

I MUST BE THE LUCKIEST...

The Literary Club of Cincinnati

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Some years as I sat out there where you are here at our marvelous annual outing, I wondered why the reader had selected such an involved, sometimes ponderous, subject. Here we are in a delightful setting, filled with good food and good drink, surrounded by good companions. It seems to me that the outing could best be served by a short, snappy, light paper with many laughs in it.

This is my first outing paper and probably my last, but after more than two decades I shouldn't be surprised that the Rota finally caught up with me. The same 2010-2011 Literary Club roster which showed my assignment for this paper also showed that my name had crept onto the first row of the list of members. Robert Hilton, beloved by many of us who remember him well and reputed at one time to be the sponsor of over half the membership, referred to that first page as, "...heaven's waiting list."

In April, as a preface to his wonderful paper about growing up in Camp Washington, Paul Franz admitted that he had a different topic in mind, but quickly realized that there were others in the Club who knew far more about the subject than he did. This is a truism that I will share with all the new members who have yet to give a paper. There is always someone in attendance who knows something about your topic that you don't. For me this occurred on my first paper about a local boy's book series, *Seckatary Hawkins*. John Diehl casually remarked that he knew the author's son and was going to share my paper with him. Over the years, members have pointed out where the 1954 winter Olympics were held – Zermatt, Switzerland, from my paper about an Audi GT painted, 'Zermatt Silver'. I also learned that the problems with the power windows were something 'everybody' knew about. There have been many others over the years - a whimsical budget piece about a katydid was greeted with a member's

comment that his granddaughter was studying for her Doctorate in entomology and he wasn't certain that all my material was entirely accurate.

Despite having offered these cautions, I stand before you with an outing paper that is not light and snappy, and concerns matters, I am sure, some of you know far more about than I do. But I wrote it in an effort to better understand things that I don't understand at all. So I ask you to accept my limitations and bear with me.

There are aspects of our community that Cincinnatians have come to rely on. One of them is that in August in Cincinnati it is going to be hot. In August of 1988, Pete Rose was managing the Reds and the first half of the month had been brutal for the town and the team. A record-setting string of 100 degree days had left the Queen City wilted and gasping for relief. And then it came. The heat broke and on August 24th, the high for the day was 82 degrees, the skies were clear and all was right with the world.

This was important to us because my godson Andrew and his new bride, Jane, had arrived from England, and on that day were to consecrate their wedding in a peculiarly Episcopalian ceremony – the Blessing of the Union. It was to take place at Christ Church Chapel on Sycamore Street.

Jane and Andrew stayed with us, however the party of travelers from England also included Jane's parents, Alistair and Louise. We had met Jane previously and loved her, and continued to tease her than certainly she could have done better than Andrew, but we were very happy with the match. Jane's parents, on the other hand, were new to us but any uneasiness there might have been was quickly erased. They are wonderful people, avid golfers, international travelers and just great fun.

We truly enjoyed their stay. In an effort to be culturally appropriate, we had made reservations at the Mariemont Inn. That lasted less than 24 hours – too remote, too boring and they relocated downtown to the Terrace Hilton.

The morning of the 24th promised a relatively cool, midsummer day. Preparations for the Blessing of the Union had gone reasonably well. With the help of our friend, Bishop William G. Black, we had recruited a priest from the Christ Church staff and with the intervention of my mother, we had made it possible for Jane's mother, Louise, to prepare the flowers on the altar. Now this may seem like a simple thing too many, for Louise was head of her Flower Guild and Altar Guild at a lovely Anglican church in the motherland. However, these credentials at first proved insufficient for the ladies in charge of the Christ Church Flower Guild who expressed concern about vases and pruning shears and other such things. Drawing on the confidences gained in 20 years at the front desk at Christ Church, my mother quickly quashed the objections and all things moved forward.

That day there was a small matter of the failure of the electronic locks at the Terrace Hilton which required emergency dismantling of doors in order to get Jane into her room and into her dress. You might think that time would have erased the anxiety that my Godson felt as he stood at the front of the chapel some ten minutes after the service was to begin – and NO bride in sight. In fact, through recent communications, I learned that the memory is still quite fresh. Other than that, things went off without a hitch.

Alistair and Louise enjoyed our city very much and became more knowledgeable and frequent users of public transportation than I have ever been. I gave up golf years and years ago. I decided there were enough things in life to frustrate me, and I didn't need to pay good money

to do it to myself. So I recruited a friend, a scratch golfer, to help them about the links. He was dubious at first. Then I repeated a story about them getting out of their sick beds on Boxing Day, a day after Christmas when they had been too sick to be with their children, because they had an appointment for the measuring of their new Ping clubs. That snippet of information that meant nothing to me sealed the deal for my friend, and I was told that they had a couple of marvelous golf outings.

As their visit drew to a close, they insisted on taking us all out to dinner as a way of saying thanks. In their travels, they had discovered a restaurant, the Glass Menagerie in Northern Kentucky with a spectacular view of our downtown. As we sat and talked, the conversation drifted to things international. It is my personal experience that anyone from outside of the United States whom I have ever met has a far better grasp of international events than almost any American. That was certainly the case with Alistair and Louise. They had spent a number of years abroad, particularly in Kenya with some time in Nigeria and British Guinea. At one point, Alistair had written their phone and room at the Terrace Hilton on the back of his card. When I turned it over, there after his name, were the initials OBE. As I subsequently learned, membership in the Order of the British Empire is an honor awarded by the Queen to Brits who have served effectively and honorably overseas. There is a military decoration as well as one for civilians. Alistair's is related to his business work in Nigeria. So while our new friends were quite knowledgeable, I on the other hand was your standard issue parochial American.

The focus of our conversation moved to the Middle East and specifically the prospect of peace between Israel and the Palestinians. To my untutored eye, there had been positive signs of progress during the first part of 1988, despite, or perhaps because of the *intifada* which had begun in December of 1987. This uncoordinated street uprising apparently grew

out of a frustration with governments' and politicians' posturing while the people grew poorer and increasingly desperate. By late summer things seemed to be moving in a good direction. Numerous creative ideas were appearing in print, and you may recall set the stage for the Oslo Accord and a number of Nobel Peace Prize awards. In 1993 to Yasser Arafat, and in 1994 to Shimon Peres and Yitzhak Rabin. Louise and Alistair offered nuanced insights that were less optimistic. Time has, of course, proven them correct.

And then I said, "What I don't get is Northern Ireland." I intended to expand on that by noting that recent news from there made it seem like an indiscriminate blood bath of random atrocities and blind revenge. It seemed more like tribal warfare than dispute resolution in a Christian European country. However, I didn't get that far. In less than ten minutes, I was catapulted through a history lesson that swept me past Bloody Sunday, the Troubles, through the bombings at the Tower of London and in Birmingham speeding back past the Government of Ireland Act in 1920 that effectively divided Ireland into two parts. We landed somewhat breathlessly in October 1641 when the Irish Rebellion began with the Bloody Massacre of Protestant landowners in Ulster. Now, remember, these are **wonderful** people. But their adamancy startled me.

In retrospect trying to sort out the lessons behind the history lesson, I think what I was told was that it is what it is because the Irish are "like that." And there is no hope in the face of the history. For some reason, this reminded me of the quote attributed to Golda Meier about the situation in the Middle East, "We will have peace when the Palestinians love their children more than they hate us." In both cases, they seem less than complete thoughts. Another somewhat related experience occurred to me. I spent a year in Vietnam. I returned in the fall of 1968 to Long Beach to muster out. I had a friend in graduate school in Berkeley so I went up to

visit. The climate of resistance to the war overwhelmed me. I came to feel that no one who had not been in Vietnam could ever be able to decide whether we should get out. The obvious corollary to that was that none of us who had been there could properly make that decision either. Reviewing my conversation that evening with Louise and Alistair, I sensed the same 'catch 22' equation.

Nonetheless, on that September meeting as our friends concluded their fortnight holiday, we were less than ten years away from the onset of peace in Northern Ireland. I cannot believe that anyone anywhere in the world would have thought that would be the case. However, on April 10, 1998, the Good Friday Agreement was signed.

But today, while the Middle East and especially Israel and Palestine continue locked in an apparently unending death spiral; there is peace in Northern Ireland. How did that happen? What can be learned?

Trying to begin the story in 1988 ignores the past that set the stage. Beginning in 1641 with the Belfast Massacre requires a nod to the Cromwellian repression in 1649. And who among the British and Irish would ever want to forget the Battle of Boyne in 1690 where William the Orange forced the Catholic James II to leave Ireland.

It is also important to bear in mind that the battles of the 17th century were brought to you directly from the migrations and invasions of the Gaelic Isle by Protestants in the 14th, 15th and 16th Centuries. Without even touching the 20st century, there is enough history and divisiveness to fuel generations of suspicion, fear and unhappiness. And religion was at the center of the conflict. It has always been the first level of classification for the Irish, for others, and themselves.

I can remember my grandfather telling me that, forced by the potato famine, his grandmother Kennedy had come over from Ireland in an open sailboat in the middle of the 19th century. He could never finish the story, however, without announcing that she was an “Orange Kennedy” - this from a man who to the best of my knowledge never attended church.

But, in fact, the history and the killings continued unabated into the 20th century. Fast forwarding through the conflict gets us to Prime Minister David Lloyd George and the passage of the Government of Ireland Act in December of 1920. This didn't actually solve Britain's Irish problem; it merely subdivided it into 26 counties in the south that were overwhelmingly Catholic, and 6 counties in the north that were about two-thirds Protestant. Various sprees of violence continued in Ireland sporadically throughout the next four and a half decades. In the late 1960's, there began in Northern Ireland the *Troubles*.

Northern Ireland had settled into a land of two communities separate and unequal. For the minority Catholics, it was poverty, high unemployment, and discrimination in jobs, wages and opportunities when there was employment and the physical containment of Catholic families into specific districts or areas of the town. For the majority Protestants, it was a generally middle class community with full access to government services and government employment. Virtually all district governments were controlled by the Protestants, and the police force, the Royal Ulster Constabulary was almost entirely Protestant. The Protestants used their power in a number of ways – one of the most blatant was the Annual Orange Parade celebrating the 1690 victory at Boyne. These parades, with only Protestant participants, inevitably wound through poor Catholic neighborhoods to demonstrate the strength of the Protestants and the helplessness of the Catholics. Not surprisingly, there was often violence when the resentment boiled over.

As an aside, it seems to me there are some similarities between the political and geographical elements of the Northern Ireland problem and those in the Middle East. Begin with a poor, disenfranchised, oppressed minority [the Catholics]. Govern that minority with a majority [Protestant] community. Surround Northern Ireland with water and a much larger population of Catholics sympathetic to the minority inside of Northern Ireland. Top that off with nearby Great Britain, more powerful, allied with the Ulster Protestants and decidedly not Catholic! It starts to feel like one of those Russian nesting dolls. How do I compare it to the Middle East? Substitute the Palestinians for the Catholics, the Arab nations for Ireland, and of course, the United States for England.

Although the names of some of the individuals would change during the next nine plus years from September of 1988 to April of 1998, the following key players were crucial. For the minority Catholics with the *troubles* came the reemergence of the Irish Republican Army. The IRA may be one of the most famous paramilitary groups in recent history. However, it was not a constant orderly initiative but rather one that ebbed and flowed, splintered and reunited. What was constant was the determination that the IRA was at war with any individual or organization that opposed reuniting the six counties in Northern Ireland with the twenty-six to the south. The Declaration of War that seemed to justify any action. However, when they were captured that they claimed they were, in fact, political prisoners. This distinction led to some of the more horrific situations surrounding imprisonment. Like the IRA, the political arm of the movement Sinn Fein, had experienced many ups and downs in its importance and relevance. At the beginning of this period, it was virtually nonexistent.

The Northern Ireland establishment was almost entirely Protestant. Control of local government in Belfast, Ulster and almost all jurisdictions in the six counties was in the hands of the Protestants. They controlled government benefits, contracts, and jobs all of which went overwhelmingly to Protestants. Their goal was to solidify their Union with Britain. From time to time, efforts had been made at limited forms of self-government for Northern Ireland. And when those times came around, the leaders were always Protestant in part because the Catholics usually abstained from running or voting, and on rare occasions, when someone did run and was elected, they refused to swear an oath of allegiance to the British monarchy which then prevented them from serving. The most important prerogative that went with local government was control of the police force. During the *troubles*, the Royal Ulster Constabulary suffered almost as many casualties as the British Army.

As if control of the police was not sufficient, there sprang up in the Protestant neighborhoods paramilitary units that characterized themselves as loyalists or unionists, but they were, to a large degree, no different than the IRA. Many were thugs, criminals and vigilantes. They adopted the same logic as the IRA – that this was war – that any strategy was accepted – and that there would be inevitable collateral damage which was not their fault because the other side had forced them to take action.

The fourth major player was Ireland. This Catholic nation served as the destination and the originating point for many IRA members and activities. As a fledgling nation still working on its relationship with Great Britain, it had as a national goal the reunification of the entire island.

The fifth player was Great Britain. Margaret Thatcher was adamant that Northern Ireland would never be a part of Ireland and that it was Britain's

responsibility to support the Protestants in their desire to be in union with Great Britain. Following Mrs. Thatcher's departure from office, subsequent Prime Ministers, John Major and Tony Blair, were far more flexible and amenable to negotiation. For most of this time, Northern Ireland was governed by a Secretary appointed by the Prime Minister. Invariably, these men found themselves challenged by the conditions they faced and all too frequently, were forced to side with the Protestants against the illegal activities of the IRA.

The other constant throughout this period was the British Army. When they first returned to Ireland in the late sixties, they were cheered by the Catholics who saw them as protectors against the rampaging Protestant vigilantes. In time, that changed completely as the Army strategies included house to house searches, detention of prisoners without trial and other tactics guaranteed to turn a civilian population against an occupying force. To the extent the Army cracked down on Protestant paramilitary units that simply earned them the right to be shot and ambushed by both Catholics and Protestants. At various times, it is clear that the collusion that existed between the Protestant police force and the unionists also extended to the British Army.

The final participant from Britain to enter the fray was MI-5. Britain's internal intelligence organization had been in the background in Northern Ireland for many years, but as bombings increased and moved off the island to England, MI-5 became much more involved in planting undercover agents and coordinating responses.

There was also a shadow participant in the affairs of Northern Ireland. That, of course, was the United States. For years, America had been a hotbed of IRA sympathizers and a provider of funds and arms to the IRA. The official government response since the Second World War and

throughout the Viet Nam era was that America and Great Britain had a special relationship. Translated into the Northern Ireland situation that meant that it was Britain's business and not anything for the U.S. to be involved with. That began to change in the mid-seventies when Senators Kennedy and Moynihan, Rep. "Tip" O'Neill and New York Governor Hugh Carey were recruited and asked to talk to President Jimmy Carter. In 1977, President Carter stated that it was in America and the world's interest for peace to come to Northern Ireland. Of particular note was the egregious lack of civil rights for Catholics. At the time, this speech was viewed as extraordinary.

THE TROUBLES

Only in retrospect can the last years before the Good Friday Agreement be seen to contain any clues as to the possibility of peace. In the heart of Belfast and Ulster, the cities had been reduced to rubble. One author on the period suggested somewhat wryly about the weapon of first choice, "so simple that it now seems incredible that anyone actually had to invent it ... the car bomb."* The first car bomb exploded in Derry's city center in March of 1972. It was said there was only one hotel in Belfast and that it had been bombed twenty-seven times. There were no concerts or places of assembly. Shoppers had to line up to be searched before they were allowed into stores. Bars or pubs resembled armed encampments with 55-gallon drums of concrete fanned out in front of them to keep car bombers from getting too close. Admission to a pub required undergoing surveillance by a guard inside of the door. The Peace Line in West Belfast was a wall, fifteen feet high which split the community, closed streets and magnified the isolation. A failed Peace initiative in 1994 only served to heighten the despair.

In the '90's the IRA began a new strategy of taking the violence to Britain. Like so many of the actions by all parties, this was the product of 'crazy

thinking' It was a recovering drug addict who introduced me to this concept. In his case, crazy thinking came into play after he had become a drug user and dealer. He said he stayed away from church because he thought that way God wouldn't see him and, hence he would not be doing wrong! In the case of the players in Northern Ireland it was consistently basing strategies on incorrect assumptions about the response of their opponents. The IRA bomb Britain strategy was based on the assumption that to avoid the pain, Britain would abandon the Protestants in Northern Ireland. Instead what happened was that MI-5 mounted a no holds barred campaign which decimated the IRA bomb building capacity by seizing materials and arresting the bomb makers. In similar fashion, the Protestant paramilitary operations thought they could terrorize the civilian population into abandoning the IRA. Again, the horrific collateral damage finally moved the police and British Army to shut down many of the most extreme operations. What both sides in the paramilitary battles had in common, other than killing the British troops, was a propensity to killing those who were on their side. With multiple groups came competition for limited resources and distrust. Not being extreme enough was grounds for execution by both sides.

One interesting thing about the casualties. In every source book I consulted, whether journalistic style or academic research, the victims and the killers were identified. Of the more than 3,500 people who were killed during the *Troubles*, many of them are clearly recalled in most every publication. The horror is not allowed to die.

THE PEACE

How did peace come to this land? Finally, a number of pieces began to fit together. With the intractable Margaret Thatcher gone, Tony Blair and Britain could entertain new ideas, and consider more flexible alternatives.

The political leader in Ireland, John Hume, was committed to a peace design which dealt with Ireland's relationship with Britain as well as the Northern Ireland situation. And following a triumphant visit to Ireland and Northern Ireland, Bill Clinton was invested in the peace effort. Also, Sinn Fein had achieved sufficient respectability to be a party at the table, and the Ulster Unionists, while refusing to speak directly with the Catholics, did agree to work through an intermediary.

Just as important, the efforts of MI-5 and other law enforcement organizations had reduced the IRA and the Unionists to their weakest condition since the beginning of the Troubles, thirty years earlier. Finally, the people were exhausted and disgusted. They could no longer stand the atrocities and collateral damage in the form of harmless infants and old people dying at the hands of bombers. Snipers targeting people at random, or worse, because they spoke to someone they shouldn't. A daily life which had no redeeming moments. All of these caused a people to say, "Enough!" They were prepared to forsake the unforgiving dicta of history and past offenses. They determined to try and start with Good Friday. Whether the people led the churches, or the churches came along, they were no longer the force for Old Testament justice which they had been.

Some have said that the women of Ireland simply were tired of birthing and raising children to hate and go to prison and die. And certainly, international efforts to promote reconciliation and understanding had to help. The Ulster Project which brings together Protestant and Catholic youth in a neutral environment is one such. A local program has been active in Cincinnati for many years.

George Mitchell, on assignment by President Clinton led the peace negotiations. It had enough twists and turns and last minute drama for any

movie. But on April 10, 1998, the Good Friday Agreement was signed. Much needed to be done. Referenda in Ireland changed the constitution to accept self determination of the northern counties as a condition of unification – sometime. In the north the agreement was approved by over seventy percent of the electorate. Here as in the Oslo Accord, the Nobel Prize Committee recognized the work of David Trimble and John Hume with the 1998 Peace award.

Things have not all gone smoothly of course. From last week in the New York Times –“ Boston College filed a motion this week to quash a federal subpoena seeking access to confidential interviews of paramilitary fighters for the Provisional Irish Republican Army.

The motion, filed in United States District Court in Boston, seeks to prevent the British authorities from accessing the interviews as part of an investigation into burglaries, kidnappings and murders during the decades known as the Troubles in Northern Ireland. “

From USA Today, April 3, 2011 – *Bomb kills Northern Ireland policeman*. The officer’s car was booby trapped. Although no one claimed credit for the act, it was blamed on IRA dissidents. He was the first security force fatality in more than two years. And a week later –*Bomb diffused near Irish Border*. A five hundred pound van bomb was diffused after it was abandoned, probably due to a police check point. It was thought to be related to Northern Ireland’s election campaign.

In a 2008 NPR interview, George Michell was asked how durable did he think the Agreement was. He responded, “Well, there are not guarantees in life and there still remain on each side a relatively small number of diehards who aren't reconciled. But I think that the process will continue, particularly if the economy stays strong. I learned several things in

Northern Ireland, one of which is there's no such thing as a conflict that can't be ended.

But a second factor - probably more important - is that there are political issues, religious issues, territorial, national identity, all of those things. But underlying all of these conflicts is an economic dimension. You can't solve them on any sustainable way until you deal with the absence of opportunity, lack of hope - the factors that lead people to take up arms.

He was also asked about the hope for a Middle East peace. He did of course take on that assignment for President Obama. He has recently resigned from that task. Does that mean it is still hopeless? I pray that is not the case. But who knows when the pieces might come together.

As to the title of this paper - a story from the early '90's.

It was a cloudy night. Along a small country lane outside Belfast, a man walked along. He moved quickly, looking around and over his shoulder when the new moon peaked through the clouds. And then, what he had feared - a voice behind him called out softly. "Stop where you are!" The 'Troubles' in Northern Ireland had made every trip dangerous.

Then came the threat, "Mick, you are in big trouble." "I'm not a Catholic." the traveler said quickly. Sensing a lie, the unknown man, said, well, then you're Orange, and that won't help you." No, no, you don't understand said the traveler, turning to face his attacker, I'm a Jew." Just then, the clouds moved aside, and in the light of the new moon, he saw the man in the balaclava, raise his gun and heard him say, "I must be the luckiest Arab in all of Ireland!"

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