

Here is a profile of Carmelo Soraci, once locked behind the bars of prison and his own cynicism; then a wise chaplain freed him from both and brought beauty to gray penitentiaries



reached out to him when things were darkest. He will to us, too."

Well, Carmelo figured, what can a guy like me lose? With Father Hyland, he plotted a way to raise funds—the way he knew best. Using a blank check, Carmelo "forged" it for \$50,000, signing it, "The People of the World."

It was a publicity stunt, of course, and a good one. Within three months, charitable persons from all over the country had "made good" the check, some with notes saying, "I am one of 'The People of the World' for whom you signed the check, so I feel obligated."

Soraci was almost beginning to believe in life again as he started, at last, on his real work, painting the chapel. The first mural was to be St. Dismas on the cross. Carpenters fashioned a cross, and an inmate posed. But Soraci's sketches were stiff and unnatural.

"I was ready to give up," he recalls, "when I thought—'Why, St. Dismas, why?' Then I knew why. The model was propped up on the cross by a barrel. The body muscles were slack, soft. I kicked away the barrel, and the model pulled tight in his bonds, his tendons taut. I sketched the vivid lines quickly, and in minutes had the drawing."

"Wonderful!" Father Hyland said. "Now start on the Stations of the Cross in stained glass."

"But I never worked in glass!"
"Better learn—no more money."

FATHER HYLAND prevailed on a New York expert to give Carmelo a two-week course in an intricate craft passed down from father to son for centuries. Carmelo, once the cynic and self-doubter, approached the impossible with quiet assurance. Four years later, he finished the giant project. Appraisers from Rambusch and Co., which had furnished the teacher-expert, valued the windows at \$150,000.

"A 'miracle!'" Father Hyland told Carmelo. "And we'll have a second 'miracle,' Carmelo—you'll see!"

Carmelo didn't understand, but he believed this time.

Carmelo was transferred back to Sing Sing. He executed 10 full-sized windows there in the Catholic and Protestant chapels in addition to several smaller insets, marvels of workmanship, each constructed of 3,000 minute splinters of glass in mosaic fashion. This work, too, was valued at \$150,000.

In 1949, Carmelo was paroled. He entered the free world full of faith in his tomorrows, and for a time that faith was justified.

"But parole isn't real freedom," Carmelo explains. "I worked for Rambusch part-time, and even built my own business. Then I fell in love. I got married without consulting my parole officer. That's a violation, and I went back to Sing Sing—after 10 years of freedom."

WHEN THE gates closed again, Carmelo, whose greatest crime was forgeries totaling \$66, had every right to sink into the cynicism of years before. Instead, he went to the chapel where his windows reflect the glory of God. In their jewel-like light, he prayed.

Outside, people were fighting for the man who could only pray—attorney William J. Hiller, Sing Sing chaplain Father McKinney, a big New York newspaper. Finally, Judge Edward Thompson, whose jurisdiction Soraci came under, visited Sing Sing to see the prisoner's work. When the judge left, he was willing to recognize Soraci as a rare man, one who had found faith where so many others lose it.

Last February, Soraci was declared a free man. He is back with his wife and the art work he loves.

"I know now what Father Hyland meant when he talked about that 'second miracle,'" Soraci says. "He wanted it for me, my freedom. I'd like to think there will be other 'miracles' from those chapel windows. Maybe they'll give inspiration to some hopeless guy, as they did to me, and start him on the way back to freedom."

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