

Quite a Story to Tell:  
The Laughs and Loves of Mary Welsh

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## Fargo, 1942

Mary Welsh was not yet accustomed to seeing her name in print, even though she worked as a journalist. At *Time*, correspondents like her collaborated in their reporting, and the magazine was printed without bylines. But on December 6, 1942, Mary's name made a headline, when the *Fargo Forum* ran a piece entitled, "True Hollywood Touch to Mary Welsh's Story."<sup>1</sup> Most likely, Mary had not been surprised when the *Fargo Forum* interviewed her for this profile, since she was already a celebrity back home in Bemidji, a small town in Minnesota about 100 miles east of Fargo, North Dakota.<sup>2</sup> In a community of farmers, loggers, and fishermen, her European adventures had all the exotic appeal of a Hollywood drama: the short profile began cinematically, "Beauty with Brains Beats the Boys to the News Fronts; Romance Flowers in the Blackouts of London, Paris, and Cairo; Glamour Girl Travels with Invading Army."<sup>3</sup> It went on to describe her coverage of the Munich Agreement of 1938, her flight to England as the Nazis invaded France, and her marriage to fellow journalist Noel Monks.

Many people asked Mary to tell her story, and, never one to be shy, Mary acquiesced with a smile. Mary Welsh's story is one of personalities and encounters, of war and fear, and of laughs and loves. Much of the Hollywood touch in Mary's story comes from her natural glamour, wit, and spirit of adventure; the rest lies in the extraordinary circumstances she sought out for herself. Mary befriended great men, visited great places, and witnessed great events. The more people she met and places she went, the more she craved greater companions and greater surroundings. All the while, Mary wrote down what she saw, in letters, diaries, and official war correspondence. Her friends and colleagues thought her a great storyteller, mostly because while

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<sup>1</sup> "True Hollywood Touch to Mary Welsh's Story," *Fargo Forum*, 6 December 1942. Mary Welsh Hemingway Papers, John F. Kennedy Presidential Library.

<sup>2</sup> Mary Welsh Hemingway Collection, Beltrami County Historical Society.

<sup>3</sup> "True Hollywood Touch to Mary Welsh's Story," Mary Hemingway Papers, Kennedy Library.

telling a story, Mary always wore her charming smile, capable of disarming even the greatest of men and hiding Mary's private doubts.

Though she never returned to Bemidji, Mary's story reverberated nowhere more strongly than where it began. While her classmates had remained at home, Mary had traveled across Europe. While her former neighbors had probably encountered a Chippewa Indian, Mary had met Winston Churchill. For her classmates and neighbors, even Mary's wardrobe was a topic of interest: "Being an accredited U.S. Army correspondent, Miss Welsh wears a regulation uniform while on duty."<sup>4</sup> A different local paper had earlier printed a short profile of Mary on the occasion of her marriage to Noel Monks; that piece concluded, "She'll have quite a story to tell if she ever gets back to Minnesota."<sup>5</sup>

#### Bemidji, 1908-1927

Mary Welsh grew up among canoes, coyotes, and Shakespeare. At a young age, she learned to navigate white water rapids, identify animal tracks, and appreciate poetry. From her father Thomas Welsh, Mary inherited a love of nature and of words that she would retain throughout her life, even as she left Bemidji, Minnesota and her beloved parents far behind.

An only child, Mary spent her girlhood summers on her father's river boat, accompanying him and his crew as they searched for new sources of timber and then hauled the felled trees back to town. On these expeditions, Mary was the only female of any age on the 120-foot-long vessel named Northland.<sup>6</sup> Excluded from the tasks of operating the boat and felling the logs, she spent her hours reading. Northland was furnished for such pursuits: on the second-deck, where Mary and her father would sleep, a modest lounge housed the boat's library. Tolstoy and

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<sup>4</sup> Ibid.

<sup>5</sup> Clipping, 19 May 1941. Mary Hemingway Papers, Kennedy Library.

<sup>6</sup> Thomas Welsh Papers, Mary Welsh Hemingway Papers, Beinecke Library.

Shakespeare shared a shelf with Ernest Thompson Seton, the author of *The Boy Scout Handbook*.<sup>7</sup> Thomas shared Mary's love of words and encouraged her to read great works of literature, often guiding his daughter to questions about the nature of storytelling itself. Much later, after retiring from his logging career, Thomas would even attempt his own work of nonfiction: an autobiography and family history.<sup>8</sup>

Mary credited two writers, in addition to Tolstoy and Shakespeare, with instilling in her a desire to write. First, a friend of her father's, the editor of the Bemidji Pioneer Press, exposed her to the world of journalism, albeit on a local level.<sup>9</sup> Second, the poet Carl Sandburg conjured for Mary an image of life in a big city. His poem "Chicago," first published in 1916, "changed the ambience of [her] youth."<sup>10</sup>

. . . Come and show me another city with lifted head singing so proud to be alive and  
coarse and strong and cunning.  
Flinging magnetic curses amid the toil of piling job on job, here is a tall bold slugger set  
vivid against the little soft cities;  
Fierce as a dog with tongue lapping for action, cunning as a savage pitted against the  
wilderness, . . .  
Under the smoke, dust all over his mouth, laughing with white teeth,  
Under the terrible burden of destiny laughing as a young man laughs,  
Laughing even as an ignorant fighter laughs who has never lost a battle,  
Bragging and laughing that under his wrist is the pulse, and under his ribs the heart of the  
people, Laughing! . . .<sup>11</sup>

Mary was captivated by this image of Chicago, with its vitality, bustle, and grit. For her, Sandburg "saw the wickedness of the city, but he also saw its grandeur and its pathos."<sup>12</sup> She felt that "without hearing the din of [Chicago's] streetcars and police whistles and feeling the heat of

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<sup>7</sup> Mary Welsh Hemingway, *How It Was* (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 1976), 10.

<sup>8</sup> Although it was never published, Thomas completed a draft of his autobiography and Mary edited it. The full draft now resides in the collection of Mary's papers at the Beinecke Library.

<sup>9</sup> Paul Bergly, "The Last Mrs. Hemingway," *Minnesota Monthly*, February 2004, 39-43, in the Mary Welsh Hemingway Collection, Beltrami County Historical Society.

<sup>10</sup> Mary Hemingway, *How It Was*, 25.

<sup>11</sup> Carl Sandburg, "Chicago," in *Chicago Poems* (New York: Holt and Company, 1916).

<sup>12</sup> Letter to Thomas and Adeline Welsh, 27 April 1944, Mary Hemingway Papers, Kennedy Library.

its inherent combat, [her] life would be zero.”<sup>13</sup> Her reading had captured her imagination before, but this time an adventure was within her reach, and she set her mind on the goal of making it to Chicago. When Mary graduated from high school in 1926, she spent a year studying at the local community college and saving the money she earned as a waitress in a local hotel. Her parents had been forced to sell their house out of financial difficulties,<sup>14</sup> and Mary would need her waitressing earnings to help pay her tuition at Northwestern University’s recently opened Medill School of Journalism, where she enrolled the following fall.<sup>15</sup>

### Chicago, 1927-1937

Mary arrived in Chicago with little cash and big hopes. She found the campus beautiful, the city stimulating, but the University disappointing. With the exception of one anthropology professor, she encountered little intellectual excitement, and she detested Northwestern’s “snobbery and pretensions” as well as her “shoddy dormitory with its smells and sounds and petty cliques of females.”<sup>16</sup> Eager for fresh air, the summer after her freshman year Mary drove east with a friend who sought a driving companion. In Boston, Mary was first exposed to life outside the midwestern bubble and the realities of earning money to pay the rent. She worked as a hostess in a tearoom in Boston’s financial district, and by the end of the summer, she had saved enough money to buy a train ticket back to Chicago.

Mary’s sophomore year would prove eventful. After a brief romance, Mary married Lawrence Miller Cook, a drama student from Ohio. She loved his “poetic eyes, superior tennis serve and gentle manner,” and they were married without pomp by a justice of the peace. This

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<sup>13</sup> Mary Hemingway, *How It Was*, 26.

<sup>14</sup> Bemidji Town Records, Beltrami Country Historical Society.

<sup>15</sup> The Medill School of Journalism opened in 1921. Northwestern University had been admitting women since 1869. “History,” Northwestern University, <http://www.northwestern.edu/about/history/index.html>.

<sup>16</sup> Mary Hemingway, *How It Was*, 27.

“innocent mistake” was not to last, and the couple soon realized that their lifestyles were incompatible.<sup>17</sup> Mary believed in hard work and achievement, but Lawrence could not keep a job, preferring instead to subsist on meager sums of money from his parents. They were divorced quietly within the year.<sup>18</sup>

While at Northwestern, Mary pursued journalism outside the classroom as a staff reporter for the *Daily Northwestern* and as a member of Cubs, a student journalism club.<sup>19</sup> But before completing her sophomore year, Mary dropped out of Northwestern to accept a position as an editor of a trade magazine, the *American Florist*. Mary learned more about journalism in her first week at the *American Florist* than she had in two years at Northwestern.<sup>20</sup> But like her university career, this stint did not last long: Mary soon became frustrated by the petty reporting and the low wages, and she quit. Confronted with a dearth of job opportunities, Mary accepted a position at a firm that published throw-away weeklies financed entirely by advertising, but she continued to look for more fulfilling work. Her first break came when she was hired as an assistant on the society page of the *Chicago Daily News*. Disappointed with her beat, she longed to be “a real reporter, covering City Hall and the courts and politics rather than extolling the charms of women’s hats or tiaras,” but she settled for “the women’s page.”<sup>21</sup> Along with three other girls, Mary was victim to the wrath of Leola Allard, women’s editor at the *News*. Miss Allard turned the newsroom into a war zone, dropping bombs each morning on the young reporters, perhaps for using the word “person” or other unsophisticated vocabulary in an article. Even so, Mary

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<sup>17</sup> Ibid, 29.

<sup>18</sup> Bernice Kert, *The Hemingway Women* (New York: W.W. Norton, 1983), 399.

<sup>19</sup> Helen M. Tillman, “Durable ‘Miss Mary,’” *Northwestern Alumni News*, November 1977, Mary Hemingway Papers, Kennedy Library.

<sup>20</sup> Kert, 399.

<sup>21</sup> Mary Hemingway, *How It Was*, 30.

liked her job, and she credited Miss Allard with teaching her to write well and to work under strenuous conditions.

At the News, Mary's attempts at breaking into the male-dominated city newsroom were thwarted again and again. "You're in my way," the men protested, and she returned to the society page.<sup>22</sup> But Mary did not let this obstruct her career. She later reflected, "When I worked on the Chicago Daily News, if I got a really hot story, the fellows in the city room would say, 'Ah, that's because you're a female, you were able to lure the information out of them.' (Laughs). Then, if I lost something, they'd say, 'There, you see, a female can't do it.' Well, poop! I never took it seriously."<sup>23</sup> In addition to working hard and maintaining an independent, positive attitude, Mary turned her gender into an advantage. In the women's newsroom and outside the office, Mary's disarming effect on men, especially important men, allowed her to strike a powerful position. She was instantly charming: her short, honey-brown hair curled tightly around her face, framing her chiseled features. She usually sported dark red lipstick, and she refused to wear a bra, contributing to her feminine and flirtatious appearance. She spoke softly, musically, and eloquently.<sup>24</sup> At only 5' 2" in her size 6.5 AAA shoes,<sup>25</sup> Mary was a very small woman, but she commanded much more presence in a room than her physical stature would suggest.<sup>26</sup>

As a reporter for the Chicago Daily News, Mary was introduced to influential writers and politicians, including her beloved Carl Sandburg. Like other men involved with the News, he

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<sup>22</sup> Ibid, 33.

<sup>23</sup> Interview with Wood Simpson, ca. 1970, Mary Hemingway Papers, Kennedy Library.

<sup>24</sup> Tillman, "Durable 'Miss Mary,'" Mary Hemingway Papers, Kennedy Library.

<sup>25</sup> Mary always struggled to find shoes that fit her, especially during World War II in London. "Shoes are by far my biggest problem," she wrote to her parents, "the British simply don't make shoes that are narrower than B, and if I get them long enough, they fall off my feet." Letter to Thomas and Adeline Welsh, 22 June 1944, Mary Hemingway Papers, Kennedy Library.

<sup>26</sup> Interview with Wood Simpson, Kennedy Library. Cf. Mary Hemingway, *How It Was*, 102, and photographs in the Mary Hemingway Papers, Beinecke Library.

frequently visited the female reporters in their separate newsroom. Sandburg nicknamed Mary, “Minnesota,” and often invited her to his hotel room, where they would drink whiskey and sing until Mary took her leave. Another visitor to the women’s newsroom, French reporter Jules Sauerwein invited the young women to visit him if they ever found themselves in Paris. Neither Mary nor any of her female colleagues had been to Paris, and the invitation became a challenge: whoever traveled to Paris first would win \$10 and bragging rights.<sup>27</sup> Not surprisingly, Mary dutifully saved her earnings, as she had done since graduating high school. By 1936, she had enough money to buy a ticket from Montreal, Canada, to Belfast, Ireland, aboard a small boat.<sup>28</sup>

Mary’s first trip to Europe would captivate her the way that Carl Sandburg’s poem had ten years earlier. After a stop in Dublin, Mary made her way to London, where she instantly fell in love with the sights and sounds of the city. She recognized its importance as the center of world affairs and was attracted to the sense of life and urgency she found in the streets.<sup>29</sup> After a few days of exploring, she hurried on to Paris to meet Sauerwein whose challenge had inspired this journey. Unfortunately, he was in Munich, reporting on the rise of Nazism in Germany. By chance, Mary wandered into the small Paris bureau of the London Daily Express, located on the same floor as Paris-Soir, Sauerwein’s paper. With her characteristic charm, Mary befriended the bureau chief, a young man from London, and he invited her to dine with him and his colleagues that evening. After dinner, wine, and dancing, they gathered at Les Halles for a bowl of onion soup to end the night. As Mary bemoaned the fact that she would soon return to Chicago, her new friends suggested she take a reporting job in London. Mary doubted the facility with which

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<sup>27</sup> Mary Hemingway, *How It Was*, 34.

<sup>28</sup> “True Hollywood Touch to Mary Welsh’s Story,” *Mary Hemingway Papers*, Kennedy Library.

<sup>29</sup> Interview with Wood Simpson, Kennedy Library.

this could be accomplished, but one of the party handed her the telephone number of Lord Beaverbrook.<sup>30</sup>

If anyone could secure a job for Mary in London, this man could. Lord Beaverbrook owned the London Daily Express, the London Evening Standard, and the Sunday Express, in addition to serving in the British government in various capacities.<sup>31</sup> Affectionately known as “the Beaver,” the media tycoon and political figure would also be swayed by Mary’s allure. After a brief meeting with her, he overcame his initial reluctance and set up an interview for Mary with an editor at the London Daily Express. Unfortunately, the editor could not find room for her on his staff; he already employed a talented, young, American, female reporter. Mary returned to the States, disappointed to be leaving London and Paris but inspired by the pace and gravity of events taking place in Europe.<sup>32</sup>

Back in Chicago, Mary’s coworkers gave her the \$10 she had earned for reaching Paris first. She worked harder than ever, becoming the most respected female reporter on the staff. But the image of London did not leave her mind. She approached her boss about the possibility of taking a job in the London bureau of the Chicago Daily News. Unfortunately, there were no openings. She continued to inquire, but a year later, she remained in Chicago.

One day, out of the blue, Mary received a call from Lord Beaverbrook’s secretary. The Beaver was visiting Chicago, and Mary accepted the offer to dine with him, first over lunch, and then again over dinner. Mary was exhilarated by her worldly and influential companion, but despite her subtle hints, the evening passed without discussion of a job offer. The Beaver went on to New York, and Mary did not expect to hear from him again, but he called her a week later and requested that she join him in New York City before he returned to London. Mary accepted

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<sup>30</sup> Mary Hemingway, *How It Was*, 35.

<sup>31</sup> Cf. Anne Chisholm and Michael Davie, *Lord Beaverbrook: A Life* (New York: Knopf, 1993).

<sup>32</sup> Mary Hemingway, *How It Was*, 36.

on the condition that they discuss the possibility of her joining the staff of the Express. After an awkward evening of Mary reading to the bedridden Lord (he suffered from asthma), the Beaver had failed to convince Mary to accompany him on a cruise on the Nile. Frustrated, he imparted his advice on the young, charming, “Midwestern dolt”: “. . . there is only one way in Europe in which a woman might advance toward whatever objectives she had and that is with the patronage of an important and influential man; . . . the single, essential goal of a young woman should be to learn how to please men in every aspect of physical living and then to perfect her practice of those sorceries.”<sup>33</sup> Perturbed but focused on her goal, Mary listened patiently and waited for him to move on to other topics before requesting again that he hire her to write for the Express. Finally, he relented, promising to find her a job in London. Upon returning to Chicago, Mary began to say her goodbyes.<sup>34</sup>

#### Europe, 1937-1944

On July 2, 1937, Mary reported to work at the London Daily Express. She encountered a large building, flamboyant and hostile with its modern lines and black glass panels.<sup>35</sup> Behind the impressive facade, through the art deco lobby, and up the oval staircase, the editorial floor left much to be desired. The long table which Mary shared with other reporters more closely resembled a lunch counter than an office desk. She put her bag and coat on the floor beneath her chair; the table barely had room enough to accommodate her notebook and typewriter.<sup>36</sup>

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<sup>33</sup> Mary Hemingway, *How It Was*, 37.

<sup>34</sup> Kert, 400.

<sup>35</sup> The London Daily Express building that Mary worked at remains standing today. “Art Deco buildings in London,” Victoria and Albert Museum, accessed 13 April 2012, [http://www.vam.ac.uk/vastatic/microsites/1157\\_art\\_deco/about/buildings/daily.htm](http://www.vam.ac.uk/vastatic/microsites/1157_art_deco/about/buildings/daily.htm).

<sup>36</sup> Interview with Wood Simpson, Kennedy Library.

Her first day at the Express, she was assigned to cover Amelia Earhart's disappearance. Mary completed the 1,000 word story within the assigned one hour, not realizing that the deadline was artificial. As she settled into her new job, Mary's assignments ranged from the frivolous ("Champagne-Drinking at the Derby") to the political ("Trafalgar Square Rallies Protest Against British Policy on the Spanish Civil War").<sup>37</sup> Her first assignment outside England took her to the Netherlands in January 1938 to cover the birth of the heir to the Dutch throne. As Mary awaited the baby's arrival with reporters from around Europe, they filled the hours engaging in Mary's favorite activity: drinking. Mary loved alcohol of all kinds, and along with her friends at the Express, she did her best to support the almost thirty pubs within a two-block radius of the London office.<sup>38</sup>

Throughout this time, Mary lived in Chelsea, in the basement of a building occupied by young, single women, working various jobs from modeling to film production. But Mary would not be single for long. After a ten month courtship, Mary married Noel Monks, a fellow war correspondent. Bulky but fit, Noel was a native of Australia; he had traveled to Europe to cover the Spanish Civil War. He dressed crisply, and his premature gray hair only enhanced his distinguished appearance.<sup>39</sup> Together, they moved to a tiny house on Upper Cheyne Row. The two did not immediately attempt to have children together; in fact, Mary was discouraged by a doctor at this time to do so, fearing complications because of a medical condition.<sup>40</sup> As time passed, however, Mary did express a desire for a family, but any attempts toward pregnancy failed; in a letter to her parents, Mary wrote, "I know that children keep a marriage alive and

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<sup>37</sup> Mary Hemingway Papers, Beinecke and Kennedy Libraries.

<sup>38</sup> Mary Hemingway, *How It Was*, 42. Mary's love of alcohol continued throughout her life, and though she did not speak Swahili, after her travels to Africa she learned how to say: "Tupa ile chpa tupu," or "Take away that empty bottle."

<sup>39</sup> Cf. Photographs in Mary Hemingway Papers, Beinecke Library.

<sup>40</sup> Medical Report, 1938, Mary Hemingway Papers, Kennedy Library.

vital, and I've wanted some ever since [Noel and I] were married. Even though we haven't been successful so far, I haven't given up hope."<sup>41</sup> The impending European war also deterred the couple from pursuing a family.

In keeping with Mary's appreciation of language and indicative of her sense of humor, Mary loved word games. One game began with participants asking, "Have you heard of the moron that . . ." and finishing the question with a funny error: ". . . sat on a busy intersection with two slices of toast waiting for the traffic jam? . . . made socks for her son in the army because he wrote and told her he had grown a foot?" In the framework of this game, Mary was a moron: she "moved to the city because [s]he heard the country was at war."<sup>42</sup> Ever since Mary had first visited London while working for the Chicago Daily News, she had been fascinated by the tense political climate. Mary felt the pressure of the imminent European conflict, especially as Hitler moved to expand German territory, and she relished the opportunity to be present at the scene of major world events. Mary later remembered a common experience during the years leading up to the Second World War: "feeling vaguely disloyal to London if one spent a night away from it."<sup>43</sup>

In pursuit of important stories, however, Mary would spend time away from London. On September 15, 1938, Mary flew ahead of Prime Minister Neville Chamberlain to Munich, Germany, in preparation for his meeting with Adolf Hitler. After arriving at the hotel, she set up an open telephone line to the London office in order to prevent censorship, then talked her way into Chamberlain's room, directly below her own, but found nothing of interest. She conducted interviews in the streets with anyone who spoke English and sat down with the chief of the Nazi

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<sup>41</sup> Letter to Thomas and Adeline Welsh, 16 August 1942, Mary Welsh Hemingway Papers, Beinecke Library.

<sup>42</sup> Mary Hemingway Papers, Beinecke Library.

<sup>43</sup> Mary Hemingway, "England's People's War," Overseas Press Club, 1964, Mary Hemingway Papers, Kennedy Library.

women's organization. When Chamberlain greeted a crowd from his hotel room window, Mary watched the spectacle from her balcony directly above his room and, facetiously, bowed to the streets below.<sup>44</sup>

After the agreement had been signed, permitting the German annexation of Sudetenland, Mary traveled to the German-Czech border to watch the terms be fulfilled. Unsurprisingly, Mary and her companions played word games in the long car ride through Salzburg and Linz. Upon reaching the border, Mary found it difficult to craft a story because nothing newsworthy had taken place: the agreement had been enacted "correctly and courteously."<sup>45</sup> While awaiting funds from London to finance her return voyage, Mary explored the villages nestled among the hills. While there, she missed Winston Churchill's address to the House of Commons on October 5, 1938. Still excluded from government, Churchill represented a pessimistic view on German ambition, later validated by the course of events. "All is over," Churchill lamented. "Silent, mournful, abandoned, broken, Czechoslovakia recedes into the darkness. . . . I fear we shall find that we have deeply compromised, and perhaps fatally endangered, the safety and even the independence of Great Britain and France."<sup>46</sup>

After much delay, Mary did return to London, and while news of German aggression spread from the continent to Britain, she continued to feel removed from any conflict. This was a golden time for her relationship with Noel: they frolicked around London, in the parks and pubs, working but also enjoying the European lifestyle. In August 1939, Mary and Noel went on holiday in St. Jean de Luz, enjoying the Basque sun and French cuisine.<sup>47</sup> They returned to England on September 1, 1939, the same day that the German army invaded Poland.

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<sup>44</sup> Kert, 402.

<sup>45</sup> Mary Hemingway, *How It Was*, 46.

<sup>46</sup> Winston Churchill, "The Munich Agreement" (speech, House of Commons, London, 5 October 1938).

<sup>47</sup> Mary Hemingway, *How It Was*, 46-47.

On Sunday, September 3, 1939, Mary leisurely prepared breakfast for herself and Noel as morning sunlight streamed through the windows into their tiny flat. Meanwhile, at nine o'clock, Prime Minister Chamberlain presented the Nazis with an ultimatum: the Germans could withdraw from Poland, or Great Britain would declare war on Germany. At eleven o'clock, the ultimatum expired with no reply from the Nazis. Mary was called to the Express office to cover the news, but she noticed nothing unusual in her walk to work. Great Britain was peacefully at war, at least temporarily.<sup>48</sup>

As autumn turned to winter, Mary became restless. War hovered over the European continent, but its effect on England was not yet newsworthy. Mary dawdled in London, covering debates in the House of Commons. She interviewed the American ambassador, but her editors disliked her story about his lack of faith in the British military. Frustrated by her distance from the important world events, Mary convinced her boss to transfer her to Paris to cover the British military presence in France. She spent a dreary few months interviewing troops, visiting encampments, and observing drills.<sup>49</sup> In a story for the Express, Mary quoted an officer as saying, "Actually, we could do with a bit of action, to take their minds off Home and Ma."<sup>50</sup> The articles she telephoned to London had little substance beyond fragments like this: like England, France still awaited the true outbreak of war.

Until a newsworthy event took place, Mary indulged in the luxuries of the Parisian lifestyle. While in Paris, Mary enrolled in French language classes, mastered the Métro, and used the bar at the Ritz Hotel as a rendezvous point. She frequented art galleries and sunbathed on rooftop terraces. On May 10, 1940, Winston Churchill became Prime Minister and Germany bombed and invaded Belgium, Luxembourg, and the Netherlands. The gravity of these events

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<sup>48</sup> Kert, 402-03.

<sup>49</sup> Mary Hemingway, *How It Was*, 49.

<sup>50</sup> Mary Hemingway Papers, Kennedy Library.

was not immediately apparent to Mary, as the French press and indeed the military remained confused about details of the attacks. As the German army approached France, Mary continued to enjoy French wine and cuisine. Noel joined her in Paris after finishing a story in Reims, the location of the headquarters of the Royal Air Force. Afternoons saw the couple playing tennis and swimming casually at a nearby club.<sup>51</sup>

Suddenly, panic took hold of the city as word spread that the German army had broken through French lines and threatened the city of Paris. Noel returned from his office on a humid Sunday afternoon with the news that Paris was about to surrender.<sup>52</sup> Mary and Noel packed in twenty minutes, managed to hail a taxi, and directed it to the train station. The city was quiet, but the station was chaotic. Mary and Noel squeezed into a train compartment already overflowing with passengers, with Mary wedged between a frightened spaniel and a Louvre curator.<sup>53</sup> Mary and Noel disembarked at Blois, where they had heard the French government was temporarily installed. They searched for sources of news, but even if they had learned anything in the chaos, they would not have been able to send their findings back to London.<sup>54</sup>

With charm and by chance, Mary hitched a ride in an acquaintance's car to Biarritz, while Noel stayed behind in Blois in an attempt to cover the events there. He quickly realized that he would not be able to do anything productive amid the frenzy, and he soon took off after his wife. His journey was much more difficult than Mary's, costing him three days and two nights to reach Biarritz by a combination of train, hearse, and foot.<sup>55</sup> The morning after he arrived, Mary and Noel managed to find a cab driver willing to take them to Bordeaux, where Americans and Brits were gathering in hopes of leaving the country in advance of the German invasion. Along

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<sup>51</sup> Mary Hemingway, *How It Was*, 50.

<sup>52</sup> Kert, 401.

<sup>53</sup> Letter to Thomas and Adeline Welsh, Mary Hemingway Papers, Kennedy Library.

<sup>54</sup> Mary Hemingway, *How It Was*, 50.

<sup>55</sup> *Ibid.*, 51.

with many other journalists and British and American citizens, Mary and Noel crowded onto a cargo ship meant accommodate 150 people; they were two of 1600.<sup>56</sup>

Upon returning to England, Mary confronted a fact that she had known all along but had not yet internalized: a war would be fought in Europe, and she would cover it. She reevaluated her position at the Express. “I didn’t want to work for the Daily Express,” she said, “on account of the fact that I thought it would be a serious war – not just a European tiff – and that I would like to report on it to somebody in America.”<sup>57</sup> She called a Chicago colleague, Walter Graebner, who had gone on to run the London bureau of Time magazine. He offered her a job.<sup>58</sup>

On June 18, 1940, Winston Churchill delivered a speech to the House of Commons that would become famous. “The Battle of France is over,” he asserted. “I expect that the Battle of Britain is about to begin. Upon this battle depends the survival of Christian civilization. Upon it depends our own British life, and the long continuity of our institutions and our Empire. . . . Let us therefore brace ourselves to our duties, and so bear ourselves that, if the British Empire and its Commonwealth last for a thousand years, men will still say, ‘This was their finest hour.’”<sup>59</sup> Indeed, the battle was about to begin, and it would be named according to Churchill’s remarks. On July 10, 1940, Mary began working at Time, and the German Luftwaffe began its aerial campaign against England. This ushered in a summer and fall that would test the mettle of Londoners and indeed the architectural soundness of the city. Mary’s resolve would also be tested, and the next few years of war would become Mary’s finest hour.

On September 7, the true Blitz began over London. Sirens sounded in the streets, bombs could be heard blasting nearby, and the reporting team frequently had to abandon their desks to

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<sup>56</sup> “True Hollywood Touch to Mary Welsh’s Story.” Mary Welsh Hemingway Papers, John F. Kennedy Presidential Library.

<sup>57</sup> Interview with Wood Simpson, Kennedy Library.

<sup>58</sup> Mary Hemingway, *How It Was*, 54.

<sup>59</sup> Winston Churchill, “Their Finest Hour” (speech, House of Commons, London, 18 June 1940).

find shelter in the basement. By this point, Mary and Noel had not settled in an apartment of their own, and their latest refuge was at Lansdowne House in Berkeley Square. One night, they returned to their apartment to find the windows entirely blown out by a nearby bomb explosion. On another occasion, their landlord called and ordered Mary and Noel to go outside because a firebomb had landed in Berkeley Square. Along with her neighbors, Mary worked to put out the flames, and after a concerted effort by both firefighters and citizens, Mary passed around a bottle of whiskey in triumph. Lansdowne was lucky that summer not to suffer serious damage in this or any other fire attack: the water supply was never interrupted, and electricity and telephone service failed only occasionally. The residents of Lansdowne House left the door unlocked so that their friends could use the working bathroom, and frequently Mary woke up to one or two soldiers taking refuge on the second-floor landing.<sup>60</sup>

The devastation was rampant throughout London. “It was a time of theater and travesty,” Mary wrote, “with seven million people, traditionally addicts of the outdoors, suddenly burrowing underground. . . . There was the evening when I walked home alone from the Savoy in a fine new black suit. When I got to my flat and looked in the mirror the suit was gray. It was a night of incendiaries. I had flung sandbags on a couple of them that were burning along my way, and had thrown myself prone on the pavement five times during the mile or more when the descending screams sounded too close.”<sup>61</sup> Sometimes, when walking to and from work, Mary would pass examples of recent devastation. She saw gray vans carting dead men, women, and children away from bombed houses. Nights saw the heaviest destruction and the loudest attacks, preventing sleep and instilling deep fears in London residents. Some nights were worse than others, and some made Mary think she would not live another day. “Today has brought the usual

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<sup>60</sup> Mary Welsh Hemingway Diary, October 1940, quoted in Mary Hemingway, *How It Was*, 64.

<sup>61</sup> Mary Hemingway, “England’s People’s War,” Overseas Press 1964.

post-bomb misery” Mary wrote in her diary on May 11, 1941, “the taste of powder in the mouth, burglar alarms ringing incessantly, glass crunching under our shoes in the flat and also outside, clothes in the closets and drawers heavy with dust, my eyes red and face old looking and feeling as though it were burning, and a terrible job to concentrate my thinking.”<sup>62</sup>

Despite these challenges, Mary worked hard throughout the summer and fall. For *Time*, Mary wrote profiles of the new American ambassador, her old friend Lord Beaverbrook, Lady Astor, and others. She used her many connections in the military to secure her access to restricted areas and gain information about the goings-on at the front. She traveled around Britain reporting on military happenings, cabling updates and statistics back to the London office.<sup>63</sup> She took up a post contributing to early morning BBC broadcasts and, with her dedicated reporting and feminine charm, won over Henry Luce, adding him to her list of powerful male friends. In 1941, Mary wrote a feature piece about British women contributing to the war effort. “In such elaborate upheavals as total war, no individual’s history can be typical,” Mary wrote, as much about herself as about her British subjects. “These are the women of Britain today. They express few high sentiments of patriotism. They work. Privately they dream their plans for reconstruction after the war. . . . They work so hard they have no time for tears.”<sup>64</sup> Like those of her subjects, Mary’s story was unique. Like her subjects, Mary worked hard and received little gratitude. Like her subjects, Mary faced extraordinary challenges in daily life, from air raids over London to the widespread food shortage to an interruption of family life. Like her subjects, Mary encountered additional obstacles because she was a woman.

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<sup>62</sup> Mary Hemingway, diary entry, 11 May 1944, quoted in *How It Was*, 70.

<sup>63</sup> Official Time Memos, Mary Hemingway Papers, Beinecke Library.

<sup>64</sup> Mary Welsh, “No Time for Tears: Women at War Keep Busy with Problems of Work, Uniforms, Make-Up, Dates and Meals,” 1941, Mary Hemingway Papers, Kennedy Library.

At Time, as at other newspapers, gender inequality prevailed nowhere more strongly than in the domain of war correspondence. Women were frequently denied official accreditation from the military; women could not access military camps and facilities because there were no female restrooms or sleeping quarters; and women were prevented from interacting with soldiers because women distracted the troops.<sup>65</sup> Mary added her name to a letter authored by fellow American female journalist Ruth Cowan addressed to the President of the American Correspondents Association; it read, “I would like to submit a memo on the difficulties we women war correspondents are having attempting to report on the activities of Americans at war. We are being stopped from doing a first class workmanship job. Instead, we are forced into the position of wrangling and fighting to do our jobs. All I want is to do my job.”<sup>66</sup>

In January 1942, Mary traveled to Dublin as an official war correspondent to report on the reception of American troops in Ireland. Accustomed to death and destruction around every corner, Mary noticed the “euphemism of life jackets” as she drifted out into the Irish Sea on an overnight ride from England to Ulster.<sup>67</sup> She encountered a hostile and confused climate; the Irish had conflicting motivations in the war. Prime Minister de Valera told a group of journalists that after centuries of harassment and abuse at the hands of the British, he could not condone the landing of America troops on Irish soil and could not in good conscience give aid to the British, their age old oppressors.<sup>68</sup> Mary herself had a complicated relationship with Ireland, her family’s original home. While she understood that the stereotypical criticisms of the Irish had some truth in them, she felt loyal to the county and its traditions. “Ireland is a wicked, filthy, ignorant

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<sup>65</sup> Penny Colman, *Where the Action Was: Women War Correspondents in World War II* (New York: Crown Publishers, 2002), 28.

<sup>66</sup> *No Job for a Woman: The Women who Fought to Report WWII*, directed by Michéle Midori Fillion (New York: Women Make Movies, 2011). Martha Gellhorn, Ernest Hemingway’s wife at the time, also signed this letter.

<sup>67</sup> Mary Hemingway, *How It Was*, 76.

<sup>68</sup> Mary Hemingway, *How It Was*, 77.

place,” she wrote in a letter to her parents on the occasion of St. Patrick’s Day, “filled with people who’ll die of nothing but stubbornness, rather than admit they’re wrong---and it would be fine if it sank in the sea. But . . . I wear the green for the great Kathleen ni Houlihan, for the wild gay men and women of Ireland’s history, with their bare feet in the mud, and strong drink in their stomachs, probably, and dreams in their heads. I wear the green for you, Pop, you contrary sentimentalist, you.”<sup>69</sup>

During the spring and summer of 1942, Mary was reintroduced to Henry Luce,<sup>70</sup> one of the many influential figures whose attention she craved. Then and always, Mary had a penchant for “rich, charming, talented, handsome men.”<sup>71</sup> She resented pettiness and anonymity, especially in people, preferring excitement, awe, even violence, if it mean adventure and grandeur. Fortunately for Mary, just as she enjoyed the attention of such men, these men enjoyed the company of a smart, sassy, and attractive female in a heavily militarized and male climate. Throughout her time in London, she took full advantage of this relationship, both inside and outside the office. In a letter to her parents, Mary wrote, “I go along as usual, working pretty steadily, getting free meals from my boy-friends, especially generals who like having a gal who’s young and passing decent looking to take to dinner.”<sup>72</sup> In the same letter, Mary expressed her love of the important city, and not just the important men: “If it weren’t for you two, nothing would pry me loose from here now. . . . London in the weeks and months and years to come is the most interesting place in the world to be.”<sup>73</sup> In a second letter a few weeks later, she

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<sup>69</sup> Letter to Thomas and Adeline Welsh, 17 March 1943, Mary Hemingway Papers, Beinecke Library.

<sup>70</sup> Mary Hemingway, *How It Was*, 77-78.

<sup>71</sup> Tillman, “Durable ‘Miss Mary,’” Mary Hemingway Papers, Kennedy Library.

<sup>72</sup> Letter to Thomas and Adeline Welsh, 23 May 1942. Mary Hemingway Papers, Beinecke Library.

<sup>73</sup> *Ibid.*

expressed the same idea: “Having seen the war through from here, I don’t want to miss even the beginning of the grande finale.”<sup>74</sup>

Her parents did pry her loose, and in the fall of 1942, she returned to the United States for the first time since 1937. She visited her parents in Chicago, where they were renting an apartment, and her holiday was relaxing and joyful. In the background, the shadow of war darkened her vacation, and she hurried back to work. While she awaited the resolution of an issue with her passport, Mary worked out of the New York office of Time. There, she found even more gender-segregated newsrooms. “In the war between men and women inside Time’s antiseptic jungle,” Mary recalled, “the lines and ranks were strictly drawn, the pecking order inviolate. On the editorial staff men were ‘writers’ (associate or contributing editors in the masthead) and woman were ‘researchers,’ and never the twain would exchange crafts.”<sup>75</sup> Indignant and unaccustomed to such extreme gender bias, Mary defied these norms, to the astonishment of the men and the resentment of the women. Mary’s success in New York distinguished her among Time’s female reporters, but Mary was not happy in the United States: in a letter to her mother, she wrote,

I feel I could be of so much more use in London. (I know how you feel about it, Mommie, that I've done my bit about the war and ought to be able now to sit back and take it easy----but believe me, I couldn't possibly do that. I'd be more miserable, I know, if I tried that, than I can describe to you. There is a tremendous job to be done by my generation toward winning this war, and particularly toward winning the peace afterwards; and I feel, without any doubts whatsoever, that my place to help in the best, most efficient way I know, that is, by going back to London and writing about it for America.)<sup>76</sup>

Finally, Mary returned to London after the issue with her passport was resolved. Noel too managed to return to London for a brief visit before he went on to various cities along the

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<sup>74</sup> Letter to Thomas and Adeline Welsh, 8 June 1942. Mary Hemingway Papers, Beinecke Library.

<sup>75</sup> Mary Hemingway, *How It Was*, 81.

<sup>76</sup> Letter to Thomas and Adeline Welsh, 12 September 1942. Mary Hemingway Papers, Beinecke Library.

Mediterranean and then to Cairo. The marriage suffered because of the lack of time they spent together, though Mary recognized that the war kept them apart. Soon, word reached Mary that Noel was seeing a woman in Cairo. She moped for two days but then shrugged, content to wait for the end of the war to resume normal married life. Meanwhile, though she never acknowledged it directly, she was not faithful to Noel anymore than he was to her. Her friends knew this about her: “She was full of laughs and full of lovers,” said a colleague. “She was very little, very attractive. . . . It was a marvelous period for her, perhaps the best time in her life. If the chase was on, it was the guy’s chase.”<sup>77</sup> Mary’s sexuality had always defined her appearance and personality, but this was a particularly flirtatious time for her, especially because of the war. “London was a Garden of Eden for single women in those years,” she remembered, “a serpent dangling from every tree and streetlamp, offering tempting gifts, companionship which could push away respective lonelinesses, warm, if temporary, affections-little shelters, however makeshift, from the huge uncertainties of the hovering, shadowy sense of mortality.”<sup>78</sup>

#### Ernest, 1944-1946

By 1944, Mary had a well established social network. As her roommate Connie recalled, “Mary had been in London so long that she knew everybody, and had wonderful connections.”<sup>79</sup> One of these connections was Irwin Shaw. He had not yet published his first and famous novel *The Young Lions* which would catapult him into the literary spotlight, but even as an officer in the U.S. Army, Irwin operated in the social circles of writers and journalists in London. Struck, as most men were, by Mary’s tight suit and sly smile, he took Mary to lunch on a sunny day in early May 1944. The restaurant was crowded and too warm for Mary’s wool jacket, so she

<sup>77</sup> William Walton, quoted in Kert, 403.

<sup>78</sup> Mary Hemingway, *How It Was*, 85.

<sup>79</sup> Connie Ernst, quoted in Kert, 404.

removed it, much to Irwin's delight. Mary never wore a bra, and that cloudless May day was no exception. As Irwin pointed out, their small table would be attracting male visitors, thanks to Mary's bright yellow sweater.<sup>80</sup>

Across the room, Mary noted a bearlike man lunching alone. At her request, Irwin identified him as Ernest Hemingway, a giant of the literary community since the late 1920s, after the publication of *The Sun Also Rises* (1926) and *A Farewell to Arms* (1929).<sup>81</sup> On his way out of the restaurant, Ernest paused at Irwin and Mary's table, as other friends had done throughout their meal. He asked Irwin to introduce his companion and quickly proceeded to invite her to dine the next day. Mary and Ernest's first date was average: their outdoor table ensured poor service and loud background noise, while Ernest's diffident manner turned Mary off. They discussed the war, leaving Mary underwhelmed by Ernest's knowledge of current events in Europe.<sup>82</sup> "I'd read all his stuff," Mary said in an interview, "but he didn't know anything about the war. He'd been sub chasing off in Cuba and he didn't know anything about the European war at all. I felt rather superior, I might say, because he was ignorant about the resistance and the bombing program and all of that, and so I was impressed by him as a writer, but not by him in that circumstance."<sup>83</sup> They went on to praise each other's spouses: Ernest had met Noel during the Spanish Civil War, and Mary knew Martha Gellhorn in the context of the journalism community.<sup>84</sup> After parting, Mary did not expect to see Ernest again, but their social circles overlapped.

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<sup>80</sup> Mary Hemingway, *How It Was*, 93.

<sup>81</sup> Paul Hendrickson, *Hemingway's Boat: Everything He Loved in Life and Lost* (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 2011), 32-34.

<sup>82</sup> Mary Hemingway, *How It Was*, 95.

<sup>83</sup> Interview with Wood Simpson, Kennedy Library.

<sup>84</sup> Colman, 40-44.

One evening not long after this date, Mary bumped into Ernest at a cocktail party before leaving the event early in preparation for work the following day. She returned home to find her roommate and a male friend talking in the dark.<sup>85</sup> Mary sat down on her bed and joined their conversation. Before long, they were joined by an unexpected visitor. Ernest knocked on their door and quickly made himself comfortable on Mary's bed.<sup>86</sup> Ernest recounted stories of his youth for the captive audience, but suddenly, after telling the story of his high school prom, Ernest switched topics. "I don't know you, Mary," he said in the darkness, "but I want to marry you now, and I hope to marry you sometime. Sometime you may want to marry me."<sup>87</sup> Surprised, Mary waited and then replied hesitantly that his proposal was "premature," that they were both married, and that they hardly knew one another. He stuck by his statement, and left along with the other man, leaving the women alone. "He's too big," Mary told her roommate before they went to bed, referring to both his size and his stature.<sup>88</sup>

This moment passed, and Mary's life resumed its wartime rhythm. She convinced a friend in the Air Force to give her a seat on one of his warplanes, and Mary flew with him over the Channel to see the gathering air force formations. She wrote stories about the increase of Allied bombing of northern France. In late May, Noel telephoned to say he would finally be returning to London from Turkey and Cairo, and Mary busied herself preparing for his arrival. "The last two weeks have gone by like a flash," Mary wrote in a letter to her parents on June 4, 1944, "chiefly because Noel got home, after being away nearly a year, and I was busy looking after him and getting him ready to move out again. . . . He was so much more silent and reserved

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<sup>85</sup> At night, it was common to keep the lights off when the windows were open, even if social activity persisted. Connie, Mary's roommate, and Michael, her friend, had desired fresh night air, and thus turned the lights off as a protection against air raids.

<sup>86</sup> While unusual for such an important, married man to lie down next to a woman he hardly knew, visiting friends' apartments by night was not an infrequent occurrence. In the event of a raid, adults would often be forced to find shelter wherever they were, including strangers' hallways and friends' beds.

<sup>87</sup> Mary Hemingway, *How It Was*, 95.

<sup>88</sup> *Ibid.*, 96.

than I had remembered him.”<sup>89</sup> Mary did not bring up the rumor she had heard of Noel’s sexual adventures in Cairo, and if Noel knew about Mary’s infidelity, he chose not to mention it.<sup>90</sup> On June 1, Noel again left London, this time on a secret mission regarding the coming invasion.<sup>91</sup> About this time, Mary got wind that Ernest had been in a car accident, and she decided to pay him a visit in the hospital. She brought flowers, and he made her promise to visit him when he was released in just a few days.<sup>92</sup>

On June 6, 1944, Allied troops arrived on the beaches of Normandy to begin the largest amphibious landing in world history. The top secret operation captured the attention of the press and indeed the world, but it was not immediately clear what the outcome would be. On June 8, 1944, Mary wrote in her diary, “Wrote a story about our wild Indian paratroopers with their brass knuckles for a newscast and found Noel’s first story from France in the Daily Mail. Tea with Pam Churchill who emphasized the stupidity of overoptimism about our chances in Normandy. The weather is being terrible and we are having trouble landing supplies.”<sup>93</sup> Mary looked upon the events as the wife of someone involved, as a reporter covering the war, and as an American citizen with additional loyalty to Britain. Beginning with D-Day, Mary spent the summer of 1944 working long hours, traveling, and, in a way she had not yet been forced to do, confronting the realities of war. Mary wrote to her parents that, “The trouble with invasions is they take away the few remaining bits of my private life. Since D-day . . . , I have been eating, breathing, dreaming and talking nothing but air-force activities.”<sup>94</sup> Throughout this period, Mary spent her days pursuing the latest information from the front, as she recorded in a letter of June 13: “fifteen

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<sup>89</sup> Letter to Thomas and Adeline Welsh, 4 June 1944, Mary Hemingway Papers, Kennedy Library.

<sup>90</sup> Mary Hemingway, *How It Was*, 98.

<sup>91</sup> Kert, 404.

<sup>92</sup> *Ibid.*, 405, and Mary Hemingway, *How It Was*, 98-99.

<sup>93</sup> Mary Hemingway, diary entry, 8 June 1944, quoted in *How It Was*, 100.

<sup>94</sup> Letter to Thomas and Adeline Welsh, 22 June 1944, Mary Hemingway Papers, Kennedy Library.

hours a day of flying around England to air stations and camps and hospitals, then back here at my typewriter to pound out the news.”<sup>95</sup> Pound it out she did, cabling military developments to London from around England as well as from France.

On July 12, 1944, Mary traveled to Normandy to report on the Medical Corps. “I stayed at a hospital camp,” Mary wrote in a letter, “worked every day from 6:50 am. until midnight, covering the endless miles of dusty roads, almost solid with traffic, talking to at least a hundred different people, including wounded and front-line doctors and behind the lines nurses and German prisoners.”<sup>96</sup> Mary was not content with the formal tour of northern France that she was given with a group of female journalists, so she found a young American man with a car to drive her off the crowded main highway and into the desolate landscape, where the country roads were lined with ditches and German signs announcing “Minen.”<sup>97</sup> The stench of death burdened the country air, and Mary more than once stumbled across anonymous corpses. More than any other experience in her reporting career, this visit to France made her understand the true nature of war. She was deeply moved by the anonymity of soldiers, the smells sights and sounds of warfare, and the devastating (and sometimes humiliating) effects of war on the human body.

With the invasion a success and the tide turning in favor of the Allies, Ernest left London for Paris in late July to cover the liberation. Mary followed him the next month, as journalists poured into France for what was sure to be a grand occasion. In the small pack on her back, Mary carried only a sleeping bag, road maps of France, candles, matches, a helmet, a water bottle, and her official uniform. Mary’s journey from London to Paris proved challenging, as the jeep scheduled to meet her in Cherbourg and drive her to Paris was nowhere to be found. She dallied at the hectic airfield, charmed the operations manager, and convinced him to persuade a

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<sup>95</sup> Letter to Thomas and Adeline Welsh, 13 June 1944, Mary Hemingway Papers, Kennedy Library.

<sup>96</sup> Letter to Thomas and Adeline Welsh, 18 July 1944, Mary Hemingway Papers, Kennedy Library.

<sup>97</sup> Mary Hemingway, *How It Was*, 104.

pilot to drop her at a nearby army camp. There, she hitched a ride with an officer driving to Paris, but they soon got lost in the countryside. When they encountered a captain asking for papers, Mary cringed; she was breaking army rules by traveling by unofficial means. Lucky for Mary, the captain overlooked this offense and offered her a seat in his jeep, as he too was also traveling to Paris. Finally, they arrived in Paris on August 25th, the Sunday after the liberation on Friday.

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Mary checked into the Hôtel Scribe, the headquarters of the Allied press. The packed hotel was full of her friends and acquaintances, dating all the way back to her years in Chicago.<sup>99</sup> Soon after arriving, and before investigating the events at Nôtre Dame, Mary stopped by the Ritz to check in on Ernest. He greeted her with a characteristic bear hug, complete with lifting, spinning, and singing. Having thus far neglected her reporting work, Mary ran off to cover the joyous events, but not before she made plans to dine with Ernest. Mary switched hotels the next day, moving into a room at the Ritz four floors above Ernest's.<sup>100</sup> Proximity to him was her only draw, as she left behind her friends and colleagues at the Scribe; on top of that, the Ritz "used to be one of the finest in town," Mary wrote in a letter, "but [is] now as cold as everywhere else."<sup>101</sup>

On August 26, Mary pushed through the massive crowd lining the Champs Elysées, the entire distance from the Place de la Concorde to the Arc de Triomphe. Along the way, she interviewed people in English and halting French, scribbling names and quotes in her small notebook. "Vive la France! Vivent les Americains!" the crowd chanted, in anticipation of the arrival of Charles de Gaulle and the victory parade.<sup>102</sup> Mary watched the French heroes greet the

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<sup>98</sup> Letter to Thomas and Adeline Welsh, 27 August 1944, Mary Hemingway Papers, Beinecke Library.

<sup>99</sup> Mary had wondered if Noel would be in Paris, but she learned by word of mouth that he was still in northern France.

<sup>100</sup> Mary Hemingway, *How It Was*, 106.

<sup>101</sup> Letter to Thomas and Adeline Welsh, 27 August 1944, Mary Hemingway Papers, Beinecke Library.

<sup>102</sup> Clipping, 27 August 1944, Mary Hemingway Papers, Kennedy Library.

crowd and hurried ahead to Nôtre Dame, where she used her press pass to gain access to the crowded cathedral. After this tremendous day, Mary returned to the Ritz to find Ernest waiting for her in his room. Amid the general glee at the liberation of Paris, Mary and Ernest spent their first night together. After that, it was only a matter of time before her moved into her room upstairs.<sup>103</sup>

“Life here has been more hectic than ever before,” Mary recorded in a letter, “with all the excitement and glory and all of the stirring times of those days in 1940 when we left France, but this time terrific joy instead of sorrow and gaiety instead of depression and new life instead of death, with so much happening and the simple solid facts of journalism colored at every corner with the emotion of seeing Paris and all its beauty again.”<sup>104</sup> Certainly, Mary’s life in Paris was hectic, but the source of Mary’s chaos, as well as her gaiety, lay in that fact that Mary’s hard work was overshadowed by her captivating romance. She and Ernest delighted in each other’s company, laughing so much that it interfered with their sexual activity.<sup>105</sup> At lunch, they pretended that famous historical figures would join them in the Ritz dining room. Marshal Michel Ney, commander of the rear guard in Napoleon’s retreat from Russia, was a frequent guest and one of Ernest’s favorites to impersonate. Out and about in Paris, Ernest thrived in the literary, artistic, and military communities he had been a part of since the 1920s. Mary accompanied him on his rounds, stopping at 27 Rue de Fleurus, the famous address of Gertrude Stein and Alice B. Toklas, as well as the studio of Pablo Picasso. Ernest requested that Picasso paint a nude portrait of Mary from the waist up; the artist agreed, but this commission was never realized.<sup>106</sup>

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<sup>103</sup> Mary Hemingway, *How It Was*, 112.

<sup>104</sup> Letter to Thomas and Adeline Welsh, 4 September 1944, *Mary Hemingway Papers*, Kennedy Library.

<sup>105</sup> Mary Hemingway, *How It Was*, 133.

<sup>106</sup> *Ibid.*, 118-20.

From the liberation of Paris to the end of the war, Mary's life was marked by less frequent but intensive reporting, a progressing relationship with Ernest, and a series of trips to Germany. Ernest traveled to Germany in September to report on an extraordinarily successful American infantry division.<sup>107</sup> On Ernest's request, Mary then took a trip to Germany in November to investigate the news that Jack Hemingway, Ernest's oldest son, had been wounded and captured.<sup>108</sup> On December 16, 1944, the Battle of the Bulge began, and Ernest immediately left Paris to cover the battle; his favorite division, the 4th, was on the front lines.<sup>109</sup> Alone in Paris for Christmas, Mary sought out the company of friends and colleagues, and partook in general celebration as the war drew to an end.

Ernest returned in mid-January to find Mary suffering from scabies, a contagious skin infection with a tiny parasite burrowing in the host's skin and causing intolerable itching. On top of that, Mary had an allergic reaction to a sleeping medicine intended to relieve her of the itching. She looked terrible, her skin red and inflamed, often bloody from scratching. Mary appreciated that Ernest did not mind, was not scared of the tiny bugs, and declined to return to his own bed.<sup>110</sup> After recovering, Mary was ordered back to London in late January, as *Time* was short on staff. She was surprised to find her apartment and her bank accounts mostly empty, and discovered that Noel had taken many of her things. She made do and enjoyed the company of her old friends and colleagues. Meanwhile, Ernest traveled to Cuba, thrilled to be returning to his beloved finca and fishing boat *Pilar*.<sup>111</sup>

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<sup>107</sup> *Ibid*, 124.

<sup>108</sup> Ernest felt that with his recognizable name and face he would inhibit success in discovering his son's whereabouts. Mary unearthed that Jack was recovering at a hospital in Alsace. Kert, 413.

<sup>109</sup> Mary Hemingway, *How It Was*, 143.

<sup>110</sup> Notes between Mary and Ernest, Ernest Hemingway Papers, Kennedy Library.

<sup>111</sup> Kert, 416.

When the 9th Armored crossed the Rhine river on March 7, 1945, they were the first foreign troops to do so since Napoleon's army in 1805. Mary once again employed her disarming charm, this time with General Quesada to secure permission to travel to Germany.<sup>112</sup> "We do not understand the thinking and feeling patterns of German people," she reported to Time, "from whom we've been isolated so long both by their propaganda which we didn't believe – but they did believe – and by our own propaganda which we did believe, and they probably didn't hear." With her red lipstick, Mary caught the attention of the Germans she met, since lipstick was banned under the Nazis, and she was intrigued by their "curious" yet "cold" stares. Furthermore, she worried about the prohibition on "fraternizing" with the enemy: "I know that our doughs,<sup>113</sup> chasing that dim light of victory through months of sleet and hunger and misery and killing fatigue, have never thought of it as making monks out of them. And they are too healthy in their own hearts to understand a nation – or a girl – without a conscience, a sense of shame, or a sense of decency."<sup>114</sup> This would be one of the last stories she wrote as a working reporter.<sup>115</sup>

On April 12, Mary broadcast her final radio report on the death of President Roosevelt. It marked the end of an era for the United States as well as for Mary: the following week, she travelled across the Atlantic Ocean and stopped in New York on her way to Cuba, where she would join Ernest at his private paradise. She landed in Havana on May 2, 1945.<sup>116</sup>

As for Noel, she had left him behind in the dust. "I suppose I ought to have an attack of conscience about it," Mary wrote in a letter to her parents. "But I feel neither mistaken nor

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<sup>112</sup> Mary Hemingway, *How It Was*, 146.

<sup>113</sup> "Doughs" was short for "doughboys," a term used to refer to American troops in World War I and World War II.

<sup>114</sup> Mary Hemingway, cable to Time, "Incident: Major Gen Terry Allen's 104th Inf. div. spearheaded into Cologne and found ample evidence how well Nazi underground was working, even then, behind the Rhine," Mary Hemingway Papers, Kennedy Library.

<sup>115</sup> Mary Hemingway, *How It Was*, 150.

<sup>116</sup> Kert, 419.

wicked nor foolish, and I have no attacks of conscience. And that is that.”<sup>117</sup> Across the Ocean, Noel received the news less casually than Mary delivered it. In addition to taking her possessions while she was in Paris, over the winter and spring of 1945, he sent Mary multiple letters expressing his anger at her behavior. A journalist himself, Noel wrote poignantly, and the notes are revealing, particularly a letter of February 1945:

I don't know whether to congratulate you or be sorry for you. I'm sure you must be one of the most envied women in the world. You threw a sprat into the sea and caught yourself a whale. I knew of course there was someone who had caused you to 'lose confidence' in our marriage. A woman doesn't ordinarily gouge the eyes out of her husband just because he's dumb. I thought the pip-speak general had turned up again, or the film unit guy who was waiting to 'jump into your arms with spring-like rapture' soon as you hit France, or the queer looking guy whose picture you carry around in your wallet and whose face I have never been able to place. Or pimply-faced Foot. . . . Or Clark again but Mister Hemingway . . . . All these horrible weeks I've been matching myself against these guys and reckoning that you'd soon tire of them. The sentimental streak in me was dying hard, Mary. Well--its dead now. I know I could never compete against Mister Hemingway. I couldn't even match his beard. . . . We were two people in love with life and each other when we saw the lights go out. Now when they come up again, we will be hating each other, and life for me at least, will be as meaningless as the promise you made to love and honour me forever. You will hate me just for being your husband and I will hate you for letting yourself become one of Hemingway's characters. Maybe I'll find some woman who'll love me for being just myself--and not the husband of the woman the great Hemingway loves. I'm at least entitled to that break. I've been thinking of a remark you made to me at the Savoy one night: "I want to walk in here and have everyone look at me." You're welcome, Madam.<sup>118</sup>

How Mary reacted to this letter, we do not know.

Cuba, 1946, and New Haven, 2012

Mary Welsh's story ended on March 21, 1946, when she became Mrs. Ernest Hemingway.<sup>119</sup> Mary and Ernest celebrated only fifteen anniversaries together before he committed suicide on July 2, 1961, but Mary remained Mrs. Ernest Hemingway until she died on

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<sup>117</sup> Letter to Thomas and Adeline Welsh, 15 January 1945, Mary Welsh Hemingway Papers, John F. Kennedy Presidential Library.

<sup>118</sup> Letter from Noel Monks, 8 February 1945, Mary Hemingway Papers, Kennedy Library.

<sup>119</sup> Marriage Certificate, 21 March 1946, Ernest Hemingway Papers, Kennedy Library.

November 26, 1986. In this role, Mary was often asked to tell her story, but listeners were interested in the story of the Nobel Prize winning author who reinvented American literature, not the small woman without a bra who had captured his heart. Mary probably agreed that her story only served to illuminate Ernest's, and she never seemed to mind retelling anecdotes about his wild birthday parties in Spain or his early morning writing sessions in Cuba. She maintained that her favorite memories were of long, sunny days aboard *Pilar* with Ernest, and she shrugged off his infidelity, mood swings, and occasional physical abuse. Only privately did she ever admit regret: "Where I am cowardly is in my fear of breaking away from him and this life and making a new one on my own," she wrote in a diary in 1953.<sup>120</sup>

After his death, Mary found it easier to dedicate herself to Ernest. She oversaw the production and reproduction of his work, built his archives, founded the Ernest Hemingway Foundation, and, over and over again, told his story. James Meredith, successor to Mary as President of the Hemingway Foundation, reflected, "She needs serious consideration if just for what she did to continue Hemingway's legacy. I personally think she did heroic work on developing and maintaining his archives. I don't know of any writer in America who was better served by their surviving spouse than Hemingway by Mary."<sup>121</sup> When she published her story in 1976 under the title *How It Was*, one reviewer suggested it be called *How It Really Was*, since its primary aim was "setting the record straight" about her late husband.<sup>122</sup>

Despite her distinguished career as a journalist, Mary did not consider herself a writer. In a note to Ernest, she explained,

But it is hard for me to write, not being a writer, having the thoughts run faster and helter-skelter and impossible to catch and arrange into orderly marches the big ones at the

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<sup>120</sup> Mary Hemingway, diary entry, 7 February 1953, Mary Hemingway Papers, Kennedy Library.

<sup>121</sup> James Meredith, correspondence with the author, 21 February 2011.

<sup>122</sup> Brian Malone, "Review of *How It Was*," *The Grand Rapids Press*, 16 June 1977, Mary Hemingway Papers, Kennedy Library.

front dominating the little ones and all of them milling around and racing off before I recognize them or even note them. And it is even harder writing to you because the writing you read should be rich and strong and slow with history and time packed in unnoticeably because we all of us have no time, but also swift like a blow that catches you off guard and shows you god damn it just how things are.<sup>123</sup>

For Mary, writing and reporting differed in that writing was active, while reporting was passive. Mary always considered herself within this second category, while Ernest championed the first. Reviewers criticized Mary's autobiography for its journalistic style: "Trained in the pre-war school of journalism, she sticks rigidly to facts: names, dates, places, Things done and Things said, all noted meticulously in her diaries, and as meticulously 'written-up' over the past eight years."<sup>124</sup> Mary used words as a means of telling stories – her own story, but more often, that of her husband and those of others – not as means of living, the way Ernest did.

Mary told stories, but she did not live them. For Mary, living meant the company of great men, the journeys to great places, and the witnessing of great events. In an interview, she reflected on her decision to abandon the war and Europe in pursuit of Ernest: "I took a chance-- what the hell. It wasn't really very difficult because I thought this [Ernest] was one of the most interesting creatures in the whole world--interesting and fascinating and complicated and charming."<sup>125</sup> After 1946, she lived through the story of one great man. Before 1946, Mary Welsh had lived through the great stories of others, first her father and Carl Sandburg, later Lord Beaverbrook and Henry Luce. At her best, Mary lived on the edges of the greatest story of her time: the Second World War. Mary doubted her own greatness – the quality she judged as most important. Mary masked her insecurity by telling great stories, and by always wearing her distinctive, sly smile.

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<sup>123</sup> Letter to Ernest Hemingway, 1 October 1944, Ernest Hemingway Papers, Kennedy Library.

<sup>124</sup> Mary Armitage, "Review of How It Was," The Book Page, Australia, Mary Hemingway Papers, Kennedy Library.

<sup>125</sup> Interview with Wood Simpson, Kennedy Library.

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