

Hemingway's Cats

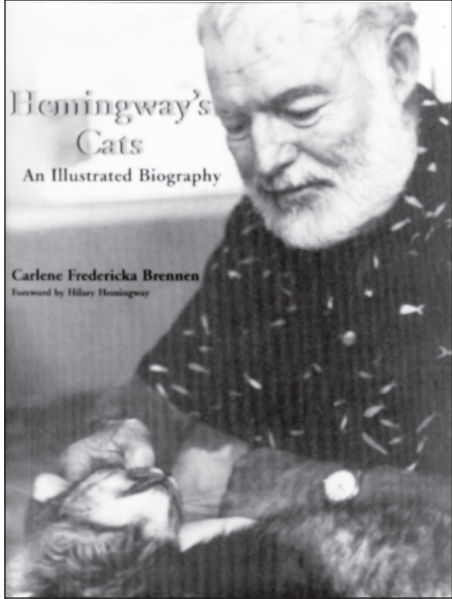
by Priscilla Friedersdorff

Hemingway biographer, Carlene Fredericka Brennen, has spent over 30 years researching Hemingway's life in Key West, Bimini, and Cuba. In *Hemingway's Cats, An Illustrated Biography*, Brennen has expanded her research to encompass the entire life of the famous writer. Using as her focus, Hemingway's fondness for animals, especially cats, she traces the life he led, the women he loved and the books he wrote.

Brennen in a recent interview with the *Island Sun* commented, "The image of Hemingway is myth – we need to show the gentle caring side of Hemingway. He adopted cats all around the world; he had 57 cats in Cuba and had nicknames for his wives that were cat's names and often signed his letters, Big Kitten. I wanted people to understand why he committed suicide. His cat Big Boy Peterson slept with him every night and was probably the last one to see Ernest Hemingway alive."

Brennen reveals that contrary to popular lore, because Pauline, his second wife, was allergic to cats, he never owned a cat in Key West. "The six-toed cats belonged to neighbors and came over the wall to visit."

Chapter one, The Early Cat Years, traces Hemingway's love for animals from



his early childhood; his mother Grace was a cat fancier and his father Clarence had been an aspiring veterinarian before becoming a medical doctor and surgeon.

Brennen's remarkable book is filled with an abundance of photos of Hemingway, his wives, his mistresses, his children, his cats, his dogs and his many residences. The author writes an unvarnished but not unkindly account of the man's life. Her 11 years of research give the reader an all encompassing insight into the life of the man. There is a photo of Ernest and his first bride, Hadley (his Feather Kitty), in which they appear heartbreakingly young, beautiful, fresh and happy. Five years later, after the birth

of John (Bumby), this marriage gives way to the next: one to Pauline Pfeiffer. And a pattern is set, a wife, a new lover, a new wife, a new lover, etc. until nearly the end of his life. A man who could not remain unmarried or faithful.

Brennen quotes him on his dilemma, "To truly love two women at the same time truly love them, is the most destructive and terrible thing that can happen to a man... you do things that are impossible and when you are with one you love her and with the other you love her and together you love them both."

The first home Hemingway ever owned was in Key West and Brennen has assembled a collection of wonderful photos from that era that also trace his life with Pauline and the births of his second and third sons, Patrick and Gregory.

Brennen notes, "Hemingway's life in Key West with Pauline was the most prolific time of his life; he had produced seven books."

Hemingway's third marriage to Martha Gellhorn, a correspondent for *Colliers Magazine*, begins the Cuba era. This period of his life is carefully researched by Brennen and she includes many personal, historical and political details from this time which impact on Hemingway's ultimate decision to leave Cuba for a new home in Idaho. By now he has yet another journalist wife, Mary Welsh, "but as before, he found himself in love with two women." Brennen quotes Martha Gellhorn who had described her marriage to a friend, thusly, "...as lovers, she (Martha) and Ernest were fine, but marriage had been a disaster."

Hemingway responds to a columnist who criticizes him for living in Cuba, "You find me a place in Ohio where I can live on top of a hill and be fifteen minutes away from the Gulf Stream and have my own fruits and vegetables the year around... and I'll go live in Ohio if Miss Mary and my cats and dogs agree."

But the revolution ended his Cuban idyll and seems to have hastened his death; "...after the April 15, 1961, failure of the Bay of Pigs invasion in Cuba, Hemingway was informed by the FBI that he would not be allowed to return to Cuba... not go back to his farm, his boat, his library of nine thousand books, his paintings, his unfinished manuscripts, and his family of dogs and 57 cats." Six days later he attempted suicide, again two days later, and finally ended his life on July 2.

This is an exquisite book; the writing is luminous, the choice of photographs to illustrate the text, brilliant. Brennen has compiled a treasure of a biography of this famous man; with careful and thorough research both in Hemingway's personal life and in the historical events that impacted on his tumultuous life.

Brennen also co-authored *Hemingway in Cuba* with Hilary Hemingway and produced two documentary films, *Hemingway in Cuba* and *Hemingway's Cats*. The publication date of her new book by Pineapple Press was March 15. It is now available from major wholesalers and local bookstores. For more information: Pineapple Press, Inc. PO Box 3889, Sarasota, FL, 34230, themac@pineapplepress.com or www.pineapplepress.com.✱