

“Remembering Schruns: 1988”

By Linda Patterson Miller & H. R. Stoneback

ED. NOTE: This is the second in our series looking back to Hemingway Society conferences of yore. Last year’s remembrance of Paris 1994 inspired us to look back even further to only the second time our organization met on international shores.

We have both meditated on the composition of place—Schruns 1988—in search of lost time, hoping for the Proustian *madeleine* that would bring it all back. We could not locate a conference program as a memory-aid—and this seems the perfect place to issue a call for anyone who may have old conference programs to scan and send copies of all conference programs listed as missing on the Society website: Schruns, Lignano (see the complete list at www.hemingwaysociety.org, clicking “Resources/Conferences”).

We do have, of course, the important book that grew out of the Schruns Conference, *Hemingway: Essays of Reassessment* (ed. Frank Scafellla, Oxford UP, 1991). Perusal of that volume reminds us that a key academic focus of the conference was the terrain of biography. For example, the section entitled “Fiction and Biography” contains important essays by Scott Donaldson, H. R. Stoneback, Donald Junkins, Jackson Benson, and Michael Reynolds. Other sections of the Scafellla volume contain essays by a veritable roster of significant names (as listed in the Table of Contents)—Hershel Parker, William Balassi, Robert Fleming, Susan Beegel, Paul Smith, Earl Rovit, Ben Stoltzfus, Mark Spilka, James Phelan, Tony Whitmore, Gerry Brenner—in the first decade and after of the Hemingway Society. Thus the Schruns volume reminds us of and recapitulates that era after our founders convened in 1980 on Thompson Island—as some of us were recalling the other day (April 20, 2015) at the PEN/Hemingway event at the JFK Library, looking across the wide water at that sacred island. Across the harbor and into the library.

But conference papers alone do not make a conference. Sometimes the conference you remember depends, in part, on the hotel in which you stayed and who stayed there with you. There were two main hotels for the Schruns conference—the newer and larger Löwen and, up the street, the Taube, Hemingway’s old hotel



On the bus to the Madlener Haus: (from left): Sandra Forman, Allen Josephs, Richard Davison, H. R. Stoneback, and Linda P. Miller, with Jackson R. Bryer, Ben Stoltzfus, and Peter Hays visible in the background.

in the heart of Schruns. The authors of this piece stayed in different hotels. Sometimes conference memories also ride, in part, on recollections from the tour bus you were on. Perhaps the present writers do not remember accurately if we were on the same bus. But we remember where we went and the joy that came with the country and the local people and we both affirm that Schruns was a joyous and magical conference in a numinous place. And (with pictures) now the individual memories:

Linda remembers: Hemingway’s stay during 1925 and 1926 in Schruns, Austria, marked a pivotal turning point in his life and career, and his time there was made graphically real to the 1988 Hemingway Society members privileged to attend what remains in my mind as the most intimate of all the Hemingway conferences to date. Hemingway’s description in *A Moveable Feast* of the train ride to Schruns anticipated our own journey—a meandering train ride through Switzerland to the Austrian border where we continued on through Liechtenstein until the train stop at Bludenz. Here, just as Hemingway described it, we picked up “a small branch line that ran along a pebbly trout river through a valley of farms and forest to Schruns ... a sunny market town with sawmills, stores, inns and a good, year-around hotel called the Taube.” This was where Hemingway and Hadley lived and where those savvy enough to get their conference money in early got to stay. I stayed in the Löwen Hotel, which seemed to me just as good in that everything in town was nestled within the seclusion of the surrounding mountains. The rhythmic pounding of the oompah bands that

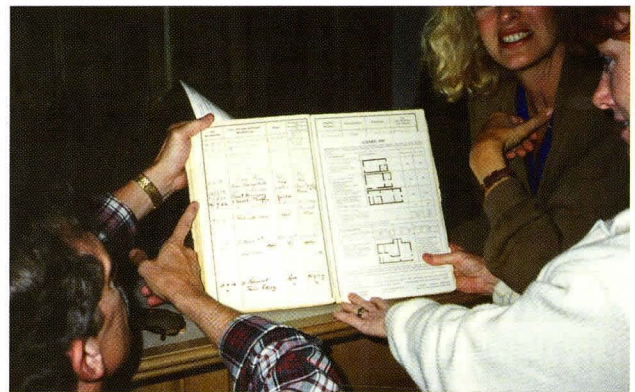
echoed in counterpoint from all the hotel gardens morning to night reinforced the sense that here, for this one week in June, was the center of the world.

Most of our conferences now, because of their multiple and often conflicting sessions, can sometimes make the conference (and the conference-goer) seem more fractured than contained. Our meetings in Schruns were held as singular sessions in one big room with floor-to-ceiling windows that overlooked the green hotel gardens. I can still see us as we sat in long rows faced to the front. We could listen to the speakers while also looking outside to catch glimpses of the occasional conference-goer who had slipped away out the back garden entrance to get a sunny lunch in town.

The highlight of the conference was the discussion of the biographies that had burst on the scene following the opening up of the Hemingway Papers in the early 1980s. Now scholars were able to look at the manuscripts and letters that Mary Hemingway had brought to the Kennedy in large brown shopping bags, and the excitement about all this new “stuff” had everyone talking. Scholars, including H. R. Stoneback, weighed in to assess the biographies and put them into context. I remember that Donald Junkins dared to “take on” the biographers (many of them sitting in that room) by challenging each biographer’s inevitable bias, and it was clear that no one was going to take any of this material lightly. It was clear as well that everything in Hemingway scholarship had begun to turn. The lively interchange among all the conference-goers contained in that one special room defined the thrill



Dancing in the garden of the Hotel Taube, with Scott Donaldson (second from left), Robin Gajdusek (yellow shirt), and Linda P. Miller (far right)



Robert W. Lewis pointing out the signatures of Hemingway and Gerald Murphy in the Hotel Rössle guestbook in Gaschurn.

of being there in those early days when Hemingway and his work was being reassessed in light of new discoveries and within a growing body of more richly nuanced scholarship. One could literally sit there and watch as scholars began to peel away the layers of Hemingway's work to appreciate him as more than a journalist and primarily as a complicated modernist master.

It was exciting to be there as well to participate in new biographical discoveries. On one of the conference side trips (I believe it was on our way by bus to the Madlener Haus, Hemingway and Hadley's stopping point halfway up the mountain) we visited the neighboring ski town of Gaschurn where Mike Reynolds asked to see the guestbook. We saw for the first time the strong signatures of "Ernest Hemingway, Writer" and "Gerald Murphy, Painter" indicating that they had not only stayed in Schruns that 1926 spring but had also stayed in Gaschurn at the Hotel Rössle between March 12 to 17.

Throughout the conference we would gather on the lawn of the Hotel Taube for drinking, dining and dancing. I recall one rugged Austrian chap who asked me to dance and, without waiting for an answer, picked me up off the ground to swirl me (endlessly it seemed) to the persistent beat of the oompah band. Jackson R. Bryer got all this on his unending video of the dance and also of the conference itself. Beyond the whirl of my cotton Swiss skirt and my blonde hair lifted skyward, you will see in the background the attendees standing with arms interlocked and swaying to the music. This was yet a time when the entire body of conference-goers was small enough to be contained in one grand circle as Stoney and Sparrow belted out "Will the Circle Be Unbroken."

The concluding event of the conference

was a play that we put on in honor of Hemingway. Sandra Forman directed this modified version of "Homage to Switzerland." Mike Reynolds held it together as Narrator, and Paul Smith, Donald Junkins, Richard Davison, Allen Josephs, Susan Beegel and Linda Wagner-Martin played key roles. I was the waitress. "The express is an hour late, Sir. Can I bring you some coffee?" Everyone gathered that final night in that same glass-flanked room applauded us heartily before we all parted the next morning.

A few weeks back as I was organizing files (perennial and thankless), I came across a box of oddments I had saved from my son Nathaniel's early years. I discovered a postcard I had sent him from Schruns on 22-6-88. Reading it brought back Schruns and the essence of this Third International Conference with an unexpected poignancy. The front of the card shows a photo of the Silvretta mountain where we had traveled by bus on one of our side trips, stopping midway at Hadley and Hemingway's resting spot, the Madlener Haus. "Dear Nathaniel—I was on top of this mountain looking down. We rode a bus on a very windy road (looked like a ribbon, which Osceola [our cat] would love to play with). A fast-rushing glacial stream pounds through this town where I stay, & out my balcony window a mountain reaches to the clouds, & birds sing. Every 15 minutes church bells chime. I sleep here under a heavy feather quilt.... Love, Mother."

Stoney remembers: As always during our many visits to Schruns, Sparrow and I had the Hemingway Room at the Taube. One of the vivid memories of the conference was our sitting on the balcony of the Hemingway Room, watching our fellow Hemingway conferees walking up the street from the Löwen (the larger hotel where most stayed) pass beneath

us in the street below, waving and calling old and new Hemingway friends to come up to Hemingway's balcony for a glass of well-chilled Grüner Veltliner. And then there was all the singing in that loveliest of hotel gardens at the Taube, sometimes with the locals, sometimes with conferees; sometimes planned for programs, sometimes spontaneous without guitar, and at all times Sparrow was in rare voice in those days. I think that was the first conference for which we wrote a conference song—although it might have been two years before in Lignano (but who remembers the songs of Lignano?)—a tradition that endured through Stresa in 2002, then neglected, but revived in the garden of the Locanda Cipriani on Torcello (for the Venice 2014 event). *Mais où sont* the songs of yesteryear? There was also singing on the bus up the mountain to the Madlener Haus, and singing there at lunch, and singing of a different kind as the bus careened down the mountain, and some looked in anxious terror at the steep drop-off on the curves and the hairpin turns, and others held their eyes shut tight until somebody suggested we sing old hymns and we did, singing for dear life until we reached the level valley of deliverance. There was always singing, yes, and there was folk dancing at the *heimat abends* with the people of the Montafon. And at the outdoor concert at the village bandstand we were so struck by the band's beloved favorite song, new to us then—*Sag Dankeschön mit roten Rosen*—that Sparrow and I rushed up to the stage and, after the show was over, sang the song with the band and learned the words; and in the rush to get backstage with the band, I somehow dropped in the crowd my wallet, fat with thousands of dollars cash for our entire month-plus trip—song always matters

Continued on Page 6

more than money-and I did not miss it until hours later when it was time to buy my round of pints in the garden of the Taube. But the panic did not last long, because the entire village had gone into immediate action to locate the owner of the wallet and it was passed along by many hands and returned to me, contents untouched, in the garden of the Taube. So we sang the *roten Rosen* thank you song all that week, on long hikes up the Silbertal valley, high on the mountain by a particularly moving *weg-kreuz*, and we sang it marching with one of the far village bands making their ritual pilgrimage song-procession along the mountain trail. We sang other songs at Mass in the lovely village church where Hemingway tried to sing. But I don't think we sang at that country lane trout place high up in a mountainside hamlet (that we could never find again in all our later return trips to Schruns), that country *haus* where you caught your own trout in the spring-fed pool and then they cooked it for you, perfection over an open wood-fire, and you could eat two or three fat trout or as many as you wanted to catch so you were too busy fishing and eating to sing. And back down in the valley, at dressy moments, there was the way Sparrow looked in her tailor-made dirndl we had made the week before Schruns in the Salzkammergut, in that other magical place called Hallstatt. And how Paul Smith looked at Sparrow's dirndl when they shared cigarettes in the Taube garden. And how Gundi and Pepsi-proprietors of the Taube (in the family since before Hemingway and the family knew many Hemingway things) kept telling Sparrow as we dined at the Hemingway table in the Stube that the dirndl was perfect for her, commenting on the local knowledge and signs present in the design-as I tried, as usual, to get the answers to important Hemingway questions by cultivating the terroir of *local knowledge* (which was and is my faith, as it was Hemingway's.)

There were these things, too: long conversations, both funny and illuminating, with locals in the garden or the *Weinstube* about many local folklore variations on the old tale told by Hemingway in "An Alpine Idyll"; the way it felt when you exchanged the greeting (and blessing) with the locals--*Gruss Gott*; and, in the village shop windows, the way the signs proclaimed *Gruss Gott Hemingway!* There was that early morning

when Sparrow and I were fishing the Silbertal and downstream from me she sang loud some old mountain ballad as she fished; and three local boys came out of the woods and sat on the riverbank by her, entranced by her singing; then they picked wildflowers and made a flower-wreath and crowned her with the garland she was still wearing on the balcony of the Hemingway Room at the Taube when I borrowed somebody's cheap camera and took her picture.

And, as always in many countries and states in our various travels, comparing local notes with Mike and Ann Reynolds, since we (the *four of us*) practiced local inquiry and the craft of the *livre d'or* (in hotels large and small); and what our resident neurosurgeon and great Hemingway aficionado and collector John Goin (and his lovely family) said to me when they bought me that drink after my paper on Hemingway's Catholicism and the *nominal country of the bogus* in the biographies; and Robin Gajdusek, always the birds and the flowers; and Bob Lewis speaking German with a wry smile in the garden of the Taube, performing his ceremonial presidential duties with great charm and style. And so many others in the *golden book*, the register of the Hemingway Society, who are not with us now. That was twenty-seven years ago and maybe we have changed but Schruns has not changed much-it was still a magical place when, on the way from our Imagism conference in Italy to the 2010 Hemingway Conference in Lausanne I led twenty younger Hemingway scholars to Schruns for a two-day Hemingway Symposium and introduced them to the unbroken circle of the Hemingway communion and moveable feast, where Gundi and Pepsi welcomed us to the Taube in their wonderful way and the village of Schruns, complete with journalists and photographers, welcomed Hemingway, yet again, back to Schruns. Maybe we should all-The Hemingway Society-go back to Schruns again and sing the unbroken circle while we are still here and numinous Schruns is still there. After that Hemingway week in Schruns in 1988, Sparrow and I sang *Dankeschon mit roten Rosen* all the way down the long road back to Paris. And I still sing *thank you* with words like *red roses* to the village and people of Schruns, to the Hemingway Society, and to all my Hemingway friends and colleagues and loved ones who were there and are not here now.