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*Michael was a pupil in the Crescent College in Limerick. Each Christmas the pupils performed an opera for the Good Shepherd residents. Here he recalls his memories of these visits to the Good Shepherds and of seeing children from the Mount orphanage being taken for walks.*

[Interview begins]

When I was a pupil in the Crescent College run by the Jesuits we used come here every Christmas. Every year we would put on an opera in the school and that opera then we would bring to the Good Shepherd convent. It was usually then closer to the New Year. It was all very...I suppose it was the ignorance of the time, but we didn't care. We were just led along without asking questions. We were put into a bus. We were brought down here. I think we entered from the other side, from the Pennywell side. I don't think I've ever come in this drive from Clare Street. So we would come in the back door. I always remember people there were always in the distance. I can never remember meeting anyone even though the hall would be full. You would have, as far as I remember; you would have nuns, old women and younger girls. I can actually half see them. They were just standing there. There was absolutely no communication as far as I can honestly remember. And they would come in and we would do the show and everybody enjoyed the show. It really seemed to be a big occasion at the time. After the show then there was always a big feast for us with biscuits and cakes and orange juice. I cannot remember who served us. I have no visual memory of whether some of the young girls were there. I actually have no idea. I don't ever remember being in contact with any of those people. There was always a gap between us. You know, we just didn't mix. We didn't say hello. They didn't come up and say they enjoyed the show. None of that happened as far as I can remember. It was like passing in the night now that I think of it. You know I have never once thought about this in my whole life until I met you that day recently.

We came down here a few times with a Fr Marmian who was a very good music teacher and a great entertainer. We used to have a great time and we drifted in and drifted out and left it behind us. This was back in the mid 1960s and that's what I remember being here. It's just funny that it was a big occasion but it was insignificant in our lives. You see, it's drifting in now, its amazing what you remember once you start. We used to come here with the laundry as well. I was born just down the road and we used to drop the laundry up and I think it used to be delivered back to us because we didn't have a car. I think I can remember walking up with my mother and giving in the laundry but even then it was *them and us* completely. You know you came into the counter. You handed in the laundry. It's where we were then, which was a very lonely and sad place for everyone. We weren't aware at all

what was going on or we weren't mature enough to deal with it. I think that was part of our problem. We weren't mature enough or we weren't allowed. Our religion didn't allow us or our education didn't allow us to question any of these things because the authorities were unquestionable.

We were always told if we were bold we'd be sent to Glin [industrial school]. That was a reform school and that was significant because it was us being sent there. And the idea if you didn't go to school you'd be sent to Glin was significant. It's only when the news started breaking or that you realise how ignorant we were. Most of it is down to sheer ignorance or not being mature enough, developed enough to question all this. I honestly don't blame individuals at all, it's much more collective than that. I mean as people we passed those streets every day of the week. I live in Ballinacurra and we had the orphanage out there, the Mount, and can I talk for a second about it, because it was the same thing. These girls on a Sunday used to be dressed up and walk out past our door. And there was always a black girl among them, which was unique. This is going back to 1960. I always remember my mother saying that we really should bring some of these out for Christmas. We never did which is probably the life story of every family around. But that school was only up the road from us, that orphanage. We never gave it a second thought. When they used [to] march out in double breast out Ballinacurra we'd stop and we'd look at them. It was for amusement. There was absolutely no thought *were these people happy. Where are they going to or coming from.* None of that came into it. And I think that was our generation. They'd walk two a breast and they all looked lovely off on their Sunday outing. To me they were as happy as Larry.

You couldn't talk to them. You see, you didn't want to either. This is the sad thing. Isn't this what it all comes down to really? We were there and we'd see them coming and we probably cleared the footpath that was probably our contribution. And they'd walk past and we'd see was the black girl there. There was no overtones or undertones or anything like that, or anything sexual, that'd be the farthest thought from our minds. We didn't even know what it was. But it was still just the viewing; just view them passing by us and never gave it a second thought. And we passed that orphanage every day - every day of the week. The Mount. It hasn't been mentioned that much but there was a woman who came on one of the programmes there when all this was breaking and she said she was abused in the Mount. And I felt guilty, I think, because she was just up the road from me. And none of us gave a damn. And if you did give a damn nobody would listen anyway in the 1960s. So what was it like in the 1950s? They had complete power. A parish priest that I know very well was chatting with me one night when all this was coming up. It was last year, 09 and he said 'we've made an awful mess of it. It's not all our fault. We were in homes and villages and we decided, maybe half of us, that we'd become a priest and the

day we said we'd become a priest everybody would be saluting you and they'd nearly be genuflecting in front of you and then you'd go away and you'd get ordained and you'd come back and you'd be the toast of the village and they'd all be saying 'oh there's Fr Johnny or Fr Something' and then he said you'd be made a parish priest and then they make you God. And unfortunately, he said, 'most of us believed it.' And he said you went in to a village and you had the bank manager, the local sergeant and the parish priest and his exact words. 'We had the holy family. And we could do what we liked and we lost the run of ourselves and that's what went wrong.' Now he's a lovely priest and I find with talking to all these priests out there, they are really hurt. But I honestly believe that they are gone back to where we were in the 60s. I don't think they were mentally equipped to take in all that was going on. They fascinate me. They never seem to take responsibility but in order to take responsibility for something you have to own it, haven't you. And they never owned that and the people who were really perverted? That was another element again and it was something we knew nothing about. I mean I grew up and I never heard of a paedophile. What we were told is don't go into the toilets when you go to the cinema which I always thought was rather a rash thing to say. I always remember being called aside, my friend's mother and my own mother saying you don't go into the toilets in the Savoy. Somebody was assaulted in the toilets but do you think they would say that to us. They wouldn't say don't talk to somebody. They wouldn't say don't let anyone touch you. They would say don't go to the toilets in the Savoy. You can go down the back lane. Do you know what I'm getting at? I'd say there were more people abused in this country than they even know. There is a very good friend of mine; we laugh about it now. She is a lovely lady and a fair old age now and she'd say he was a lovely neighbour. He'd always give you sweets but she always had to sit on his knee in order to get the sweets, you know, in her summer dress.

I see it as a completely collective thing. I think the government and the authorities are more to blame than the clergy because I don't think the clergy were mature enough. I don't think they were grown up enough. I don't think they were educated enough. I think men were put out into situations there that they had no idea how to deal with. And now they are blaming people for ignoring it. Everybody ignored it. We ignored it. We weren't interested really. And we didn't know what it was. We didn't know what sexual abuse was. We didn't even know what sex was, never mind sexual abuse. And I am convinced half the people who committed it didn't know what it was either.

It was just an animal instinct. They were deprived. These people were deprived but they were deprived of an education and that's where we have to step in as a unit and take responsibility. Individually they were sick individuals. I have no doubt about that but they were probably sick individuals that needed

care. You know what I mean. But I always remember [Father] Brendan Smith; the way the nun would bring the young girl in to him. He would arrive in the parlour and the girl would be brought to him. She'd be brought screaming to him and she'd be brought out screaming after him and I could not understand this. I have an aunt a nun so of course one day I had to say it to my aunt, and she did find it very hard to accept, being honest, but she said, 'it's very very simple,' she said, 'when you had a priest like that calling its an honour to have him in the convent'. You are brainwashed that the priest is superior and better than you and you didn't question that. And if it were a bishop he'd get a lot more if he wanted it. And that was just the culture. And that's much more recent. I think it's horrific. It's frightening actually. The priests were put up there and they were put up by the people and they are still there...

[Interview ends]