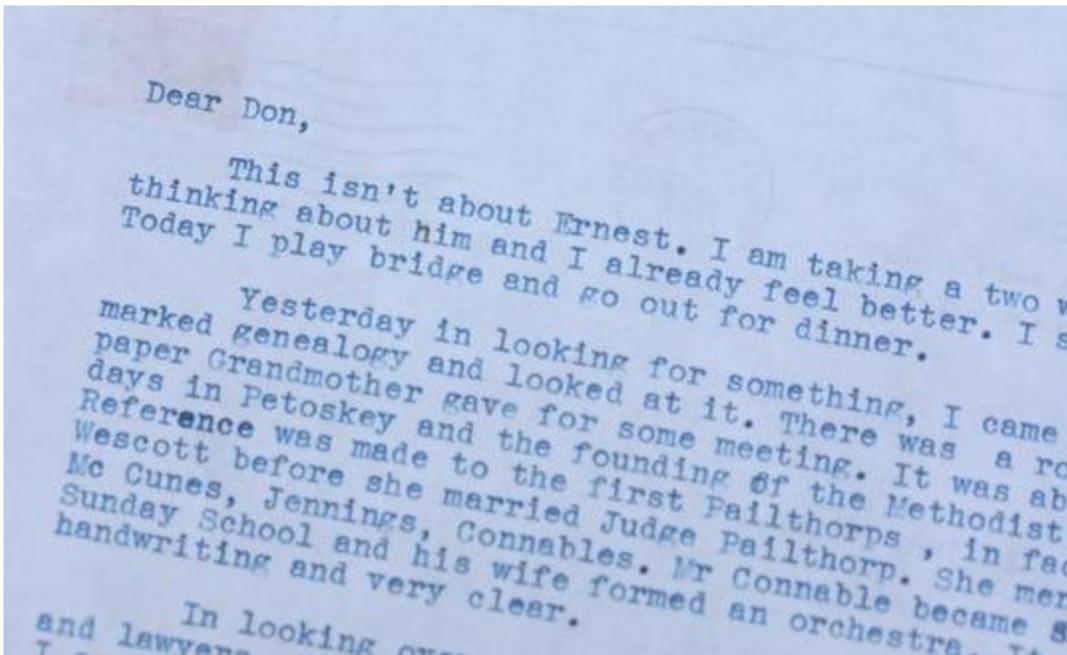
Therein lies the problem.

Bump never consented to being a character in the stories. She was not thrilled with how she came off, fearing readers would conclude she'd had an affair with the famous novelist. Hemingway's words were read by millions and prompted all manner of gossip.

A group of West Bloomfield High School students is helping to make Bump's account heard.

"Marjorie Bump got a bum rap," said Jennifer McQuillan, a board member of the Michigan Hemingway Society, who teaches English at West Bloomfield. "Because her name was Marjorie Bump, you can imagine what they did with Bump. They slut-shamed her. Her daughter spent a lot of time trying to clear up her reputation. It was so painful for Marjorie. As Hemingway rose in fame, the interest in Marjorie rose as well. It was insufferable, especially when people got the wrong idea."

Bump, who died in 1987, vented about the relationship in a lengthy private correspondence with a New Hampshire bookseller. Those letters, some handwritten, others typed, now belong to the Michigan Hemingway Society.



A letter from Marjorie Bump to Don St. John who between the two wrote 250 letters back and forth in the late 1960's about Ernest Hemingway and other matters. Sydney Carroll, a 2020 graduate of West Bloomfield High School spent part of last semester transcribing the letters of Bump who was romantically linked to Hemingway at one point. Photographed on Tuesday, July 21, 2020. (Photo: Eric Seals, Detroit Free Press)

McQuillan has enlisted students in her 12th-grade college prep course class called Points of View to help transcribe them into a digital format for research purposes.

Some of the letters have been published before. In 2010, Bump's daughter, Georgianna Bump, included some of them in a book "[Pip Pip to Hemingway in Something from Marge](#)," that also includes other reflections from her mother about Hemingway. Efforts to reach the daughter were unsuccessful.

McQuillan said the transcription project will expand on that work by providing researchers with the complete set of letters.

More: [Sculpture honoring Ernest Hemingway's Michigan ties is missing](#)

More: [The Last Good Country event celebrates Hemingway](#)

McQuillan also used the letters to prompt a discussion about reputation damage, something students today encounter on social media.

"If Hemingway has controlled her reputation this long, look at how fast you can shape someone's identity with just a hashtag," McQuillan said. "How do you protect yourself from being a tag? How do you control your identity in a world where you can have that all undone in a click?"

Nick Adams stories

Hemingway mentions Bump in two of his Nick Adams stories, "The End of Something," where she's identified as Marjorie; and "The Three-Day Blow," where she's Marge. Nick Adams is considered Hemingway's alter ego.



Ernest Hemingway, pictured here in 1921, was six weeks old in the summer of 1899 when his parents brought him to northern Michigan's Walloon Lake, then named Bear Lake, near Petoskey. Dr. and Mrs. Hemingway built a cottage on the lake and for the next 22 years, Hemingway spent his summers in the area that was just becoming known as Up North, (Photo: Ernest Hemingway Collection at the John F. Kennedy Presidential Library)

In "The End of Something," Adams and Marjorie share what appears to be shaping up as a romantic encounter. The pair is out fishing in the evening. Then they come ashore for a fresh perch dinner beside the moonlit water. Adams takes the occasion to break up with Marjorie and she rows away in a boat, alone.

The break up is mentioned again in "The Three-Day Blow," when Adams's friend, Bill, tells him it was the right thing to do.

When the stories were published in 1925, Petoskey was still a small town. Bump's father ran a hardware store there and it didn't take much sleuthing for the locals to identify Marjorie. She left Petoskey and lived most of her life in Florida. The portrayal of her in the stories bothered Bump to her death.

When she was buried in her hometown, her gravestone was engraved Lucy Bump Main. Though she always went by her middle name of Marjorie, her first name was Lucy. Her married name was Main.

Strong woman

Not everyone thought Bump came off badly in the stories, said Linda Patterson Miller, a Hemingway scholar who teaches English at Pennsylvania State University's Abington campus.

"I think she should be quite pleased actually," Miller said. "The portrayal of her is quite beautiful. She's one of Hemingway's strong women. She has such dignity in not making a fuss when Nick Adams says that love is not fun anymore."

Miller said many of her female students admire Bump's character.

Miller said she doubts Hemingway and Bump were lovers, but a summertime romance seems likely. She suspects Bump's real displeasure may stem from the way her family, particularly her mother, was portrayed.

In "The Three-Day Blow," Adam's friend, Bill, derides Marjorie's mother as bossy and implies a class distinction, telling Adams that Marjorie "can go marry somebody of her own sort..."

"She actually comes across as a strong woman, but apparently, people in town talked, according to Marjorie," Miller said. "She felt her reputation was besmirched by the stories and the reference to her actual name."

Marjorie isn't the only Hemingway friend to object to being mentioned in his work, Miller said. When Hemingway wrote "The Snows of Kilimanjaro" for Esquire magazine, he included a reference to "Poor Scott Fitzgerald," who was in awe of the rich.

The famous author of "The Great Gatsby," F. Scott Fitzgerald, a Hemingway friend from their Paris days, was so irked by the mention he prevailed on the editor, Max Perkins, who convinced Hemingway to delete it before the story was published as a book.

Her story

McQuillan's students embraced the transcription task. Because the school was closed by COVID-19, McQuillan sent them digital scans of the letters. The originals now are housed at the Clark Historical Library at Central Michigan University.

The students then transcribed them precisely, including typos and misspellings as well as information on the envelopes in which they were mailed. An editor reviews their work for accuracy.

"It is such a rare opportunity for high school students to be working with primary source documents," McQuillan said. "This was a gift."

The letters are correspondence Bump traded with a New Hampshire bookseller, Donald St. John, beginning in 1966. After Hemingway committed suicide in 1961, St. John set out to interview people who had known the author in life.

He tracked down Bump, who by then was married to a Daytona Beach dentist, Sidney Main. St. John peppered her with questions about Hemingway. She responded at length on some occasions and tersely at other times.

In one typewritten letter from January 1967, Bump described her and Hemingway as sharing a friendship and she denied having an affair with him. She wrote to St. John at that age, she had no "knowledge or interest in sex."

She also urged him to not consider "The End of Something" as a true story, noting Hemingway visited her years later in Florida and the two corresponded for years. Before she died, Bump destroyed her exchanges with Hemingway.

But through the letters she wrote to St. John, students said a more complete picture of both Bump and Hemingway emerges.



Sydney Carroll, a 2020 graduate of West Bloomfield High School at her West Bloomfield home on Tuesday, July 21, 2020. Carroll spent part of last semester transcribing the letters of Marjorie Bump who was romantically linked to Earnest Hemingway at one point. (Photo: Eric Seals, Detroit Free Press)

"In Hemingway's short stories that she's in, she was always depicted as someone who was cold and kind of selfish and just kind of superficial,' said Sydney Carroll, one of McQuillan's students who graduated this year and will study psychology at Wayne State University in Detroit in the fall. "But through the letters, you just see a whole different side of her, that she had passions of her own. She wanted to be a writer herself. She loved writing."

Carroll is 18 now, about the same age Bump was when she was close to Hemingway. Carroll said she has transcribed about eight letters. There are about 250 of them in the collection and the work is ongoing.

"She talked about how her life was affected by the things Hemingway said about her and how she didn't like how she was depicted and how she felt he treated her unfairly and wrote about her own unfairly," Carroll said.

Carroll said that one lesson she draws from the letters is to define yourself, rather than let others define you.

"You can only control what you do and what you say," Carroll said. "You shouldn't let the words of others, ultimately have so much effect on who you are, what you accomplish and the legacy you leave behind. You're in control of your legacy and your identity and the name you make for yourself."

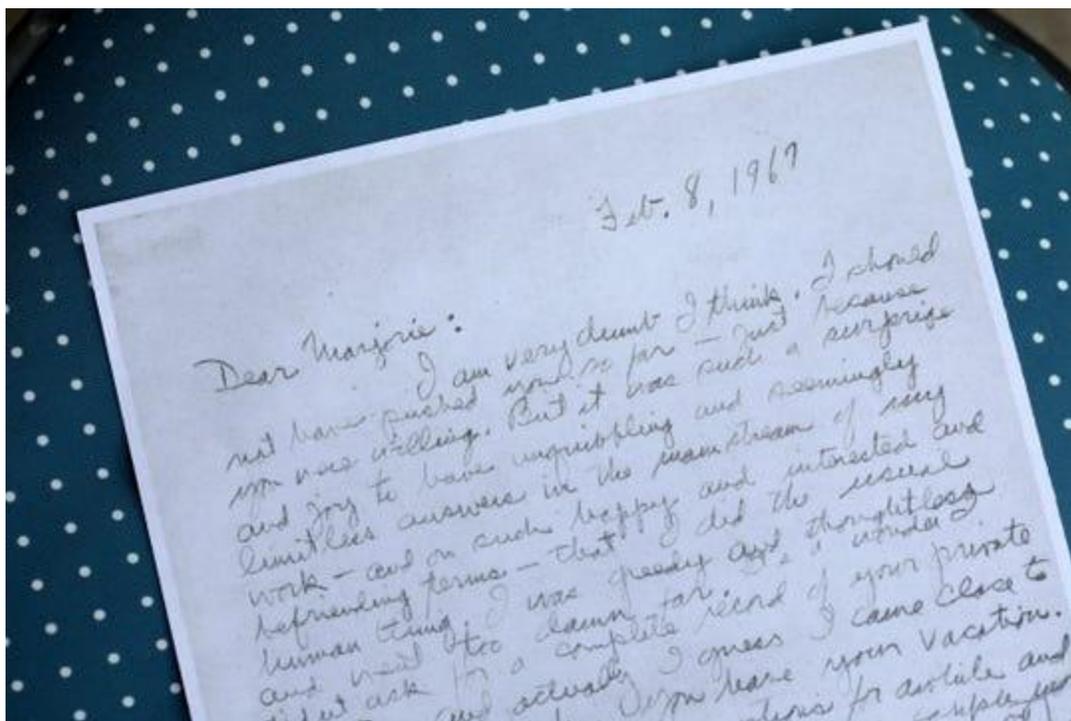
Learning cursive

Jarrett Hazelton is another student who worked on the project. One challenge he had to overcome was reading the cursive handwriting Bump used in some of the letters. He'd learned some cursive in early elementary school and his parents helped him, too.

"I learned that she's an eloquent writer and she's quite the intellectual person," said Hazelton, who graduated from high school this year and will study at the University of Cincinnati College-Conservatory of Music.

Some critics have tagged Hemingway as a misogynist and McQuillan notes he had "four marriages and umpteen girlfriends."

But Hazelton said despite Bump's misgivings about how Hemingway portrayed her in print, she defended him on that count.



A letter from Don St. John to Marjorie Bump who between the two wrote 250 letters back and forth in the late 1960's about Ernest Hemingway and other matters. Sydney Carroll, a 2020 graduate of West Bloomfield High School spent part of last semester transcribing the letters of Bump who was romantically linked to Hemingway at one point. Photographed on Tuesday, July 21, 2020. (Photo: Eric Seals, Detroit Free Press)

Hazelton said although some of Hemingway's stories tend to portray him as a misogynistic person, Bump described him more positively in her letters.

"I see her as a very trustworthy person and I'm seeing that she's giving another side of the story," Hazelton said.

Filling gaps

Penn State is in the process of compiling and publishing [Hemingway's letters](#). The school has access to more than 6,000 letters that survive.

The work the students are doing on the Bump letters is important because it fills in some gaps in Hemingway's correspondence, said Christopher Struble, president of the Michigan Hemingway Society.

"There are still little holes in the Hemingway story," said Struble, a Petoskey jeweler. "This may seem trivial, but Hemingway comes up here in 1919 to begin his career as a professional writer of fiction. Well we knew he was here. We know we've got letters back and forth from his family. But he disappears at Christmastime. So where was Hemingway in Christmas 1919?"

The answer is found, Struble said, in the Bump's correspondence with St. John, where she recounts a conversation she had with Hemingway.

"He talks to Marge Bump and he tells her, 'you know if I could spend every Christmas of my life like that Christmas 1919 in Petoskey, that would be great. I'd be a happy man,'" Struble said. "So there's really heartwarming stuff in these letters and it just gives us a little bit more provenance and fills in a couple gaps that even Penn State wasn't able to find."

McQuillan said the exercise has been a good learning experience for her students.

"I still have kids working on this over the summer for community service hours and some of my seniors wanted to continue because they felt so invested in the project," she said. "They were determined to give Marjorie a voice."

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