

Martin mystery prompts new police appeal

by Bernard Johnston

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THE MYSTERIOUS disappearance of Hollywood man Martin Kelly has prompted a fresh police appeal for information as the third anniversary approaches of the day he vanished without trace.

The PSNI appeal is the latest attempt to find any clue at all about what became of Martin, now 24, since he went missing for no apparent reason from outside a Belfast bar on January 1 2006.

The new information appeal has been welcomed and echoed by Martin's family, with his father Raymond insisting that they will never give up hope of discovering what has happened to him.

Raymond Kelly has stressed that even one tiny piece of information could prove to be the first part of the jigsaw which ultimately completes the full picture of what has become of his son.

Police investigating the disappearance of Martin, whose 25th birthday is in March, issued their latest appeal for information about his case as a missing person to the Spectator yesterday (Wednesday).

Their appeal began with a brief outline of the facts which are already known about his movements in the hours prior to his disappearance outside a bar in the docks area of Belfast.

It said, "Martin, who worked as a plumber and a part time bar man in the Priory Inn at Hollywood, worked on New Year's Eve 2006 and then went on to two house parties with friends.

NEW YEAR'S DAY

"On New Year's Day he and his friends went to Pat's Bar in Garmoyle Street to watch a football match.

"The friends left and Martin remained in the bar talking to other customers. He left at about 7.10pm and has not been seen since.

"Martin, who is about 6ft 1in tall and of slim build with short dark hair, was wearing a black 'Guinness' T-shirt and blue jeans.

"Over the past three years police have carried

out a full and thorough investigation into Martin's disappearance and have carried out extensive underwater and land searches.

"Police remain committed and determined to discovering what happened to Martin and to bringing closure to his family.

"Detectives will continue to follow up all new lines of enquiry and any new information."

Martin's father Raymond echoed the police appeal for information, urging anyone to come forward with anything which could be helpful to the police, no matter how small it seems to them.

He said, "In particular I would appeal to the witnesses who were with Martin in the bar that night to revisit the scene in their minds to see if they can jog their memories in any way.

NOT TOO LATE

"We don't want people to think that because it is now almost three years down the line that there is no point in coming forward, that it is too late in some way or another to do anything.

"As far as we are concerned everything is still to play for here and I would appeal for anyone with any scrap of information, no matter how small, to let us know about it, whatever it is.

"It could be that someone considers what they know, or have seen, to be of little or no importance or even irrelevant, but they should let others be the judge of that and come forward.

"If anyone has a problem with doing so to the police for any reason they can still give the information through a variety of other channels.

"For example they could go to a priest or a minister or contact the Missing Persons Helpline. The free phone number for that is 0800 700 700."

It is also now known that a new police officer has recently taken over Martin's case and Raymond Kelly is hoping to have a meeting with him in the next week or so.

Martin, an apprentice plumber and part-time barman in the Old Priory Inn in Hollywood, was last seen on January 1 2006.

He had spent New Year's Eve working in the Hollywood bar and was celebrating the New Year with friends in Pat's Bar in Belfast's Clarendon Dock the next day.

Martin was last seen when he left the bar at about 7.15pm, possibly intending to return to his home in the Kinnegar area of Hollywood.

Exhaustive land and sea searches and a high profile publicity campaign across Britain and

Ireland have so far failed to turn up any clues as to what happened to him.

The young Hollywood man definitely had everything to live for and was in the prime of his life.

He had embarked on a promising apprenticeship and supplemented that income with part-time work in the Hollywood bar. He hoped one day to buy a property abroad.

Just a few years prior to his disappearance Martin, then aged 17-18, had worked in an orphanage in Africa and aspired to return there to help again.

Just a few nights before his disappearance Martin attended a party in Carmichaels of Hollywood where he was seen chatting, joking and laughing with friends.

There are only theories as to what has become of the young Hollywood man who was 21 when he disappeared.

Could he have fallen into the docks and tragically drowned, with his body becoming trapped or snagged under the water in some way?

Could he have lost his memory after being innocently injured in some way or attacked by persons unknown?

Searches were conducted by police and other divers of the harbour near where Martin disappeared.

Hundreds of volunteers joined extensive searches along the shores of Belfast Lough and the marshlands, known as the Kinnegar Lagoons, which border the harbour estate.

At one point a specially trained dog, which can sniff out evidence of human remains in the water, was used in additional searches of the harbour.

Martin's family members conducted their own relentless search for any scrap of information as to what has become of him.

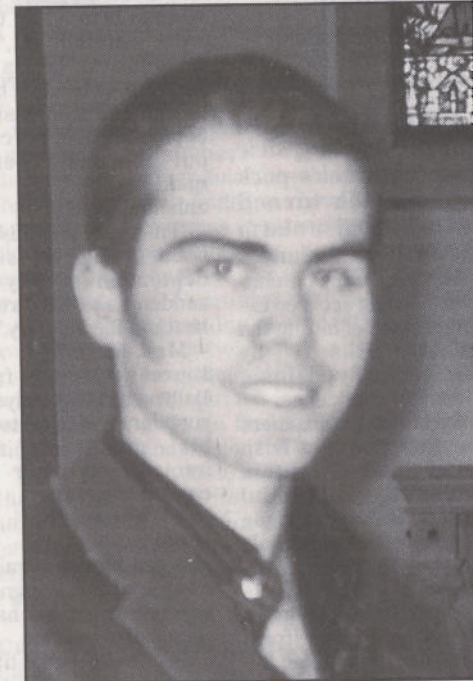
The searches have so far been in vain.

JOURNEY

His mum Karen embarked on her own month long search mission to highlight his case across England, Scotland and Wales.

Her trip, during which she fell ill with suspected heart trouble, publicised his case in 14 cities with accompanying TV, radio and newspaper information appeals.

The journey was funded with the proceeds of two charity tribute concerts which were held for Martin in his home town and which raised over



Martin Kelly.

£12,000.

Martin's dad Raymond extended his own search for his missing son to the south of the border.

He has gone to the Republic on a number of occasions in search of any scrap of information, including trips to Dublin, Limerick and Clare.

Martin Kelly is described as being six feet one inch tall and of slim build with short dark black hair.

When last seen almost two years ago he was wearing a black Guinness T-shirt and a pair of blue jeans.

Further information can be obtained via www.ourmartyn.com

The investigation into Martin's case is being conducted by the PSNI at Musgrave Street station in Belfast. It can be contacted on 0845 600 8000.