

VANESSA MARSH

Boarded Up House, from the series
Always Close but Never Touching, 2011
C-Print, 26.5 x 39.5 in



COURTESY DOLBY CHADWICK GALLERY

ANDREW SLOUGH

Avoiding Hemingway in Ketchum, Idaho

Finding My Voice in the Shadow of a Legend

I met Ernest Hemingway in the ninth grade. Not the Nobel Prize–winning writer, but by way of his book, *The Old Man and the Sea*. It was required reading in Ms. Lyon’s literature class but I spent math class sneaking glances at the book open on my lap below the desk. While Mr. Manfred worked through a geometry equation, I met Santiago, the Cuban fisherman who had gone eighty-four days without a catch. I learned the boy Manolin’s parents forbade him to fish with Santiago, who planned to sail alone from Cuba into the Straits of Florida. There in the Gulf Stream, he believed his luck would change in the deep water where the schools of bonita and albacore lived.

It was nine that night when my brother complained about the light and I retreated to our only bathroom. I was still reading in the empty tub at midnight when my mother knocked at the door. “Do you know what time it is?” she whispered.

“No. I’m almost finished with this book.” I thumbed the remaining pages.

“You have school tomorrow,” she reminded me.

“Ten pages more.”

I returned to Santiago and his cramping left hand.

“Andrew,” she whispered and returned to bed.

I was hooked from the beginning of the story when Santiago first catches the marlin.

“Yes,’ he said. ‘Yes,’ and shipped his oars without bumping the boat. He reached for the line and held it softly between the thumb and forefinger of his right hand. He felt no strain nor weight and he held the line lightly. Then it came again. This time it was a tentative pull, not solid nor heavy, and he knew exactly what it was. One hundred fathoms down a marlin was eating the sardines that covered the point and the shank of the hook where the hand-forged hook projected from the head of the small tuna.”

Thirteen years old and embraced by the tub’s cold porcelain, I could not know how hard Hemingway must have worked to write sentences that drove gooseflesh onto my arms and back. Sitting in the bow of Santiago’s skiff, I listened to the old man beseech the fish, “Just smell them. Aren’t they lovely? Eat them good now and then there is the tuna. Hard and cold and lovely. Don’t be shy, fish. Eat them.”

During the following two hours I felt Santiago’s pain when the Marlin ran and the line cut into his right hand.