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This 'papa' can preach

[CHRIS CASEY](#),

The resemblance couldn't have been more stunning. Here I was talking with Ernest Hemingway ... er, Brian Gordon Sinclair ... in white rocking chairs in the shade of the veranda.

The “veranda” was actually the porch of the Country Inn and Suites in Greeley, but I'll be a speared marlin if I wasn't chatting with “Papa,” as he was known, at one of his sunsplashed retreats in Key West, Fla.

Sinclair is a playwright and classically trained stage actor and renowned as “the foremost dramatic interpreter of Ernest Hemingway in the world” (so says the Stratford-upon-Avon Herald in England). He had just completed a week of performances at the annual Hemingway Days Festival in Key West.

Sinclair, a 65-year-old Irish-Canadian, performed Thursday night at High Plains Chautauqua. It marked the first time he'd performed Hemingway (1899-1961), to whom he bears a striking resemblance and has been portraying for about seven years, at a Chautauqua event.

Sinclair, a hirsute gent who speaks in a rugged baritone, took the lunch hour to chat with me Thursday afternoon.

Head to foot he wore the trademark khakis the Nobel-winning writer was fond of, and he chuckled heartily when asked how the fishing was in Colorado.

“I discovered you have some of the finest trout in the entire country here,” he said, his eyes squinting as he looked toward the mountains.

Hemingway's passions ran the gamut as the native of Oak Park, Ill., led a man's-man kind of life – boxer, fisherman, soldier, bull-fighter, womanizer, raconteur, writer – the kind of guy who loved to hold forth in the bar. But anyone who got cross-wise with him – people often wondered if he was as tough as the newspapers said – ended up with an invitation to step outside.

“If you threw a punch, I would simply say I cooled them,” he said. “They had been cooled by Ernest Hemingway.”

Mostly, though, Hemingway's life is a whirlwind of hot-blooded adventure, keeping true to the ambition he first wrote of as a seventh grader: “to travel and to write – I was smitten with it at a very early age.”

After an early stint as a newspaper reporter, Hemingway fought in World War I where he joined the ambulance corps of the Italian Red Cross. During the war, a bomb tore out his knee and left him riddled with shrapnel.

That experience inspired his novel “A Farewell to Arms” and became part of an acclaimed body of work – “The Old Man and the Sea,” “A Moveable Feast” and “For Whom the Bell Tolls” among the most well-known – which chronicled adventures that were layered in bone truths.

Here are excerpts from my porch chat with Papa:

TRIBUNE: Why did you take such a succinct approach with your writing?

HEMINGWAY: I learned a lot about writing when I was (in Paris) with Gertrude Stein, Ezra Pound and James Joyce. ... If

you could write simply enough, honestly enough, truthfully enough, truth is always there. There was a deeper truth always lurking beneath the surface, and if you could tap into that, every person with a modest level of sensibility would relate in a way to what is floating under the surface.

TRIBUNE: You once wrote that a man can be destroyed but not defeated. What do you mean by that?

HEMINGWAY: What people don't realize is that much of my life functioned on a level of compassion. And eventually you developed a nature where you were strong and solid in and of yourself. ... You would be strong enough in yourself that no matter what they did to you they couldn't take your soul away from you. You can destroy me, you can shred my body into a million pieces, but strength of soul can never be destroyed.

TRIBUNE: Did your fondness for drinking hinder or help your writing?

HEMINGWAY: I never, ever drank while I was working. ... People who know me understand that for almost the entirety of my life I got up at dawn and worked until lunchtime as a writer. ... There's no doubt in modern terms somebody would say I'm an alcoholic, but relative to the time I would have been considered a social drinker.

TRIBUNE: How many marriages did you have?

HEMINGWAY: Four. I was always susceptible to women and female flattery. ... There was a special magic to that first marriage (to Hadley Richardson). Well, some people say I was a son of a bitch, and I was then. But I was never quite as bad as a lot of people like to make me out.

TRIBUNE: What period of your life do you have the fondest memories of?

HEMINGWAY: Paris is a moveable feast and that was one of the truly great periods of my life. ... That first tail fin of a tarpon rising out of the water like a silver dream. ... People don't realize this but I have always been against war. I lost any illusions of immortality when I was blown up in Italy. ... I'd say that was one of the great formative moments of my life, and it played into my writing.

TRIBUNE: Why did you kill yourself?

HEMINGWAY: He ticked off a list of struggles: a dislike for celebrity, battles with depression, family history of depression and suicide (his father, brother, also grandchildren), electroshock treatments, alcohol and drugs to treat his mental illness. "I was often fighting depression ... When I came to (after electroshock) I remembered nothing, absolutely nothing. Mary (his fourth wife) took me back to Idaho but I was already dead. You sit there and the entire essence of your life has been writing for every day as long as you can remember. Then somebody has reached inside your heart, inside your soul and just ripped out the guts of all that. There's nothing left. ... They had defeated me, but I wasn't going to let them destroy that last moment. That last moment was my choice."

Today at Chautauqua

Adult programs

Where: Greeley Senior Activities Center Dining Room 1010 6th St., Greeley

Details: Changing the Way You See, Nan Colton as Georgia O'Keeffe, 9:30-10:30 a.m.; The Man Behind the Mask, Bill Young as Woodrow Wilson, 10:45-11:45 a.m.; The Stories of César Chávez, Fred Blanco as César Chávez, noon-1 p.m. (at the Jesus Rodarte Cultural Center Gymnasium, 920 A Street, Greeley); Reel America: Hollywood Images, 1-2 p.m. (at Kress Cinema, 817 8th Avenue, Greeley); The Secret Life of Albert Einstein, Frank X. Mullen as Einstein, 2:30-3:30 p.m.

Youth programs

Where: Family FunPlex, 1501 65th Ave., Greeley

Details: Art: A fun way to learn history, 9 a.m.-noon

Evening programs

Where: The Big Tent, Aims Community College, 5401 20th St., Greeley

Details: Branch Ricky (played by Chuck Chalberg) and César Chávez (played by Fred Blanco).

For more information, go to www.highplainschautauqua.org

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