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*Pat grew up in a large family and lived close to the Good Shepherd Institution. As a child during the late 1960s he served Mass in the Good Shepherd church where the women and children went to Mass every morning. Later, when in secondary school, he had summer job working in the laundry in the delivery section. Here Pat shares his childhood memories of serving Mass, the women, and his time spent delivering laundry.*

[Interview begins]

I came from a family of ten – I have seven brothers and two sisters. My brother and myself served Mass in the Good Shepherd Convent. He was there before I was as he was two years older than me. When he finished I got in and we also worked there in the summer with the laundry as summer jobs when we went to school. It would be 1968, around that era.

So we used to serve Mass. We used to be up at half six in the morning and we'd serve Mass every second week. The Mass would be at seven o'clock and we'd have our breakfast there. Sr Olive [pseudonym] was one nun. I can't remember the other nun now. I was doing my Intercert, as it was called at the time, and I'd be the first into school every morning as a result of being up so early. We used to get lovely breakfasts – that's my memory and every Easter and every Christmas we used to get a báinín [Aran] sweater and two pounds – two brand new pounds. My memory is the girls coming up for communion – you'd be assisting the priest – and they were very shy and inhibited, young girls and older women and the nuns would be there. There would be a lot of people in the church you know when I think about it. They seemed to be happy enough. I didn't see anything but maybe it was innocence too, I was only thirteen or fourteen.

Then I worked in the laundry in the summer time and they'd be working hard there. I used to deliver the laundry with a few guys. One guy, he played for Ireland actually. He was the driver. Two of my other brothers worked there as well. But the fact that we were from a big family I'd say they gave us the work. That's what I think – I could be wrong.

There was one girl in particular that I remember, she was the youngest of them, Tracy [pseudonym] was her name. I won't divulge the rest of her name. My eldest brother was a teacher, he got the scholarship in Limerick and he gave her grinds and she went on to third level. I remember her being the youngest there. She used to come up to our house for the grinds.

The main thing that stuck in my mind was their shyness and they all working in the place. All you'd hear were the machines going and you'd get this smell – I always remember the smell there. It was kind of like damp clothes, which is kind of obvious but I always remember the smell of the laundry and then they'd be putting them through the pressers and the dryers. But they worked hard there that's all I'll say. I don't know whether they got paid or what was the story but I think they were well looked after accommodation wise. In later years then I remember seeing a lot of the women – they are still there – but they moved out of the place into houses next door. Pennywell are the houses adjoining where they are living now where they have all moved in to now. The neighbours were very nice to them. Some of them would come over and visit. There was a good community there.

But I remember all the priests there. They used to come in different times to say the Mass. I remember later meeting a priest and he saying that, 'ye were from a big family' he says 'we got ye in there so ye'd be fed'. That was a comment he made. We were well looked after at home.

We didn't interact with the women. It was mostly the nuns. The women were kept behind the scenes really. They were very shy; you know, when they would see you coming. But they were going all the time. But I didn't see anything, to be quiet honest with you. I didn't see any kind of cruelty but all I noticed is they were doing hard work. You would know they were kind of institutionalised, you'd know the way they dressed – these little boots on them and the clothes were very, how would you put it, not fashionable clothes. I don't think they wore a uniform. All I can remember is that they were clothes that were kind of - institutional clothes I'd call them really – Kimono's – that's what I call them. They were brown, thick material, heavy-duty type of material. They never mixed you know. They'd come up – I'd be holding the baton for the communion. That time we used to hold out a baton in case the communion would fall – and they'd be very shy.

My mother used to tell me it was a place where people went that had no parents or no homes. That's what we were told. So later it came out that a lot of them were single mothers. I didn't know that. A lot of that came out after. There was kind of, how would you put it, I never had a fear going down there but I remember when you'd press the bell in the morning to go in and one of the nuns – it was like something you'd see in a film, where people would be let go after years of being there. You'd see them leaving with their cases – they are leaving the convent and the nun goes to the door and she opens the door. It was like getting out of jail. It reminded me of that. I remember there'd be fierce security that time. The walls were high.

As the years went on they opened up the place. But I remember you'd press the bell. There were two big timber gates and you pressed the bell and the nun would come. I used to walk down a kind of laneway from our house. It would be pitch black. There'd be lights there but it was dark and you pressed the bell then and you'd wait and the nun would open the door and in you'd go then and you'd be brought in to this area to change for Mass. I used to have my case and you'd have your soutane [religious garment] and you'd change and the priest would arrive then and say Mass. But it was all kind of a closed-door type of set up.

I came in from the Pennywell side. You'd be brought across I remember through a kind of courtyard, through kind of an arch. I remember then you'd get the odd funeral there and you'd say Mass and you'd get paid – there'd be a little envelope left with 50 bob for you. There was one case I remember: Fr Power was the priest there at the time and there was a funeral Mass there. There was very few at it. It was one of the girls that stayed down there you know. I think there was a graveyard down there as well. I did one or two funerals there.

The only time you'd see the public in there is if there was a funeral or something, if somebody died there. That's the only time I remember that. Some of the women would be slightly handicapped. You could see from her appearance – you know the way you'd see the teeth protruding. I remember one woman used to come up from Mass like that. Now there was another woman then not physically but you just kind of knew that they weren't normal. I sensed that as a young fella. It was never really discussed much when you came home. My mother would just say, 'how did you get on?' It was never any stigma with my parents, which was lovely I thought.

The thing that stuck in my mind all the time was Mary, the girl coming up for tuition. She was kind off a new breed you know. The nuns are big into education and they educated her and pushed her on – it was all about Mary because she was bright. How she ended up in there I don't know whether her parents died or whether she had a child, I don't know. She was too young to have a child but she could have been a prodigy, brought up there. She was a lovely person and she looked to me like that she came from a good class.

There were a few of us then that worked in the laundry. We used to drop the laundry off and we'd pick it up. But I remember they'd have it wrapped in brown paper delivering to all the hotels at the time in Limerick. It was big business you know. It was a big money spinner and all the work was done by the, what would you call them, the inmates, if you want to use that word. But I remember it now – it was a

huge professional set up. We would deliver on a Thursday and Friday and we'd collect on a Monday and Tuesday – all around, the hotels and stuff. They had about four vans on the road. The nuns were running it. I remember then you got paid in a small brown envelope. It was great that time when you were going to school to get cash, you'd get your wages, to the button. There was a little shed or office then down the back, all the money was left there in the drawer and your name would be on in and you'd take it out. Joe was one of the van drivers. John was another, a fella from Murrough. Another man lived up near us then. All lovely men. They were full time drivers – deliverymen. They used to get their vans then from Gleeson's in Ellen Street – brand new vans. There was a garage down there. Instore is there now. It was a huge thing when you think of it. They had four vans on the road and I remember then they had two brand new vans. They had a Bedford van that was a second hand but they were all in good nick. The whole thing was professional but very fair - they would pay you. I'd say we were the only ones getting paid. You could see where they were making the profit – the staff weren't paid at all as such. The nuns then were doing it all privately themselves – you know the official work, the clerical work.

We delivered to hotels, houses – private houses, out the Ennis Road – the posh areas we used to call them in my time. People used to get a lot of towels, tea towels that kind of thing. They used to be wrapped in beautiful brown paper and the content of it would be on a little invoice slip, the total, what it was worth. They'd give you the money then and you'd have a little bag. I used to love when you were made collect the money, you'd have your little book and you'd tick it off and you'd go back then to the laundry later, down to the little place where they collected the money, and we'd count all the money and the money had to be dead on with the drivers. He'd count his money and you'd count yours. But it was all, when you think back on it now, very professionally run and very clean.

When I served Mass you'd be put into a little room for breakfast. What you did was you served your Mass, and then you walked down and in these two big doors into the right to the sacristy. That's where you changed. Then you got your gear and if you were on for the week you'd leave it there – your soutane and your case. You'd put it into a drawer and you'd walk down the courtyard area. There were big steps up to a door – it mightn't be there now – on the Clare Street side and in there she'd put me. I'd ring the bell and she'd have the little table set up – I always remember we got two boiled eggs, lovely homemade bread, tea and then she'd come down again and I always remember the nun. She was very tall, Sr Olive. She had a lovely smile. But there was very little conversation, you know and she used to have one of these aprons on, a long apron when she was cooking. And an odd time then you might get a fry and they'd come along with a plate and they'd take off this circular, like the cover of a pot, and you'd lift it then and you might get poached eggs, beautiful fried eggs, rashers, sausages. It

used to be kept hot for you while you were saying Mass. But there was another nun then, a small nun. We went down to see her one day, my brother and myself, years after. She was lovely. She would ask about your family, ask about what your dad did but Sr Olive was quieter. They were lovely nuns.

I used to see them all walking – you'd see them on Sundays. We'd often do a Sunday Mass and you'd see them all walking in queues with the nuns and they'd be bringing them to different sections of the place – inside the grounds. But you always kind of knew – you were kind of naive too at the time, you know we were young - it was a kind of institution. There is no doubt about it. I couldn't share now that I saw brutality because I never saw anything like that. All I know is that they were very shy and inhibited. You wouldn't chat with them or anything like that.

Then when I served my time as an electrician, I was working for a company called Clancy's and it happened that they did all the maintenance in the Good Shepherd and I was brought down there. It was just coincidence that I was in there and being in around all the rooms and seeing the place. You'd be given the tea break, the dinner, the whole lot. And another time then, there was a man there, Seán, he did maintenance and he lived up the road where I grew up. He was a handy man. But I got a few days below. I was putting up a few lights and I was talking with Seán and I was telling him I used to serve Mass and so he showed me around the place. I went to the church. I hadn't seen it in a while. It was 10 years later. That would have been '75, '76. Then later I was down there again. I went in there to do a job. Limerick laundry took it over and I went in around and looked around. I had quite fond memories.

My memories are good there but the system was all wrong probably at the time. They were subdued. I would love to know why they were in there, these particular women that were in there. You didn't know them by name. The only girl was Mary. But to this day if I saw some of them they'd salute you, because you were there in the laundry times. That's how you'd get to know them by being in around the laundry. You'd never get to know them serving Mass. But we were lucky, when I took over from my brother to serve Mass there was another guy who served Mass there but he never got a summer job. We seemed to be lucky. We got the summer job. But by getting the summer job we broke the ice. We got to know them and it was a plus. I'd say I did three summers there. A younger brother of mine came on the scene when I got my apprentice and he took over and then a younger brother than him took over. We were all well got there. Maybe it was the fact that we were from a big family. But my eldest brother got a scholarship you see and the nuns probably thought that was a great thing at the time because we were from a big family. We hadn't much but the scholarship paid for his education and the nuns love all that. They would see how well he was getting on. My father then was a tiler and he used to work in the

convent. He used to often tile below in the Good Shepherds. So that might have something to do with it too. I remember he saying [sic] 'you are going down to serve Mass in the Good Shepherd,' and you just did it. You'd be shining your shoes and cleaning yourself up. Your mother would be scrubbing your neck in a basin on the table. They were the times.

You'd see them out for a walk from the Good Shepherds and my sister she'd say to me that she felt sorry for them. They'd have the long dresses on them. They'd go out on a Sunday and you'd often see them down by Clare Street. She saw them but I didn't remember this at all. They wouldn't look 100 percent some of them. They'd have their heads down. Tough on them you know, tough. I never really got to the back bone of why the half of them were in there. I was so innocent at the time and so young I didn't now why they were in there. It was only when the Magdalene Laundry story broke that you'd hear it. But I never saw brutality there.

My sister had terrible times with the nuns when she went to school. She has bad memories of nuns. She used to tell me they were bitter. We had in the CBS memories of the Christian Brothers as well. But you see they went to these places very young as well and it was a status symbol to have a priest, a nun or a brother in the family. I was nearly shoved in to them at thirteen. Brother O'Brien came around looking for recruits. My father said to be careful. They were recruiting from a young age, at thirteen they didn't even see puberty. They were the times.

[Interview ends]