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"Papa," New Hemingway Film Shot in Cuba, Gets Around U.S. Embargo

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"The film shows something that a lot of people in the U.S. don't know, which is the deep connection my grandfather had with Cuba. This island was his home for more than 30 years, and he considered Cubans to be his family," Mariel told the press at the film's screening Sunday at the Havana Film Festival.

The film had its official world premiere Saturday as part of the festival, three months before its official debut in U.S. theaters, one of the few examples of a production shared by Cuba and the United States – and also Canada – a symbol of the diplomatic thaw between the two nations.

For Mariel, being in Cuba for the month-long shoot in Hemingway's old haunts, such as the Finca Vigia house and the La Floridita bar, was "an incredible experience" that allowed her "to relive" the life of her grandfather, whom she never knew since he committed suicide in July 1961, four months before she was born.

"I came to Cuba 13 years ago and visited all the places related to the life of my grandfather. But this second time, for the filming, it was as if he had come back to life," Mariel said, referring to the experience of returning to Havana in April and May of 2014 to take part in the production.

The movie focuses on the last three years in the life of the writer – played by veteran actor Adrian Sparks – a dark time for a Hemingway in a downward spiral of depression and alcoholism, as reported by his friend, Miami Herald journalist Denne Bart Petitclerc, played by actor Giovanni Ribisi.

The film recaptures the same settings where Hemingway and others he knew once trod – Morro Castle, the Presidential Palace, the Hotel Ambos Mundos and the Malecon esplanade – during those tumultuous years, not only for the novelist, but in the history of Cuba, since they coincided with the first years of the victory of the Cuban Revolution from 1959-1961.

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