

Nov. 27, 1966

Dear Mrs. Main:

Last month, in Petoskey, Mich, a lady by the name of Mrs. Lewis Hart, formerly Olive McIntyre, told me she had received a letter from Ernest Hemingway at the Mayo Clinic a month or two before his suicide in Ketchum, Idaho. Mrs. Hart's husband had, regretablely, tossed the letter out with some other papers, but both Olive and her brother, Bruce McIntyre, (Circuit Court Reporter) remembered quite a bit of what was in the handwritten letter. Both remembered references to you, Marjorie Bump. Olive had written Hemingway that thousands of his friends around Petoskey were pulling for his recovery (Of course this was not literally true because Hemingway is but slightly remembered in Petoskey and then, pejoratively, because of some of his In Our Time stories, and the fact is that Petoskey's favorite writer, though not mine, is Bruce Catton, who was born in Petoskey as a kind of accident during a trip being made by his mother.). Hemingway was apparently touched by the letter, which stated that no answer was required and either handwrote himself or dictated to a nurse (Bruce thought the writing a bit frail) an answer to Olive. (She graduated in 1923 from Petoskey High School, after a delay of some kind.) In his letter, Hemingway said he grateful for Olive's letter and that he remembered with fondness his days in "cold old Petoskey." He went on to say (and this is Olive's memory, mind you, not me ~~talking~~) that he probably should have given up drinking and married Marjorie Bump, that he would then have had a better life. And he noted that he had seen Marjorie in Florida and that she was as beautiful and wonderful as ever. (All of this in paraphrase since there is no exact quote available anymore. I asked Olive, who was quite nice about discussing the matter, to write the letter down from memory so that history would at least have this residual trace of one of the century's greatest stylists in his last days on earth, and in one of his rare bridges of life and fiction. But she could not. Olive is not well and she is busy caring for a talkative minah bird named Webster (Because of his vocabulary) a mourning dove with a broken wing and a 15-year-old white chihuahua who must take a daily digitalis pill wrapped in thin Hershey chocolate. She referred to Hemingway invariably as Stein and I wonder if that was what you called him too. (I just received a letter from a Mrs. Richard Miller of Petoskey who was Ruth Smith when you were a girl; she lived with the Ramsdells. She had a wire sent ~~to~~ ^{from} Pailthorp and "Stein" in January of 1920 on the occasion of her first marriage.) But most of this is disgressive and a leadup to my main question:

Did Hemingway see you in Florida (or someplace) years after you knew each other in Petoskey and, if you would be so kind, do you remember anything about the meeting that might help see Hemingway again? (I am doing a study centering on Hem's Michigan years and hope to have it published in a year or so.) (cont.)

I've been at work on this for almost a year now, and have been to Michigan in connection with it four times. (I must admit it helps that my wife is an East Lansing girl and graduated from Michigan State and Michigan (Masters), thus giving my work a partial guise of home coming. I have talked to many, many people, including Sunny, Hem's sister, Dutch Pailthrop, Dorothy Connable, the Curtis bankers, old Joe Bacon of the Bacon farm near where the Hemingway cottage was located on Walloon and, an ardent if, at the time, young, admirer of yours by the name of Kenneth Van Hoesen (The Van Hoesen family of UP IN MICHIGAN). Leicester Hemingway, the younger brother, was 16 years younger than Hem and not in a position to talk authoritatively about those days, but I have had an interesting correspondence with him and that is one of the reasons I am down in Florida now, to talk with him in Miami. Today my wife and I go off to Key West to look at the Hemingway house there (now a museum I take it) and to drop in at Sloppy Joe's to see if I can pick up any of the knick knacks thrown out by Mary Hemingway and ordered burned but which were retained as a kind of treasure trove by Stan Smith (Sloppy Joe's son). All of this from Les, who is about to follow in his brother's footsteps by covering the war in Viet Nam (around Christmas time) for NANA, which is pretty dangerous it seems to me. Les is 51 now and a great guy, big, much like his brother, no beard, rather a cavalryman's mustache (trimmed a bit). He is raising his second family with his second wife, Doris, a redhead as you might expect and, lord love me, Iowa 1951 (As compared to my 1934). They have two darling young daughters and live on one of Dade's fine islands. But for the first time in his life Les is without a boat.....I have also seen another Hemingway scholar in Ft. Lauderdale, a man by the name of William Forrest Dawson who published a Petoskey interview in the Michigan Quarterly Review back in 1958. But poor Dawson is so busy now running the Hall of Fame in Ft. Lauderdale that his only Hemingway joy now is his vicarious interest in my own project....

Too long this letter grows. To summarize, if I may crave your kind indulgence: May I have your confirmation and, hopefully, elaboration, re Hemingway's meeting with you in Florida 25 years later? My wife and I will be here in Florida until near Christmas time and I would dearly love to meet you when and if you come back to Florida at that time. May I conceal the identity of the person who told me where to reach you? At least until I know how you react to this intrusion of mine? In fairness to me I know you will agree that it is not simply prying to attempt to illuminate the life of a man of Hemingway's dimensions. I have no connection with Mrs. Constance Cappel Montgomery whose HEMINGWAY IN MICHIGAN has recently been published, and I had been at this work of my own a year, as I have said, when her book came out. This 30-year-old girl started her work as a college paper and, while she did an enormous amount of work on it, I would hope that my effort contains rather less conjecture than hers.

Sincerely yours,

Donald St. John