

CHAPTER I

“I have never known peace.”

I am afraid.
Afraid of the land that I live in,
That I was born in.
The ground I tread each day
Resounds with shots,
With screams;
It is saturated with tears,
Tears that have never ceased flowing.
I have never known peace.

*Excerpted from a poem entitled “No Hope For Tomorrow,”
written during the Troubles by Karyn Woods of Northern Ireland
when she was fourteen years old.*

THE telephone in my office rang at 4:45 p.m. David Trimble was on the line. This was the call I'd been waiting for. That morning we had distributed the final version of the agreement to the British and Irish governments and the eight Northern Ireland political parties, which were involved in the negotiations to end the conflict. Throughout the day I had been talking with the leaders of the parties. How's it going? Have you been through the agreement? What do you think? What do your people think? Can you vote for it? When can I set the meeting to vote on it? I tried to answer their questions, to ease their doubts. I was very tired, but I had to be wide awake for this, the last day, a day of questioning, exhorting, pleading.

Gradually the leaders responded. Some were enthusiastic, others restrained but positive. By four o'clock I had heard from both gov-

ernments and seven of the parties, all of whom were prepared to support the agreement.

Only the Ulster Unionists remained. Theirs was the largest and most important of the unionist parties, so their vote would be decisive. Under the complex voting procedure governing the negotiations, the Ulster Unionists were one of four participants who had veto power. If they said no, the agreement was dead, the peace process over. Twenty-two months of negotiations were about to end—and I still didn't know how.

The Ulster Unionists had been in a closed meeting all afternoon, and the rumors were flying: Their delegates were badly divided, shouting at one another; they were working it out. They were against it; they were for it. David Trimble, their leader, was in control; Trimble had lost control. The meeting would be over soon; it could go on all day.

I could no longer tell fact from fiction, reality from rumor. So I waited, tired and nervous, thinking about how to deal with a no vote from the Ulster Unionists. I didn't have to worry about a yes vote. That would be easy to handle. But a no would have profound adverse consequences. Many more people could die.

I had been involved in the peace process in Northern Ireland for more than three years, the last twenty-two months as chairman of the negotiations. It had all come down to this last call from Trimble. An agreement could mean peace after centuries of conflict and decades of war, during which thousands had been killed and tens of thousands injured. An agreement could save so many lives, give hope to so many people. Failure could mean more years of war, more death, more destruction, more despair. After so much effort it would be a crushing letdown.

I took a deep breath and picked up the phone.

"Hello, David."

"Hello, George."

"How's it going?"

"We're ready."

"Are you all right?"

"We're ready to do the business."

"That's great. Congratulations."

"Thank you."

“I’d like to call the meeting as soon as possible. Can you be ready in fifteen minutes?”

“Yes.”

“I’d like it to be a short meeting. No long speeches. Let’s get to a vote right away. Everyone can talk as long as they want afterward.”

“That’s fine with me.”

“I’ll see you at five.”

I took a deep breath and felt tears welling in my eyes—tears of exhaustion, tears of relief, tears of joy. I had to sit down.

As majority leader of the United States Senate, I had learned that when you’ve got the votes, you vote. Delay can only hurt. After long and difficult negotiations, the votes were there for the agreement. I was determined that they be cast as soon as possible. I didn’t want to take a chance on a last-minute change of mind. I instructed my staff to notify the governments and the leaders of the other parties that there would be a formal session of all of the negotiators at five o’clock, and that I wanted a short meeting and an early vote.

I had only a few minutes to prepare. But first I had to close my eyes, to calm down, to collect my thoughts. It was Friday, April 10, 1998, Good Friday. I was totally exhausted. I had been awake for nearly thirty-six hours, in meetings almost continuously since early Thursday morning. And for most of the preceding week I had slept only a few hours a night.

But despite the exhaustion, I felt an exhilarating surge of accomplishment. We had done it. After seemingly endless negotiations, an agreement was within reach. What had seemed impossible for so long was about to happen. I could hardly believe it.

Then my thoughts shifted. I had promised my wife, Heather, that I would be home for Easter, to take her and our boy Andrew for a walk in Central Park. I pictured a warm spring day, me carrying my six-month-old son on a leisurely stroll across the large meadow in the park. I smiled and started to doze off.

Suddenly I sat up straight and my eyes popped open. It was three minutes to five. I still had to go in and chair the meeting, hold the vote, and announce the result. I got up, walked out of my office and down the hall, and entered the large meeting room, as I had done hundreds of times before. But this time was different. This was the last time. This time there would be an agreement.

Two governments and eight political parties were about to commit themselves to peace, political stability, and reconciliation in Northern Ireland.

My Irish journey was over.

CHAPTER 2

“Would you be willing to help?”

ALTHOUGH I didn't realize it at the time, my journey to Northern Ireland began in December 1982, when I decided that I would limit the time of my service in the United States Senate. I had been appointed to the Senate in May 1980 to complete the unexpired term of Edmund Muskie, who resigned to become secretary of state. His Senate term continued through 1982, giving me two and a half years to demonstrate to the people of Maine that I deserved election in my own right to a full six-year term. As it turned out, I needed every bit of that time.

Appointed senators rarely win election on their own, and it looked as though I would continue that tradition. Throughout 1980 and 1981, Maine's two members of the House of Representatives, both Republicans, jockeyed for position in what was widely perceived as the sure thing of defeating me. In May 1981 one of them, David Emery, released a public opinion poll which showed him trouncing me by 61 percent to 25 percent—a thirty-six-point spread. Not to be outdone, the other House member, Olympia Snowe, announced a poll which had her ahead of me by thirty-three points. Kenneth Curtis, a former governor, then stated that he was considering running against me in the Democratic primary. He cited yet another poll, showing him leading by twenty-two points.

Publication of the polls produced the intended and predictable result: an avalanche of negative news reports and a growing uneasiness among Democrats about the viability of my candidacy. I had been working hard for a year, but the only response to my political problems I could devise was to work even harder.

I had been traveling around the state, speaking at service clubs and high schools and going to bean suppers. But these were random appearances, usually in response to invitations I received. I now began a systematic effort to visit every service club, high school, hospital, grange hall, senior citizens center, and manufacturing facility in the state. Instead of eight to ten public events each weekend I attended twelve to fifteen. I also increased the time I devoted to researching and studying each issue on which the Senate voted.

It was an extremely difficult year. I was usually tired, often discouraged, always anxious. But I never felt that my situation was hopeless; I never lost faith in myself or my principles.

Over time, my prospects improved. Curtis decided, for health reasons, not to seek the nomination. Snowe deferred to Emery and withdrew from consideration. It was then Emery's bad luck that the incumbent Republican administration, and those candidates associated with it, were held responsible for the worsening economy. Late in the campaign the tide turned decisively in my favor. In the election I received 61 percent of the votes.

Among the lessons I learned from this experience were the importance of having a plan and sticking to it while retaining the flexibility to make adjustments as circumstances change; the necessity of total commitment; and the need for patience and perseverance to overcome the inevitable setbacks. These are not brilliant insights, but rather the kind of common sense that is often overwhelmed by panic at the first sign of adversity.

Shortly after the election I began to think seriously about my future in the Senate. I had seen many senators become totally consumed by the institution. I now realized that I had become one of them. I worked seven days a week, twelve to fourteen hours a day. My marriage suffered, my other interests atrophied. Since I had just received a sizeable majority of the vote after serving as an appointed senator for less than a full term, I was confident that with a full term I could establish myself so solidly that I could win re-election in the future. (My analysis was correct. In 1988 I received 81 percent of the vote, the highest percentage ever achieved by a candidate in a contested statewide election in Maine history.) But the more I thought about it, the more deeply I felt that I should not try to make the Senate a lifetime career. On Christmas Day, 1982, I decided to term-

limit myself. It was a private decision. I kept it to myself for eleven years.

Just after Christmas in 1993, I decided that the time had come to leave the Senate. In late February 1994 I notified my staff and asked them to make preparations for a public announcement. March 5 was chosen as the date, Portland as the place.

On the morning of March 4, I videotaped a five-minute statement to be broadcast throughout Maine the next day. Although I ordinarily could do tapes on the first try, I needed three takes for this one. I found, to my surprise, that it was hard to say the words now, when it really counted, as opposed to when I had been just thinking about it. The final tape was barely acceptable, definitely not one of my best efforts.

That evening I went to the White House. By coincidence I had been invited to attend a small dinner in the First Family's living quarters, and I sat next to President Clinton. Near the end of the dinner I asked if I could speak to him privately for a few minutes. He suggested I join him in his study, where we talked for two and a half hours. The president was obviously surprised when I told him of my plans. He first tried to get me to change my mind. During the conversation he asked me, "If in the future something comes up where I think you can be of assistance, would you be willing to help? Or are you just turned off of politics?" I told him that I was not turned off, that I loved public service, and that I would be happy to help on anything he thought was important. He didn't mention Northern Ireland, and it never crossed my mind. But on that evening, without realizing it, I took the second step on my journey to Northern Ireland.

On November 1 President Clinton issued a statement on Northern Ireland. It was part of a continuing process under which, for the first time, the problems there were given a high priority by an American administration. In the statement he announced his intention to sponsor a White House Conference on Trade and Investment in Northern Ireland. It was to be part of a strategy to support the effort to bring peace to that troubled land by encouraging economic growth and job creation.

In early December I was asked by a member of the White House staff if I would undertake a diplomatic mission on behalf of the pres-

ident. When I asked what it would involve, he said it would require all my time. I told him that wasn't possible. I was to be married on December 10 and was planning to return to private life. I was interested in doing something involving public policy, but I wasn't interested in anything that was a full-time job.

Later, I was shown the president's November 1 statement on Northern Ireland and was asked if I had any interest in getting involved there. Although I had never been to Northern Ireland, I was generally aware of the situation. I asked, "Is the president planning to appoint an envoy to Northern Ireland?" Not an envoy, I was told, because that was a sensitive subject with the British government. "But he does want someone to put together a trade conference in Washington in the spring. That would take just a few days of your time. Would you do it?" I said I would think about it and get back to him. I talked with friends at the State Department and on the National Security Council staff at the White House. I also discussed it with Heather. The task seemed interesting and undemanding, and it would be over in a few months, so later I called back and said I would take it on. I had taken the third step on my journey to Northern Ireland.

I left the Senate on January 2, 1995. Seven days later I was sworn in as the special advisor to the president and the secretary of state on economic initiatives in Ireland. The title was long and vague enough not to be offensive to the British government, or to anyone else. My mission was simple: organize a conference in Washington on trade and investment in Northern Ireland and the six counties in the Republic of Ireland which border on the north. I was given an office in the State Department and the authority to hire a small staff. I asked Martha Pope to join me. She had been a member of my Senate staff since 1981, rising to the position of chief of staff. I had then appointed her Senate sergeant at arms, the first woman to hold that position. She didn't know any more about Northern Ireland than I did, but I trusted her judgment and her integrity; in the years to come, both were to prove invaluable, to her, to me, and to the cause of peace in Northern Ireland. The State Department assigned David Pozorski to my staff. He was a career foreign service officer, insightful and methodical. For a brief time he served as acting U.S. consul in Belfast, and he knows the politicians and the issues there.

Later, when the negotiations began, I was joined by Kelly Currie, who had worked for a time on my Senate staff. He had left to attend law school and now practices with a large firm in New York. He took a leave of absence to spend two years in Belfast. He is intelligent and gets along very well with people. Pope, Pozorski, and Currie formed a dedicated, able staff, and they deserve a lot of credit for whatever effect I had on the peace process.

A month later I made my first trip to Northern Ireland. At the time I thought it would be my last, and I remember it vividly. I had lived in Berlin and was familiar with the Berlin Wall. But I had never heard of the "Peace Line." When I went to it for the first time, I was taken aback.

The Peace Line is a wall that stands up to thirty feet high, is topped in some places with barbed wire, and goes right through the middle of Belfast—through urban streets, even through buildings. It is one of the most depressing structures I've ever seen. To call it the Peace Line is a huge irony. The name, presumably, is born of the notion that peace can be achieved by building a wall between two warring communities, in this case unionists, who are predominantly Protestant, and nationalists, who are predominantly Catholic. Unfortunately, if people are determined enough, they can get around, through, and over a wall, and enough of them did so in Northern Ireland to keep the fires of conflict burning. I hope and pray that I live to see the day when the Peace Line goes the way of the Berlin Wall: its destruction will be the symbolic end of an age of conflict.

On my first day in Belfast I met with two groups of local officials, businessmen and -women, and the leaders of community and development organizations. One group was nationalist, on their side of the Peace Line. The other was unionist, on their side. I was told that the groups had little or no contact or communication with each other. Yet, to my surprise, they both conveyed essentially the same message. With charts, graphs, and slides, in persuasive presentations, they told me that in Belfast there is a high correlation between unemployment and violence; that unless jobs become available to the young men of the inner city, there cannot be a durable peace. As I sat and listened, I thought I could just as well be in New York, Detroit, Johannesburg, Manila, or any other big city in the world.

The aspirations of people the world over are the same. To satisfy

those aspirations they need work. Jobs. Good jobs. Good-paying jobs. Fathers and mothers must be able to satisfy the economic needs of their families: housing, food, health care, education, recreation. They also have to be able to satisfy their own emotional need for productive work, for self-respect, for meaning in their lives.

The dispute in Northern Ireland is not purely or even primarily economic in origin or nature. There are many other strands to this complex conflict. It is, of course, in part religious. It is also very much about national identity: Protestants overwhelmingly want Northern Ireland to remain part of the United Kingdom, in union with England, Scotland, and Wales; thus they are called unionists. Catholics generally want Northern Ireland to become part of a united Ireland; they are called nationalists. But economic deprivation is a contributing factor in the problems in Northern Ireland. Along the Falls Road in Belfast, where the working-class Catholic families congregate, and the Shankill Road, where their Protestant counterparts live, some estimates suggest that as many as a third of the men are born, live out their lives, and die without ever having held a job. For some of these men, I was told, membership in a paramilitary organization offers steady pay and a status that they cannot otherwise achieve. For others, patriotism or idealism or revenge may be sufficient motivation. It is possible, of course, that some are driven by all of these factors and others as well.

On this first trip I gained a sense of the importance attached to American involvement in Northern Ireland. Although my role was minor, there was extensive media coverage of every meeting; my discussions with the community groups were carried live on the radio. I met for the first time many of the men I would come to know well in the coming years: the political leaders of Northern Ireland. I was impressed by their involvement in economic issues, by their candor, and by the extent of their mistrust of "the other side." Most of them were blunt in their negative assessments of the other politicians in Northern Ireland. I didn't know at the time how mild these comments were in comparison to what I would hear later in the negotiations.

I spent nearly a week in Northern Ireland. I was favorably impressed by the energy and intelligence of the people. As I was later to confirm in much more detail, Northern Ireland is an advanced,

modern society. Its people are productive, literate, articulate. But for all its modernity and literacy, Northern Ireland has been divided, by a deep and ancient hatred, into two hostile communities, their enmity burnished by centuries of conflict. They have often inflicted hurt, physical and psychological, on members of the other community, and they have been quick to take offense at real or perceived slights. They have a highly developed sense of grievance. As one of the participants in the talks later said to me: "To understand us, Senator, you must realize that we in Northern Ireland will drive 100 miles out of our way to receive an insult." Each is a minority: Catholics in Northern Ireland, Protestants on the island of Ireland. Each sees itself as a victim community, constantly under siege, the recipient of a long litany of violent blows from the other.

As I flew back to the U.S., I thought about how the harsher side of the Northern Irish personality had so dominated the recent past. For a quarter century, violence, and the threat of violence, hung over Northern Ireland like a heavy, unyielding fog. Thousands of people were killed, tens of thousands injured. Fear and anxiety were as much a part of daily life as work and school. But the real damage being done was to people's hearts and minds, where, with each new atrocity, the hostility grew more and more intense. A bombed-out building can be quickly rebuilt, a burned-out car replaced. But as one generation, then another, grew into adulthood knowing so much hate and fear, the prospects for reconciliation receded.

The events of recent years can be understood only in the context of the long history of British domination of Ireland. In the early seventeenth century, at about the time the British began the colonization of North America, they undertook the settlement of Ireland; it was called "the plantation." The policy encouraged settlers from England and Scotland to go to Ireland, the lure being grants of land. As in North America, the settlers landed on the east coast and gradually advanced westward, pushing the native inhabitants ahead of them.

The native Irish were needed to work the land, so their movement to the west was not as complete as in America. Nonetheless, to this day, the western part of Northern Ireland is largely Catholic, the eastern part largely Protestant. Belfast, in the middle of the Protestant heartland, is the capital. The second biggest city is Londonderry (called Derry by Catholics); it is in the west and has a