

The Wives of Ernest Hemingway

~Steve Newman

In 1920 Ernest Hemingway lived his bachelor life at 1230 North State Street, Chicago, until he was offered an apartment in a large old house at 100 East Chicago Street. Many of the apartments were occupied by writers, including Hadley Richardson's friend, Kate Smith, who later married John Dos Passos. Another of the apartments was occupied by the painter, Kenley Smith, and it was when Kate Smith invited Hemingway to a party in Kenley's apartment, that he spotted Hadley Richardson - a young woman he'd seen playing the piano at a recital some years before.

The couple hit it off immediately and both of them soon realised they had met the person they wanted to marry. Maybe both saw in the other the renegade in themselves and a kindred spirit. They both had a love of literature, art, and music, and were looking for a secure place to deposit their emotions. But they were also bursting with sexual desires and frustrations.



Hadley was eight years older than Hemingway and a woman who, at first sight, was of rather conventional looks, but a woman with an aura of oozing sensuality. She also looks remarkably like Hemingway's mother.

Hadley Richardson was born in St. Louis on the 9th of November, 1891, and was the youngest of four children. Her father, James, as Bernice Kert, describes him: "...was a genial man who had reluctantly assumed an executive position with the family drug company. Her mother, Florence, was a talented musician who often accompanied her husband on the piano as he sang out in his fine baritone voice. But in other important ways, they were incompatible. Florence had a driving intellectual curiosity, was never at ease in a frivolous setting, and was intensely interested in religion."

After a serious childhood fall from a second-floor window - after which she spent many months in bed - Hadley's parents became somewhat over protective, although her father did try to treat her as normally as possible by showing "endless patience for her childish games." Not unnaturally a deep bond grew between the two of them, which was shattered when James shot himself due to financial difficulties. As a result of this tragic event (which of course mirrored Hemingway's own experience with his father) Hadley became extremely withdrawn, a situation that was not helped by her mother, who, after moving to a smaller house, created a household where alcohol, and any form of light-heartedness were strictly forbidden.

Only after leaving school, and moving to Bryn Mawr College, was Hadley able, at last, to start making friends and enjoy herself. But that was soon brought to an end when Florence convinced Hadley she was not well enough to attend the college, and that she must come home.

After the death of her elder sister, Dorothea, Hadley took up an earlier passion for music, and began to take piano lessons with a teacher called Harrison Williams, who quickly became her male ideal, and a man who looked not unlike Hemingway. He was also a good teacher, and encouraged Hadley to play professionally. Hadley's mother did not approve, and wished only that her daughter stay home to look after her.

Toward the end of 1920 Florence died after contracting Bright's Disease. Suddenly Hadley found herself on her own, with Kate Smith's letter asking Hadley to come to Chicago a Godsend, which brings us back to Ernest.

Over the winter of 1920 - 21 Hadley and Hemingway wrote to each other every day. Hadley often called Ernest 'Dearest Nesto' and coined the adjective 'Ernestoic', to describe his inability to talk about his experiences in the war. He wrote about his friends, about fishing, and about his writing, and that he guessed he 'loved her well enough'.

But by the spring of 1921 the talk - if not the letter writing - was all about marriage and how they might spend Hadley's inheritance.

Sherwood Anderson suggested they live cheaply in Paris among the famous expatriates on the Left Bank. But Hadley wasn't so sure and thought they might settle down firstly in Chicago before deciding on their future. Finally, an apartment in Chicago was found, with a wedding date of September 3rd 1921 finally agreed upon.

Ernest took a three day fishing trip up the Sturgeon River with old friends, Howie Jenkins and Charlie Hopkins, as an extended stag night, showing up bleary eyed at the little Methodist country church at Horton Bay on the day of the wedding. A Methodist church had been chosen because Hadley was an Episcopalian and Ernest a Congregationalist. A Methodist church wedding seemed the best compromise.

The day of the wedding was clear and sunny. Hadley was a little late in reaching the church as she'd gone swimming in the morning and her hair had taken rather longer to dry than anticipated. Hemingway stood waiting for her with a pounding head and the faint smell of fish about him. When Hadley eventually arrived on the arm of old family friend, George Breaker, Hemingway's head cleared completely, until Hadley's sister held up the proceedings by insisting the word 'obey' be omitted. After the ceremony, and a chicken dinner at Liz Dilworth's place, Hemingway rowed Hadley across Lake Wolloon to the Hemingway holiday cottage and a two week honeymoon. On day two they both came down with food poisoning and heavy colds. Sex was the last thing on their minds.

In 1922 the Hemingway's arrived in Paris, with Ernest now working for The Toronto Star, which gave them the opportunity to travel throughout the continent of Europe.

In March 1923 the couple travelled to a Germany rattled by horrendous inflation and violent confrontations between opposing political ideologies and their cohorts of thugs. The German mark was on its way to becoming utterly worthless, and just before inflation reached its peak, in late 1923, wheel

barrows and horse-drawn carts were needed to carry the money around to simply buy a loaf of bread, if you could find a loaf of bread.

When Hemingway and Hadley arrived at the German border that cold wet March day they were met by two of the 'meekest and most discouraged looking German soldiers you have ever seen.' The soldiers were unarmed, ill-fed and badly clothed, in stark contrast to the heavily armed, well fed, French guards who strutted up and down their sector of the frontier wearing steel helmets and well cut uniforms. The victor and the vanquished.

The trouble was the vanquished had not been beaten militarily. There was a score to be settled.

Hemingway and Hadley tried to exchange some money in the bank at Strasbourg before crossing the border but were told the mounting exchange rate had cleaned them out days ago. They eventually exchanged ten French francs - about 90 cents - at the railway station for 670 marks. That 90 cents gave the Hemingways a day of 'heavy spending' and still left them change of 120 marks!

A couple of days later, from the banks of the Rhine, the couple witnessed a group of angry young men fighting six policemen on a bridge. Five of the policemen were thrown from the bridge into the fast moving river leaving one hanging from the rail of the bridge 'like a puppet' until one of the young men chopped off the policeman's hands with an axe. The policeman fell to his certain death in a black and freezing Rhine.

Then Pauline Pfeiffer came into their lives.

The short, slim, dark haired Pfeiffer, who, as a journalist working for the Paris edition of Vogue in the early 1920s, was one of the first critics to give Ernest Hemingway a good write-up for his worst book, 'The Torrents of Spring', and soon made her alluring, and very wealthy presence, known to the handsome and aspiring novelist.



Pauline Pfeiffer was born in Parkersburg, West Virginia, on July 22nd 1895. In 1901 the family moved to St Louis - a city that was responsible, one way or another, for most of the women in Hemingway's life - where Pauline's father, Paul Pfeiffer, established the family pharmaceutical business. The family prospered and, by 1913, had a chain of several hundred drug stores across America. In 1913, after Pauline graduated from the Academy of the Visitation in St Louis, the family were on a train journey to California when the locomotive broke down at Greenway, Arkansas. Paul stepped down from the train and took a stroll in the fresh air along the track toward the town of Piggott. In fact he stayed out all night, and by morning had calculated how much money he could make by converting the newly de-forested land into prime, cotton producing acreage - and with land selling for a dollar an acre it was an exciting prospect.

The Pfeiffer family never made California, but settled in Arkansas instead, and over the next few years bought in excess of 60,000 acres. To achieve his aims Paul Pfeiffer hired over 200 people to prepare those 60,000 acres for cotton, corn, wheat, and the new miracle crop of soybeans. Eventually Pfeiffer's representatives would travel as far as Iowa and Illinois to recruit tenant farmers, eventually owning the cotton gin and the local bank, exerting an influence "that was virtually feudal." To quote from Bernice Kert's 'The Hemingway Women': "

The Pfeiffer house in Piggott was a sprawling white frame structure, set in a grove of oak trees, surrounded by wide, shady porches, furnished with massive, German-style furniture, and filled with objects d'art from St Louis galleries. There were five family bedrooms, maids' quarters, good well water, and a red barn for the rubber-tired family buggies. Paul Pfeiffer converted one room of the house into a chapel for his wife, Mary Downey, who was a devout Catholic. Himself an agnostic, he left the religious instruction of his children to her."

Although sounding a bit like the set description for Orson Welles' *The Magnificent Ambersons*, this was not an untypical, upper middle class house of its time, and could just as easily be a description - perhaps minus the oak trees - of either the Hemingway house in Oak Park, or the Gellhorn home in St Louis. During the years of the First World War Pauline attended the University of Missouri, where she majored in journalism, which was no mean achievement for a woman in America at that time. By the time Hemingway was being ministered to by Agnes in Milan, Pauline was working as a reporter for the *Cleveland Star*.

By 1919 she had moved to New York and was on the staff of the *Daily Telegraph*, before finally moving to the arts and fashion magazine, *Vanity Fair*, where she worked as a fashion reporter and publicist. Of course, Pauline didn't have to rely on her journalist's salary, receiving a generous allowance from her father, and the use of a family apartment in New York. But she could write and had a good eye for the latest fashion trends, and before long was offered the position of assistant to the editor of the Paris edition of *Vanity Fair's* sister magazine, *Vogue*. Naturally she accepted. Pauline sailed to France with her sister Virginia, and within days of arriving in Paris had become the exciting new members of the American ex-pat set.

As with Martha, twelve or more years later, Hemingway set his sights on Pauline Pfeiffer and she responded. Hemingway and Hadley, and the two Pfeiffer sisters, were soon seen out together in Paris, usually dancing at the many bal musettes, then on holiday at the famous skiing resort of Shruns. Then, suddenly, Virginia and Hadley were out of the circle, with Hemingway and Pauline taking afternoon walks together.

Then Ernest started visiting Pauline's apartment in the rue Picot. They could be seen eating in obscure bistros, and be overheard talking about literature, history and art. They went to the galleries and art shows, Ernest even accompanied Pauline to several fashion shows and, through all of this, Hadley stayed at home looking after Bumby, and still considered Pauline to be her friend, when she knew deep down she was not, that she was stealing her husband away, but she did nothing.

Ernest then sailed back to the States to see Max Perkins at Scribners and, on his return, he and Hadley, and a group of old friends went to Spain for the bullfighting, and Pauline kept in touch by letter, and Hadley knew she did, but again she did nothing. Hadley then took Bumby to the south of France to stay with Gerald and Sara Murphy, and Hemingway did nothing to stop the affair with Pauline, and Pauline did nothing except worry about the dreadful sins she was, as a devout Catholic, committing.

Then, in 1926, the arguments between Hadley and Ernest began to grow, and Hadley simply couldn't hold her anger and her disappointment in any longer.

Hemingway left and moved in with Pauline.

Hemingway's divorce from Hadley (on the grounds of desertion by Ernest) was finalised in Paris on January 27th, 1927.

Ernest and Pauline were married in Paris four months later, on May 10th, 1927.

Hemingway first set eyes on Martha Gellhorn in Sloppy Joe's late in 1936, when, as Kert writes:

"...a trio of tourists walked in . One was a young woman with beautiful hair-tawny gold, loosely brushing her shoulders. She wore a plain black cotton sundress whose simplicity called attention in a well-bred way to her long shapely legs. Ernest listened with interest to her eastern seaboard diction and the low, husky tone of her voice. He formed the hasty conclusion that she was married to the young man with her and that the older woman was her mother."

Right and wrong. The young man was her brother, and the older woman was indeed her mother. The three had decided to spend a short holiday in Florida.

Hemingway soon introduced himself.

Now, Martha Gellhorn could never be described as shy, and in Hemingway's company she sparked with witty conversation from the start. So much so that in the New Year she stayed on when her mother and brother returned home. Hemingway saw her as much as he could, and as they drove back along the causeway one January day in 1937 - after having lunch in Key Largo - they talked about his books, and her books, about the so called Cuban revolution of 1934 that brought a young politician-cum-soldier called Batista into power. They also talked about the Spanish Civil War, and about Hurricanes, and about the threat to democracy. When they reached Key West they picked up a very disgruntled looking Pauline and drove back to the house.



Although Martha, her mother and brother, had been briefly introduced to Pauline a few days earlier, Martha recalled that Hemingway seemed ill at ease to be found in Martha's company by his

wife, and retaliated rather cruelly toward Pauline, who, nonetheless was courtesy itself to Martha - and, if she was jealous of the younger woman, she didn't show it.

The Hemingway home was a two-storey, square concrete mansion with a covered veranda that bordered the entire ground and first floors. It had been constructed in the 1860s to withstand hurricanes and probably a siege by a three masted fifty gunner of the Union Navy. In 1937, as now, it stood on a corner plot with flat open lawns to the front, surrounded on all sides by a tall iron fence and palm trees. Hemingway's nearest neighbours lived in small, weathered, grey paint-peeling timber houses that looked, according to writer Arnold Samuelson, as if they would be the first victims of any hurricane that might - and regularly did - come their way. It was a house that spoke of wealth and power. Of course, when the Hemingways moved there in the late 1920s it was Pauline's money that purchased it, paid for its upkeep and its staff. Although Ernest had a good advance on his novel, *A Farewell to Arms*, it was still Pauline's money that bought the food and the drink, and the motor cars.

But, by 1937 Hemingway was one of the biggest grossing writers in the world, and no doubt at last made a significant contribution to the household budget, as well as buying his beloved boat *Pilar*, and keeping *Sloppy Joe's* in business almost single-handedly.

As Arnold Samuelson reminds us in his 1985 memoir "Hemingway's workshop was over the garage in back of the house. I followed him up an outside stairway into his workshop, a square room with a tile floor and shuttered windows on three sides and long shelves of books below the windows to the floor. In one corner was a big antique flat-topped desk and an antique chair with a high back. E.H. took the chair in the corner and we sat facing each other across the desk."

Samuelson was there to meet his hero and get some advice about writing, which Hemingway gave freely and generously. Martha Gellhorn needed no advice about writing, not from Hemingway or anybody else. And, one evening, sitting in a cane chair on the first floor veranda (Pauline had excused herself and gone to bed early saying she didn't feel well), wearing one of Ernest's sweaters against the chill, and sipping whisky with Ernest after a dinner of steak and mashed potatoes served by Hemingway's black servant, Louis, Martha told him about herself and her family, about her early career as a reporter, and later as a writer in Paris, and about Eleanor Roosevelt, and the President, and the many times she'd stayed at the White House, and the awful food served there, and the lack of anything to drink apart from one glass of wine at dinner, and that a very poor Californian that was too sweet and served warm instead of cold.

Hemingway then recounted his experiences in Italy in 1918, and told her, at length, about Agnes, and about Paris and his marriage to Hadley, and falling in love with Pauline and how he became a Roman Catholic, and his marriage to Pauline, and their two sons, and about Morley Callaghan, and then about his stories and novels, and the awful films that had been made of his books, and about money, and the six day cycle races, and fishing in his new boat, and boxing:

" Do you like boxing, daughter? You don't mind if I call you daughter?"

" No, I don't mind. Boxing? It's okay, seen a few fights."

" Not what it was. Joe Louis is okay, but he was too heavy and slow against Schmeling. Capentier was a great boxer, greater than Dempsey and quick on his feet for a heavyweight. There are some good fighters around here too, but they've no stamina, don't eat properly, and drink too much rum. Used to box back in Paris, I was pretty damn good, so was Morley, floored me once."

Hemingway re-filled Martha's glass and asked:

" Have you ever been to a bullfight, daughter?"

" No."

" Are you afraid of going?"

" No."

" Then we will go."

" Yes, we must go to Spain, Ernest. The war there is just the start. Whatever happens there will happen in the rest of Europe sooner or later, and I fear sooner. I intend to go as soon as I can get the paperwork sorted. Why not come with me? Say you'll come with me?"

" Yes, I'll come with you."

Martha left Key West toward the end of January, leaving behind a letter for Pauline thanking her for her hospitality, and referring to Hemingway as "Ernesto", and his work as the "tops", which must have pleased Pauline no end.

After her departure, Hemingway also left Key West, finally catching up with Martha in New York where he 'phoned her hotel room every few minutes because he was feeling "dreadfully lonely."

And, as Martha and Ernest covered the Spanish Civil War together - and spoke of marriage, his marriage to Pauline began to go down hill, although it would not be until 1940 that Pauline and Hemingway agreed to a divorce, hammering out a financial agreement that ensured their sons came out of things well provided for financially, with Ernest given full access to them.

Pauline and Ernest were divorced on November 4th, 1940.

Ernest and Martha married sixteen days later, on November 21st, in Cheyenne, Wyoming.

Soon after the Hemingways discovered the Finca in Cuba, which became their home until they both headed off to cover the war in China, and some time later the latter stages of World War Two.

And it would be war - personal and global - and another female journalist, that would break-up Martha's and Ernest's marriage.

Mary Welsh was a journalist from northern Minnesota whose father had once owned a paddle steamer, called the Northland, which he'd piloted around Leech Lake picking up loggers. She was, unlike

Martha Gellhorn, a diminutive blond with the features of a handsome boy, and to quote Jeffrey Myers: " In contrast to Martha's aristocratic dress and manner, Mary's style was hopelessly unchic and middle class. Like his previous wives Mary had been to college (Northwestern). She resembled the actress Mary Martin; and had a sharp little face, a good figure, short curly blond hair. Though not beautiful or even pretty, she was a cute and attractive woman. Hemingway was the first husband of his first three wives; but Mary had been married twice before: to Lawrence Cook, a student at Northwestern, from 1929 to 1931 and to Noel Monks, an Australian journalist, from 1938 to 1946. Hadley had lasted six years, Pauline fourteen, Martha seven; but Mary endured for seventeen years."

Mary came to London first in the 1930s to work for Lord Beaverbrook's Daily Express. With the outbreak of war in 1939 she transferred to the London Bureau of Time, Life and Fortune. Apart from a short spell in New York, in 1942, Mary had been in London throughout the war. Like Martha, Mary enjoyed the good life and, when she met Hemingway in 1944, she lived at 31 Grosvenor Street - a very fashionable area, then as now - just around the corner from the American Embassy and the Dorchester Hotel.

Mary Welsh was easily bored and loved the company of men. She had been a fan of Hemingway for years and couldn't resist going to see the famous novelist in hospital after he'd suffered head



wounds in a car crash. She took him some daffodils wrapped-up in newspaper. He seemed genuinely pleased to see her, and at the end of the visit he said:

" I'll be back at the Dorch in a day or two, come and see me."

" I will."

" Thank you for the flowers."

" Flowers are good for everybody."

" You're good for me."

Hemingway's marriage to Martha was by now on the rocks too, due, in no small measure, to professional rivalry, and probably to the fact that Martha didn't want children, preferring to lead the life of the war correspondent; and World War Two did separate them, and Hemingway hated being separated from his women for too long.

Mary was an ideal companion: she listened to Ernest and, was, unlike Martha, prepared to play second fiddle, which was how Hemingway liked it. In fact they were a very good match, which doesn't mean to say that, during WWII, Mary didn't play her part. She did travel to Europe after D-Day, where she wrote convincingly about the horrors of war, and how the GIs were coping. But, as a journalist, she was no Martha Gellhorn and knew it.

Ernest Hemingway and Martha Gellhorn were divorced on December 21st, 1945.

Ernest and Mary married in Cuba on March 14th, 1946.

Hemingway stayed on reasonably good terms with all his ex-wives, especially with Hadley, who re-married a rancher, and with Pauline, who got on very well with Mary, as did his sons from his first two marriages.

Sadly, Ernest and Mary had no children of their own, although Mary did suffer an ectopic pregnancy in the late 1940s that could easily have resulted in her death had Ernest Hemingway not been the son of a doctor.

Hadley died in 1979, Pauline in 1951, Martha in 1998, and Mary in 1986.

To find out more, read Bernice Kert's superb, *The Hemingway Women*.