

# Abuse fuelled alcoholism, court told

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The soft, lilting voice of a witness in his mid-70s set an eerie tone in Courtroom No. 2 at Newfoundland Supreme Court in St. John's Thursday as he sang a taunt from several decades ago.



Barb Sweet/The Telegram

Justice Alphonsus Faour, shown in court Wednesday, is presiding over the Mount Cashel civil trial.

"(Witness's first name) wants to be teacher's pet, teacher's pet, teacher's pet. He wants to be cuddled and cuddled, close up to (Christian Brother's name) as he can get," the man sang, repeating what another Mount Cashel resident would recite to him.

This rhyme he sang to a courtroom of lawyers, Justice Alphonsus Faour and the usual daily spectators — among them, Roman Catholic officials and two former Mount Cashel residents of his era.

The witness has claimed in testimony already that he was repeatedly fondled by a Christian Brother.

Thursday, he said his marriage failed because of those abuse experiences at Mount Cashel, and a once-promising career was derailed by alcoholism as he drank to forget what happened to him.

He spent 11 years — beginning in 1949 — at the infamous St. John's boys orphanage, run by the Catholic lay order Christian Brothers.

He is the third former resident to testify among four who are test cases in a civil trial representing about 60 men who resided there as boys from the 1940s to the 1960s.

They allege that the Catholic Church — the Episcopal Corp. of St. John's — is liable for the physical and sexual abuse of boys by certain Christian Brothers. The church denies that, saying it wasn't running the facility.

Despite the taunt from the fellow Mount Cashel boy who did not like him, the witness said he never talked of the abuse with other boys and initially denied it to police decades later.

The man said he might have had a different life — like colleagues in his profession — had it not been for the abuse.

"How would your life be different if someone had stepped in and stopped that abuse or it never occurred in the first place?" claimants' lawyer Will Hiscock asked him.

"Everyday life has ups and downs ... but my life would have been normal. What I mean by normal, I would have been married with kids, home, steady job, you know, happy, not living in boarding houses or being tossed from here to there or drinking ... just basically unhappy and depressed," the witness said.

While he married and had a son, his wife eventually left him for another man because of his inability to perform sexually, he said.

He said he would just turn away at night and wasn't interested in sex. He never told her about Mount Cashel. (On Wednesday, he had told the court that he would try to get a top bunk at night so he could turn away from the Christian Brother who he said would fondle him.)

The witness said he did not blame his wife for leaving — he came home one day and she and the children — their son and his stepkids — were gone.

"She knew there was something wrong with me," he said. "It just fell apart."

Later Thursday, he told the court he has not seen his son in a dozen years and has no idea if his son is married or has children.

The man — who with his two brothers was brought by train by their father to the orphanage from their home in central Newfoundland when their mother died in childbirth and their grandmother became too old to look after them — also told a heartbreaking story of when he and his twin were taken from class at the orphanage and informed that their father had died.

When they went back to class, he said, they were each told to stand in a corner and could take their desks if they stopped crying.

The witness told Hiscock he took his first drink at around age 21 and remembers telling his pal, "This is great."

But the man said he eventually became an alcoholic. He would go to rehab in St. John's, he said, but after six days there and back in a boarding house, he was back on the booze.

He said the longest he had spent off alcohol was during a year's stay with his sister after attending Humberwood rehab facility in Corner Brook.

Eventually, the man went to Alcoholics Anonymous.

After the early 1980s, he said, he relied mostly on social assistance to live.

But he conceded to church lawyer Chris Blom that he could not adjust to a computer program that was required in his field. The man also acknowledged he worked pretty steadily for about 20 years after he got out of the orphanage.

Blom challenged the witness on reports from psychological interviews as part of the case in which he made statements about his father and an uncle being alcoholics. The line of questions suggested the disease is hereditary to his family.

But the witness said his older sister told him he was mistaken about his father, and he did not know his uncle well enough to speculate.

He also asked about his brother's drinking, and said that while the man's wife said he had bad hangovers, the witness does not think he was an alcoholic.

The man noted to Hiscock that his brother is also an abuse claimant.

Blom pointed out that in hospital reports from years ago, the witness attributed his marriage breakup to financial difficulties, and did not cite Mount Cashel as a cause of problems in his life.

But the man told his own lawyer that no one was openly talking about Mount Cashel abuse until news reports in the late 1980s led to the Hughes Inquiry.

Blom also asked the witness if he used compensation he got from the Christian Brothers' bankruptcy to get treatment and counselling. The man said he did not.

The witness did, however, back up testimony of the first witness in the case, who detailed a story of starved boys stealing scraps from a vat of swill before the discarded food from city hospitals was fed to pigs. A St. John's man routinely collected the swill — of patients' leftovers — and brought it to the orphanage by truck.

The witness said there was a wet vat and a dry vat and he would go for the bits of toast in the dry barrel.

While there were dairy cows on the Mount Cashel farm, most of the milk went to city schools, and the orphanage boys got little of it, he said.

While he tried to do his homework to avoid strappings — and so did not get as many as others may have — he said the boys would harden their hands playing handball, and when the Brother beating them caught on, they were beaten on their forearms instead.

He was beaten with a ruler, however, he said, because he was left-handed. He would get whacked unless he used his right hand to write.

One time, the man said, a boy was ordered to pull down his pants in front of everyone and was beaten so hard, he soiled himself.

The man, like other former residents in the John Doe case, cannot be identified due to a publication ban.

Follow @bsweettweets and #mountcashelciviltrial for live updates today from the courtroom.

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## **Man links orphanage abuse to alcoholism, failed marriage**

### **Mount Cashel civil trial enters third day**

Courtroom No. 2 at Newfoundland Supreme Court in St. John's was gripped this morning with a soft-spoken man's testimony of marriage that he says failed because of his abuse experiences at Mount Cashel and a once-promising career derailed by alcoholism.

The man, now in his 70s, spent 11 years at the infamous St. John's boys orphanage, run by the Catholic lay order Christian Brothers.

It was an eerie atmosphere when the witness softly sang to the court one chilling song that a taunting fellow resident who disliked him would recite about him being a teacher's pet and wanting to be coddled by the Brother that he now claims was fondling him in his bunk many nights.

But the witness said he never told of the abuse to other boys and initially denied it to police decades later.

The man said he might have had a normal, happy life — not one of drinking, depression and boarding houses — had it not been for the abuse. Instead he said while he married and had a son, his wife eventually left him for another man because of his inability to perform sexually.

He said he would just turn away at night and wasn't interested in sex. (On Wednesday he had told the court that he would try to get a top bunk at night so he could turn away from the Brother who he said would fondle him.).

The witness said he did not blame his wife for leaving.

He is the third former resident to testify among four who are test cases representing about 60 men who resided there as boys from the period 1940s to 1960s.

They allege that the Catholic Church — the Episcopal Corp. of St. John's — is liable for the physical and sexual abuse of boys by certain Christian Brothers. The church denies that, saying it wasn't running the facility.

The man, who with three brothers were sent to the orphanage as their central Newfoundland mother had died in childbirth and their grandmother became too old to look after them, also told a heartbreaking story of he and his twin being taken from class at the orphanage and informed that his father had also died.

When they went back to class, he said they were each told to stand in a corner and could take their desks if they stopped crying.

The man told claimants' lawyer Will Hiscock he took his first drink at around age 21 and remembers telling his pal, "This is great."

But the witness said he eventually became an alcoholic. He would go to rehab here in St. John's, he said, but after six days there and back in a boarding house, he was back on the booze.

He said the longest he had spent off it was during a year's stay with his sister after attending Humberwood rehab facility in Corner Brook.

Eventually the man went to AA.

After the early 1980s, he said he relied on mostly social assistance for a living. But he conceded to church lawyer Chris Blom that he could not adjust to a computer program that was required in his field.

Blom has also been challenging the witness on reports from psychological interviews as part of the case that he made statements about his father and an uncle being alcoholics.

But he said his older sister told him he was mistaken about his father and he did not know his uncle well enough to speculate.

He was also asked about his brother's drinking and said while the man's wife said he had bad hangovers, the witness does not think he was an alcoholic.

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