Introduction

It was late January 1994, and I was having difficulty falling asleep. President Bill Clinton had just granted Sinn Fein leader Gerry Adams a visa that would allow him to visit New York for forty-eight hours. The political representative of the Irish Republican Army would be restricted to travel within a twenty-five-mile radius of Manhattan. Neither my boss, Senator Ted Kennedy, nor President Clinton would meet Adams in the absence of a cease-fire by the IRA. As Kennedy's foreign policy adviser, I was sent to meet with Adams.

I was thirty-one years old and for many months had been the day-to-day negotiator for Kennedy, and effectively the White House, which refused to have any direct contact with even the New York–based publisher of the *Irish Voice*, Niall O'Dowd, who was the interlocutor for Adams and the person I spoke with several times a day. For a variety of reasons, it also served Sinn Fein to have Senator Kennedy and me in the middle. If there were disagreements, the White House version would likely be accepted over Sinn Fein's without a respected third party to keep the White House honest as well.

I was sleepless because I was anticipating my meeting with Adams that would take place the next day, February 1, at the

Waldorf Astoria, the landmark hotel in midtown Manhattan. The hotel had served as the home of the US ambassador to the UN until 2015, when a Chinese group bought the hotel and the US government feared electronic espionage. But in 1994, Ambassador Madeleine Albright resided on the forty-second floor. A little more than a year earlier, I had been one of a small group who prepared her for her confirmation hearings before the Senate Committee on Foreign Relations. But our paths would not cross at the Waldorf Astoria—the White House led on the Northern Ireland issue, and Albright was not involved.

While I appreciated what Gerry Adams was now attempting to do—bring an end to the IRA's campaign of violence—I was not an admirer. I was to serve as the counterbalance to the uncritical adulation of his supporters who would greet him on this trip, a visit that would receive blanket news coverage, including an interview on *Larry King Live*, CNN's popular prime-time television show.

The controversial Adams visit was the culmination of months of behind-the-scenes negotiations, capped by a month-long, very public disagreement between the US and UK governments. A year earlier, Clinton had been inaugurated as president of the United States. In March, he named Jean Kennedy Smith, Senator Kennedy's sister, as his ambassador to Ireland. Shortly after, Niall O'Dowd had approached me at the suggestion of Brendan Scannell, a friend of O'Dowd's who was a diplomat in the Irish embassy in Washington. If Clinton, who did not have much of a history with the issue, was to take any major initiative regarding Northern Ireland, it would not be done without the imprimatur of Ted Kennedy. Kennedy had national and international prominence and a long history on the issue going back to his first meeting with John Hume in Germany more than twenty years earlier. Hume was the leader of the Social Democratic and Labour Party (SDLP) and an advocate of peaceful change in Northern Ireland. While some

on Capitol Hill were unquestioningly sympathetic to the IRA and Sinn Fein, Kennedy was not. He agreed with Hume's nonviolent approach. Kennedy's support was therefore essential. If he could support a visa for Adams, it would give Clinton cover if the effort failed. As the summer of 1993 began, we were testing O'Dowd's claims that the IRA was prepared to end the violence.

O'Dowd wanted Clinton to make good on his campaign promises of appointing a special American envoy for Northern Ireland and granting a visa for Adams, commitments he had made at the urging of former congressman Bruce Morrison at a gathering in New York City in April 1992. As an adviser to the Clinton campaign on Irish issues, I was against the promise of a visa for Adams because, at that time, there was nothing going on that indicated movement toward an end to the violence and nothing to suggest that the president would keep his word. A former colleague of mine in Kennedy's office, Nancy Soderberg, who would leave Kennedy's office to go work in Little Rock on Clinton's campaign staff full-time, was less concerned. As is often the case in campaigns, promises are made to many groups on many issues because it is what they want to hear. Nancy told me she would deal with the unhappiness of broken promises after the election.

Over the course of the next year, Clinton would indeed walk back those promises. After the election, President Clinton would deny Adams a visa twice, in May and again in October 1993. He also didn't keep his promise to name a special envoy. With neither the British nor Irish governments wanting a special envoy, Clinton recognized that he couldn't unilaterally impose one.

Kennedy supported those decisions. I had been in constant conversation with O'Dowd since the spring, but even in October, the situation was not yet ripe for a visa for Adams. O'Dowd and a small group of activists were angry.

The autumn of 1993 was tense. In October, an IRA bomb exploded prematurely in a fish shop in Belfast, killing ten people, including the bomber. Retaliatory killings started immediately, and within nine days, twenty-four people were dead. Seeing Adams carry the coffin of the dead IRA bomber did not sit well with many who were contemplating an opening for Adams. There were questions about whether he could truly bring the IRA along. Despite that stomach-turning event, we focused on the positive signs.

In December, Irish taoiseach Albert Reynolds and British prime minister John Major issued their Joint Declaration on a way forward for Northern Ireland. Sinn Fein had not responded. Adams wanted talks without preconditions. Both governments demanded an IRA cease-fire prior to any talks. Kennedy visited his sister Jean Kennedy Smith in Dublin just after Christmas. Reynolds and Irish historian Tim Pat Coogan had convinced the new American ambassador that the time might be right for a visa. Senator Kennedy returned to Washington prepared to seriously consider advocating for a visa. Sensing the shift, O'Dowd had Bill Flynn, an Irish American business executive at Mutual of America, issued an invitation for Adams to speak before a foreign policy group in Manhattan. That would force the president to grant or deny a visa. While Kennedy was leaning in favor, he was not going to be bounced into anything, and he wanted to know what John Hume thought. Hume was not in Ireland when Kennedy visited, but they met in Boston in early January for the funeral of Tip O'Neill, the former Speaker of the House of Representatives. Hume gave Kennedy a green light. I'm not sure what Kennedy would have decided had John opposed the visa.

In early January 1994, once Kennedy concluded that a visa might help, battle lines were drawn. The row was heated. The British government did not want President Clinton to grant the visa, even though it had come to light in November that

the British had themselves been talking with the IRA for some time. The US Departments of State and Justice were siding with the British government. Dick Canas, the president's director of counterterrorism, and someone I worked with after the 1988 bombing of Pan Am Flight 103 over Lockerbie, Scotland, was disappointed with our position, which he thought was naive. The Speaker of the House, Tom Foley, annoyed Kennedy, not because he didn't support a visa but because after telling Kennedy he wouldn't oppose it, he went behind his back to the White House to urge the president to deny the visa.

In addition to my daily conversations with O'Dowd, I stayed in touch with Sean O hUiginn in Ireland's Department of Foreign Affairs and Martin Mansergh, adviser to the taoiseach. Both were brilliant architects of the peace process. They were more visionary than the Irish ambassador to Washington, Dermot Gallagher, who was more cautious.

I was also in constant contact with Jonathan Powell, a diplomat at the British embassy who would later become Tony Blair's chief of staff. Powell had come to the US in 1991 and was then married to an American who happened to be the niece of Senator Kennedy's former press spokesperson. Despite many heated disagreements in the lead-up to the Adams visa, Jonathan and I got along and regularly made use of the British ambassador's tennis court. I had a slight edge on Jonathan in tennis, so he talked me into taking up squash, where he held the upper hand. But we were officially on opposing sides—it was my job to make sure Adams got the visa and Jonathan's to make sure he didn't. Powell was so convinced that Adams would not get the visa that we wagered lunch on the outcome. After Clinton granted the visa, Powell made good on the bet. Despite his hard work to prevent the visa, I never felt that his heart was in it—I didn't think he was personally opposed, and he would later go on to have an important role in the peace process.

Meeting Adams in my hotel room at the Waldorf Astoria was not the plan. Bill Flynn had a suite in the hotel where I was to meet Adams. But when I turned up as scheduled, not only were O'Dowd and Adams not there; some members of the press were. Spotted by one who recognized me, I was asked if I was there to meet with Adams. I ignored the question and simply said I was looking for O'Dowd and left. While we wouldn't have considered the meeting secret, it wasn't anything we announced, and I wasn't looking to be part of the story. When I got back to my room, O'Dowd called. He apologized for the confusion and suggested they come to me. It was just as well, because someone may have been listening to what went on in Flynn's suite, but it was less likely they'd bugged my room.

The hotel's heating system was not working, and my already small room was cramped even more with a couple of portable space heaters. Adams sat in the one proper armchair, O'Dowd on a small stool at the vanity table, and I sat cross-legged on the bed. It was an odd position from which to deliver my message. I told Adams that Kennedy's opposition to the IRA hadn't changed and that he believed the IRA's position had changed. We believed they were prepared to end the violence, and there should be no confusion about why this visa had been granted—Kennedy stuck his neck out and urged the president to grant it because he believed this would help Adams deliver the IRA. In a press conference later that day, Adams said he would not disappoint those who stuck their necks out for him. Our meeting was cordial. Forty minutes later, he left with a clear understanding of our views, but without his anorak. I waited until I knew he was delivering his speech in the hotel ballroom and then sought out a hotel employee who could return the coat to Adams. I obviously did not say that he'd left it in my room; there was enough scandal with the visit as it was.

In my briefing for Kennedy after the meeting, I wrote, "I found Adams surprisingly likable. He was not your

stereotypical scary, raving, irrational, fanatic terrorist. He is intelligent, articulate, reasonable, had a sense a humor, and he doesn't seem to lose his temper. He was dressed in a business suit and looked like a stockbroker. . . . He seemed very relaxed and not at all hostile. He seemed very sincere when he talked about his desire to end the violence. He is either being honest or he is an incredibly good liar."

That night at the Waldorf, someone violently trying to get into my room awakened me from a deep sleep. I froze with fear, quickly assuming this visit must have something to do with the one earlier that day. After some time, the person was violently trying to get into the next door down the hall, and I concluded someone perhaps had simply had too much to drink and was trying to find their room by process of elimination.

That visa and the visit did turn out to be instrumental in the process, and seven months later, the IRA declared a cease-fire, followed soon after with a cease-fire by the Loyalist paramilitaries. Four years later, Senator Mitchell ushered in the Belfast Agreement (a.k.a. the Good Friday Agreement) after exhibiting great patience as chairman of the peace talks.

Not long before the Belfast Agreement was signed, I let Senator Kennedy know that I would leave his employ after more than a decade to create a nonprofit organization that would focus on the future of the US-Ireland relationship. Those years in the mid-nineties marked the beginning of the end of a certain kind of relationship, and it would have to evolve or it would fade away. Existing Irish American organizations were not addressing this evolution, and I wanted to start an organization that would.

It was a good time to depart. The years from 1987 to 1998 were an incredible period in history, and I had been fortunate to be with Senator Kennedy as a young foreign affairs staffer on Capitol Hill during that time. In 1989, the Berlin Wall came down, and Vaclav Havel became the president of

Czechoslovakia. In 1990, Lech Walesa was elected president of Poland. That same year, Nelson Mandela was released from prison, and by April 1994, he would become the president of South Africa. At the very moment we were contemplating asking President Clinton to grant a visa for Adams, on the south lawn of the White House, Israeli prime minister Yitzhak Rabin and PLO chairman Yasser Arafat signed a Middle East peace accord. I think that most of us present on that occasion felt anything was possible.

In January 1998, I accompanied Kennedy on his first visit to Northern Ireland. While there, we visited with Mo Mowlam, the British government's secretary of state for Northern Ireland. Mo's direct and casual manner was a welcome breath of fresh air compared with that of her predecessor, Sir Patrick Mayhew, a pompous man for whom Kennedy barely concealed his contempt. I was happy to have another woman in the mix, and one who was good fun as well. There is a lot of sexism in Northern Ireland politics, and while the male Unionist politicians in particular didn't know what to make of me, Mo confused them even more. I noticed Kennedy appreciating a chess set Mo had in Hillsborough Castle—the pieces were related to Northern Ireland with one set of pawns being Royal Ulster Constabulary (RUC) members (police) and the other being IRA gunmen. I remembered it when I was trying to think of a gift to give Kennedy when I was leaving his employ. Mo's adviser, Nigel Warner, introduced me to the artist so I could purchase a set for Kennedy and one for myself. On Mo's next trip to Washington, she brought them with her, and when Kennedy was out of his office at a meeting, I set up the board so it would be there upon his return. It remained prominently displayed in his small "hideaway" office in the Capitol until his death.

"The Irish never get their act together like Jewish Americans do and Greek Americans do. What are they gonna do when I'm not around anymore?" When Kennedy said this to me in the

mid-1990s, his not being around seemed implausible. He was elected to the Senate in 1962, the same year I was born. But he was adept at looking far down the road, including to a time when he wouldn't be around any longer, which would be just a decade after we had that conversation.

Kennedy's comments and my own experience spurred me to create the US-Ireland Alliance. Witnessing a rapidly changing America and Ireland, I was thinking ahead to the day when Ireland would no longer enjoy the place of prominence on the American political agenda that it did in the 1990s. While fighting to obtain the visa for Adams, I couldn't help but notice the number of Rhodes Scholars in the Clinton administration who had studied at Oxford, and I thought it would be of long-term benefit to the relationship if we could steer some of America's future leaders to study on the island of Ireland. (Ours would be called George J. Mitchell Scholars.) At the time, the Irish economy was booming, and it was clear that the large numbers of Irish emigrating to the US would continue to decline; in fact, many had returned home at the encouragement of Ireland's political leaders. After 2008, with America's own economy in the worst shape since the Depression, the Irish leaving their country followed the jobs to places like Australia and Canada. All of this means that the future of the relationship cannot simply rely on waves of immigration. Nor should we want it to—that's like hoping for, and counting on, Ireland to fail.

It was also evident that the demographics of America were changing and that Irish Americans' historical lock on political positions would diminish. For decades, Ireland relied on a handful of hugely influential politicians—House Speaker Tip O'Neill and Senate committee chairmen Ted Kennedy and Daniel Patrick Moynihan, a Democrat from New York—to sort out whatever needed to be addressed in the relationship.

In July 1998, just after creating the Alliance, I warned in a *Washington Post* opinion piece that with a wealthy Ireland

and a lessening of attention to Northern Ireland, Irish America was becoming a constituency without a cause, that complacency could lead to disintegration, and that Irish America and Ireland must develop a dynamic new relationship that is broader than the narrow ground of Northern Ireland.

Ireland was no longer a poor country in need of handouts from its rich American cousins. Between 1995 and 2007, Ireland's economy was outpacing our own. Even after the 2008 economic crash, Ireland was not a poor country. Many Irish went all in during the Celtic Tiger years, believed the hype, and flew too close to the sun. Conversely, the perpetually skeptical never developed confidence, thought it all a mirage, and then felt vindicated. Both were wrong.

The positive developments in Northern Ireland and the Irish economy were like shifting tectonic plates. This shift left the political and diplomatic establishment in Ireland and Northern Ireland issueless in US political terms. There had always been a simple ritual to the way things were done, a pattern that continued well past its sell-by date. Political leaders from the island came to Washington each St. Patrick's Day and continued to represent the Ireland of thirty years ago. The president and Congress were asked if something can be done for the Irish who are illegally in the US and for support for the outdated International Fund for Ireland. The relationship has for too long been largely about what the US can *give* to Ireland. This approach has worn thin with most American politicians and philanthropists. If Ireland and Northern Ireland don't radically and more quickly recalibrate their relationship with America, they will soon find no one is at home when they come knocking. That is already happening.

I believe that the relationship is worth maintaining. The US and Ireland share the strong bonds of history and family ties, and the US is also an important market for Irish goods and the expansion of Irish companies. Ireland serves as the home for

a lot of American corporations, many chasing low corporate tax rates. It is also culturally convenient and comfortable for these companies to be in an English-speaking country, where they can access employees from the entire European Union. Additionally, there are vibrant cultural ties, and a resurgence of interest in Ireland came with the 1990s' film adaptation of Roddy Doyle's *The Commitments*, U2, and Riverdance. Irish film, music, theater, and literature remain popular with Americans. The US also serves as a pool of students who are willing to provide cash to underresourced Irish universities.

A strong relationship can exist, but it must be built on the basis of education, culture, and business, not fading nostalgia. Politics will have less prominence in the relationship, but that is a positive thing, the result of the success of those on the island and friends in the US. Ireland no longer requires America's daily attention.

When I created the US-Ireland Alliance, it was always with the very real question of whether a critical mass would recognize these subtle shifts and be interested in nurturing a different relationship. Twenty years later, I still find myself wondering if there is critical mass. Americans are now thought of as white, Latino, and black; distinctions between white Americans (Italian, Irish, etc.) have faded. Is there sufficient interest in reshaping the relationship for future generations? Do the Irish care enough to dramatically reverse the habit of being the supplicant? The jury is still out.

On September 11, 2001, I was on America West Flight 85, which took off from Washington's Reagan National Airport at 8:59 a.m., minutes after the first hijacked plane crashed into the north tower of the World Trade Center, and at about the same time the second plane hit the south tower. I was bound for Las Vegas, where, in a couple of days, singer Maura O'Connell was to perform a benefit concert for the US-Ireland Alliance. About forty minutes into the flight, unbeknownst to

us, a third hijacked plane crashed into the Pentagon, just a couple of miles from where we departed. Within a half hour, the final hijacked plane would be crashed by its brave passengers, in bucolic Pennsylvania, a mere twenty miles from where my family resides. Our plane's pilot announced, "There have been major attacks on the East Coast. All planes must land immediately." Nothing similar to this had ever occurred in the US, but passengers on our plane were calm. I suspect everyone was trying to imagine what had happened and where it had happened. Having been very involved with Senator Kennedy in the aftermath of the 1988 bombing of Pan Am Flight 103, I was thinking that they never land all planes; there must be bombs on planes. I obviously didn't share this thought with my fellow passengers, but our diverted landing in Indianapolis couldn't come soon enough for me. The pilot said nothing else, which was probably best; given where our flight had originated, there would have been some chance that people on the plane knew people in the Pentagon. I recall the rest of the flight as being silent. It was not until we entered the terminal and saw the surreal images on the televisions that we learned what had happened. My flight itinerary from that day hangs next to my front door to remind me that every day could be my last. It also reminds me of what is important, that everything is relative, and I hope it emboldens me.

This book is a look, and often a hard look, based on my experiences, at the relationship between Ireland and Irish America and the things that are holding it back. The future of the relationship is uncertain, and a massive disservice is being done by failures, misunderstandings, missed opportunities, complacency, benign neglect, and even some intentional sabotage. I did not come lightly to the decision to write this book. There came a point, however, when I concluded that remaining silent made me part of the problem. Not "leaning in" would allow the people referred to in this book, and those like them,

to continue with business as usual. Numerous people, most of them Irish, also urged me to write. Many have had similar experiences and feel they cannot speak up because they fear the payback that would follow.

Irish people always ask why I bother. Some who ask this question left Ireland in the 1980s. They feel like the country let them down, and they can't be bothered with it now. They profess to know all too well what I describe in this book, and many tell me it's the reason they left Ireland. The others ask this in a suspicious way—they can't make out why one would care.

I tend to be optimistic, even idealistic. One reason it has taken me so long to write this book is that I much prefer to focus on the positive and the future, and I have set this aside regularly. I also mistakenly assumed that those who felt threatened by the changing relationship would come to accept the inevitable and perhaps embrace our work. But resistance and a whispering campaign continue, and therefore must be challenged. One reason I have continued to hang in there is the inspiration I receive daily from our George J. Mitchell Scholars and the many wonderful people I work with—Irish and American. My other difficulty in writing comes from my penchant for discretion. But the problems have become pervasive. Any hope of solidifying the future of the relationship requires shining a light in some dark corners. As Astro Teller of Google X said in a TED Talk, "Enthusiastic skepticism is not the enemy of boundless optimism. It's optimism's perfect partner."

A couple of caveats: First, for the ease of the reader, I sometimes refer to Ireland, meaning the island. It gets tiresome to repeatedly use "the island of Ireland" or "Northern Ireland and Ireland" in an effort to be politically correct and precise. I trust the reader will understand what I mean. No political statement is intended.

Second, this book is a recounting of my own experiences. While I will refer to the US-Ireland Alliance—as it is from the vantage point of founding and running the organization I speak—my views are my own.

As Ireland and the US consider the future of a historic relationship, it must begin with an honest reckoning.