



A TALE FOR OUR TIME

STORY BY DEXTER CIRILLO
Photography by Matt Suby

This centennial flag of 1876, the year Colorado became a state, was a gift from Ken Burns to Ken Adelman. It has thirty-eight stars. Below: President Reagan and Adelman, 1983.




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THE REYKJAVIK SUMMIT is something out of an Agatha Christie thriller. Two vivid characters meet over a weekend, on a desolate and windswept island, in a reputedly haunted house with rain lashing against its windowpanes, where they experience the most amazing things. The summit between Ronald Reagan and Mikhail Gorbachev on October 11 and 12, 1986, was like nothing before or after—with its cliffhanging plot, powerful personalities, and competing interpretations over the past quarter century.

With these opening lines, Ken Adelman sets the stage for the drama that unfolds in his new book, *Reagan at Reykjavik: Forty-Eight Hours That Ended the Cold War*, which was published by HarperCollins on May 6 to critical acclaim. Of the several endorsements that appear on the book jacket, Tom Brokaw writes, “Reagan at Reykjavik is a lively, important account of an historic weekend. On a barren island nation in the north Atlantic, the two great nuclear adversaries faced reality—and the world was changed.” Ken Burns calls the book “a riveting history of one of the most important moments of the Cold War.”

If this were not enough, the movie *Reykjavik* is scheduled to be released next year starring Michael Douglas as Reagan and Christoph Waltz as Gorbachev. Ridley Scott is the producer, and Adelman is executive producer. 2014 is, indeed, turning into a blockbuster year for Ken Adelman.

A former ambassador to the United Nations and director of the U.S. Arms Control and Disarmament Agency from 1983 to 1987 during the Reagan administration, Adelman divides his time between Washington, D.C., and Aspen. He is, perhaps, best known to Aspenites as vice president of Movers and Shakespeares, a company he and his wife, Carol, the president, formed in 1997 to teach leadership skills and ethics through Shakespeare’s greatest works. They have conducted many leadership seminars at the Aspen Institute, where Adelman also serves as executive director of the Arts and Ideas Series. This spring I sat down with Adelman at his Aspen home to talk about his book, the movie, Shakespeare, and Aspen.



Reagan reading the final U.S. offer at Reykjavik before the summit ended. Clockwise from the president: Secretary of State George Shultz, National Security Advisor John Poindexter, Ken Adelman, U.S. negotiator Paul Nitze (of Aspen), and White House Chief of Staff Donald Regan.

PHOTO COURTESY KEN ADELMAN



IT WAS THE BEST WEEKEND OF MY LIFE—THE MOST CHALLENGING, MOST EXHAUSTING, MOST STRETCHING, AND PROBABLY THE MOST IMPORTANT.

DEXTER CIRILLO: When did you decide you wanted to write a book about Reykjavik?
KEN ADELMAN: I had been thinking about Reykjavik for twenty-seven years. I was there. It was a seminal event in my life. It was the best weekend of my life—the most challenging, most exhausting, most stretching, and probably the most important. I decided to write the book about a year and a half ago, because I learned that the American and Russian notes from the ten-and-a-half-hour private meeting between Reagan and Gorbachev were now available. I was an advisor to President Reagan, and I talked to him before and after he went into the arena with Gorbachev,

but I wasn't in the room and didn't know precisely what happened. When I read the notes, I was very impressed with Reagan. The more I looked into it, the better the story got, the more important and ironic the story got, and the weirder the story got. I didn't know about the ghosts of Hofdi House [where the summit took place] or that the CIA and the KGB had so many interchanges right there in that little house. I didn't know that Raisa Gorbachev was running around town, changing outfits four times the first day of the summit and going to eight sites in seven hours.

DC: And I didn't realize until I read your book that Soviet first ladies were practically invisible. No wonder Raisa loved the attention of the international press, and Nancy Reagan was upset that she had elected not to go to Iceland with President Reagan. I love all the intrigues that you uncover. President Reagan has become an icon in our national politics. What was Reagan, the man, like? Did you get to spend much one-on-one time with him?

KA: I was never one-on-one with Reagan. I spent a lot of time in meetings and had a few meals with him. He was very warm, but he was warm to everybody. He had a nice veneer of being friendly, but I don't think he had any real friends. He was very close to Nancy. Theirs was a very special relationship, almost a fairy-tale relationship. But he always wanted your frank opinion. Sometimes I contradicted the things he said, but he never

seemed to mind. He wasn't arrogant in that way. He always wanted the best from his people. He was a very kind person.

DC: What was the outcome of the Reykjavik summit?

KA: Nothing immediately, but Reagan had opened the door for arms negotiations, and the next year, 1987, the United States and the Soviet Union signed the Intermediate-Range Nuclear Forces Treaty. Reagan also threw down the gauntlet to Gorbachev in his famous 1987 speech at the Brandenburg Gate near the Berlin Wall, when he said, "Tear down this wall!" That happened two years later in 1989, but all of the elements leading up to the treaty and the fall of the Berlin Wall were in play at Reykjavik. Finally, two years after that, in 1991, the Soviet Union itself fell. And that ended the Cold War.

DC: It's amazing to realize in hindsight that those forty-eight hours in Iceland had such a profound impact on international relations. Given the drama and intrigue of the Reykjavik Summit, you must have been reminded of Shakespeare. Looking back, if you had to decide which characters from Shakespeare Reagan and Gorbachev represented on that weekend, who would they be?

KA: Reagan, I think, was more like Henry V. He was inspirational, direct, quite confident, adept at deflecting criticism, and very, very skillful at arguing with Gorbachev. Gorbachev was more of a Bolingbroke, who becomes Henry IV. He was also direct but in a plodding and engineering way. He was meticulous with numbers and pretty cold. Reagan liked to tell stories that were almost parables, while Gorbachev came up with facts and figures.

DC: Was there a Falstaff at Reykjavik?

KA: There wasn't much humor. Things were pretty serious that weekend. We were euphoric on Sunday morning when it appeared we had a nuclear arms agreement with the Soviet Union, but then the talks collapsed, and we were in fits of depression because everything seemed to be crashing.

DC: How did the movie *Reykjavik* come about?

KA: Stewart Mackinnon, a British fellow and cofounder of Headline Pictures in England, had the idea for the movie almost seven years ago. After the Reagan funeral in 2004, there was such an outpouring of emotion for Reagan that he wanted to make a movie about Reagan. He contacted Mike Deaver, Reagan's deputy chief of staff from 1981 to 1985, and Deaver asked me to join the meeting. Mackinnon wanted to know what seminal event defined

Reagan's presidency. Deaver immediately said Reykjavik, even though he was not there. Three years ago, Mackinnon and Kevin Hood, the scriptwriter at the time, showed up in Aspen and sat on my porch for two days, while I went over, hour by hour, what happened in Reykjavik and what I thought about it. They went back to England and started putting together the movie and asked me to stay on as a consultant and executive producer.

DC: It sounds like the evolution of the movie and the writing of the book were parallel events.

KA: No, the movie started two or three years before I began writing the book. But now that the book has been published, we are going back and reviving some of the stories in the book to include in the movie. Michael Douglas has a copy of the book and is studying it for his role as Reagan. I will advise on the script. I want the movie to be as accurate as possible.

DC: Let's talk about your background. You received your B.A. from Grinnell College in Iowa in 1967, where you majored in philosophy and religion. You then earned an M.S. in foreign service studies from Georgetown University in 1969 and a Ph.D. in political theory, also from Georgetown, in 1975. From 1972 to 1975, you lived in Zaire and wrote your dissertation there. How did that come about?

KA: I was a dependent husband. My wife was a career foreign service officer (1971-1981) with the U.S. Agency for International Development and was assigned to Zaire at the time. I did my dissertation, collected African art, acted as a French-to-English translator for Muhammad Ali at the Rumble in the Jungle heavyweight fight, and went down the Congo River on the one hundredth anniversary of Sir Henry Morton Stanley's historic journey in 1874. It was a wonderful time.

DC: In government, you worked in the Office of Economic Opportunity, served as assistant to Secretary of Defense Donald Rumsfeld under President Ford, became an ambassador to the United Nations, and served as the director of the U.S. Arms Control and Disarmament Agency for nearly five years. And that's just the short list. In 2001, you were appointed to the Defense Policy Board and served until 2006. What was your role there?

KA: We were a body mandated to advise Donald Rumsfeld, the secretary of defense, on all sorts of issues. My fellow members were Henry Kissinger, Newt Gingrich, Dan Quayle, and Harold Brown, who had been President Carter's secretary of defense.

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Clockwise from top left: Gorbachev and Reagan sign the arms accord coming out of Reykjavik, East Room of the White House, December 8, 1987; Adelman in his Aspen home, 2014; Daughter Jessica is greeted by the president, while her sister Jocelyn holds back and Carol Adelman looks on holding the family Bible during Adelman's April 1983 swearing-in as U.S. arms control director; Adelman going down the Congo River, Zaire, 1974.

HISTORICAL PHOTOS COURTESY KEN ADELMAN; MATT SUBY

D.C.: One career is enough for most people, but you have had two parallel careers: one in government and the other in the humanities. You have taught Shakespeare courses since 1977 at both Georgetown University and George Washington University. You dedicate *Reagan at Reykjavik* to Carol and Will—your wife and William Shakespeare. When did your fascination with Shakespeare begin?

K.A.: I never took a Shakespeare course. I never took a drama course. I never even took a literature course, but I've taught a lot of them. After graduate school, I became interested in Shakespeare and started seeing more and more plays and reading Shakespeare. I went to the Georgetown administration and said I'd love to teach a course on Shakespeare, and they said, "What qualifications do you

have?" And I said, "None." And they said, "Why should we?" And I said, "Because I've learned a little bit, and I think I could teach a course pretty well." So they hired me. And then the president of George Washington University heard how successful the course was and offered me a Shakespeare course with just twelve students, all honor students. I moved the course to GW the next semester.

WE DECIDED ON ASPEN, BECAUSE ASPEN HAS EVERYTHING, AND IT WORKED LIKE A CHARM. WE NAMED OUR HOUSE SELAH, WHICH IS THE HEBREW NAME FOR "PAUSE AND REFLECT."

DC: Do you consider yourself a Shakespeare scholar?

KA: No, I consider myself a Shakespeare aficionado. I have hundreds of books on Shakespeare. I read a book about *Hamlet* every year. I have a whole library of *Hamlet* studies. I love reading interpretations of the plays, and I go to the plays. I've seen *Hamlet* live on stage twenty-five times and *Richard III* probably fifteen times. I must see six live Shakespeare plays every year.

DC: How does Shakespeare inform your views?

KA: I don't think Shakespeare informs my views, but he does deepen my appreciation of the foibles of humanity and the wonders of human existence. What Shakespeare does is show us in large part what happens in the human condition. It's like a giant MRI machine. You have all these things that are happening that you can't see, and you blow it up big on the screen, and Shakespeare shows you these emotions on the screen so we see them. And that's relationships between husband and wife, relationships between father and son, relationships of power, wealth, beauty, hatred, and jealousy. You know, emotion enlarged. It's just fabulous to see.

DC: In 1999, you and Norman Augustine published *Shakespeare in Charge: The Bard's Guide to Leading and Succeeding on the Business Stage*. What do you do with Movers and Shakespeares?

KA: We do executive training for corporations all over the country using the wisdom and insights in the plays of Shakespeare. Our approach is lighthearted and interactive. It's a wonderful job. Any time you can spend with Shakespeare is time worth spending.

DC: When did you first visit Aspen?

KA: I would say 1983 or 1984.

DC: How did you happen to pick Aspen?

KA: I didn't. I was asked to join the Strategy Group of the Aspen Institute headed up by Brent Scowcroft. On the second day, Carol asked me, "How do you like it?" And I said, "It's fine. They are talking about the same subject, arms control, that I talk about all day long in Washington, with the same people." She said, "OK, just get invited back, because I love this place." We bought our house here ten years ago. We had been looking for a second home that our two daughters would love to visit. Carol looked at Park City, but we decided on Aspen, because Aspen has everything, and it worked like a charm. We named our house *Selah*, which is the Hebrew name for "pause and reflect."

DC: What is your role as the executive director of the Aspen Institute's Arts and Ideas Series?

KA: We have put on a number of seminars, ranging from cartoonists to the history of Florence. The purpose of the seminars is to examine contemporary issues through the lens of the arts. I select the topics and help get speakers for the panels.

DC: What do you see as the role of the Aspen Institute in America's cultural and political life?

KA: It is a very good place to convene people of different views across the political spectrum to talk about the importance of ideas in a decent and civil manner. That civility has been lost in too many places.

DC: Sitting here in your living room, I can't help but notice that we are surrounded by dozens of framed *Time* magazine covers. What's that all about?

KA: In high school, I was very interested in public policy issues, and I loved *Time* magazine. So I began collecting the *Time* magazine issues of Person of the Year. It took me a dozen years, but we have on the walls every Person of the Year cover, beginning with Charles Lindbergh in 1927 when it started. The most recent one was Pope Francis. I have fifty-five signatures of the recipients, including seven presidents: Harry Truman, Dwight Eisenhower, Jimmy Carter, Ronald Reagan, George Herbert Walker Bush, George W. Bush, and Barack Obama. It's a unique collection. We did a fundraiser here for the Aspen Institute several years ago with Walter Isaacson, because he was editor of *Time* magazine for ten years and was the

one who chose the Man of the Year. I saw a little bobbing head in the audience and said, "Walter, one minute. I think we have a Man of the Year here in the audience," and it was Jeff Bezos, who had come over. He signed his cover right in this house.

DC: How are you involved in the Aspen community?

KA: Besides the Aspen Institute, I'll tell you what we're most proud of. We're most proud to open our house for fundraisers for local institutions that run on a dime, such as Theater Masters, Shakespeare in the Park, and the Hudson Reed Ensemble. We also have receptions for the Aspen Institute and the Music Festival, but I'm talking about the wonderful little organizations that offer a lot to the community and don't always get a lot of support. It gives us a lot of pleasure.

DC: What's next on the horizon for you?

KA: The message of *Reykjavik* is a wonderful message about the importance of negotiations, the importance of understanding the other guy, and the importance of courage. I want to take that message and show how Ronald Reagan combined these traits in a phenomenally effective leadership role. The Cold War may be over, but there is still a desperate need in today's world for leaders who listen to each other and treat each other with mutual respect. ●

