**Hemingway's Cuba**. By Scalzo, Jim Lo

In Old Havana, you can still hear his voice. You can hear it on street corners in the tough language of men, and in the bar El Floridita in the soft chimes of daiquiri glasses; you can hear it in the salsa bands that perform in the Plaza de Armas, and in the church bells that toll in the Plaza de la Catedral; you can hear it in the sea crashing against the Malecon, and in the silence of an old fisherman plying the waters. Thirty-six years after he rested the gun barrel against his palate, his voice still echoes through La Habana Vieja. Cuba may belong to Castro, but Old Havana belongs to Hemingway.

Ernest Hemingway helped define American literature. And Cuba defined Hemingway. Ernesto, as the Cubans called him, lived here from 1939 to 1960. It was his only stable home and the place he wrote his finest works: *To Have and Have Not*, *For Whom the Bell Tolls*, and dozens of short stories and novellas, including *The Old Man and the Sea*.

To this day, Hemingway is a demigod in Havana. At the Partagas cigar factory, hand rollers listen to designated readers who recite his literature. At the Marina Hemingway, the world's best marlin fishermen gather annually for the Hemingway International Billfish Tournament. And Castro himself has called Hemingway his favorite writer. In 1956, while hiding in the Sierra Maestra, the young Marxist read For Whom the Bell Tolls, absorbing strategies of guerrilla warfare that he later said helped him to overthrow Fulgencio Batista.

All of Hemingway's old haunts--from his home to his favorite watering hole, from the hotel room where he wrote *For Whom the Bell Tolls* to the tiny village that inspired The Old Man and the Sea--are esteemed as sanctuaries. Together these sites make up the Hemingway Trail, a historical pilgrimage popular with Canadians and Europeans, as well as Cuban schoolchildren--and one that for 3 decades few of Hemingway's own countrymen have been able to make. Just months before Papa's suicide in 1961, the U.S. government severed diplomatic relations with Cuba and clamped down on travel.

Technically, it is legal for Americans to enter Cuba; they only violate the law, under regulations set by the Treasury Department's Office of Foreign Assets Control, by spending money there as tourists. The regulations are not being aggressively enforced, but that could change. Nevertheless, tens of thousands of U.S. tourists are expected to enter Cuba this year through a third country. Travel agents in Toronto, Canada; Cancun, Mexico; and Nassau, Bahamas, routinely arrange round-trip air passage, hotel, and a tourist card (box, Page 64).

The Hemingway Trail is a dream journey. Its historic sites paint a landscape--not just of a place but of an era. The cobblestone labyrinth of Old Havana remains as Hemingway saw it: shabby and graceful, chaotic yet carefree. Automotive relics from the '40s and '50s decorate the streets. Buicks and Hudsons, Studebakers and Edsels, are common. Owners brush house paint over the rust and the dent filler but can do little about the extravagant gasoline consumption--a major concern given local fuel shortages.

La Habana Vieja's streets, the most densely populated in Cuba, are centuries old--UNESCO has even classified them as a "world heritage site." Around every corner, an eye-catching scene unfolds. At a pickup debate, young men face off on subjects from socialism to baseball. Children play soccer in red-and-white school uniforms, using a plastic milk carton as a ball and a doorless refrigerator on its side as a net. Salsa bands drive writhing dancers at a street party, while a block away, old men in the pleated tropical shirts called guayaberas smoke cigars and play a lazy game of dominoes.

In the heart of Old Havana, in Room 511 of the Hotel Ambos Mundos, Hemingway resided on and off for five years. His was a modest, one-room apartment, with three french windows offering majestic city views and an occasional ocean breeze. The Ambos rents out Hemingway's room for $70 a night. For a few dollars, the hotel also allows visitors to look around.

When Hemingway wasn't writing, he was either drinking daiquiris at El Floridita or drinking mojitos (a traditional Cuban mix of lemon juice, sugar, and crushed mint leaves, topped with a liberal splash of Havana Club rum) at the La Bodeguita del Medio.

As bars go, El Floridita is legendary. Seventy years ago, bartender Constante Ribailagua created the frozen daiquiri here. But it was Papa who made the drink famous, in his literature (recall the scene in Islands in the Stream when Tom Hudson sees the wake of a boat in the frappe of his daiquiri) and in his consumption (he downed 12 doubles in one sitting at least once, says biographer Norberto Fuentes).

The Floridita has become Old Havana's most exclusive hangout. If Papa were still alive, he'd probably beat the bartender senseless for charging six bucks for a daiquiri. A regal mahogany bar dominates the room, nearly chest high to its bartenders and ascending the back wall to frame an 18th-century mural of a galleon entering Havana harbor. A bust of Papa looms over his favorite seat, as do several photographs--Hemingway at the bar with Gary Cooper, Hemingway toasting Spencer Tracy, Hemingway chatting with Ingrid Bergman.

In 1940, Hemingway purchased Finca La Vigia, a bright and breezy mansion overlooking San Francisco de Paula, a village about 10 miles southeast of Havana. Here, surrounded by mango trees and areca palms, the writer spent his last two decades. He once told his fourth wife, Mary Welsh, that Finca was the only place he ever felt at home.

A month after Hemingway's suicide, Welsh received Fidel Castro on Finca's front porch. In a brief ceremony, she handed over the home to the Cuban government. The next year, Castro turned Finca into the Casa-Museo de Hemingway. Current curator Gladys Rodriguez Ferraro is quick to point out that, unlike Hemingway's home in Key West, Fla., Finca remains as Papa left it.

Inside the mansion is a peculiar hodgepodge of African fetishes and Arab daggers, of Picasso sculptures and Goya paintings. Everywhere are books, more than 9,000 of them. And staring from every wall are the stuffed victims of Hemingway's hunting prowess--impala and antelopes, buffaloes and brown stags, pronghorns and Grant's gazelles.

Hemingway's presence is conspicuous even in Finca's details. In the living room, next to his favorite armchair, are empty bottles of the Gordon's gin he poured into his morning cocktails. On a bookshelf in the bedroom is the Royal portable at which he stood to hammer out his stories for the last 17 years of his life. And in the bathroom, scrawled like hieroglyphics on the wall, is the daily register he kept of his weight, which fluctuated between 190 and 242 pounds.

Around the corner in Hemingway's office, unused rounds of ammunition, including a dozen 20-gauge Winchester cartridges, stand upright on his desk. Here at Finca, Hemingway rehearsed his suicide in front of his friends and doctor, who knew full well what he was doing. Seated in his armchair, he braced the barrel of his Mannlicher Schoenauer .256 against the roof of his mouth and pressed the trigger with his big toe. "The palate is the softest part of the head," he told them.

Seven miles east of Old Havana lies the last stop on the Hemingway Trail, the setting for The Old Man and the Sea. Nestled in a crescent-moon-shaped cove, the fishing village of Cojimar (pronounced Co-HEE-mar) is as easygoing as any hamlet in the Caribbean. A bronze bust of the author overlooks the port, where a few boats are moored to a rickety pier. Groups of shirtless, barefoot children run up and down the pier's wooden planks, laughing and casting their reels to sea.

A less dexterous figure often totters along Cojimar's ocean promenade. He wears a black peacoat, collar upright, and rarely is without a half-smoked cigar dangling between his lips. At 99, Gregorio Fuentes is Cojimar's most prized citizen. He is also a legend in American literature. Hemingway's longtime friend and fishing-boat captain, Fuentes was the primary inspiration for Santiago, the old man of The Old Man and the Sea.

Fuentes was in his mid-50s when Hemingway wrote the novella. "Everything about him was old except his eyes," he said of Santiago, "and they were the same color as the sea and were cheerful and undefeated." Fuentes's eyes remain a bright Caribbean blue.

Fuentes never passes up a chance to speak of Papa, if only in romantic generalities. He says he never saw evidence of Hemingway's alcoholism and depression. When I ask if he was surprised to hear of Hemingway's suicide, he grows irritated. "By then he was so sick . . . he didn't want to be a burden. But I never thought he'd kill himself. It would have been better for me if he lived."