

# Former Mount Cashel orphanage resident tested on memories

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The first of four former residents of the Mount Cashel orphanage to testify at a civil trial to determine whether the Roman Catholic Church Episcopal Corp. of St. John's, is liable for actions of the Christian Brothers, is being cross-examined today by the church's lawyer.



Toronto lawyer Chris Blom tested the man, now in his 70s, this morning on his memory of certain events, on his feelings toward his father for putting him and his four brothers in the orphanage and on his reasons for not pursuing a PhD in teaching.

The witness, 77, said he left the orphanage at age 15 with his best friend on Boxing Day 1955. The pair had no winter coats and dragged their few belongings in a cardboard box, tied with a rope, through the snow to the friend's grandmother's house. There had been a blizzard the night before and his friend was late getting back to the orphanage. According to the witness, his friend was held by the throat by one of the Brothers and got the "bejesus" beat out of him because of that tardiness.

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The witness took a chair and hit the Brother to defend his friend and the two of them were ordered out on Boxing Day, he said.

But Blom pointed out to the court that the movie the witness said the orphanage residents watched that night — said to be "Gunfight at the OK Coral" — was not released until a couple of years later.

Blom also noted that during the discovery interview process involved in the case, the man had said financial reasons played into his decision to not pursue a PhD. But he had told abuse claimants' lawyer Geoff Budden that it was because of self image.

The witness described how he felt dirty and unworthy as a result of physical and sexual abuse by some Brothers and a couple of employees at the orphanage between 1948-55.

He said he spent 20 years trying to get his wife to leave him because he felt he was way beneath her.

The witness said he could not remember saying anything about financial reasons for not going for the PhD, which he was encouraged to do by the U.S. university where he obtained his masters in education.

The man is the first witness of four test cases, representing about 60 former residents of the infamous orphanage from the 1940s to 1960s.

The complainants contend the RC church knew or ought to have known about abuse at the orphanage and was involved in its operation. But the church denies that.

Men involved in this case did get some compensation from the Christian Brothers, but lawyers say it was small and inadequate.

The Catholic lay order went bankrupt and action in this case against it was discontinued.

Follow @bsweettweets and #mountcashelciviltrial for live tweets from the courtroom at Newfoundland Supreme Court.