Chapter 1

They Haven't Gone Away, You Know

The Troubles have not returned,
they just never went away.

- Andy McNab, former British
soldier in Northern Ireland

Making peace is like pedaling a
bicycle, if you stop, you fall off.

- Tony Blair, former British
Prime Minister

Belfast looks so peaceful from high up on top of a tall building. The red brick houses are all lined up in neat rows. Smoke from coal fires curls up in a predictable pattern. The winding streets appear so quaint and serene. Down below buses are running on time. Stores and pubs are open for business. But appearances are deceptive – Belfast has been a troublesome place for well over 150 years. There are many reasons why there has been turmoil.   The root causes are (in no particular order) political, historical, economic, religious, cultural, territorial, colonial, sectarian, and nationalisonon 0 rg   0.9981 0 12 357.36 Tn

was actually shot by Protestants. It was a complicated war – the bottom line was that no one was completely safe anywhere at any time.

When I first set foot in Northern Ireland, government forces were out on the street, all day and all night. It was especially dangerous for army and police patrols in Catholic working-class neighborhoods marked by green, white, and orange curbstones (colors of the Irish Tricolor flag) and in Protestant neighborhoods with the red, white and blue markings (colors of the British Union Jack). Some Irish republicans, who wished to avoid any association with the color orange, refer to the Irish tricolor flag as being green, white and *gold*.

These neighborhoods were adorned with opposing flags and painted curbstones symbolizing the political allegiances of local paramilitary members who defied anyone to take down the flags or paint over the curbstones. These were the visible signs of an ancient Irish "Holy War." It has haunted the villages and cities of Northern Ireland for a very long time.

The British have always declared that they were n

open question. It is the "elephant in the room" in Irish politics.

Anyone who even thinks of permanently ending the conflict should remember that it has been engrained in the communal DNA of both Irish republicans and Ulster loyalists for centuries. Small groups on each side have fighters who are following in the footsteps of their parents, grandparents and great grandparents. Every new generation produces a fresh crop of people who want to "fight for their country."

As long as the British rule any part of Ireland, *it is inevitable that some Irish republicans will fight back.* In addition there will always be working-class youth who have romanticized the conflict as they hear stories about what happened in the past. Often the older generation leaves out the parts about front doors being knocked do20(c)413c 70(i)17(ne)] T

Northern Ireland. Many of the young ones joined the army to see the world, but they ended up in dingy quarters in a divided land they could not understand. They lived in armed forts in areas where they were viewed as an occupying army. They dared not go out socially in unfriendly parts of town for fear of being "set up" by young women and led into an ambush where they would be killed. When on military patrols, they ran down the street in zigzag patterns, in full combat gear, crouching in doorways behind brick walls. They were trained to aim their automatic weapons at anyone and everyone. Even during rush hour traffic in Belfast, they pointed their guns at the driver of any car following their army land rovers. I never got used to confronting young, nervous, threatened soldiers with loaded guns pointing at my head.

The troops were nervous for good reason. They all knew they could be killed instantly by a single Irish republican with a 50 caliber (Barrett) sniper rifle that was lethal from more than a mile away. It could make a three inch hole in the chest, even through body armor. There was no defense against a sniper who could fire a fatal shot and then fade into a friendly neighborhood. Some of the soldiers were so terrified to go out on the streets that they suffered severe diarrhea and disabling psychological problems. Suicide rates and alcoholism soared among these soldiers.

The word on the street was that one of the best-trained snipers was a woman who was notoriously accurate. Whatever the gender of the shooter, the situation illustrated again that modern technology could be used by local rebels to intimidate one of the most professionally trained armies in the world. Despite the fact that the British army had all the latest equipment, they were never able to defeat the paramilitary fighters on either side.

Helicopters hovered overhead in Northern Ireland (day and night80.9981 0 0 1 245.76 274.56 T

phone. They spoke in hushed tones, all the time, even when they were far from any listening or recording devices. Gathering intelligence was always a top priority. Everyone knew they could be targeted

Before the Troubles broke out in 1969, Northern Ireland had been one of the most law-abiding areas of Europe. Belfast had an exceptionally low crime rate. But soon after the conflict escalated, more prisons were built to house both Protestants and Catholics who were arrested for paramilitary offenses. Most of these men (and a few women) never would have seen the inside of a jail had it not been for the war out on the streets. There soon developed a very unusual honor

There is still a deep fissure running through Northern Ireland that can't be papered-over soon, if ever. Below the surface, there are

But most are unsure of what can be done to promote accommodation. Perhaps one of the best ways to reduce the tensions of today is to try to find out *what makes the northern Irish people tick*. There is real value in setting out all the underlying issues in a comparative format so everyone can see the foundations of this conflict. It may sound surprising, but the northern Irish may benefit *most of all* from an objective analysis of how all these issues have evolved to the present. For local people, the power of mythology on both sides has elevated the conflict to a level beyond rational thought. Despite the thousands that were killed, *many on both sides don't really know why they were fighting*. It is utterly surprising that they still say, "What was it all about?" And if they don't know why they were in a war, they certainly can't bring it to a close.

Peace-making and signing agreements are fine, but unless it is clear to everyone *why the conflict*

Have the leaders in London and Dublin done all they can to promote political accommodation?

Can the churches play a more positive role?

Why do some people believe that a small quantity of guns remaining in each community is a stabilizing factor?

In what way may the leadership of paramilitary groups be the best hope for the future?

These questions are what this book is all about. Perhaps the most important step toward a lasting peace would

centuries. Perhaps the most serious mistake has always been to underestimate the negative power of a secret, one-sided history that people past down from one generation to the next. How can that chain be broken?

Today it is the same old thinking: "It will do no good to talk about issues that divide people." The official strategy is to build "a shared future" that focuses on the positive aspects of life. There is an underlying hope that a prolonged period of relative peace will cause people to feel more secure, and ultimately both sides *may* decide to come out from behind their walls, both figuratively and literally. But the leadership on both sides needs a dose of "truth telling" to keep both sides on a reality track. There needs to be some clarification of *who* took actions that were completely indefensible.

Much of the "terrible truth" about the past has evolved to a mythical level. It is lodged in the folklore of each side. In Ulster, *perceptions are more important than fact*. What people *think* happened is *always* more important than what *really* happened. Stories, music, and poetry abound with vivid accounts of tragedy – when "our people" were victims. A sense of injustice haunts the history of both religious traditions. With this as a backdrop, symbolism among the peacemakers is one of the most effective ways to ease the pain from the past. In Ireland, *history must be dug up before it can be settled.*

Good examples of symbolically "settling the past" were the acknowledgments made by two British prime ministers and the Queen: In 1997, Tony Blair made a public apology for his country's role in the Irish famine of the 1840s. Later in 2010, Prime Minister, David Cameron admitted that the British army was "unjustified" and "wrong" in killing 14 unarmed Catholic nationalists on "Bloody Sunday" in Londonderry in 1972. And finally, in 2012, Queen Elizabeth shook hands with Martin McGuiness, the former leader of the IRA, and Prime Minister Cameron apologized for the government's involvement in the 1989 killing of a Catholic attorney, Pat Finucane.

Some may see these actions as mere "political propaganda," but all of these actions add up and help relieve some of the resentment that had been festering for years. But there is still much more to be told: At what level (in the British government) was the decision made to arm loyalist paramilitaries? On the republican side, where are the "disappeared" people who were killed and buried in unmarked graves? There are many more questions that need to be answered. Bad actions don't get better in time.

Yet there has been notable progress among former paramilitaries on both sides. New channels have been opened for peaceful intent. Some (but not all) of the weapons have been destroyed and pledges have been made not to go back to war. When a leading Ulster loyalist, David Ervine, died of a heart attack, Gerry Adams, (leader of the Irish republicans) went to his funeral and consoled the dead man's wife. Ervine and Adams had been on opposing sides for many years. Virtually everyone was impressed that Adams dared to journey into "enemy territory" to show his respect for a former foe.

Public statements by British prime ministers, the Queen, and gestures from former paramilitaries will not restore any of the lives lost, but these public acknowledgements may well ease the plight of the living that still hold in fear and resentment. There will be short-term pain realizing what was done (especially by your own side) but unless the past is brought out into the open, there will never be a lasting peace. Truth always has a way of seeping out later. (Examples include illegal actions and criminal activities by members of the clergy, paramilitaries, the police and British government officials.) It is far better to initiate actions bringing out this dirty laundry willingly than to have damaging details leak out every few months and poison

about the events of yesterday. It will be more difficult to recruit paramilitary members into future violence if there is a general atmosphere of truthfulness. Clearly there is a fear among many that a fragile peace might be jeopardized if the past is unearthed and acknowledged. They fear losing the narrow ledge of goodwill they have today. But it may be just the reverse! Times of "relative peacirev7 o2Tf 0 F3.

us." It is always "they" who set the conflict in motion. And one of the depressing things about northern Irish history is that often these allegations are actually true. There is no shortage of blame. Atrocities occurred on both sides.

Because of the violence, many around the world have concluded it is not safe to live or work in Northern Ireland. Nothing could be further from the truth. Actually I feel more secure in Belfast than I do in many American cities. The northern Irish are careful to make a distinction between outsiders (who are completely safe) and their eternal foes that live just across town. Everything about the *enemy*

of different faiths. After some reflection, I co

Will Come." But the comment of Bishop Poyntz illustrated the point that Protestants see the conflict in a religious/cultural context. Their struggle is to save their people from a foreign culture that would undermine the freedom to practice their religion. The main slogan for Protestant paramilitaries is, "For God and Ulster."

Many in both camps see compromising as losing out in the most important struggle of their lives. For Irish Catholics it would be giving in to continued British control that keeps them down as second-class citizens. And for British Protestants it is the fear that they have surrendered to the Roman Catholic Church and that they will be overrun by a foreign culture. For both, *their apprehensions and goals are incompatible.*

But with this as a backdrop, nearly everyone in the North says they want peace, yet they are all aware that there are two overriding, irreconcilable visions alive in this land. Peacemakers of today are respected, and even admired, but never fully believed by people out on the streets. Thinking positively about a peaceful future is an engaging process, but the past still haunts this land.

The Irish conflict has been smoldering for hundreds of years. There have been many times when people thought the lid was on tight, that it would never explode again. Sometimes years would go by with only a few riots and murders, but there was never to be a lasting peace.

Today there is *hope* that the peacemakers will be successful, but everyone suspects there is still much *hate* in this land. There are some who recoil a bit when the word "hate" is used. It's such a strong term that conjures up so many negative emotions. Some say "it used to be that way, but now it's different." Perhaps that is a bit of wishful thinking, but maybe it has changed for the good. Who knows? But one thing is certain, it is difficult to be hopeful when recognizing the deep roots of antagonism on both sides that have existed here for so long. Northern Ireland today is a contradiction between the optimism of *hope* and the pessimism of *hate*. No one knows which will prevail in this troubled land.