

DEBORAH LEFF: Good afternoon and welcome. I'm Deborah Leff, director of the John F. Kennedy Library and Museum, and along with John Shattuck, the CEO of the Kennedy Library Foundation, and actually, far more important, the proud father of one of this year's L.L. Winship/PEN New England Award finalists. Along with John, the friends of the Hemingway Collection, PEN New England, The Hemingway Foundation and Society, *The Boston Globe*, and the Ucross Foundation, it is my pleasure to welcome you to the 29th Annual Hemingway Foundation PEN Award and the 10th Annual L.L. Winship/PEN New England Awards Ceremony.

I also want to say what a pleasure it is to have so many members of the Winship family here with us today.

As most of you know, the Kennedy Library has the privilege, because of the extraordinary gift of the Hemingway family, to house and make available the Ernest Hemingway Collection, the world's most comprehensive archive of Ernest Hemingway's work. We've had an exceptional year. We were honored with a \$150,000 Save America's Treasures grant from the National Endowment for the Humanities to preserve the Ernest Hemingway Collection. That grant was matched through the extraordinary generosity of Ernest's son, Patrick, and his wife, Carol Hemingway. It's meant that for the first time we've been able to hire a full-time Hemingway curator, Susan Rinn, and we've begun a new literary forum series.

I know that many people in this room, along with CSPAN, joined us a few weeks ago for a terrific forum on writers on war with Sean Hemingway to guide us. This progress is all the more special because 2004 marks the 50th anniversary of Ernest Hemingway's winning of the Nobel Prize in Literature.

I suspect you won't be surprised to learn that I can't match the eloquence of Ernest Hemingway, so I thought it would be best to let the writer speak for himself. Listen to what Ernest Hemingway said about writing in accepting the Nobel Prize:

"No writer who knows the great writers who did not receive the Prize can accept it other than with humility. There is no need to list these writers. Everyone here may make his own list according to his knowledge and his conscience. It would be impossible for me to ask the ambassador of my country to read a speech in which a writer said all of the things which are in his heart.

"Things may not be immediately discernable in what a man writes, and in this sometimes he is fortunate. But eventually, they're quite clear, and by these and the degree of alchemy that he possesses, he will endure or be forgotten.

“Writing at its best is a lonely life. Organizations for writers palliate the writer’s loneliness, but I doubt if they improve his writing. He grows in public stature as he sheds his loneliness, and often his work deteriorates. For he does his work alone, and if he’s a good enough writer he must face eternity or the lack of it each day. For a true writer, each book should be a new beginning, for he tries again for something that is beyond attainment. He should always try for something that has never been done or that others have tried and failed. Then sometimes, with good luck, he will succeed. How simple the writing of literature would be if it were only necessary to write in another way what has been well written. It is because we have had such great writers in the past that a writer is driven far out past where he can go, out to where no one can help him.

“I have spoken too long for a writer. A writer should write what he has to say and not speak it. Again, I thank you.”

MS. LEFF: In discussing what it takes to make a great writer, Hemingway noted that it was “real seriousness in regard to writing being one of the two absolute necessities; the other, unfortunately, is talent.”

Today we honor those writers who meet both criteria as we present the Hemingway Foundation PEN Award, America’s best-known prize for a distinguished first work of fiction, and the L.L. Winship/PEN New England Award honoring a book about New England or by a New England author.

Before turning to today's event, let me offer a few thank yous to those who made the ceremony possible: *The Boston Globe*, especially Aisha Saunders, Nancy Buzby, and Jim Venable; The Hemingway Foundation and Society, which funds the PEN Award, and especially its president, Linda Wagner-Martin; the Friends of the Hemingway Collection, which I encourage all of you to join -- it's dedicated to commemorating the life and work of Ernest Hemingway and supports the purchase and preservation of Hemingway materials for the archives here; The Ucross Foundation and its new president, Michelle Sullivan; PEN New England, including Perri Klass, the chair; Helen Atwan, who chairs the Hemingway Foundation PEN Awards Committee; Andre Dubus, who heads up the L.L. Winship/PEN New England Awards Committee; and Christine Casan and Kathryn Parnell, who did so much to make today's ceremony happen; at the Kennedy Library, James Roth, our wonderful Hemingway archivist, and Megan Desnoyers, who has worked so hard and wonderfully in the Hemingway Room for so long. And I want to thank our foreign coordinator, Amy Macdonald, our entire public programs and forums staff, and at the Kennedy Library Foundation, Ann Scanlon and Sandy Sedaca.

Most of all, of course, I thank the wonderful Hemingway family. It is really special to have with us here today Ernest Hemingway's grandson, Sean, and his wife, Collette. Unfortunately, Ernest's son, Patrick and his wife, Carol, couldn't be with us today. They've given us so much and have been

tremendous visionary supporters of this collection in every possible way.
It's now a great pleasure to open the 2004 Presentation of Awards.

Joining me on the stage in just a moment will be Margot Livesey and Sean Hemingway who will announce the runners-up and finalists and then they will announce the winner of the Hemingway Foundation PEN Award. Monica Wood, Richard Hoffman, and John Crawford, who is Lawrence Winship's grandson, will announce the two winners and four finalists of the L.L. Winship/PEN New England Award. Perri Klass will then introduce our keynote speaker, Russell Banks, who has recently returned from the Hemingway home in Cuba.

Margot, please join me on stage. [Applause.]

MARGOT LIVESEY: Good afternoon. I'm thrilled to be here at this august occasion and to be speaking on behalf of myself and of my estimable and opinionated fellow judges, Dagoberto Gilb and Chris Bohjalian. Together we've shared several months of vigorous reading and debate. And it's wonderful to be here today to celebrate the outcome of our joint endeavors and much more importantly to celebrate the exhilarating and beautiful work of the finalists. Reading your work educated and entertained us and reminded us of our best selves. It also filled us communally and separately with the less-admirable emotion of rightly envy. As Chris

Bohjalian said in one exchange, “If only I had been this good when I was that young.” We congratulate you heartily and heartfelty.

This year’s runners up are: Suki Kim for *The Interpreter*. Will you stand, Suki? [Applause.] And Ellen Ullman for *The Bug*.

The finalists for the PEN/Hemingway Awards are: Murad Kalam for *Night Journey*. [Applause.] And ZZ Packer who couldn’t be here today for *Drinking Coffee Elsewhere*. [Applause.] And the winner is Jennifer Haigh for *Mrs. Kimble*. [Applause.]

MS. LIVESEY: *Mrs. Kimble*, it’s rare that a novelist offers both page-turning linear momentum and graceful stylistic arabesque. Jennifer Haigh gives her readers both in *Mrs. Kimble*, the tale of three complex women and shrewd cold-blooded Ken Kimble, who marries them all in the course of four decades. This book is notable not only because of Haigh’s rich characterizations and the deft maturity with which she explores love, it is also an insightful social history tracing both the role of women and the place of marriage in the second half of the 20th century. Elegantly structured, rich with wisdom and surprise, here is a truly remarkable first novel. Thank you, Jennifer. [Applause.]

JENNIFER HAIGH: Thank you. It is such a remarkable experience to publish a first novel at all. And to write the book and then have it be noticed

by an organization like PEN New England, is an incredible experience. Thank you so much to the Hemingway family and to everybody involved with PEN. And thanks to everyone at William Morrow for publishing this book so intelligently and with such conviction. I am truly grateful.

I'm going to read a bit from *Mrs. Kimble*. As Margot explained, it's the story of three women who marry the same man. I'm going to read a little bit about the first of the three wives, Birdie. In this scene, Birdie is reminiscing about the husband who has left.

“Drinking, Birdie remembered, late summer at Hambly(?) Bible College, her third floor dormitory room stifling hot. Rules for when you could eat, or sleep, or shower, the length of your skirt, what you could listen to on the radio. The dormitory, a world of women, their voices, their laughter, damn stockings and under things drying in the communal bathroom. After 8:00 p.m. quiet hours. No speaking above a whisper, only studying. Exception on Wednesday night: choir practice, the only time a Hambly girl was allowed to raise her voice. Reverend Kimble directed the choir with watery strokes, eyes closed, a heaviness in his fingertips as if they'd been dipped in something sweet and elastic. He was young then, just past 30.”

“Except for the elderly Dean, he was the only man the girls had seen in months. After practice, they crowded around him, giggling, asking questions. He had a remarkable voice, deep and resonant. He gave his full

attention to each girl as she spoke as if she were the only one in the room. He did not appear to play favorites, though there were rumors. A girl had been seen coming out of his office, a blonde girl from Charleston, tall and exquisite. For all her beauty, she had a voice like a toad. She did not sing in the choir. Why then, would she visit the reverend in his office? Publicly and privately, the girls could only wonder.”

“At practice they followed his hands with their eyes. The hands told them when to breathe, to release, to fall silent. Birdie had studied Art History. Watching him, she thought of the Pieta, Mary weeping over her son’s crucified body, his naked arms smooth as milk, his chest delicately ribbed like the underside of a flower. She imagined Reverend Kimble’s shoulders bare beneath his shirt, his body the long white body of Christ. One evening, he approached her after practice. “Vivian,” he said, “are you having problems with the descant?”

“No one had ever called her anything but Birdie, a childhood nickname that had stuck because of her lovely voice. Vivian fit her badly, as stiff and chafing as a new pair of shoes. His eyes were a startling blue. He watched her closely as though he could see through her skin, blood rushed to her face. ‘No,’ she said. ‘I can sing it.’ ‘I know you can,’ he laid his hand over hers. ‘That’s why I gave it to you.’

“In the spring he touched her again. Rehearsal with the windows open, filling the chapel with the muddy smell of life. Birdie’s sinuses were swollen with allergies. Her voice thick and nasal. She inhaled and felt a horrible squeeze in her chest. As a child she’d nearly drowned in the pond behind her house. She’d never forgotten the sensation. Her lungs clutching for air and pulling in water instead. She grabbed a music stand for support and sent the pages flying. A sheaf of paper drifting to the floor. The reverend sat her on the piano bench. Even in her terror she was aware of his arm across her shoulders. He dismissed the class with a wave of his hand and spoke to her in a soft voice. “Asthma,” he said. “My brother had it as a child.” He rubbed her shoulder through her blouse.

“You have a brother,” she said. She didn’t care if he had ten of them; she would have said anything to make it last, the unexpected gift of his hand on her shoulder. “Used to,” he said. “He died as a child.” “I’m sorry,” said Birdie. And quickly, before she could be afraid, she laid her hand on his thigh. “My mother died last year.” Tears slipped down her cheeks. She wanted to lift her skirt and show him her knees covered with childhood scars. To tell him about the woman her father had just married, now using her mother’s things. She wanted to take off her clothes and show him everything. He kissed her on the mouth.”

“They were married on a Saturday morning in June, the day before her 19th birthday. She was three months pregnant, not yet showing. They drove to a

country church in North Carolina where the pastor preached in shirtsleeves and owned a strawberry farm across the way. After the ceremony, he sold Ken an old pick-up truck for \$200. A week later they drove it to Pullman, Missouri, to live with Ken's parents. He'd been fired from Hambly. There was nowhere else to go."

Thank you. [Applause.]

MONICA WOOD: Hello. The L.L. Winship/PEN New England Award is named for long-time *Boston Globe* editor Lawrence L. Winship and is given annually to a book with a New England topic or setting or by a New England author. And I know I speak for all my fellow judges when I say that this task which requires reading poetry, non-fiction, and fiction was both daunting and delightful. And we are all thrilled with all of our final choices.

The four finalists of the L.L. Winship/PEN New England Award are: Caroline Alexander for *The Bounty* and she is not here today; [applause] Dick Allen for *The Day Before*; Jessica Shattuck for *The Hazards of Good Breeding*; and Rosanna Warren for *Departure* and she is not here today [applause].

We have two winners this year which, I believe, is unprecedented. And the first I would like to announce is Joan Leegant for *An Hour in Paradise* [applause]. And it is my great pleasure to read the official judges' citation:

“The earnest seekers that populate Joan Leegant’s story collection, *An Hour in Paradise*, are Jews of varying degrees of orthodoxy who have one thing in common: a search for meaning. Leegant's poignant and often comical cast of characters includes a rabbi trying to resuscitate a rag-a-tag Boston shul, a resentful do-gooder and his ungrateful neighbor, a father whose only son is wrecking the family business, and a retiree who has waited 40 years to marry her first love.

As these ordinary people muddle through troubles largely of their own making, they cleave to their religious beliefs with mixed results. Reminding us that life is not so much a matter of faith as a matter of hope. Because their longing is common to us all, they transcend the particulars of Jewishness and enter the realm of the universal striver. This transcendence is the mark of literature.”

Congratulations, Joan.

JOAN LEEGANT: Thank you very much. And thank you for those very kind words. I also want to express my thanks to *The Boston Globe* and Winship family and PEN New England for this wonderful honor, not only for myself but really on behalf of all writers for your commitment and dedication to literary craft.

I'm going to read from the beginning of the first story in the book and it's called "The Tenth."

"After 51 years as a Rabbi, Samuel Steele had believed until that morning that when it came to the often elusive tenth man needed to complete a minion, he had seen everything: drag queens, blonde farmboys with names like Swenson, Nordstrom, a former monk who sometimes wore his robes.

"He gazed out that big window of the study and what he was sure would be his last shul, small, sparsely attended, and like almost all of its members, dying, and watch Beaconswood Avenue come to life. He had been wrong.

"The steady flow of pedestrians had already absorbed all but one of the handful who'd made up that morning's quorum, conducting them like a gentle stream into the everyday world. It was a beautiful day, one of the first of real spring, the season is always late getting to Boston as if it had to stop somewhere else along the way. Bulbs, green leaves, a blue sky like a postcard.

"The trolley stopped on the corner with a loud clang, the car Nathan Lefkowitz should have been on. Instead, Lefkowitz, at 86, the oldest of Samuel's congregates lay sleeping on the couch behind him, recovering. It was Lefkowitz who had been charged that morning, as he had for the past 40 years of mornings, with finding the tenth man. They could pray without a

full quorum but most of the men, some weeks all of them, were saying the Kaddish which could only be said with the requisite ten. And what else could they do for their dead now but pray.

“The door of the trolley flew shut and the car lumbered on. Samuel glanced over at Lefkowitz who was covered with a thick blue banquet cloth, the only thing Samuel could find in the closet. At 6:45 that morning, Lefkowitz had posted himself outside the shul, standing by the door as was his custom, counting. By ten to seven, there were eight of them. By five minutes of the hour, they had nine. Taking no chances, Lefkowitz had immediately begun to make the rounds, starting with the trolley stop. There, he would have politely inquired of any of the men if they were Jewish and, if so, could they help form a minion. Samuel had watched him from the study window as he did every time the old man ventured out, his small and ancient form draped in a gray raincoat. He admired Lefkowitz’s style, he had been privy to a variety of techniques in his day from strong-armed tactics laying the guilt on redescent Jews to the ultimate indiscretion that verged on code, so much so that it was sometimes impossible to know what religion was involved or even that it was religion at all. He appreciated Lefkowitz’s straightforward manner.

“Having no luck at the trolley stop, Lefkowitz had turned around and began walking to the other end of the block. He passed Samuel at the window but he didn’t look up. At the other end, they both knew was a less-promising

source: an apartment building, heavily populated with college students. Samuel had never actually seen Lefkowitz at work there, the building was out of view, nor had he ever approached it himself but he had heard enough to imagine, to guess that the handful of rumpled students who emerged at that hour probably didn't live there and had, instead, spent the night in someone else's apartment having too much to drink, or smoking marijuana, or being in love or something simulating it. It was hard to know.

“The two or three souls Lefkowitz had managed to pick up there since the year Samuel had arrived invariably fled at the first sign of anyone removing a tallit and preparing to conclude, lest God forbid they might have to face anyone, talk about themselves.

“The street was perking up. More trolley clangs, more traffic. That morning, however, astonishingly, shockingly, Lefkowitz had been successful at the student apartment building. A set of Siamese twins. Recruitment hadn't been involved. According to Lefkowitz's account after the service, he hadn't even opened his mouth when they stepped out of the doorway and said, ‘You're from the synagogue up the street, aren't you?’

“Lefkowitz was in the middle of telling this to them, to Samuel, when suddenly his face turned ashen and he began to tremble. Samuel helped get him onto the couch. Then went to the kitchen for a cup of orange juice. By the time he got back, Lefkowitz was asleep. That was over an hour ago.

“Now Lefkowitz was coughing himself awake. Samuel went to the couch and handed him the juice. ‘Did I tell you what they said to me as they came out of the doorway?’ Lefkowitz said, as if he were dreaming. Not an hour, not even a minute having passed. Samuel sat on the edge of the couch. Of course Lefkowitz was shaken up, they had all been shaken up. Not given to talk, especially not to anything resembling hysteria or gossip, the other men had left quickly keeping their words brief, hushed, covert, poor fellows, God help them, see you tomorrow.

“But Lefkowitz was taking it the hardest and why not? He was the one who’d first seen them, the one they talked to. ‘You’re from the synagogue up the street, aren’t you?’ Lefkowitz said. ‘That’s what they said, Samuel.’ And then what happened? ‘I couldn’t utter a word, though they seemed non-pulsed, like they were used to it.’ Lefkowitz paused, ‘I don’t know how they live.’ Samuel nodded. ‘Who could imagine such a life, forever side-by-side with another with a line where one began and the other ended, disappeared half-way down or never even existed.’ Lefkowitz went on, ‘Finally, I began to recover my senses but before I could think of what to say, they asked if they could come to the minion.’ Lefkowitz’s eyes, a faded gray that thirty years before might have been pale blue, seemed to be pleading with Samuel as if Lefkowitz were afraid he’d made some terrible mistake. ‘So, I asked if they were Jewish.’ ‘And?’ ‘And they said, yes. But I couldn’t tell who was talking, one of them or both. It was like one voice coming from two people

or two voices speaking at once or maybe one was speaking and the other gesturing, I couldn't tell. It was so confusing.'

"Samuel put his hand over Lefkowitz's. More than anything, they all feared confusion. The tricks, the mind play, the lapses that happened without them knowing. But who wouldn't have been confused? The two of them standing in the doorway chatting with poor Lefkowitz as if coming upon such a tenth were the most natural thing in the world. 'The walk back was a blur,' Lefkowitz said. 'I don't know how we got here.' He waved his free hand aimlessly. "All through the davening I'm thinking, I never saw them walk. How did they walk? One pair of legs, two half bodies on top, two arms, the hand came down, limp, onto his chest. But they must have walked in front of me. They were holding the door when I got here.'

"Samuel pressed Lefkowitz's hand. 'Maybe you kept your eyes down, Nathan. Maybe you looked away, not to make them feel like a pariah.' Lefkowitz turned, shook his head. 'When in your life did you ever stare at the misfit, the cripple, or the crazy person?' Samuel insisted. 'You were fed it with your mother's milk like the rest of us. Don't make a mockery of the stranger, a spectacle of the infirm.' Lefkowitz made a sad smile, 'Paganism. That's what my father called it. The side shows at the circus. The veterans without legs that we've looked at in the street.' He paused, remembering. 'By him, one look made it into a freak show. One glance and we were as bad as the barbarians who've made midgets dance on tables. Always we

were one step away from idolatry.’ ‘You’re not loosing your mind, Nathan,’ Samuel said. ‘I’m telling you, you looked away. Wild horses couldn’t have made you watch those two unfortunates.’

Thank you. [Applause.]

RICHARD HOFFMAN: It’s my great honor and a pleasure to read the judges’ citation for the other winner of the L.L. Winship/PEN New England Award, Carlo Rotella.

“Like the fighters, fans, and family who so vividly inhabit these nine essays, Carlo Rotella takes pains in cut time. He examines encounters that become, through his exquisite prose, not only his education but ours. Whether he is writing about a young person’s ambitions or an older person’s resignations, Rotella captures the movement from skill to grace, from discipline to dignity, that is his true subject. *Cut Time* is a book about acquiring a broad, deep, and lasting education, about honoring consequences as lessons about becoming more fully human.”

Congratulations, Carlo. [Applause.]

CARLO ROTELLA: Thank you. To start with, thank you, Richard. Those are words that I will remember, especially coming from the author of

a book as disciplined and as fearless and as unsparing and as compassionate as *Half the House*.

I want to say a little something before I read. When I first got the happy news besides being almost abjectly grateful and especially pleased because the recognition comes from colleagues in the writing trades, I thought, that's funny, this is for a New England writer or a book about New England. And here I am, a guy from Chicago just passing through.

And if you want to nail this book to a region, to a place, then it's probably a Pennsylvania book, a Lehigh Valley book. That's where I started writing it and that's where the main character lives. But then I went back to *Cut Time* with New England in mind. I began to realize that as much as anything else, it's a Brockton and Lowell and Mattapan and Boston and Providence and Foxwoods and New Haven sort of a book. And that, like a prospect out of Pennsylvania who moves up to Brockton to train with Goody Petronelli, it matured on the New England tank-town circuit. It couldn't have been written anywhere else and come out the way it did.

Then I got to thinking that I've lived out east longer than I ever lived in Chicago. I crossed that line three years ago. And I lived most of the last 21 years in New England. It will take me awhile to get used to the idea that maybe I'm more of a Boston and Cambridge and New Haven and New York and Eastern PA, and maybe even Bedford, Massachusetts, shaped person

than I am a guy from Chicago who's just passing through. Maybe I sort of am a New England writer and maybe *Cut Time* is a New England book. It all comes as news to me and there can be no more pleasant way to learn these lessons about your book and yourself than this.

So, my thanks to PEN New England, *The Boston Globe*, and L.L. Winship's family and especially the judges. Not only for the honor which I take deeply to heart but for the education.

I'm going to read a very brief ring-side scene from the book. It's a Pennsylvania scene that was written in New England. [Laughter.] It's a little set piece -- I take good notes. It's a little set piece that opens the chapter about why a former champion still fights and why he fights well, which are two different things.

This is Chapter 8. It's entitled "Bidness" for reasons that will become clear.

"Larry Holmes stood at the ropes in the ring haranguing a pair of lawyers who'd stopped by his gym to watch him train. The two visitors both short and soft had the look of Lehigh Valley big shots. Winter tans from Florida or a salon, sport jackets that fit poorly at the neck and butt ledge, stretch slacks and loafers. When they came in they'd hesitated self-consciously just inside the doorway, looking over the room and marshalling the appropriate bluff hardiness. A slight awkwardness in one's public manner, even if one is

a big shot, marks the local style. A touch of the loathing for fancy self-regard on which the nearby Amish have built their way of life.

“Holmes, wearing a sweat-soaked gray T-shirt and skin-tight electric blue leggings was finished sparring. His cornerman had divested him of gloves, foul protector, and head gear. As Holmes approached 50, his sparring sessions had become more measured, even contemplative, but this afternoon’s had turned mean. Shouting encouragement to his initially recalcitrant sparring partner, Linwood Jones, Holmes had walloped him thoroughly. Holmes had made effortful punching sounds, hu hu, yoop, ly yoop. And that’s always how he does it hu hu, yoop, ly yoop. And the last one’s a question, “Does it hurt there?” Made effortful punching sounds as he threw combinations, a sign that he was hitting in earnest.

“Jones, hard-pressed, had fought back with more than fanned aggression and the action had been unusually fast and fierce. At the end of the last scheduled round, Holmes had said, ‘Now you gotta’ go one more because you hit me in the back of my head.’ And in the extra round, he had landed hurtful body punches with his breakable right hand. Another sign that he meant business.

“The next fight in his long running comeback was still more than a month away, but his fighting disposition, like his technique, needed tuning up before a bout. Holmes had been warming down in the ring by himself when

the lawyers came in. He interrupted his shadow boxing to give them a hard time, too. He held one or both, and perhaps the class they represented, responsible for not selling a piece of his property as quickly and lucratively as he would have liked. 'It's not making any money, god dammit,' he told them. 'What the hell these lawyers for except to make me some money?'

"The visitors sat in folding chairs at ringside looking up through the ropes at his imposing figure. They wore smiles meant to show that their colorful pal did not fully comprehend the complexity of such matters. Holmes pointed down over the ropes at them with one wrapped and taped hand. He said, 'That market's gonna fall soon, a big fall.' The smiles grew wider and thinner. 'What's gonna be left that's worth something? Property. That's right. Real estate. Real property. So take care of my god damn bidness like you're supposed to.'

"Holmes says business when he wants to, but when he says bidness, he means not just his financial affairs but also the whole unsentimental history attached to his name. The story of laboring in the gym, in the ring, and at the office for many long years to earn the right not to take any shit from anybody. Having said what was on his mind, Holmes let the moment pass. He offered a hard peace-making laugh, echoed uncertainly by the lawyers. And was circling and jabbing routine. As he shadow boxed, he added, between breaths, 'My mama always said use your head, it's the little things that count.' The lawyers, deciding they had not been insulted, sat back in

their folding chairs relieved. Each hauled a loafered black socked foot over a stretched slacked knee, the pant leg hiking up to expose the pale calf above the sock line. Their jackets gaped and settled. Holmes moved in the ring, sticking and countering an imaginary opponent.

“On another afternoon at the same winding-down hour, still unretired and a few months closer to 50, Holmes was messing around in the ring at the end of a workout and somebody asked him about the continuing Fraser/Ali feud. Holmes said, ‘Why should Joe Fraser be mad at Muhammad Ali? Every time he fought him, he made \$5 million. That’s \$15 million. If you give me \$15 million I’ll kiss your ass in Center Square.’

“An observer sitting for a few days among the idlers on the benches around the Civil War monument in Center Square, the traffic circle in the middle of downtown Easton, could count on seeing most of the towns inhabitants pass by. And to the imagination of a resolutely local man of the Lehigh Valley like Holmes, there is no stage more public than that. Not even the television screens and national publications where Fraser and Ali have conducted their extended beef. Holmes said, ‘I’ll let you fuck me in the ass in Center Square for \$15 million.’ They can call me a faggot and I’ll say,’ (here he affected a high effeminate voice) ‘Thank you very much.’ Still in that high effeminate voice he called out, ‘Bye, now,’ turned, and waved over his shoulder like Audrey Hepburn departing in a roadster and climbed out of the ring.”

Thanks very much. [Applause.]

PERRI KLASS: It is a real honor and a real pleasure to introduce our keynote speaker. To introduce a writer who is a brilliant and important voice in American literature. I'm thrilled to welcome a writer whose work I have loved and admired so much for so long. And also to celebrate these awards, a writer with, as you will hear, very special connections to Hemingway in this anniversary year. And a writer who has connections to this region. Russell Banks was raised in New Hampshire and eastern Massachusetts and among the many regions and parts of the world that he has evoked so confidently and brilliantly, he has written about New England and I'll read you a line or two from the beginning of his novel *Affliction*.

“Everything of importance, that is everything that gives rise to the telling of this story occurred during a single deer hunting season in a small town, a village, located in a dark forested valley in upstate New Hampshire where Wade was born and raised and so was I and where most of the White House family has lived for five generations.”

Russell Banks has published many works of fiction, including: *Searching for Survivors*, *The New World*, *Trailerpark*, *Relation of My Imprisonment*, *Continental Drift*, *Affliction*, *The Sweet Hereafter*, *Rule of the Bone*, *Cloudsplitter*, and recently, *The Angel on the Roof*, a phenomenal collection of short stories. Two of his novels have been made into movies: *The Sweet*

Hereafter and *Affliction*. He's won many awards and prizes for his work, including John Dos Passos Award, a literature award from the American Academy of Arts and Letters. Two of his novels have been finalists for the Pulitzer Prize.

A decade ago in a profile of Russell Banks for the magazine *Ploughshares*, Don Lee began the profile by citing the words which began Banks's fifth novel, *Continental Drift*. And early in the novel you hear, "It's not memory you need for telling this story, it's clear-eyed pity and hot old-time anger and a northern man's love of the sun. It's a white Christian man's entwined obsession with race and sex and a proper middle class American's shame for his nation's history. And he went on to comment in the article, "Within those brief lines are adumbrations of Banks's concerns as a writer and as a citizen, of his mastery at turning words into incantations, his urgency as a storyteller, his personal roots and demons. Russell Banks continues to write about the world with clear-eyed pity and hot old-time anger. And to write as if the writing itself is a matter of life and death."

In one interview in 1998, he was quoted as saying, "Storytelling has made it possible for me to make my life coherent to myself. I think writing saved my life."

The fiction of Russell Banks, urgent, incantatory, speaks to us in voices ranging from a teenage girl in the 1980s who has lost the use of her legs, the

elderly son of John Brown a hundred years ago looking back on his family and their turbulent times, a desperate women fleeing Haiti with her baby, a personal injury lawyer in a town which has had a terrible accident.

In all of these voices, his fiction confronts again and again the hard, the difficult, the unanswerable questions of the world, of our country, of our times, of all times. What happens to a town if it loses its children? How can terrible things happen in the world? Must they be somebody's fault? What happens to a tragically abused child who grows into an adult with the power to do harm? How can the world hold its great imbalances of rich and poor, of white and black? What happens when people do terrible things in a good and noble cause? And how can human lives encompass injustice and tragedy and yet continue?

These aren't questions to be easily answered, but Russell Banks in his fiction engages them and re-engages them in brilliant stories; gives them voice and personality and character and often heart-breaking substance in stories that matter in all the ways that stories should matter. Stories that engage our ears and our minds with the complexities of voice and narrative. Stories that engage our imaginations and our souls with the world and all of its questions and all of its outrageous and all of its glories and hopes.

In his own introduction to the short story collection *The Angel on the Roof*, Russell Banks describes his father telling him a story and says, "His story

was a prayer, like all good stories.” That profile that started with the beginning of *Continental Drift* ended with some lines from the very end of the novel, *Continental Drift*. “The world as it is goes on being itself. Books get written. Novels, stories, and poems stuffed with particulars that try to tell us what the world is. Good cheer and mournfulness over lives other than our own, even wholly invented lives know, especially wholly invented lives, deprive the world as it is of some of the greed it needs to continue to be itself. Sabotage and subversion then are this book’s objective. Go my book, and help destroy the world as it is.”

Russell Banks writes words that matter. And he writes with power and with a certainty that words do matter, that stories matter, that fiction matters, that writing and literature matter. He writes stories as prayers, stories to bring good cheer and mournfulness over lives other than our own, stories to change the world, stories to subvert the world, stories to save one’s life. It’s a great honor to introduce Russell Banks.

[Applause.]

RUSSELL BANKS: Thank you, Perri Klass. And thank you, Deborah Leff, director of the Kennedy Library, and members of the Hemingway family and administrators of The Hemingway Foundation and the PEN Awards Committee for giving me the opportunity, finally, to visit this extraordinary institution for the first time. It shan’t be the last. And

congratulations to the finalists and winners of these two very important and prestigious awards.

Finding myself in this place and in particular on the occasion of the presentation of the Hemingway Award, I'm suddenly moved at finding myself in the mere presence of the papers of Ernest Hemingway. In fact, I visited them a little earlier, which was a little bit like visiting a shrine. My legs are a little wobbly, my hands tremble, and I fear that my voice will tighten and rise as if the man himself or his ghost were somewhere in the building waiting impatiently for me to finish so he can say his piece and shake the hand of the winners and go out with a few fishing buddies for a mojito or three.

I should not be surprised by my emotion. After all, the letters, journals, and manuscripts archived here are the writings that over my lifetime created me. Or at least that part of me which is responsible for much of my own letters, journals, and manuscripts.

Like so many American writers of my generation, perhaps especially those of us who are male, my sense of the enterprise, my view of myself as a writer, my understanding of the writing process for better or worse, and there are some of both, have been generated and shaped by the life and the work of Ernest Hemingway. Perhaps, especially, by the life. My connections with Hemingway were so linked to his work and to his public

image, but for me they still are powerful. I never met him, which from some accounts might have been fortunate for me.

When he died in 1961, I was 21 years old and had only begun to think of myself as a writer and would not have dared to present myself to him in person. And I never qualified for the Hemingway Award. Since by the time it came into existence, I was 37 and my first book, which was not very good anyhow, had long gone out of print along with my second and third. Happily, they have since been returned to print. But you know what I mean. Too late, and too soon for any personal association, direct or indirect with Ernest Hemingway. Nonetheless, he is as vivid a presence to me as any writer who ever lived. And I have in the last few days been wondering why this is so and how.

The shape of my work does not especially resemble his, although it is American fiction and is, therefore, inescapably descended from his. And as I am now a few years older than he was when he died, I can say that I have lived my life very differently than the way he lived his, which is one of the reasons I am a writer and probably one of the reasons I am still alive. In fact, I am a few years older than my father was, my real father, when he died of the same causes as Hemingway.

I've been put in mind of a novel by Nicholson Baker published back in 1992 called *U and I*, the letter "U" and "I", the letter "I." A comedy of literary

manners about the obsession of an obscure novelist named Nicholson Baker for an older, very famous novelist named John Updike, the “U” of *U and I*. It’s a novel of an obsessive love of an imagined object as well as an amusing meditation on fame, literature, and the writing process itself. It tells us perhaps more than we want to know about “I” and rather less than we want to know about “U”, but nonetheless, it made me think that I might title my remarks today “H and I” and hope that in the process I can shine a little more light on “H” than “I.”

There is probably no writer in American literature who in his or her lifetime was as famous as Ernest Hemingway, not even Mark Twain who wrote more, lived longer, was a stage performer and a stand up comedian of the first rank and probably out sold Hemingway from first book to last.

And in the late 1950s, when in my late teens, I first rose to literary self-consciousness as opposed to literary self-awareness, it was practically impossible for me, a white boy turned loose in America not to model myself in my own inept, skinny way after the public persona created by and for Ernest Hemingway. Though I was impressed and, as an American, proud, it wasn’t because of his Nobel Prize which he won in 1954 when I was 14. Faulkner who won it in 1949, the first American Nobel in my lifetime, made no such impression on me. His fame was of a different order. A strictly literary order. It wasn’t because of *The Old Man and the Sea* which I read at about the same time or *For Whom the Bell Tolls* or *A Farewell to*

Arms which had already become part of a classic American literature read in classrooms alongside *Moby Dick* and *The Scarlet Letter* and his own beloved *Huckleberry Finn*. And it wasn't because of the permanently great short stories. I was too young and cosseted and innocent to understand let alone imitate the astringent stoicism of his protagonists, their disillusionment and tight-lipped rejection of both despair and happiness in this or any other life.

And a few years later, when I began to fumble my way into writing stories and novels, I saw it once that his style, his sentences, paragraphs, diction, and structure was whole and of a piece, uniquely his, perfect, and inimitable. So it wasn't that. Instead, drunk on words and high on American history and myth, I imitated Faulkner, Thomas Wolf, Kerouac, and Nelson Algren.

Yet in 1959, when I hitchhiked south from my mother's home in Massachusetts to join Fidel Castro, and ...(inaudible) and Cienfuego and put my poor shoulder to the wheel of revolution, it was due less to revolutionary order than to Ernest Hemingway's publicly declared support of Fidel and his bearded band. I was, therefore, motivated more by product endorsement than ideology which is probably why I never got closer to Cuba than downtown Miami, Florida.

And when Fidel in early 1959 rode triumphantly into Havana and no longer needed the help of a teenaged American kid who spoke no Spanish, I got a job moving furniture in a Florida hotel and a year later married a pretty girl

who modeled bathing suits for Moss Brothers Department Stores. And a year after that discovered I was a father. Not an auspicious start for a young man trying to model himself on Ernest Hemingway, who at the same age had gone to war, been gravely wounded, nursed back to health by a beautiful older woman, and wrote deathless prose by the time he was 21. I was frightened by what seemed to be my fate and ashamed of myself for having failed Hemingway, "H."

Yet, despite my early failure to achieve heroic literary lift-off, two years later, by which time Hemingway had forcibly taken himself from us, I did think of myself as a writer. I was also newly divorced, as he had been at that age.

Like Hemingway, I wrote every day and kept a list of each day's word count. I drank heavily and did a bit of barroom brawling. I fished for trout with flies and shot at animals. Once again, the image of Ernest Hemingway was in ascendance and was constantly before me. Now, however, with his shocking suicide, like so many young men of my generation few of whom were actually writers, and like most of the male writers of the generation preceding mine, I was worshiping at the alter of an absent god. Having methologized his life we elevated his death and personalized it. We made his death as heroic as his life had seemed, and used it to color our own lives with a preening dread.

Ostensibly writing about the Apollo 11 mission and a fire on the moon, Norman Mailer began, “Norman, born in the sign of Aquarius, had been in Mexico when the news came about Hemingway.” He continues the ponderous hymn, a song of himself as much as of Hemingway, “Now the greatest living romantic was dead. Dread was loose. The giant had not paid his dues and something awful was in the air. Into the silences static would enter.” As indeed it does, at least in that particular book.

“Russell, born in the sign of Aries, was in Boston’s Back Bay when the news came about Hemingway.” I was an urban beatnik and snapped my fingers to Miles and Monk, read poems in coffeehouses, and typed out my first novel on a battered Olympus portable typewriter. But it wasn’t long before I was hitchhiking south to the Florida Keys where I hunkered down alone in a rented room on Isle Maraca Key, situating myself there for no other reason than that it was only a few miles from Key West where the old man had lived and famously fished and drunk too much and brawled from the late 20s into the mid 30s. Where he’d sucker punched Wallace Stevens and insulted John Dos Passos and entertained fabulous movie stars. Where he wrote *A Farewell to Arms*, *Death in the Afternoon*, *Green Hills of Africa*, and some of his greatest stories. And in the process, turned himself or was turned by others into an American hero. Not merely a literary hero, something more nearly mythic than that. An iconic figure, the likes of which we had never seen before and probably never will again.

I moved down the Keys, landing eventually at Key West. Rented a room in a house that turned out to be a whorehouse where I saw a man get stabbed to death, played cards with a man named Doc, which I advise you never to do, ate at a place called Mom's which you should also never do, and drank too many daiquiris at Sloppy Joe's, Hemingway's old haunt. Then one lonely night, standing in an alcoholic haze outside the gate of Hemingway's empty, darkened house, it gradually dawned on me that I was too late. In every imaginable way, too little and too late. I was chasing Hemingway's ghost. Worse, I was chasing the ghost of a ghost, not that of a man. Certainly not the ghost of an artist of the first magnitude. And it was only an image designed to feed male fantasies of bravery and glamour, manufactured for popular consumption by magazines and films and newspaper columnists. It was if the real ghost of the real Hemingway himself, like Hamlet's father, had emerged from the long abandoned house on Whitehead Street, had stood there on the veranda for a moment and had spoken to me.

I saw for the first time that the raw material used to construct and sustain that god-like image was a man, a genius, yes, but a deeply flawed human being who had suffered physically and mentally for decades, who had been driven mad by fame and his need for it and alcohol and for violence. At that moment, a great sadness came over me.

I soon left Key West and traveled first to New Orleans with Doc, as it turned out, where we shared a motel at the edge of the city with a dozen strippers

from the Latin Quarter, a cheerful, friendly clack of women whom Doc had worked for as a barker, back in his Atlantic City days. From there, I made my way to Mexico where I was mugged and robbed at gunpoint and on out to Los Angeles, all the while banging away on my old Olympus typewriter.

After that, down and out in LA, broke, and unable to find work, for I had no marketable skills and for all I know still don't, I returned to New Hampshire where I had been raised. I joined the Pipefitters Union and started working days as a plumber alongside my father, nights writing stories and poems and re-writing that same first novel. I read obsessively and with reckless abandon from the Concord, New Hampshire Public Library.

I fell in love and married again. And though I eagerly read the posthumous works of Hemingway as they appeared year after year, *A Moveable Feast*, *Islands in the Stream*, and the previously uncollected bits of journalism and fiction and loved everything of his that I read and learned with each sentence fresh ways to master my own craft, the image of Hemingway no longer held me in thrall. I was inventing my life as a writer the only way a writer can: with no models, no templates, and no gods, false or true.

Many years later, I returned to Key West. This time to accept a career achievement award made annually during a festival called Hemingway Days. And this time I was invited through the gate and into the house on Whitehead Street where in a ceremony on the veranda, I was given a plaque

and check by the mayor of the city. As today, there were several members of the Hemingway family present which certainly gave the event a special luster. Of course, I remembered freshly that young beginning novelist who had nearly been lead astray by the manufactured image of Ernest Hemingway and realized anew that if I had continued to follow what I imagined was his lead, I would never have qualified for that or any other career achievement award. I would have had no career. I probably would not have even had a life.

Nonetheless, I took delight in the irony of finding myself on the streets of Key West anxiously eyed by a large number of robust, broad-faced, white bearded men of middle age all of whom seemed to be wearing turtleneck sweaters and fishing caps. Another aspect of Hemingway Days was the annual Hemingway look-alike contest. It had come to that.

Then a year ago last December I finally made it to Cuba. Forty three years too late for the revolution, I had come as a guest at the Havana Film Festival with my fellow American writers William Kennedy and Frank McCourt, and the Canadian, Michael Ondaatje. Again, I remember the teenage boy who, hoping to follow the image of the young Hemingway, had run away from home to join Castro in the Sierra Maestra Mountains.

To complete that fantasy journey in literal fact, I left my writer friends in Havana and flew across the island and climbed up into the mountains, now a

national park, a pre-Columbian ecological wonder. The actual location of Fidel's encampment is marked off and is considered a historical shrine, one of the Revolution's stations of the cross. There is a plaque in a clearing in a shelter against the rain and little else. I stood there among the head-high ferns, the liana vines, and orchid-laden trees, and looked out over the string of green peaks and wondered what that American boy would have become if he had actually somehow made it here and had taken up arms and fought his way with the others down from the mountains and into Havana. Surely, there would have been no grievous wound, no beautiful older woman to nurse him back to health. And most importantly, no deathless prose written at the age of 21. Or at any other age, either.

Probably, he would have ended up a minor Marxist bureaucrat, a party apparatchik, bitter, alienated, and lonely but fluent in Spanish.

Naturally, when I returned to Havana, my writer friends and I wanted to visit Hemingway's famous retreat, Finca Vigia which had been his ...(inaudible) after he left his home on Whitehead Street in the early 1940s until his death in 1961. It's owned by the Cuban government. The buildings and contents willed by Hemingway in perpetuity to the people of Cuba, and is closed to the public. Although, because we were visiting foreign writers who were guests of the government, we were allowed inside to wander through the house as we wished.

It was as if its occupants, Mary and Ernest Hemingway, had left just yesterday for the weekend and intended to return tomorrow. The table was set for lunch. Liquor bottles were half full. Hemingway's shoes were lined up erratically in the closet and much of his clothing on hangers needed pressing. There were stuffed animal heads and game fish, trophies, and pelts, and weapons and paintings and drawings by his friends who were the modernist masters.

We prowled through his thousands of books, a writer's collection, with Norman Vincent Peale cheek by jowl with James Joyce, Dante, and *Birds of the Caribbean*. At one point I peeked into his bathroom, which was off the room where he slept alone I surmised, as it held nothing belonging to a woman. It was strictly a man's room. In the corner of the bathroom, almost out of sight, behind a door, was a doctor's scale. I stepped up to it, swung the door back and there across the white-washed wall from as high as I could reach down to my knees were columns of carefully inscribed dates and figures. Every day during the years that he lived and worked at Finca Vigia, right up to his final departure from Cuba in July 1960, each morning when he woke in the adjacent room, Ernest Hemingway weighed himself and wrote on the wall the date and his weight. Just as every day when he finished his work he noted the number of words he had written.

The words were the record of the writer's mind but the numbers and dates on the bathroom wall were strange, sad evidence of the physical man's physical presence and his desperate attempt to monitor and control it.

For years, the figure for his weight varied little, usually between 204 and 208 pounds, which happens to be precisely my own weight. And although I do not write the numbers on the wall, I do have a doctor's scale and weigh myself on it every morning. And then over the last few months of 1960, the numbers suddenly rise until the final July entry in his log when he's ballooned to nearly 275 pounds.

We know that he went to Spain alone in August, abruptly ended his trip and went to Idaho. We know that in November he began a series of long-term treatments at the Mayo Clinic. We know that he shot himself in Ketchum, Idaho, on July 2nd, 1961. But somehow for me those columns of numbers on the wall of his bathroom in Finca Vigia a few miles east of Havana tell me more about Ernest Hemingway than anything in any of the biographies.

They are the marks made on the wall by an imprisoned man, counting the days until he's served his sentence at last and is released. And then he realizes that his broken and battered body are the prison and he's serving a life sentence, and that's where the numbers suddenly change and then end.

Thank you. [Applause.]

DEBORAH LEFF: Simply extraordinary. I thank you. I encourage everyone to join us downstairs in the Pavilion to celebrate the writers today. Their books will be on sale and the authors will be there to sign them. Thank you for joining us. It's a wonderful day and Russell Banks just made it a whole lot better.

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