LIMERICKMAN MIKE KELLY, 33, told the Limerick Leader this week how, through the influence of his father, Michael J. Kelly’s C., Southill, he renounced 17 years of crime and alcoholism. He was contemplating suicide as an easy way out when, last month, Fr. Young, admitted Mike, who spent 10 of the 17 years in prison, “I’ve come to see Fr. Young, I’ve given up alcohol for the sake of the people around me.”

One of a family of 13 and a native of Prospect, Mike said of his life as a criminal: “I lived like an animal and had a terrible hatred for society.”

Describing his school days at St. Brigid’s in North Limerick, he told the Leader: “I grew from the age of 14, living from the streets and was arrested, I was let out of prison when I was 14, I was left on the streets and I was a boy.”

Petty crime
At the age of 14, Mike with his friends tried to rob a man in the city. He said: “I was at that time that I first became in contact with the guards, in relation to petty crime.”

In March 1946, at the age of 15, Mike was arrested for the first time on charges of petty crime, seven of which were suspended, on condition that he be good behaviour for five years, on a charge of intent to endanger life.

In 1951, when he was serving his third three months in prison, Young was appointed to the visiting committee of Limerick Prison by the then Minister for Justice, Mr. Michael Noonan, T.D.

From the age of 17, Mike said, “I was on a special diet and was not allowed to eat meat.” He continued: “I was allowed to drink, but not to eat meat.”

Asked if his drinking habits led him to crime, he explained: “I did not have a mind of my own and I drank, but nobody forced me to do the things I did. It was easy to drink the juice.”

Even while he said he still continued to cause trouble, “I was very depressed at this time in 1964 and my marriage was broken up. I was drinking and smoking continuously.”

The following Sunday, Fr. Young returned to Limerick Prison, and in the governor’s office told Mike that his father had died suddenly that morning. Through the then Minister for Justice, Michael Noonan, Young arranged for Mike’s temporary release from prison.

“At that moment I was a changed man,” Mike said.

On the evening of his release, he was taken to Fr. Young’s home in the city, and again talked with him for an hour.

Governor
During this time, the governor of Limerick prison, Mr. Limerick mother of four, Mrs. Griffiths, who travelled to Venice this Wednesday to represent Ireland in the European Chamber of Commerce, was impressed by the Italian women’s competence and professionalism.

She was accompanied on the trip to Venice by Mr. D. O’Donnell, president of the Irish Women’s Association, and her husband, Dr. Michael O’Donnell.


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