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## Professor's Book Takes a Look at Life of Hemingway ; Web Story

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## Professor's Book Takes a Look at Life of Hemingway

BLOOMINGTON, Ill. – When asked to write the captions for the new book, *Historic Photos of Hemingway*, Illinois Wesleyan University Professor of English and Department Chair James Plath believed it would be a worthy challenge. At the time, he had no idea how great of a challenge it would be.

The book, published in March as part of Turner Publishing's Historic Photos Series, creates a portrait of the famed author and adventurer using more than 200 photographs taken throughout his life.

Plath decided to depart from the standard format of the Turner series, which usually depicts historical figures and locations. "When you have an author like Hemingway, so many of the photos exist as more than a connection to history, but in the context of his personal life," said Plath. "I looked at it as a chance not to write 200 captions for 200 photos, but as a chance to write a mini-biography of Ernest Hemingway that actually flows from entry to entry."

The publishing company found Plath a natural fit to narrate Hemingway's life. Co-author of the book *Remembering Ernest Hemingway* (Ketch & Yawl, 1999), Plath is the former director of the Hemingway Days' Writers Workshop & Conference in Hemingway's old stomping ground of Key West, Fla. He is also a member of the Hemingway Society, and has lectured at the Museo Ernest Hemingway, the author's former residence in Cuba.

Plath was ready to impart some of his Hemmingway knowledge to the book. The challenge came when he received the photos, many from the Hemingway collection at the John F. Kennedy Presidential Library. "None of the photos were identified, or even in chronological order," said Plath, who found he needed to do some detective work to identify many of the photos before he could begin to compose captions. His efforts were further stymied by contradictory identifications of photos in biographies of the author. "Even a lot of the biographers disagreed on identifications of the photos," he said.

One particular photo identification gave Plath great pride, a photo of Hemingway sitting on a balcony of his first apartment when he moved down to Key West. "With a friend who used

to direct the Hemingway festival, we identified the photo because his apartment was over a car dealership, which you can barely see in the background,” said Plath. “There he sits, with zinc oxide on his lip – they way they used to treat sunburn – in the days before he became this figure associated so much with Florida.”

Plath also suggested photos he thought might round out the book. “I worked to find photos I knew would offer a complete picture of Hemingway, such as a photo of Hemingway and Castro in Cuba I had used in my book,” he said.

According to Plath, while many photo books on the author have an insular feeling, isolating moments of his life, he worked to give *Historic Photos of Hemingway* a literary feel. “Yes, there are photo books of Hemingway, but this is the largest concentration of photos that attempts to truly tell the story of Hemingway,” he said.

Plath’s next project will be a continuation of his research on the late author John Updike.