

**NAME OF PROJECT:** *Italian Canadians as Enemy Aliens: Memories of WWII*

**DATE OF INTERVIEW:** June 6, 2011

**LOCATION OF INTERVIEW:** Toronto, ON

**NAME OF INTERVIEWEE:** John Edward De Toro

**NAME OF INTERVIEWER:** Melina De Guglielmo

**NAME OF VIDEOGRAPHER:** Stefanie Petrilli

**TRANSCRIBED BY:** Krystle Copeland

**DATE TRANSCRIBED:** July 6, 7, 11, 2011

**ACCESSION NO.:** ICEA2010.0002.0002

**PROJECT NOTE:**

**Please note that all interviews have been transcribed verbatim. The language in this transcript is as it was provided by the transcriptionist noted above. The project staff have not edited this transcript for errors.**

**ABSTRACT**

John Edward De Toro was born in Toronto in 1929. John De Toro recounts his experiences growing up in Toronto, and the discrimination he faced by classmates at Fairbank Memorial Elementary School in the city. He explains that his father spoke with the school's Principal, Mr. Wheeler, who kindly took measures to make sure the bullying and name calling ended. He also explains that his father faced discrimination in the workplace at Ontario Hydro, St. Catharines from his coworkers with whom he had to physically fight off and as a result, felt he had to leave his job and start his own paving/concrete company. The De Toro family business that started as a result was called Advance Paving Company Limited. John Edward worked as both an electrician with the City of Toronto and for the family business as a Contractor. He talks about his memories of the Palais Royale from the 1940s to the 50s, and his hobby of restoring and showing antique cars over the past few decades.

**INTERVIEW**

**JEDTT: John Edward De Toro, interviewee**

**MDG: Melina De Guglielmo, interviewer**

[Title screen]

[Fades in at 00:00:10]

MDG: Okay, this is Melina De Guglielmo interviewing John Edward De Toro on June 6, 2011 at the Columbus Centre. So, John, uh first I'm going to ask you a little bit about your early childhood um, so when is your birthday?

JEDT: February 26, 1929.

MDG: Okay. And where were you born?

JEDT: Right here in Toronto.

MDG: In Toronto. And—

JEDT: Yes.

MDG: And were your parents born in Toronto as well?

JEDT: No, my mother was. [clears throat] Excuse me. My mother was ah, was born here. My dad came here when he was, I think, when he was about eight, nine. Seven, eight, nine. And went to school here.

MDG: Oh, okay. And he was born in where?

JEDT: He was born in Abruzzi in ah, in let's see I'm trying to think of the name of the town. Um, uh, it doesn't really matter I guess. Um, yeah Abruzzi, Abruzzi. Yeah. Oh, Rocco san giovann'.

MDG: Oh, Rocco san giovann'.

JEDT: Yeah, yeah. How should I, how can I forget that? [Says while laughing]

MDG: And um, so where, where, let me ask you first- what is your earliest childhood memory?

JEDT: My earliest childhood memory is, was going to school when I didn't want to go to school. There was a school on um, Caledonia Road called F.H. Millar School. And my parents had a house on ah, Gilbert Avenue which was the next street over from the school and there was a laneway going from Gilbert up uh, behind the school and they had a chain link fence on it. And this is important the chain link fence here. So, uh, my mother walked me up the laneway, we went into the school and uh, the next day uh, she let me go by myself. Now this was at a time when you could let kids go out and do things by themselves and not have to worry about being attacked or anything. And I went up the laneway and I can remember hanging onto the chain link fence. [Motions gripping onto the fence with his fingers] I didn't want to go to school. The school opened and I was not there. And I guess my mother must have got a phone call or something. And she came looking for me, and there I was hanging onto this chain link fence.

Not wanting to go into school. And it was kind of— that's, that's my earliest memory as far back as I can go.

MDG: Yeah? And what do— what were you afraid of?

JEDT: Uh, I don't know. Um, see being a February child, when the school starts, it starts in September, my mother stuck me into school, I guess it would be about six months too soon. So, I really should have been entered in school in the, in September and instead she put me in in order to avoid that six month time frame in there. [Motions hands back and forth] And I, I always found that I didn't like school for that reason. For the first little while. And I, and I hated to go there. [Says while laughing] I was the youngest in the class.

MDG: Oh, okay. And, and were you, um did you have any siblings?

JEDT: Ah, not at that time, no, no. 12 years later I uh, my brother was born, twelve years after me. After my birthday, yeah.

MDG: And did you live on, you mentioned uh, your street, where you grew up.

JEDT: Yeah. Yes.

MDG: Was that primarily an Italian street or were there many?

JEDT: No, back at that time uh, there were very few Italians uh, families other than down through the Royce and Dupont area and Dufferin, which was sort of the Italian community because there was St. Mary the Angel's church was there and there were a lot of Italians that went to St. Mary the Angel's Church. So no, there were a lot of Italians that went to St. Mary

the Angel's Church. So, no there were very few Italians up in my area, spasmodically you know they would be here and there and everywhere. But they were mostly Anglo-Saxons.

MDG: Mostly Anglo. So growing up your friends were mostly...

JEDT: Yeah, yes. Yes. Oh, yeah. Yup.

MDG: And um, so, growing up in this atmosphere of being, being an Italian amongst um, you know the English, the English children. How— did you ever feel any sense of um, otherness or discrimination or...

JEDT: Absolutely not. Not until the war broke out. And even then, the kids that I played with, played ball with and, and whatever, even then they did not [clears throat] excuse me. They did not harass me in any way, or my family uh, I was harassed the couple of days or week I guess it was after the war broke out in '39. I recall coming uh, exiting the, the the school, walking down the concrete steps and I can see it [clears throat] excuse me. See it as if it happened yesterday. Some things live in your memory in infamy. And I remember walking down those steps, and at the bottom of the steps there were three boys. Bigger than me because I think at that time I was in ah, grade uh, I think I was in grade six maybe. So these kids were maybe in grade 8. They were bigger. When I got to the bottom of the steps, they really began to push me around, punch me. And I, I, "what are you doing?" Well, "your, your people are killing our people." And I "what are you talking about? Your people are killing our people?" I couldn't understand it. Well, "because of the war, and Italy's in the war" and this, um isn't—was not these kids speaking. This was their parents. Their parents teaching them this. And uh, from that day forward, I had a terrible time for a few weeks. When I was ah every day I pretty well had to run home from school. My clothes were torn and uh, you know. They beat me up and called me a wop and a dago. And there were only two of us in the whole school.

[6:38.0]

And me and Frank Stilo. And there were only two of us there. And uh, after ah, after a little bit of this, my, my father came home. He was working out of town. And my mother told him, she said "you're going to have to do something about this, she says because Eddie's coming home every day and every other day his clothes are torn and he's being beat up and so on. So my father went to the school. And ah, there was a Principal there and I'll never forget him when I think of him. When I think of him it always brings tears to my eyes because Mr. Wheeler. I'll never forget Mr. Wheeler. [says while becoming emotional] He ah, he talked with my dad and ah, it ceased immediately. And here's how it ceased. There was a library down at St. Clair Avenue, and uh, the kids used to walk from the school down Dufferin Street to the library. And ah, it's a long walk to go. But anyway, uh they used to do this every so often. And there was ah, so they took me out of my class and put me in the library group that was walking down to the library. And ah, Frank Stilo was with me and I couldn't figure out what, why is Frank with me and he's not in my class? Well, as it turned out, while we were gone, Mr. Wheeler got on the PA system in the school, and he said, if there is ever this happening again, you will be expelled for a number of days, and it has to cease immediately. There's to be no further harassment of these boys. And from that day forward, it ended. So, when I say you know Mr. Wheeler, I can't help but get it, it brings, I get very sentimental. And a number of years later when I was in ah, the family business. I was a road contractor. Paving contractor. I was paving a school, I think it was down on Oakwood Avenue. And who was the principal? Mr. Wheeler. [says with a smile] So I went in and I introduced myself and ooohhh, he remembered me [motions a hug] and he was just so nice to me. And um that's a memory that you can't forget.

MDG: No. [says softly] And, and did he—was Mr. Wheeler the reason why you really enjoyed, enjoyed perhaps in your school...

JEDT: Yes, after that things just grew right down and you know got back, went back to being kids in the playground. And it ended. And that was it.

MDG: And ah, during the war time, did your family, also other members of your family also go through any sort of...

JEDT: No, [clears throat] my no, not really on the street, no one really did anything that I can recall other than my father. My father was working [clears throat] for ah, the Ontario Hydro, in a sub station out in uh, Burlington.

MDG: Sorry, and what's your father's name?

JEDT: My father's name is John, same as me. But they called me Eddie because my name was really John Edward so they, my, my parents would start calling me Eddie simply because people would come call "is John in?" And my mother would say, "oh, which one? Junior or Senior?" So, she says, "look, let's call you Eddie" and that's that. So that's why everybody calls me Eddie.

[10:13.1]

But anyway, my dad was working out of town for the Ontario Hydro and they were doing a sub-station project. And when the war broke out my dad was ah, severely ah, challenged. He was set upon. You know they called him names and everything. And uh, they started to get uh you know physical, but they picked the wrong guy to do it with. My dad was a good amateur wrestler. So, they picked the wrong guy. Well, you know, he got physical and he had to defend himself and he came home, I'll never forget. He came home one, one night with— in the, I think it was in the fall and his clothes were torn. His face was badly bruised and uh, my mother said. And my mother said, "John" she said. "You're not going to go back to work there" he said. "I

have to, these guys" he says "I had to fight them" he says, "outside the gate" he says. I can't do this again. So she said, "well, you're good at what you do, your trade." My dad was a cement finisher. So she said, "You're good at what you do." She says, "Maybe you can start your own business" she says "there's— right now there's very few contractors around. A lot of men are in the army" and so on. And ah, they need the, you know somebody to do concrete and repairs. So he did it in a small way and that's where he got off the ground. But, there's a strange twist to this story. He got started and he had, I don't know maybe uh, three employees perhaps. About. Yeah, two, three employees. He got a call from the superintendent of the uh, project in ah Burlington. And uh, he said to them, "Johnny" he said, "I understand that you started your own business" and he said "we're having a problem out here finding good cement finishers. Would you be willing to come out here to give us a price to finish the work?" So my dad went out there, and of course everybody left him alone. [motions pushing away with arms] I mean, this was, you didn't do, you didn't do—

MDG: So this was his old boss, calling?

JEDT: This was his old boss. K, who was okay with him. He didn't give him any problems. But my dad went out there. He finished the job. And I think it took him two or three weeks maybe, something like that. K. And at that time he made just over 600 dollars profit. Which at that time was like, I don't know [laughs] maybe ten thousand today. So, he had the last laugh. Yeah.

MDG: Wow. And do you think that those that those experiences maybe during the war fueled his ambition...

JEDT: Yeah. I think so, yes. Yes, I think so.



MDG: Yeah. And, so, um so after the war finished. And I guess uh, your dad, your dad building up his company—

JEDT: Yes, right. Yeah.

MDG: Uh, what was it like for you growing up in Toronto?

JEDT: Well, I found it okay. I wasn't really harassed in any way. [coughs] Excuse me. Um, the fellas, the boys that I played ball with and uh, hockey and so on. They were just like, like nothing had happened. They did not harrass me in anyway. They never called me names, and it was, I think it was mostly in the, in the, it may be around the Italian community that ah, that people were, were more harassed. But once that episode with ah, with Mr. Wheeler straightened everything out, I never had another problem. Never. Never.

MDG: Do you remember stories of other people being arrested, or interned, or?

JEDT: Well, yeah there was ah. There were things that happened. Happened in ah, mostly in the Italian community from what I can gather. I was sort of out away from the Italian community. They were over here [motions away with hands] and I was, all the people around me they were mostly Anglo-Saxon people. So, there were the odd uh European person uh, could be Greek or Macedonian or whatever. But ah, that was it; we never had really any problems at all.

MDG: No, and how, how did that, those experiences maybe change your perspective on life? If they did.

JEDT: Well, not. I can't really say that it changed my perspective on life in any way. Uh, I went to high school and I— a technical school out in Weston. And ah, one of the courses that they had

in the technical school was electricity. So, electricity fascinated me and I took the course. And ah, I took the course and I graduated and then I went to start looking for work, hoping that I could find, would be able to find work hoping that I maybe as an electrician, electrical apprentice or helper or something. And I couldn't find work. There was not that many electrical contractors around. So, I, its funny how fate has affects on many of us in many ways. I happened to be in a restaurant one day and I met one of the boys I went to school with. And uh, we got talking and I said, "you know Ronnie, you got a job, what are you doing?" "Oh," he says "I work in the Canadian General Electric." He says, "I'm an apprentice, electrical apprentice." Now Ronnie and I both took the electrical course.

[15:40.6]

MDG: At which school did you take the course now?

JEDT: Well it was Western Collegiate Institute. So, Ronnie and I both took the electrical course together. We, we went to school together. We rode our bikes together, we were not just casual acquaintances, we were good friends and ah, we went to each other's houses and so on. And ah, I said "gee Ronnie, I can't find a job anywhere." I said you know, "I'm getting desperate." He said, "well why don't you go down to GE" he says, "and ah, apply in there. And tell them your experiences, what course you took." So I did. And about a week or two later they called me up and said uh, "we're gonna— would you like to come down and start work?" So I did. I started work at the GE and I served my apprenticeship there. Four and a half years. And then I wrote for my, my ah electrician's license. In the, in the metropolitan Toronto. That time it wasn't City of Toronto. I wrote for my license and I got it. And uh, without trying to sort of pat myself on the back, but I have to say the truth. As far as I know, to this day, it still stands that I was the youngest person to ever get an electrician's license on the first try. I think I was, six months short of my, twentieth— or four months, I don't know, of my twentieth birthday.

MDG: Wow. That's amazing.

JEDT: Yeah. Twentieth to twenty-first birthday. I don't recall exactly which. But I got it, and I, I worked in the trade for about three, four years. After I got my license, and then I went into the family business.

MDG: And then you went into the family business. Yeah. And um, did you feel pressured at all to have to go into the family business or?

JEDT: Well, you know what. In a way, in a very light way, yes. My father wanted me to go into the business with him. It was just a small concrete contractor. And he did trucks and he was you know, you know just doing sewer work and so on. And my mother said, "No! No! He can't go! That's not the kind of work that you can do!" She says "Uh, no, no, no she says I don't want you doing that." We he put the arm on her I guess and she kind of relented. You see in the construction industry and as far as I know, today it still stands. The licensed trades are the ones that are sort of looked up to, take your hat off to. [motions taking his hat off in respect] Especially the electricians. Because electrical things are still a mystery to the average person. They don't understand how electricity works and what, how, what you can do with it and how you can get hurt with it if your not careful. And so, it was an entirely different thing for me to go from a trade that everyone took their—more or less took their hat off to when you arrived on the job. There wasn't really— I wasn't there with a pick and shovel. And you know shoveling dirt into a truck. You know I went from one extreme to another. But I did it, I toughed it out somehow. And ah, got over it.

MDG: Did you learn to enjoy it?

JEDT: Oh yeah, as a matter of fact, yes I did. I ran the company after a number of years. I worked at it and ah, yeah. My father sort of retired, and ah, I, I ran the company along with ah, my younger brother, took him in with me. And ah, and that was the way it was.

MDG: And what was the name of your dad's company?

JEDT: It was called Advance Paving and ah, Advance Paving yeah just Advance Paving. And we had ah, an asphalt plant which manufactured hot mix asphalt. Which was called Torro Asphalt. Yeah.

MDG: And uh, now going back. We talked about your work life and getting into your trade—

JEDT: Yeah, yeah.

MDG: ...and family business. Uh, how about your social life. Growing up in Toronto how was that?

JEDT: What do you want to know?

MDG: I want to know about the Palais Royale! [Says while laughing]

JEDT: [Smiles and laughs loudly] Oh the Palais Royale! Yeah, you know it took a while for me to ah, [laughs] get my wife interested in this. There was that—. They were the greatest times in a young man's life.

[20:02.9]

In the city. When ah, it was a time when you met a girl and you respected her. I don't recall in, I started to go to the Palais Royale I guess when I was about 17 then, 17 yeah, I guess about 17. I started to go to the dance halls. They had dance halls in Toronto. There was about—

MDG: Oh with the bands? The bands?

JEDT: Oh yes, the Palais Royale was ah, was the outstanding place to go to, Bert Niosi was the, was recognized as the— throughout the country. And then they had ah, Columbus um, Columbus Hall. And ah Jack Evans was ah a band leader at Columbus Hall. And Jack Evans played at the Sea Breeze. Ah, which was an outdoor dance hall. On the lakeshore. Now, visualize the Palais was here on the Lakeshore [motions with left hand on table] and the Sea Breeze was, I don't know half a quarter of a kilometer maybe away. On the same side, facing the lake. And ah, it had a beautiful Terrazzo floor. And the band played there. Dancing outdoors at night under the stars. Was, was really something. It was, it was, it was great and what we used to do we'd go to the Palais and we'd get our hand stamped. And then we'd walk along the boardwalk if there was no what we would say "no action." So to speak. [laughs] Cause the girls all went there and they stood in a line. And you walked down "would you like to dance?" [motions reaching out hand] This is how it was, so there wasn't if you didn't find anybody you wanted to dance with. You would walk [clears throat] excuse me, walk down the boardwalk to the Sea Breeze. And you'd check into there for another buck and a quarter I think it was. And you'd get your hand stamped there. So then if there was nothing doing there, you'd walk back to the Palais 'cause you had your hand stamped, you got in for nothing. [shows hand out and laughs] This went on for— and at the end of the night you went home with the Globe and Mail. [laughs] But that was it. It was a time when ah, ah dancing was a nice way to meet a girl. Not like today you go to a bar and you don't know what you're going to find there. Getting all— drinking.

MDG: And what—

JEDT: There was no drinking. Absolutely not. [clears throat]

MDG: And was there food or?

JEDT: No, there was no food, there was no food. It was strictly, strictly— mind you, the older crowd would bring a small mickey and keep it under the table and ah, the bouncers knew that it was there. But nobody, in all the years that I went there uh, and the many times that I went to any dance hall be it the Palais, or the Mazurek Hall, or the uh, or the Sea Breeze, or the Columbus Hall, there never was, I don't recall ever seeing anybody drunk or really obnoxious. Unless really the only time you might get obnoxious would be a fight over a girl or something. Somebody said something. But really nothing rarely ever happened. So, it was a clean, it was a clean time. So it was a time when uh, uh girls were respected a lot more than they are today. I can recall being at the Palais and on the Lakeshore there was this street that went from the Palais up to King Street. And the girls would take the street car and walk down this street and it was dark, and walk over the bridge, ah over the lakeshore into the Palais and you know if they didn't meet up with some guy they would keep trying until they went home and take them to a coffee or something at night. They walked back and it was never— I don't recall ever, hearing any of these girls ever being accosted in any way, I mean it just wouldn't happen today. But that was a time when there was a little more respect.

MDG: Yeah. And is that where you met your wife?

JEDT: No, no my wife my wife I met through a family situation. Yeah, yeah.

MDG: Oh. Well that sounds like a dream date.

JEDT: Yeah.

MDG: A real dream. And so, so you um I guess. How old were you when you, when you hung out at the Palais Royale?

JEDT: I was in my [clears throat] early 20s to my 30s, early 30s. Hmm.

MDG: And then how did that change, or did you stop going?

JEDT: Well, I met my wife and I had no reason to be chasing around other places. [laughs] So.

MDG: And so you got married and did you, did you have any children?

JEDT: Yes, I have two children.

MDG: Two?

JEDT: Yup.

MDG: And what are their names?

JEDT: John Michael and uh Michelle Grace.

MDG: And are they also involved now in the family business or—

JEDT: No, no. No I sold the business a numb— quite a while ago, and uh, my son is ah renovation contractor. A home renovations and editions. And ah, my daughter her, her in-laws,

her family own a window business. FM Industries and they manufacture windows. Ah, they're both university graduates. And ah, so is my wife actually. My wife is the one you got to take your hat off to because after twenty some odd years of marriage she decided to go back to university. And, and graduate.

MDG: Wow.

JEDT: Yeah, yeah. She went back to York.

MDG: What was your wife's name?

JEDT: My wife, Diane Carol. Yeah, she ah, she graduated from university the exact same time as my daughter did. In fact they were in one class together. Could you believe that? [smiles] Yeah. Yeah.

[25:41.1]

MDG: And so now looking back at your early life experiences and then having children, getting married, or getting married, having children. [laughs] And um, what advice would you have for, for the youth of today? In terms of that?

JEDT: Well, I don't know that's a pretty difficult question to answer. I would say, try to get an education. For one thing. Try to get an education. [says while nodding] Although, there is a lot of talk and conflict about what good is an education lately. My son's graduated, he's a graduate. And so is my daughter. And he says to this day, "You know. What the heck good did it do me? I got my BA." You know, what good did it do me? "Here I am, I'm a renovation contractor and I got to work in construction which is the hardest business that you could find", and uh, [clears



throat] he says, "What the hell good did it do me?" Uh, yes and no. Uh, it's the start because you get a BA and a BA at one time was the [waves hands out] was the thing. The, oh geeze, a BA Graduate a BA was— but what good does it do today. It's just a title at the end of your name. But it's a step towards something else. In other words, you've got to have a BA. If you want to be a dentist or a doctor or a doctor, lawyer, Indian Chief, as they say, you have to have the BA to get started so it's the first step. And that's what you do. I would suggest you know try to get an education. Ah, until recently, not getting too far back, anybody that was a tradesman was "Oh, you. You're what?" [leans back disinterested] "You work with your hands?" Uh, "what do you do?" "Well I sit behind a desk and—" but now, it's changed. Now there are registered apprentice-ship, apprenticeships. Uh, out there and they tell you, you see it on television every so often that you get yourself into an apprenticeship. And you spend the time to learn to be somebody in the construction trade. Which is generally a licensed trade, a plumber or an electrician, or you learned the business and, and, and that's it. Um, other than that I don't know what else to you know to say, to do. My son started in the business and I said to him um, don't do too much of the work yourself. I said, "You hire people." To do the work. And ah, look what she does. And ah, he was doing a lot of it himself. But I says you hire people and, and that's it. It gives work to other people and while you're doing it, somebody else is being denied the work, but if you, if you hire somebody to do the work then it's another story.

[noise that sounds like a vacuum comes from outside the room and JEDT looks towards the noise.]

MDG: Um, okay, so uh, is there anything else that you would like to add that we haven't talked about? Um.

JEDT: Um, I don't really know. [noise stops] Other than uh, no, um. What other questions do you want to ask me?

MDG: Oh, that would be it; you did very well, perfect.

JEDT: Yeah. Well, other than the harassment of uh, of the Italians, uh, I didn't really experience that much of it other than what my father went through, which was horrific. And sometimes things happen which are a blessing in disguise. And had my father not been—gone through that harassment. He may not have started his own business. In which case then it would have been different from our family. And ah, and that was it. And I say I started in— my father had a belief that don't tell somebody what to do unless you've done it yourself. So, when I started in the business, in the family business, I started with a shovel and a pick in my hand and I worked with everybody else. And you learn you know what it's like that way. And you, you get, you get the respect of the people you're paying. And so consequently as time went by, and I grew up in the business then I took over the business. As I knew it from the ground up. There was nothing much that you know you could tell me. Other than that.

MDG: Did you ever find that people uh, who worked for your father treated you differently? Perhaps?

[30:14.1]

JEDT: No, no, not really. Not really. No, no. Uh, not really. I uh, I wrote a couple. I wrote a book, I wrote—actually I've written three books. And I've had them published. And the one book, which Pal Di, Di Iulio read and I don't know if he mentioned it to you or not. It was called um, Cast the First Stone. And it was about, and this is, this is true. Based on, uh, how should I say um, it's based on hearsay fact. Hearsay fact. Hearsay—you know what that means? Hearsay fact is something you hear about but is actually true. And you can't be sure if it's true but it is true. During the war, there was a young Italian boy uh, who was about to go into the army and ah, he had an affair with a soldier's wife. And ah, they decided to I guess it was the army or

whoever uh, decided to make an example of him because uh, the girl he had the affair with. She— her husband found out about it. And I guess he must have convinced her to cry rape in order to cover things up. And it was found out that he was Italian, a soldier's wife, they made an example of him and so the story goes that he went to Kingston Penitentiary for seven years. Now, I recall my father coming home. I was, what, maybe twelve years old at the time. I remember my father coming home and I was in the bedroom and I heard him talking to my mother and my mother this, this story of what happened to this young boy. Got caught up in this. And, and he went to jail. So I wrote a book on the story. I made a story about it.

MDG: So that really stuck in your memory then?

JEDT: Oh yeah. It's it stuck in my memory. Yeah. Yeah.

MDG: And why did you feel—what called you to writing? What was it about writing?

JEDT: Well, it was just something I wanted to do. Most of my life, and having been in, in the business for a number of years— many years uh, about 10 years I was in the business. About 10— I was close to 30 years I was in the business. Uh, I got used to writing and I like writing documents and letters and so I decided to write the book and I wrote the story on it and um and that's it.

MDG: And you had them published as well.

JEDT: I, I published it, yeah I published it. And I had ah, I had a, a, a book signing had a book signing at Chapters and I sold a few. Yeah. It's not. It's not a money maker. It was something to do to, to say, just to say I did it. That's about it.

MDG: And your other two books that you mentioned?

JEDT: Well one was a fiction, well actually *Cast the First Stone* is, is also a fiction. Yeah, so the other two. One's an autobiography.

MDG: Of your life story?

JEDT: Yeah, yeah, yeah. Yeah.

MDG: Okay. And why uh, I love autobiographies and I find them so fascinating. What called you to write the story of your life? Why was that important to you?

JEDT: Oh, I don't know. My wife convinced me she said "you've done so many interesting things" she said "maybe it's, you should put it in print" and ah that kind of thing.

MDG: And is it important in terms of memory and keeping, keeping your memories alive?

JEDT: Uh, yeah sort of. Yeah. Yeah. Yeah. That's about it.

MDG: Well, I'd like to thank you very much for coming out today.

JEDT: Okay.

MDG: And uh, it was a wonderful interview—

JEDT: Okay.

MDG: And we look forward to having you um, involved with the project.

JEDT: Yeah, okay. [puts glasses on]

MDG: [unclear]

JEDT: If I can be of any help I will. I just hope I haven't been a boring thing on my part.

MDG: No, it was fascinating. I always love hearing about the Palais Royale because I drive by it every day.

JEDT: Well funny that you mention that. [clears throat] Excuse me. I guess it must have been about a—two years ago. My son, gave Diane and I a gift. And it was to the Palais Royale. They were having a function there. [clears throat] Now the Palais Royale has been re-done you know. Re— you know it's—

MDG: It's sort of a banquet hall now.

JEDT: Yeah, yeah, yeah it's sort of a banquet hall. No it was a it was a— the uh, it was, it was a memory function there or something. So, we went and said oh you know, I've been there so many times but it was changed. And ah, it was. The weather was good so we were able to go out on the back in the balcony. And ah they served a meal believe it or not. And ah, there were a, the dancing was different to what—when I was there. Everything changes. Nothing stays the same. See, there's a lot of Oriental people today. They love their dancing. The Orientals. And of course the place, excuse me, was full of Orientals. And they're doing the ballroom type dancing. There's ah, we don't do ballroom type dancing, you know. [laughs] You, you held a girl in your arms and her cheek on your cheek and ah, and ah that was it. You know you're doing the

jitterbug, or slow dance but they do the, the, the ballroom type dancing. And it was interesting. And it was a nice meal and it was good. The floor uh, is a different kind of a floor, it's on springs. I don't know if you know that.

[36:08.8]

MDG: Really?

JEDT: Yes, the floor is on springs. I mean you can't feel the springs, it's not like you're walking on [motions bouncing with hands] and you're going up and down.

MDG: [laughs]

JEDT: I don't know how they've suspended it, but the floor is on springs. And ah, it is a great floor to dance on I mean.

MDG: So it makes it good for your knees probably.

JEDT: Yes. Yes, yes, yes. Yeah, yeah, yeah. So we went there. We had a nice time, but it wasn't the same. It's not the same. It's never the same.

MDG: And how did that make you feel about...

JEDT: Well, [laughs] I was a little disappointed in a sense. I mean, my wife said, "Well you should know better! Things don't stay the same. They change." But you know memories stay with you and you remember the good things. Ah, about it. But ah.

MDG: It really sounds like the glory days of Toronto.

JEDT: Well they were, they were as I say. You know they were. I don't recall a, the, the things that go on today just didn't happen. Uh, you hear so many stories about girls being raped and ah, the shootings. It didn't happen, to me ah, guys respected girls a lot more. Uh, maybe there were things that went on ah, that we didn't hear about. I'm sure there were. But it never hit the papers and you know, you just, you just had a little more respect for girls than, than you do today. For some reason, I don't know.

MDG: Well and another question, I always ask this, I always ask this as well. What was your— after starting to work for a bit and earning a wage—

JEDT: Yes.

MDG: What was your first big purchase?

JEDT: My first big purchase was a car. [says smiling and then laughs]

MDG: What kind of car was it?

JEDT: It was a brand new Pontiac. And I didn't have enough money to buy it. It was, let me think how much it was. I think it was two thousand dollars if memory serves me right. Two thousand, twenty-two hundred. Pontiac. A new Pontiac. And I didn't have enough money and my dad put the hundred dollars—but he says “okay”. I was four hundred dollars short. So my dad put the four hundred dollars in. And ah, I said, “okay I owe you for it.” “Naw, forget about it, forget about it.” So I went out to, after I saved up enough money. Saved up the four hundred bucks, uh, about a year or so later I bought a television set for my, for my mother and father. Yeah I

bought them a big television set. And that was back, for four hundred dollars [motions a big TV set with arms out] Yeah it cost me, I remember [unclear] it was three hundred and ninety-nine dollars. The TV set, so I said "okay, we're even dad." "No, what'd you do that for?" "Well." [says while laughing]

MDG: And then did you drive around in the car for a while?

JEDT: Uh, oh yeah. I, I, I wanted the, I wanted the new Pontiac. Yeah.

MDG: [unclear] and how old were you when you bought it?

JEDT: Uh, I was I think I was about twenty three— two. About twenty three I think I was. Twenty two, twenty three, I wasn't working with my parents I was working as an electrician. So that the money that I made was, was that. That was it. Yeah.

MDG: And, and did the other kids in the neighbourhood envy you? [laughs]

JEDT: Oh, of course. Oh, yeah sure. I mean any, anybody that had wheels back then of, of whether it was an old car, new car, or a truck you were— "wow! He's got—we don't have to walk!" Yeah. Oh yeah it was, it was a thrill to, to have wheels yeah.

MDG: Do you remember your first drive then?

JEDT: My first which?

MDG: Your first drive in your new car? Where did you go?



[39:46.8]

JEDT: Not really, I can't remember, remember that. Well, maybe some of the first drives I went I drove it to the, to, to, to uh, the, the company I worked for— the boss's house. Jack McCartney. I drove it to him and I said [waves arm towards the car] "Jack, I got a brand-new car. Look at that!" I says, "and it looks better than your Ford." [laughs] I'll always remember that. [laughs] He had a Ford I had a Pontiac, I said "it looks better than your Ford." [laughs]

MDG: Yeah, that's interesting. So was it important—I always find this fascinating, was it imported was it an American car?

JEDT: No, there were no foreign cars. No, there were no foreign cars back then. Ah, There was a number of years later the Volkswagen Beetle came out. But ah, there were no foreign— you had ah American cars and um, that was it. You, you and the warranties were terrible on them. Uh, warranties as you know today are, are fabulous it seems endlessly. But back then a warranty on a car was ah 12 thousand miles or I think it was 90 days. Whichever came first. That was your warranty. God, yeah. After that, after that anything you wanted done to the car you had to pay.

MDG: Oh my goodness!

JEDT: It was a terrible warranty. It wasn't until Chrysler came out, I can't remember what year it is, and they brought out the 50 thousand mile warranty. And General Motors and Ford and all the rest had to smarten up. And that was it. But ah, later on in years, you talk about cars, I got involved in ah. In restoration of antique cars.

MDG: Oh really?

JEDT: Yeah. And ah, 'cause I had a shop out on— I had a shop with mechanics. So, it was kind of easy—kind of easy for me. So I always wanted to ah, I always wanted a Packard. Packard I know you've never heard of it. Packard, Packard. No, you've never heard of Packard. Packard was ah, was a car that the celebrities [nods seriously] liked to own. So, I, there was a magazine out ah, I don't know if it's still around or not. And it lists the, I think it is. It lists all these old cars that are for sale in the United States. 'Cause that's where they all are, in the United States. So, I saw this Packard. It was a 1940 Packard Convertible. So, I thought, um so I called the guy up and it was in Newark, New Jersey. So I thought, well, what have I got to lose? So I took a flight— plane flight there. Met the guy and took me and I said "sure" 1940 Packard wingback and it was kind of run down and so on. So I said, "Okay, I'll buy it from you." So I bought it and then I had it shipped back to Toronto and we took it all apart in the shop. Took everything. Took, took the top, took— literally took the body off and it was all cleaned and sandblasted and repainted. It took ah— a woman can have a baby in the same time it took me to restore this car. And I have all the pictures to prove it. Magazines and everything. And restored it completely. It was a gorgeous looking car. It was a cream coloured with red upholstery inside. And it was, and I entered it in a number of different contests. And I only lost first prize once.

MDG: Really?

JEDT: Yup. [hands folded together and nods]

MDG: Wow and do you still have it?

JEDT: Oh, heck no. I, I got rid of it a number of years ago. It's ah, when you have a car that is ah, how should I say, a show car. That's all you can do with it. [sound of plane flying overhead and JEDT points to the camera]

MDG: Oh, sorry. We're running out of time.

JEDT: Are we running out? Okay.

[camera fades out at 43:49.2]

JEDT: When you have a show car [clears throat] it is brought back to factory specifications. And you don't really do much driving around or parking it anywhere. In other words you don't go to a parking lot and leave it there because when you come out you may not recognize it. It will be scratched and the worst thing that scratches a car is the innocent person who has a zipper and they lean on the car and they lean over to look in and that zipper goes up and puts a scratch in. And one scratch you can lose points. I entered it in a contest at the exhibition one year. And they— out of 100 points I got 99 points out of 100. Now that was really, really phenomenal. To get 99 points out of 100. And I won first prize. I've still got the trophies and all the stuff at home. But I finally sold it because it got too difficult to keep around and now you got to store it and ah so on and you can't drive it anywhere other than, than keep moving. You get in a car and my wife and I she used to love to go out on a summer's night you know with the top down and the driving and of course the glares of people looking at, what kind of a car is that? And it had ah, ah a thing on the front, the ornament we called it the donut chaser. It was, it went out like this [projects arms forwards together] it had a girl with a disk like this in the front. Like this, this was the ornament. In front of the car. And ah, I got, I sold it and I had no trouble selling it. I mean it was all restored beautifully. And ah and I had a '32 Buick.

MDG: Okay.

JEDT: Which ah, wasn't restored like the Packard. It was— but it was a good car. And I won a lot of prizes with it. I went out to ah Oshawa out to Sam McGlocklin's ah, estate out in Oshawa.

They used to have strictly for Buicks. They had a group get-together and a contest once a year. And I went out there and we had a great time. It was a family thing. My kids got involved in the polishing and ah, my wife loved it because ah you met a lot of nice people. With the car. And ah, the Buick was a great car to drive around. I didn't really care too much about putting that in a parking lot. I wasn't really worried about it. But the Packard, yeah. Yeah. I worried about that. And then I got rid of that and ah, then one day as a surprise to my wife I bought her a 1957 Thunderbird Convertible.

MDG: Oh, wow!

JEDT: Yeah, it was a real, that was a real nice car. That was a good car. That was a fun car. 'Cause you could drive it anywhere.

MDG: Yeah.

JEDT: And she had a good time with it. So I had to get rid of that. Maintenance was getting high on it. And parts were hard to get so, I said okay the game's over, that's it. And I got rid of it that was it. But it was a great hobby. Lot of fun. Yeah, yeah, yeah, yeah.

MDG: Wow. Do you have any photos of ah, of—

JEDT: Photos? Oh, I've got articles in magazines that I wrote and had published and pictures. I have pictures of the car when it came back from Newark. Before they did anything. And I have pictures in the, in the, in steps and as the car was being taken apart, I photographed it as it was taken apart. And put back together again with my mechanic. Uh, Phil Carpentiri loved to work on it and ah, we it took, like I said it took 9 and a half months. 9 months for the thing to be done. But ah, yup.

MDG: I'd love to see some of those photos if you—

JEDT: Yeah, why don't you— I'll bring, I'll bring the book down and let you see the book, yeah.  
Yeah, yeah. The photos.

MDG: And what year did you buy the Packard?

JEDT: Uh, it's gotta be ah about ah 20 years ago now. Yeah, 25 years ago. Yeah, 20 years ago.  
Yeah, yeah. But it just got too, too complicated finding a place to store it in the winter. Unless  
you have a three car garage. And I had a two car garage. And a two car garage and four cars. To  
say nothing of the Packard.

MDG: Yeah. [laughs] It gets tricky—

JEDT: Well that, that, that's, that's right. And you have to store it someplace you can be sure  
that when you go to pick it up again and I stored it in a garage uh, with other antique cars. So,  
it's all insured and everything. But, uh. Yeah. There used to be some great events at the Inn on  
the Park.

MDG: Oh, yeah?

JEDT: Oh yeah, before the well you know the park's no longer there. It's a car dealership there.

MDG: Oh, okay. I [unclear]

JEDT: On the corner of Leslie and uh, and uh, and Eglinton. There's a car dealership. There's I  
think it's a Lexus dealers there.

MDG: Yeah, okay.

JEDT: Yeah, the Inn on the Park was a big hotel that was there. Oh yeah. [plane flies overhead]  
Yeah, see you would remember. That's before your time. That's right. When I got married that's  
where I spent my night. My honeymoon, yeah the Inn on the Park. Yeah.

MDG: Yeah?

JEDT: Yeah. And they had a big circular [motions a circle with hand]. They had a big parking lot.  
And a big circular driveway. In the front. And ah, when they would have ah, hold an event there  
once a year for the antique cars the car club. Antique and Classic car club of, of Ontario I think it  
was. And you would bring your cars down there and they would be judged. And then if you won  
first prize at night there was a big dinner. And a big function and you would drive your car in the  
circular driveway and you would be photographed accepting your prize.

MDG: Oh wow!

JEDT: Oh yeah. It was great, yeah. Lot of fun. Oh, it was a real good hobby. Terrific hobby and  
ah, and uh, I understand every Monday night on the corner of uh, Bayview and ah, Steeles.  
Yeah there's a church there. And uh, they have a parking lot there and they have antique cars in  
there. Yeah, every Monday night through the summer. They bring them down there. Yeah, it's  
the antique car club of ah, of I guess Toronto, I'm not sure. Is there. Yeah.

MDG: That's interesting. I've got to check it out sometime.

JEDT: Anyway. I can go on, and on, and on, but I won't.

MDG: Oh, no problem, I love to hear any other stories that you have. [laughs]

JEDT: Well, it's got nothing to do with the Italians being persecuted. [laughs]

MDG: Oh yeah, but um I guess we'll stop rolling. Yeah. But yeah—

[video fades out at 50:02:6]

**[End of Interview]**