

IRENE'S LETTER: HEMINGWAY'S 'LOST' LOVE RESURFACES IN PETOSKEY

Irene Goldstein is mentioned briefly several times in various biographies about Hemingway's early romantic interests in Michigan, but then she disappeared from the records.

It turns out that Irene Goldstein, now Irene Gordon, has been right in Petoskey most of the years since her first encounters with Hemingway in 1919-20 and that she had two more notable contacts with him in the late 1940s. One contact was a brief in-person visit Hemingway paid her in Petoskey, apparently in the fall of 1947. The second contact was a lengthy letter he sent her in September of 1949 after both had recently marked their 50th birthdays.

Her memories of Hemingway are still vivid at age 95 and the 1947 visit and 1949 letter offer revealing glimpses into Hemingway's early and mature years, his last marriage, and his constant striving for better literary expression.

Even though Mrs. Gordon has been living in Petoskey for years, her more recent experiences with Hemingway went unnoted publicly until Petoskey News-Review reporter Steve Brede wrote a feature story about her in late 1991 that prominently mentioned her Hemingway memories and letter. It's apparently not until this newsletter, however, that her last experiences with him and the letter have been reported in any publication devoted to Hemingway.

The Brede article raised fascinating insights, which were further strengthened in an interview I had with Mrs. Gordon in her Petoskey home on June 10, 1994. As she recalls it, she first met Hemingway while home from college over Christmas break in late 1919. When she went back to school in Chicago, she said she spent a couple of days with Hemingway and then that summer played tennis every day in Petoskey.

Irene says "there was no romance" that summer. But Mary Hemingway, in her book, *How It Was*, tells Ernest's memories in 1948 of once being engaged to two girls at the same time in the 1920s and adds: "And then he found his true love, a Jewish girl, Irene Goldstein. He had seen her just the year before on the drive to Sun Valley, the best-looking woman in the town...." By the next summer after the tennis, however, both Irene and Ernest had married.

Years past, as Irene and husband Joseph Gordon had two daughters and divorced in the 1940s. She began helping out at the department store, S. Rosenthal & Sons, that her grandfather started in Petoskey and eventually ended up running the business.

Irene watched Hemingway's career with interest but didn't see him again until some 27 years later when he suddenly appeared in her store in September of 1947, picked her up and kissed her. (This apparently was during Ernest's little-noted side trip to Windemere while motoring to Sun Valley.)

Hemingway came and went quickly, but two years later she sent him a birthday card, noting they were both about to observe their 50th year. Ernest responded in a letter dated from Cuba on

September 1, 1949. The one-page typed letter is complete with references to their friendships, his life with Mary and other family matters.

"Irene I tell you now honestly to God that I have never knowen (sic) a finer or lovelier (sic) girl than you and I have been for bad or worse around for a long time, also am writing this at 6 A.M...."

In another passage Ernest talks about his by-then rocky fourth marriage: "Mary is fine. I love her very much and she puts up with everything that is bad about me and keeps me straight because I love her and am making a last good fight to be a good husband and not a bastard. I wish you could know each other because you both have so darn much class. Like great race horses or fine fast boats or the way ducks fly."

There's considerably more to the letter and Irene's recollections about Ernest. Publication and study of the correspondence and memories should shed new light on Hemingway's many Michigan connections and how they influenced his personal and literary lives.

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