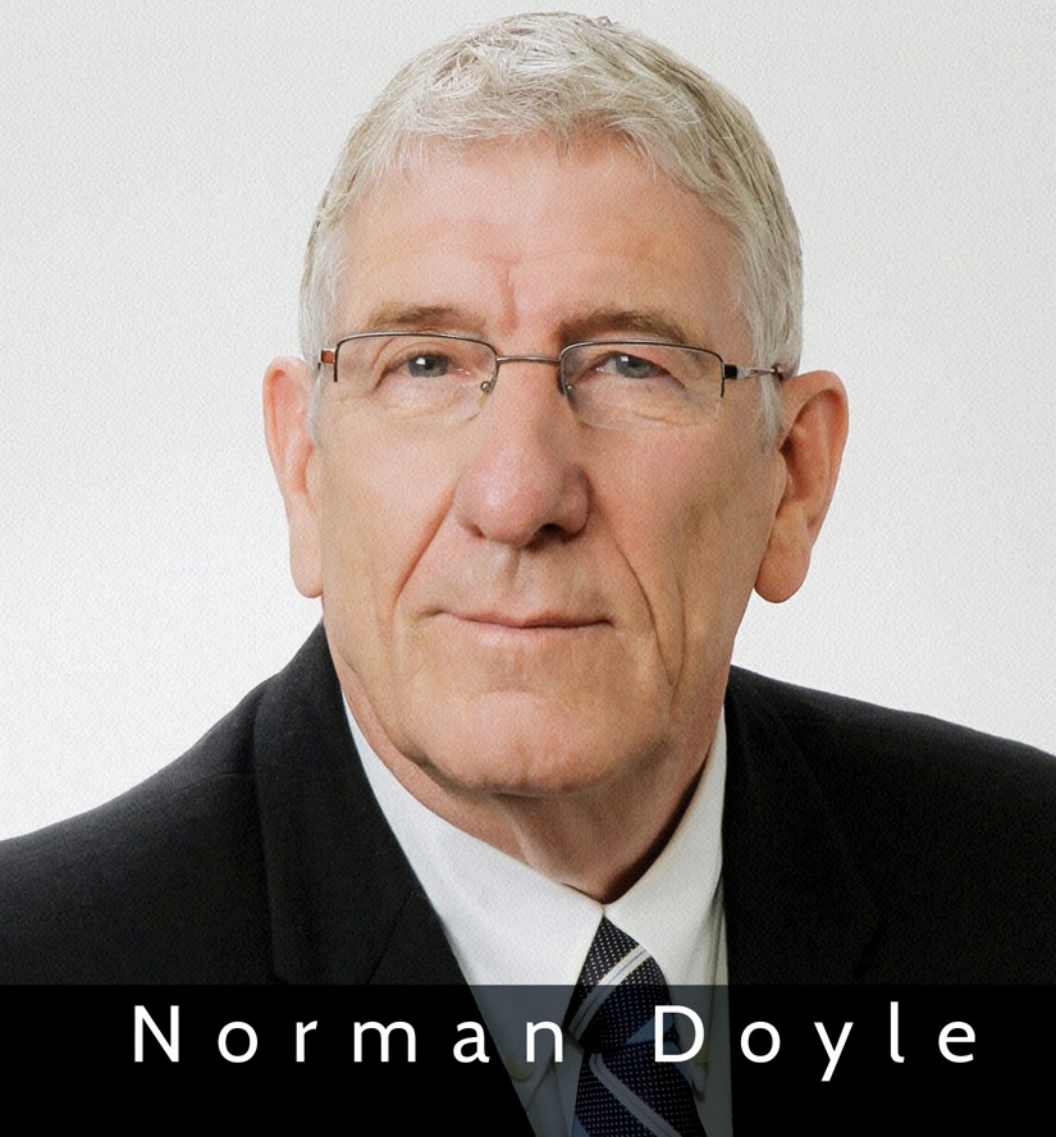


ACCORDING TO DOYLE

- A M E M O I R -



Norman Doyle

**According
to DOYLE**

According to DOYLE

Recollections

NORMAN DOYLE

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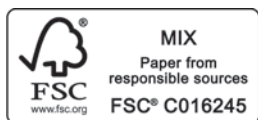
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I dedicate this story to my grandsons, Thomas Randell and William Norman. Someday they might develop a certain curiosity concerning the life experience of family which has gone ahead of them. This is my small gift to them and to anyone who might have an interest in such matters.

In preparing for this work, I asked myself if there was any value in it, outside of providing a record of my own personal journey through this wonderful world of ours. The answer was, yes, there is value in it. We should record the interesting events of our lives. It's not that history in general would benefit from such humble works, but it's important for much the same reason that a headstone is important to a grave. It says you were here.

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Introduction

It's been an interesting twenty-seven years in political life, both at the federal and provincial levels. I suppose I can count myself among the ranks of successful politicians, having been elected eight times back to back, four in each House.

I'm not sure how success is measured in politics, but it might have something to do with one's ability to get elected, and after that to get re-elected and re-elected. Then again, success in politics could be measured in other ways—how did you serve your constituents, the province, and country? Did you make it to the cabinet table? Were you respected?

Some people say that a politician's success should be measured by the number of visits he receives (or doesn't receive) from the law-enforcement people. Good news! No visits. No reason, as far as I am aware.

So, with that sort of opening, I guess I could be expected to write exclusively about my time in politics. Well, not so.

As with anyone who lays pen to paper, there is always more to reflect upon than the experiences of just one part of

the journey. Notwithstanding my longevity in elected life, I am hesitant to devote too much time to the subject. However, I have had a political career that spans twenty-seven years, so it will be difficult not to consign a chapter or two or more to those very wonderful people who have made such a significant contribution to whatever interesting things I might have encountered on my sojourn.

Simply, what I want to do is tell my story for what it's worth. It may not be worth much, but there have been some interesting things to talk about.

I've heard it said that each of us, without exception, has a book somewhere deep inside our souls begging to be written. All it takes is the motivation to put one's thoughts into print. In my particular case, I have been reluctant to do so, intimidated no doubt by those who, correctly or not, have succeeded in convincing me that, as a politician, I was just about as interesting as paint drying. What could I possibly want to talk about?

Actually, a lot!

I've read my share of political books, and books written by politicians. The biographies and autobiographies, the memoirs and the tales of great victories written by public figures, all seem a little self-serving and ego-driven.

I cannot possibly hope to go down that track, not because my ego wouldn't stand the strain, but because I have very few victories worthy of public disclosure.

However, I know I'll be forgiven if I have a few points to make on the times and political events that landed me right in the middle of a political career that was unbelievably

interesting yet amazingly difficult. Politics is a very difficult job if you intend to do it honestly and with some degree of integrity. The job breeds difficulty. On any given day you can experience the full range of highs and lows. A phone call might come from a grateful constituent to say you've solved the most difficult problem in his or her life, but the next call drops you back to earth, flat on your face. That call might be from an angry individual ready to take a strip off your hide for something over which you have little or no control.

That's how it goes in politics almost each and every day. As a federal politician, of course, you get to deal with all sorts of federal-provincial issues, issues over which premiers and prime ministers will sometimes take opposing views.

In my twelve years in the House of Commons, it was—as Charles Dickens said in his *A Tale of Two Cities*—the best of times and the worst of times. The worst no doubt for me were the times when I found myself in the middle of the big federal-provincial battles trying to be all things to all people.

These were indeed difficult times, especially when you felt the pressure of being squeezed at both ends with your loyalties divided. When you're an MP trying hard to represent your province well, it's difficult to divide these loyalties evenly. To paraphrase a scripture verse, you can't serve two masters. If you do you will probably wind up hating one and serving the other.

By virtue of being a Member of Parliament, the “two master” concept is automatic. You must be conscious of the overall well-being of the country in all decision making. After all, you are a Canadian citizen. At the same time, however, you

must be aware that you're elected to serve the people of your province. Their needs are paramount. Sometimes it's a tough balancing act, and one I would not have appreciated during my years as a member of the provincial House, because the "two master" concept just didn't apply or even come to mind.

Very often, of course, when you're caught in the middle of a political dispute, you could be in the crosshairs of both governments. The prime minister has every right to be ticked off because of your constant barrage on his office fighting for the province's demands, while the premier is back home getting the feather bag and tar can ready because of your failure to convince the prime minister to buckle down to his or her demands. In the meantime, as an MP just hoping to do a decent job, you're desperately trying to be all things to all people. In politics that's really the rock and the hard place, a no-win, so it's no great surprise if the Christmas cards stop coming.

Now, before I launch headlong into the stories that come with over a quarter-century in political life, it's necessary to go back a little, beyond that, to a time that speaks not of my beginnings, but the beginnings of family before me. Why, you might ask, would you want to go there, especially when recounting the political tales of the recent past? Well, if you're reading this work, all I can say is that I hope it becomes evident by the time you finish and you file it away on some dusty shelf or box in the attic. Truth, although at times not as entertaining as fiction, is more laudable because it's true.

Chapter 1

The Early Days

IF I HAD been given a choice to be born anywhere in this wonderful world, it would have been in either a scenic little community in Newfoundland or, failing that, the greatest city in the world, my favourite city, New York. As it turned out, Newfoundland won. Avondale was a nice little community nestled in Conception Bay. People scraped together a living by working in construction in St. John's, cutting the forests of Grand Falls to support the demands of a wood-hungry mill or, in the case of my family, by travelling stateside to do ironwork in New York, Boston, or Philadelphia.

Our community was one of five comprising Conception Bay Centre. We rarely if ever thought of ourselves as part of a central structure and, oddly enough, it remains so today. We were just one in a collection of small villages totally independent of each other without much concern for whatever the town next to us was doing.

I was last in a long line of children born into the Doyle family. Although I cannot remember a hungry day, it's interesting to look back and realize that, like most families in rural Newfoundland prior to Confederation, we were probably poor.

My father had left home shortly after I was born. My recollection is of seeing him on four or five occasions in my lifetime when he would arrive for a week or so to do odd chores around the property before heading back to work in New York.

I remember viewing my father in a rather odd way. To me he was a strange man showing up every couple of years to take control of my life for a week or two, and then disappearing somewhere into the sunset until the next visit. Today, with the benefit of hindsight, I sometimes think it's a mystery how my mother and women of her day survived the hardships they endured trying to raise a family under these difficult conditions. With the man away most of the time, his involvement with the family very often bordered on no involvement at all.

It's strange being raised in a large family in which you're the youngest member. In my case everyone, with the exception of my brother Jack, left home before I reached my teenage years. Some were raising families of their own or had moved elsewhere to chase their dreams, the same dream that had beckoned my father at an early age to pursue his future in New York. This same dream, however, had eluded my mother.

As the children left home, the thought of some rest and relaxation must have crossed her mind. However, instead of rest and relaxation, she suffered both physically and mentally.

Looking back, I often wonder how she summoned the endurance to go on. Hers was a difficult existence indeed, but one she lived out in patient expectation of the better times that never came.

From time to time I reflect upon her story and how she used extraordinary courage and strength to survive some unbelievably difficult years. You could almost say her story was one of never quite making it, always falling short of catching that elusive dream.

My mother was born in a small community in Conception Bay called Chapel Cove, just a few kilometres from where she would eventually spend most of her life. I was somewhat amazed as a young boy to learn that, while she was still a young girl of only eighteen or nineteen with just grade three or four education, she decided one day to pack up her few simple possessions and make her way in to St. John's. From there she would board a steamship somewhere around 1923–24 and begin the long journey to New York. From all accounts, she arrived at Ellis Island in good health carrying the sum of twenty-five dollars.

She told me that Ellis Island was the clearing centre for new immigrants arriving in New York, and that the only hurdle one had to clear upon arrival was to have someone meet you who had the wherewithal to supply some temporary support until you found a job. The Great Depression of the 1930s was almost a decade into the future, so the prospects of finding work would have been quite encouraging. She said it was a frightening experience in those days to leave your sheltered existence and set your compass for a city a world away. My

questions, I remember, were never-ending, but she would always try to form the image in my young mind of what New York was all about.

How could there possibly be buildings that almost touched the clouds? I asked. Was it a fairy tale, or could there really be a statue of a lady in New York Harbor, hundreds of feet high, that held a flaming torch, a statue that symbolized everything that was so wonderful about America? This same symbol of freedom, generosity, and hope which stands so proudly today had also welcomed my mother. I could tell by the trembling in her sad voice, as she again recounted her story to her last offspring, that these were happier times.

She told me she disembarked the steamship probably after seven or eight days sailing. One can only speculate what it must have been like sailing on a cargo/passenger ship in the cold North Atlantic in those days. I remember she told me it was a very cold day when she first glimpsed New York Harbor. She said it was a vision that would remain in her memory forever. Where she went from Ellis Island and the harbourfront, I cannot say. I was probably too young to ask for such details. However, with her first step on dry American soil, the adventure began.

Finding a job is always the main preoccupation of a new immigrant, and it was no different for my mother. Even in the land of opportunity, you have to work to realize that opportunity, and the opportunities can be few when you consider the limits imposed on one by little or no education.

Be that as it may, fate would wave her generous hand and, shortly after she settled down in Brooklyn, a kindly

Jewish family came to her rescue. How it happened, or why it happened, I do not know and was never told. Maybe the word “rescue” is not the appropriate one here. However, when a young girl, not yet twenty years old, leaves a small community in Conception Bay in the very early 1900s, makes her way to New York by steamer, and is given a job in the home of a wealthy Jewish family, then I can think of no better or more applicable word.

The Makarens were a well-to-do family living in Brooklyn. They were obviously wealthy enough to afford a housekeeper or two, and my mother must have fit the bill. Coming from Chapel Cove in the 1920s did not equip one with the culinary skills necessary to take up duties in the home of a wealthy Jewish family in New York. However, this seemed to be of secondary importance to these generous people, so she was immediately assigned the task of taking care of the two children in the Makaren household. She told me that, after a few months, the family, confident she was ready for more onerous responsibilities, assigned her the task of cooking the family meals. That was not an easy undertaking. She worried that she might encounter a strange fish that had to be cooked differently from cod, or a piece of meat that was not cut from a cow or a pig. Many years later she would laugh when she recalled how Mr. Makaren spent most of supper hour one evening picking sand out of his teeth because she had not washed the spinach sufficiently well or even washed it at all. She was quick to add that she had never seen spinach in her life and that it was not a vegetable one easily found in a Chapel Cove garden in the 1920s.

Being a good-humoured and forgiving man, Mr. Makaren was quick to overlook such trivialities and patiently tutored her in the finer art of properly cooking spinach. I have never since eaten a forkful of spinach without thinking of that story or of visualizing the look on my mother's face when she was told that the sand had to be separated from the spinach before cooking.

After thoroughly settling into this strange yet fairy-tale way of living, it seemed only natural, I suppose, that the lure of a social life would begin calling her. By the late 1920s and early 1930s, Canadians—and certainly Newfoundlanders—were living all over New York and especially Brooklyn, so it wasn't difficult to find the companionship to form some sort of a social group. She told me she and her friends loved to go to a place called Prospect Hall in South Brooklyn for the regular Saturday night dance, and it was there that she would meet my father.

And what a coincidence it was! Here was a young girl from Chapel Cove meeting a young man from Avondale—communities five kilometres apart.

Prospect Hall was the focal point for young people to gather in those days, not much different than George Street in St. John's today, although possibly a bit more civil. It was the place to dance and sing. I remember well as a young boy hearing my mother sing Irish folk songs around the kitchen. She had a beautiful singing voice and she would captivate me with her ability to deliver the notes so perfectly. Knowing her love for music and having experienced her talent first-hand, it was no surprise to me to learn from her friends that she often

sang on stage during the Saturday night dances at Prospect Hall. Years later I would hear the same stories from her friends who lived in New York, that she and my father actually did a song-and-tap-dance routine at this grand old hall on Saturday nights.

Having had my young mind filled with these visions of glitz and grandeur, I remember as a boy telling my mother that one day I would also see New York for myself and visit this place called Prospect Hall that she talked about so often. I would just have to experience as vividly as I could what it was that held her so entranced for that brief but wonderful period of her life.

Things were going quite well for this young, hard-working Newfoundland girl, and I can only imagine that she was not spending too much time thinking about the harder days back home. After all, she was young, about twenty years old. She had a secure job and was living the good life.

However, I guess we've heard it said time and again that in one brief moment your fate may be sealed and your life changed forever. So it was with my mother. She had met my father at the Saturday night dances in Brooklyn and, while it was coincidental that they had been born and raised only five kilometres apart in Newfoundland, it was even more coincidental that they lived only two streets apart in Brooklyn when they met. He was living on Ninth Street and she on Eleventh Street.

It was just a year or so after their initial meeting that the knot was tied at St. Thomas Church in Brooklyn, just a few minutes from Prospect Hall. My mother was just twenty-three at the time, and I can only imagine the happiness and sense of

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