

Remembering Bloody Sunday

January 30, 1972

By [Matt Morrison](#)

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There are many persons in my hometown of Derry, I am sure, who have more-detailed memories of Bloody Sunday than I have. I must admit to feeling that I was more an observer of the event than a participant in it. I suspect, twenty-five years along, that I am still grappling¹ with the enormity² of that day....

It was on a beautiful, sunny, winter afternoon that I, my father Paddy, Liam, a cousin, and I set out on foot from Shantallow for the staging area of the march, up in the Creggan. We were all able walkers and were moving at a good clip up the fairly steep incline³ that is Rosemount Hill.

As we were striding by the park, we met a British-army foot patrol. The sergeant, waving his rifle as a teacher would a pointer, indicated that he wanted us to stop and stand at a particular spot. We knew the drill. We were spread-eagled against the cold iron perimeter railings of the park. The cold metal reminded me that there was no heat in the low-lying winter sun. We were warm because of the fast pace that we had been maintaining in order to reach the assembly point at the common ground known as the Bishop's Field.

I can still recall the strong smell of waterproofing on the Brit's uniform as he gave me a "rubdown"⁴ that was anything but perfunctory⁵. I can still see my father raise his eyebrow in a quizzical⁶ manner as this same soldier warned us to be very careful today.

We were now late. When we arrived at the Bishop's Field, the main body of civil-rights marchers had already departed en route for Free Derry corner. We were part of a tardy⁷ rear-guard of stragglers who decided to take a shortcut through the city cemetery so that we could more quickly catch up with the rest of our friends and neighbours.

Already, at sixteen years of age, I was a "veteran" of numerous civil-rights marches and numerous active protests, including a stint⁸ at the barricades during the Battle of the Bogside in August 1969. Rather ironically, however, Bloody Sunday was the first time that I had actually accompanied my father with his permission. The normal drill was that my father would leave the house for a march. I would give him a few minutes to be on his way, and then I, too, would leave for the same march, being careful of course, not to let him see his first-born at any stage in the proceedings.

¹ Holde fast ved

² Afskyeligheden

³ Stigning

⁴ En omgang (stryg/bank)

⁵ Alt andet end rutinepræget

⁶ Spottende

⁷ Langsom

⁸ Job/arbejde (deltagelse på)

ROOFTOP SNIPER

As we walked down William Street, I noticed a Brit sniper walk up towards the apex⁹ of the roof of Stevenson's bakery. I commented to Paddy and Liam that even if the Brits wanted to shoot us all today, they wouldn't have enough ammunition, because there was such a large crowd of us.

The first person shot on Bloody Sunday was actually shot by that sniper. John Johnston died about a year later of his wounds.

That said, we were all in good spirits as we moved towards Rossville Street and our final destination of Free Derry Corner. The marchers were bantering¹⁰ in what I regard as a typically Derry way. Everyone knew almost everyone else there-by sight, as they say, if not by name. There was almost a carnival atmosphere, reflective in many ways of the hope, the optimism, the joy inherent¹¹ in even painful struggle.

Somehow or other, I became separated from my father and cousin. I couldn't see them in the vicinity¹² of the Free Derry Corner, where a truck bed was being used as a platform from which various speakers were addressing the rapidly assembling crowd, so I decided to backtrack to the corner of William Street and Rossville Street to search for them.

A small group of teenage stone throwers and a much larger group of spectators were there. We were a tightly packed crowd, especially in the narrow alley where I was. A British-army water cannon showered us with purple dye. Then, when they shot tear gas, I could not manage to get my hand up to my eyes, such was the crush¹³. I decided it was time to move on.

I was about one-third of the way up Rossville Street when I heard the distinctive sound of rifle fire. Looking back over my shoulder, I could see British paras crossing some open ground. They were running forward, some pausing to shoot, and were sweeping the crowd before them. I crouched over¹⁴ low and started to run. I knew that if I fell, I would be trampled in the forward surge¹⁵ of the crowd.

In a brief, surreal moment, I saw an old man sitting on a low, brick garden wall in Glenfada Park. He was laughing maniacally. Even in the midst of a moment of panic, this scene struck me as particularly and memorably bizarre.

HELPING HAND

I was running for the shelter of a barricade at Free Derry Corner. I had the silly notion that once over the barricade, I would be safe. An Olympic hurdler¹⁶ could not have hopped over that barricade as quickly as I did. No sooner had I reached "safety" than I heard a very plaintive¹⁷ voice, "Oh, son, could you help me? I think my foot is stuck." Cursing like a trooper to myself, and damning this woman, her seed, breed and generation for being so inconsiderate¹⁸ as to get her foot

⁹ Toppen

¹⁰ Drillende

¹¹ Den glæde der var ved selv en pinefuld kamp

¹² Området omkring

¹³ Trængslen

¹⁴ Bøjede mig helt sammen

¹⁵ Bølge

¹⁶ Hækkeløber

¹⁷ bedende

¹⁸ ubetænksom

stuck at such an inopportune¹⁹ moment, I reluctantly²⁰ remounted the barricade. "Give me your hand, missus!" I yelled as I grabbed her outstretched hand and tugged her free. She was coming with me even if I amputated her foot. I was most certainly not one of those brave souls who risked their lives for others in the middle of the para killing zone. Several civilians were shot for their courageous acts, but thankfully, I was not one of those who lost a family member in the slaughter. I was a scared sixteen-year-old who did everything that he could to stay alive in a situation of utter²¹ confusion and carnage²².

Suffice it to say²³ that I saw several persons shot that day. I realized instantly that I had witnessed an event that would feature large in Irish history. I knew at a visceral level²⁴ that I was done begging for my rights. I would rather be scared and armed than scared and empty-handed.

Bloody Sunday was a personal watershed²⁵ for me, even though I could not realize then how it would unalterably change my life and impact the lives of my future wife and children.

As I recall that event of January 30th twenty-five years later, I know that my current deportation battle is a replay in some ways of that event. Both events are born of the same struggle to live our lives in safety, in justice, and free of British interference. INS wields²⁶ paper in the same way the Brits wield their guns and clubs. Either way, they both show the same callous²⁷ disregard²⁸ for the lives of the deportees and their wives and children. They demean²⁹ and devalue³⁰ our right to raise our families in peace.

Don't merely³¹ remember Bloody Sunday! Learn from it!

Matt Morrison was 16 when, on Jan. 30, 1972, British troops shot and killed 13 people taking part in a civil-rights march in Derry, Northern Ireland. That experience caused him to join the Irish Republican Army and fight to end the British occupation.

He was arrested and served 10 years in prison before being released. He married and eventually moved to the United States, where he lives with his family. But today Morrison is fighting extradition³² because of his past.

¹⁹ upassende

²⁰ Uden lyst

²¹ fuldstændig

²² blodbad

²³ Lad det være nok at sige

²⁴ Jeg fornemmede

²⁵ Vendepunkt

²⁶ fører

²⁷ hjerteløse

²⁸ ligegyldighed

²⁹ nedværdiger

³⁰ devaluerer

³¹ Husk ikke blot

³² Udleveringen (af fanger)