

## **The English woman who made a difference in Ireland.**

### **Sylvia McShane**

Without a rule book she came to Belfast to serve tea and wee buns with the sole purpose of coaxing big rough, tough men to talk peace any time, anywhere, in the prison, the street corner, the committee room, the holy houses or the posh castle. She worked it, tearing off her blonde wig, lighting a fag, kicking off her shoes rolling up her sleeves and disarming them with her informality until most of the big tough men agreed to something. Her own brand of politics and diplomacy was effective in the stuffy walls of power around Stormont Castle. Walking the tightrope of orange and green sensitivities, the jealousies of colleagues and leaders, she pirouetted in the darkness of a terminal illness that must have continually threatened to derail her. Dealing with flags, flutes and drums she didn't always get it right but she kept on trying with an unrivalled tenacity. All the while playing a blinder on talking; late nights, early mornings in Holy Week until the new dawn of an agreement on Good Friday. Twenty five years on, I remember the heroine who played it her own way all over that particular treaty. Only a woman like the indomitable Mo Mowlam could do it.

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