

The Ferenka Story

MARY Moloney has lived all her life in Lisnagry, County Limerick. An only child from a farming background, she has always been interested in other people's stories, history and English and from this came her love of writing. After completing a course in Journalism and Radio at HSI in Limerick, she began to have her work published. She is a regular contributor to An Caisleán, the parish journal in Ahane/Castleconnell. Much of Mary's work has now been compiled in a book, *The Story of Ahane*, which was published in March of this year. A few remaining copies are still available in Eason's and O'Mahony's. In this extract from the book, Mary recalls the drama 30 years ago that surrounded the kidnapping of Ferenka managing director Dr Tiede Herrema and interviews some of the protagonist in what was the major news story of the day.

By **MARY ANTOINETTE MOLONEY**

AS Dr. Herrema remained in captivity, the search for him widened. Some mediators had been contacted and negotiations regarding a ransom for Dr Herrema began. One negotiator, Fr Donal O'Mahony OFM Capuchin, told of his Ferenka story in this way.

The late Cardinal Alfrink of Holland had been in contact with the parent company of Ferenka in Holland. The Cardinal wondered if Fr O'Mahony could go as a "go-between" because it seemed that the life of Herrema was in danger. Fr O'Mahony continued:

"The Cardinal knew me personally as I had been an executive member of an international Catholic movement for peace, Pax Christi International, and the Cardinal was its president."

To continue with Fr O'Mahony's memories, he offered himself as a "contact" person on behalf of the company if the kidnappers wished to avail of a third party.

"Unfortunately, in those days no one was sure who the kidnappers were and so we had no alternative but to announce it publicly on the RTE evening news and simultaneously on the news telecast in Holland, hoping the kidnappers would see it or hear it on the radio."

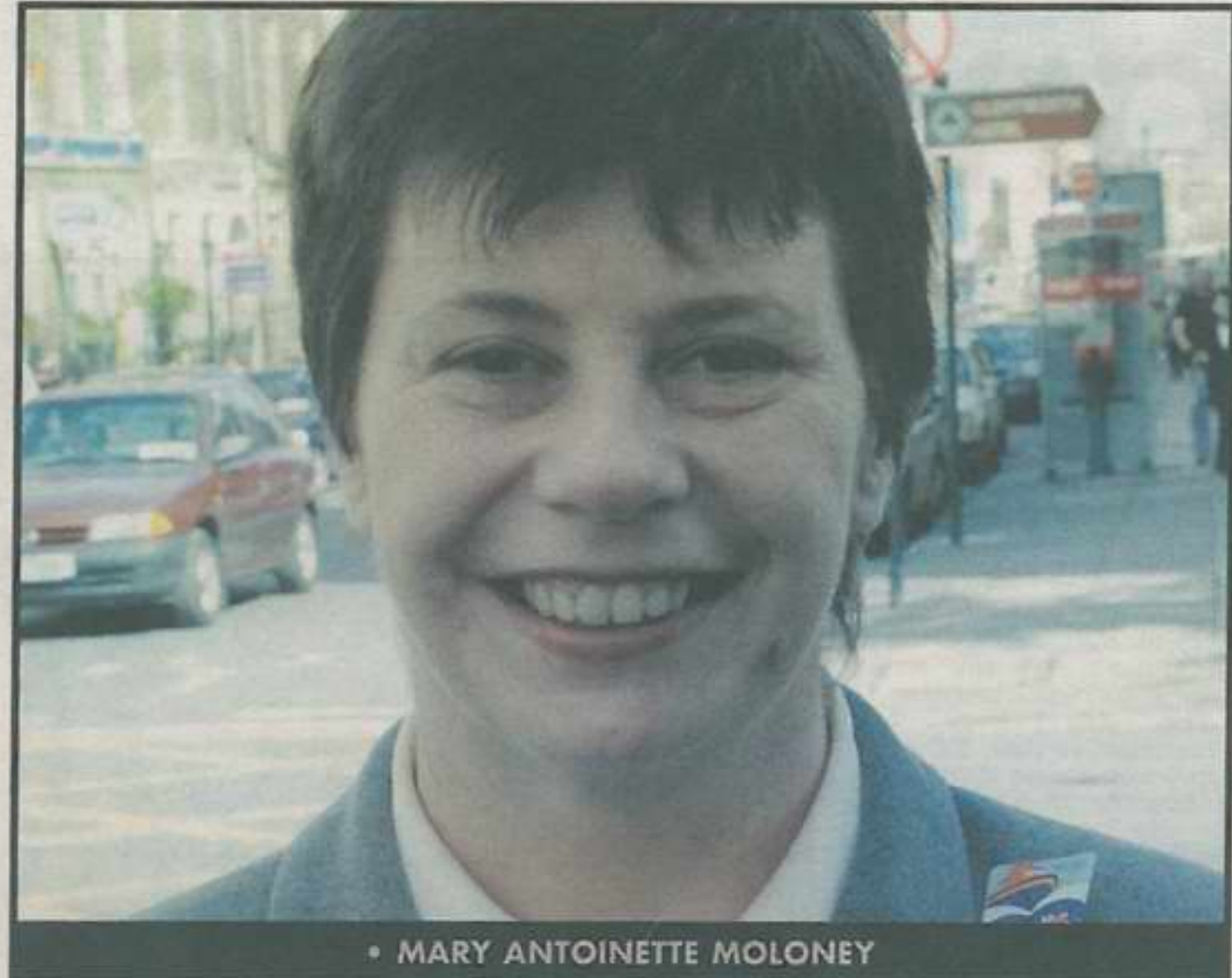
Fr O'Mahony went on to relate that "the initial publicity subsequently became a real difficulty for me."

The kidnappers did make contact with him within a couple of days through a tape.

Dr Tiede Herrema told Fr O'Mahony later during a round of golf in Castletroy how disappointed he was that the kidnappers ordered through him that the Ferenka company be closed. Fr O'Mahony believed the closure to be "only for a specific duration." As for the subsequent efforts this episode had on the life of Fr O'Mahony, he went on to relate: "it catapulted me more into the international arena, and was also the reason for my later involvement in other involuntary incarceration causes in Southern Italy and in Central America."

As well as the negotiations which went on to secure the safe release of Dr Herrema, contingency plans had to be prepared. Dr Stephen Flynn was involved in these contingency plans. He gave me the following account of his Ferenka experience in this regard. The plans "were more or less finalised and clarified when the siege started in Monasterevin." He recalled getting a call on a weekday night "to go immediately to Monasterevin." Dr Herrema had been located. Dr Flynn recalled in being a "very foggy, misty night getting up there."

"There was quite a lot of confusion around the place meeting various guards and also emergency procedures which were in place. There was a great encampment of all the press and they had bonfires lit."



• MARY ANTOINETTE MOLONEY

He also recalled a private ambulance service which was run by a man called Gleeson in Dublin. There were one or two ambulances permanently there during the siege available if Dr Herrema was released or if there were any injuries. There was only one injury during the siege itself.

Dr Flynn recalled going to the Ambassador Hotel in Kill where he met with the Garda Commissioner, Des O'Malley, a representative of the company, a representative of the Dutch Embassy and somebody from the Army. They were all working out these plans.

On November 7, Dr Herrema was freed. Dr Flynn recalled:

"On his release he did not go to the Curragh Camp but instructed his driver to take him straight to the Dutch

Embassy as he felt he didn't need medical attention. Again it was a very misty night."

"I remember driving up late at night to the Curragh Camp with special instructions to identify yourself etc."

However, as Dr Herrema was not there, Dr Flynn was directed to the Embassy.

It was not part of the original plan "but ultimately we got as far as the Embassy and then I saw him that night." The doctor went on to describe Dr Herrema as "a man of great inner strength."

After his ordeal, Dr Herrema was suffering from some minor injuries; "he had injured his hand and a broken tooth but apart from that mercifully he was fine."