

## THE TATTOO

THETATTOO@GMAIL.COM

MAKING A PERMANENT IMPRESSION SINCE 1994

VOLUME 12 No. 24

## Limerick's dangers worry teens

By MARESE HEFFERNAN  
The Tattoo

Beneath the surface of a seemingly friendly and productive Irish city lies the grim reality of drug scandals, assault and murder.

Construction of impressive new buildings, efforts to preserve scenic places of interest and the creation of new tourist attractions often conceal the bleak truth about Limerick, Ireland's third largest city.

But for many teens living in the city and its suburbs, Limerick's dangers cannot be smoothed over so easily - they're a part of life.

"When I'm on my own [in Limerick] I feel quite nervous," said Leah Hughes, 15. "I feel really aware of the fact that I might be robbed or attacked. When you've lived here as long as I have, you tend to know what kind of people to be wary of."

Marese Heffernan / The Tattoo  
Henry Street, Limerick, Ireland

Crime in Limerick city frequently dominates the news, and around Ireland, the county has gained the unfavorable nickname "Stab City."

Despite her fears about Limerick, Hughes objects to the nickname.

"I don't think [this nickname] is fair because Limerick isn't the only place where people get stabbed," said Hughes. "Also, many people don't look at all the facts before giving the city a very general nickname."

So how did the county get such a bleak epithet and reputation?

"I think that the cause for Limerick's reputation is many years of crime and toughness," said Suzi Newman, 13, who has lived on the outskirts of Limerick city all her life. "If you read *Angela's Ashes*, you can sense a trace of modern Limerick. People in the city are just rough and raw, and some of them

act like their parents never taught them anything. I believe that these people are totally to blame for what Limerick has become."

Newman isn't alone. Teenagers are exposed more than anyone to Limerick's cruelties and many have strong views about their city. Some feel afraid to be alone there.

Too many Limerick teenagers drop out of school, go off the rails and become involved with smoking, drinking and drugs at a young age.

"There is a lot of opportunity in Limerick to smoke and drink," said Laurie Guinane, 15. "Sometimes in the city you get offered drugs and cigarettes, so they are easy for teens to get our hands on. A major problem is teenagers dropping out of school. This happens so often once teens reach the legal age of 16, and sometimes even before."

The result, according to some teens, is that walking on the streets of Limerick can be frightening, especially if they happen to come upon some of the city's youth. Avoiding eye contact is crucial in those situations in order to avoid a confrontation.

"Teenagers in Limerick can be scary and tough," said Guinane. "Sometimes, if you even look at another girl your age, she will

threaten you or shout abuse at you. It's tough when our entire age group is branded as arrogant and selfish, when it's really only that handful."

"I feel scared walking down Limerick roads," said Newman, "and I've lived here since I was born!"

Some say the problems in Limerick are centered around the city, and that the county area has nothing to do with any of these issues.

"It's mainly the city that's very bad," said Hughes. "But some areas

"Teenagers in Limerick can be scary and tough."  
— Laurie Guinane, 15

that were once very respectable are becoming dangerous, too. The urban lifestyle is spreading to all areas of the county."

Cops on the streets of Limerick also have concerns.

"Security is much tighter and there is more patrol around the city than the country and county areas," said Limerick Garda Garry Browne, a city police officer.

According to Browne, police work in Limerick is tougher than in other parts of Ireland.

"I fear for my own safety as a garda when I'm caught in the middle of a fight with an armed drunken person," Browne said. "House break-ins are most common in the city. There are more problems in Limerick [than in the rest of the country]. There are more murders that are harder to solve, and we have to do harder work that is more dangerous."

Some people argue that

crime in Limerick is over-emphasized by the media.

"Often, they make a bigger deal of a robbery in Limerick than in a quiet county like Mayo or Leitrim," said Hughes. "On the other hand, there is more crime in Limerick than in other counties, so maybe they're just telling it like it is."

Guinane's mother, Deborah Guinane, has lived in the center of Limerick for more than 30 years. According to her, the look of the city has improved, but the problems are worse.

"It was the same as growing up anywhere else, I think. It has become more dangerous in recent years, although I must say it looks a lot prettier and more respectable," Deborah Guinane said. "Going into the city is putting your life in your hands. There is a major danger element."

Apart from the troubles with teenage crime, Limerick has a huge problem dealing with a feud between two tough, powerful families with grudges against each other so deep they will do nearly anything to eliminate one another.

This dark and underlying, Mafia-type world of drugs and hate often leads to shootings, stabbings and killings.

Though the feuding has lessened in recent years, some people remain worried.

Newman said the feuds "are pretty pointless. It's just people fighting and getting killed for stupid reasons. The police need to do something about it. It's annoying because everyone in Limerick knows the things that are happen-



Marese Heffernan / The Tattoo

Cruises Street in Limerick, Ireland

ing. We know the places it happens and the names of the families. But still nothing is being done about it."

Deborah Guinane said the family feuds "are one of the major problems in Limerick. They've been going on for years, though they weren't as prominent in the news as when I was growing up. I think they are a major factor in the city's downfall."

Some of Limerick's 175,000 residents don't think the problems in their town will ever be resolved. Hughes, who is one of them, is ready to leave her hometown for a better life.

"People aren't going to change now," Hughes said. "It's been this way here for years. I can't wait to move, though. I don't want to be sucked into that lifestyle. I don't want my children to be like so many people here, and I don't want to spend my life in the grotty Limerick streets. I want to get out of here!"



Marese Heffernan / The Tattoo

This statue in Limerick represents the sports of rugby and hurling.



Marese Heffernan / The Tattoo

Accordion player on a Limerick side street

## It's Christmastime in the city

## Santa at Macy's makes the season

By ZACH BROKENROPE  
The Tattoo

Like anyone visiting New York City for the first time, my expectations were high when I set foot in the Big Apple last Christmas.

Little did I know how those expectations would be exceeded as I marveled at the sights and sounds of the city at Christmastime.

My first taste of true New York Christmas tradition was navigating the maze that is the Macy's department store on 34<sup>th</sup> Street at Herald



Tattoo photo

When *The Tattoo's* Zach Brokenrope landed a big interview with Santa Claus at Macy's in New York last year, Santa turned the questions onto our young reporter, asking what he wanted for Christmas. "World peace," Brokenrope said. "Good for you," said Santa. Sadly, he couldn't deliver. Maybe this year...

Square.

My mission: find and sit on the lap of one of the world's most famous men. Yes, I'm talking about Santa Claus.

My journey through Macy's eighth-floor Santa Land began when I entered a small room made to look like a train. On the walls were images from *The Polar Express*.

Leaving the train, I then followed a path through a glittering replica of the North Pole.

After several quick photo opportunities in front of oversized candy canes and gingerbread houses, I arrived at the cottage of the big man himself.

Now, I've seen some pretty good Santa Claus impersonators in my day, but nothing has ever compared to what I saw sitting in that department store.

The man who played Santa could have possibly been the real thing, if I didn't know better. His hair was gray and he sported a real beard. His nose and cheeks shined a rosy red, and his red suit stood as a testament to the traditional Santa image, embroidered in gold string and soft to the touch.

So what did I wish for as I sat on Santa's lap? World peace, of course.

After leaving Macy's, I stopped at each outdoor display window and carefully inspected the scene inside. Despite the frigid temperatures, the windows - showing detailed scenes from the classic Christmas film "Miracle on 34<sup>th</sup> Street" - were worth lingering over. Each window displayed frozen moments from the film using richly decorated dioramas to tell the story.

My last stop in New York was at the gigantic Christmas tree that sat perched in Rockefeller Center - a classic testament to why the city is one of the world's most desirable places to live and visit.

As music played lightly above the ice skaters below the tree, I stood in wonder. Large statues of angels and nutcrackers stood guarding the tree, some blowing silent horns as the lights on the tree shone brightly.

As I stood there, I began to understand why people love New York at this time of year. Santa, the big Christmas tree and the shop windows harkened back to a simpler time.

Even though New York is all about hustle and bustle, I found that sitting on Santa's lap and standing under a Christmas tree while carols played could still make me smile and enjoy the quieter moments in life.

## Best view in the Big Apple

By TEAGUE NEAL  
The Tattoo

Rising 102 stories above the never-ending bustle of the streets of New York is the Empire State Building.

Featured in more than 90 movies - including the famous scene in which King Kong climbs it - the skyscraper is a world famous symbol of Manhattan.

And visitors to the Big Apple shouldn't miss it.

Entering the Art Deco building from the street, tourists see a glitzy lobby lined with European marble and a large aluminum outline of the entire building hanging on the wall.

Buy a ticket - preferably beforehand at [www.esbnyc.com](http://www.esbnyc.com) - to go up to the observation deck.

After passing through the airport-style security check, it's into one of the glamorous elevators that whisk visitors to the 80<sup>th</sup> floor, where large windows offer stunning views of New York below.

Photographers will snap a picture of you in front of a mural of the building, and then it's on to the 86<sup>th</sup> floor observation deck.

There, after descending a ramp, travelers are outside one of the most special places on the planet.

Beyond the Art Deco gates are the skyscrapers, landmarks and atmosphere of the sleepless city - the Chrysler Building, Rockefeller Center, the huge expanse of Central Park, the Statue of Liberty on her post at Ellis Island and everywhere below are seas of honking yellow taxis and streams of traffic.

The Hudson River seems to separate the steel and glass that encroach upon its shores.

The views are absolutely stunning, no matter which way you look. On a clear day, it's possible to see five states: New York, New Jersey, Connecticut, Massachusetts and Pennsylvania.

Make sure to peer up at the building's spire and television tower that reach even higher.

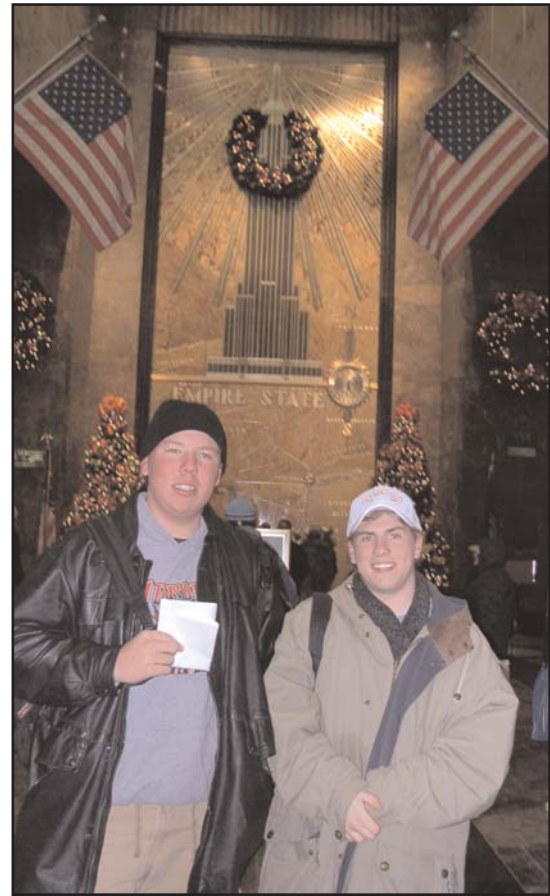
While on one of the highest manmade points in the world - it was once the highest - visitors can slip inside the gift shop and make a call anywhere around the world to tell a special some-

one the extraordinary place they are calling from.

The Empire State Building is frequently lit up. At Christmas, for example, it is awash in red and green.

The Empire State Building, open every day until midnight, deserves at least an hour and a half of even the most harried traveler's time.

Visit this terrific tower at 350 Fifth Avenue and take it all in.



Tattoo photo

Tattoo staffers Zach Brokenrope of Aurora, Neb. and Teague Neal of Oakville, Ontario in the lobby of the Empire State Building.

WWW.READTHETATTOO.COM

The best teen journalism in the world. For questions, comments or to join, contact advisors Steve Collins and Jackie Majerus at (860) 523-9632.