

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

DATE OF INTERVIEW: May 31, 2011

LOCATION OF INTERVIEW: Coquitlam, BC

NAME OF INTERVIEWEE: Attilio Girardi

NAME OF INTERVIEWER: Raymond Culos

NAME OF VIDEOGRAPHER: Anna Wilkinson

TRANSCRIBED BY: Krystle Copeland

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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

Attilio Girardi was born in Vancouver, British Columbia on July 27, 1937. He has two siblings, Brenda and Sandro, but he was still an only child at the time that his father, Bruno Girardi was interned. Attilio describes growing up and attending school in Vancouver, before being sent to Italy in 1956 to learn Italian. Attilio recalls his father's early life: Bruno was born in Canada but lived in Italy from 1922-1935 with his brother (also named Attilio). There, Bruno studied to become a boat captain at a nautical college in Venice. In 1935, at the advice of their father, Bruno and Attilio returned to Canada to avoid the danger of being Canadian-born Italians living in Italy when war seemed imminent. Upon his return to Vancouver, Bruno co-founded a newspaper business in Vancouver, *L'Eco D'Italia*. Attilio recounts how his father was arrested at home and taken to a tribunal at Petawawa. He was then transferred to Kananaskis where he was interned for 18 months and ordered to report monthly to the RCMP (Royal Canadian Mounted Police) from December 16, 1941 to July 26, 1943. Bruno's brother, Attilio, was also interned in the same cabin (Hut 32) with 10 German internees. Attilio explains that his father

did not find his time at the camp difficult, but was more worried about how his absence affected the family back home. Attilio says that his father was not interned for his work with his newspaper, but because of an informant who said that he was a German sympathizer. Attilio explains that he has learned a lot from his father, such as how to get along with people of all nationalities. He states that if he had the chance to discuss his father's internment with the Canadian Government, he would ask how people that were born in Canada were declared enemy aliens. Attilio Girardi has three children of his own with his wife Joan.

INTERVIEW

AG: Attilio Girardi, interviewee

RC: Raymond Culos, interviewer

[Title screen]

[Fades in at 00:00:10]

RC: Uh, this is Ray Culos, uh, with, uh, Mr. Attilio Girardi and, ah, we're gonna have a discussion on, ah, some of his memories. And the project, uh, name is the *Italian Canadians as Enemy Aliens: Memories of World War II*. So, Attilio, um, uh, when we, when we were young, you were living in a neighbourhood of Vancouver that was a Little Italy.

AG: Strathcona District.

RC: Strathcona District. Were you actually born in Vancouver?

AG: Yup. In St. Paul's Hospital.

RC: Okay. And, uh, what was your full name?

AG: Attilio Luigi, as in my grandfather, Girardi.

RC: Right. And what was the date of your birth?

AG: Thirty—1937, 27 July.

RC: I see. And so were you the first born in your parents' family?

AG: Yes I was, I was the oldest. [Nods]

RC: Yeah. And do you have siblings? Do you have—

AG: I have a brother, Sandro Girardi and a sister, Bre—uh, Brenda Girardi—uh, Brenda Della Gaza.

RC: And, ah, do you have any children yourself?

AG: I have three. A bo—two girls and a boy.

RC: Wonderful. So, and you live nearby, uh, in the Greater Vancouver area now?

AG: I live in Coquitlam. I've been there for over—close to 40 years.

RC: So, when you were young, uh, what school did you attend?

AG: I started at Strathcona. And, ah, then I was trying—my father decided to put me in Sacred Hearts School. And then from there I went to Burnaby North and there I went to Italy.

RC: Yes and when you were in Italy, you actually went there—your dad I believe sent you there so that you could be educated in Italian in certain, uh—

AG: Uh, my, my father's belief was that the male children, once they finished their education in Canada, they went to Italy to learn Italian. He would not force them to learn Italian while they lived in Canada because the fact is it would confuse them too much. So he sent me over there and he came to me in June of 1956 and he asked me, "When are you finished school?" And I said, "I'll be finished, pfft [makes sound with mouth], on the 15th of June." [Motions with hand] And he said, "Okay, on the 30th you're leaving for Italy." [Laughs]

RC: [Laughs] Oh my God.

AG: He sent me over there and he had me met at the Rome Airport by a man by the name of Mario Puntini, which was one of his ex-employees from here, who drove me up to Perugia. Which is a famous University for foreigners.

RC: Wow. So, in 1956 then, uh—and did you stay in Italy, uh, for any length of time?

AG: Well, I was in Italy from June of '56 till October of '56, then there was a, a problem with the [unclear] communist uprising. So, he, he sent a gentleman from here, Bruno Ciccolini, to come and get me in Italy and bring me back to Canada. Where I stayed here till March, then I went back.

RC: Oh.

AG: And I stayed till October.

RC: And at the end of it all were you—did—were you fluent in Italian?

AG: Uh, it seemed to be, like, but the problem is when I came back from Italy, I spoke in Italian that half the Italians here didn't quite understand. Because they are of the peasant race, and, ah, you know, you learn the proper Italian and use these highfalutin' words and it confused them. So I had to resort back to the *Calabrese* and, ah, *Abruzzese* level. [Gestures with hands]

RC: That you learned—

AG: Yeah, before. [Smiles and laughs]

RC: [Laughs] And, ah, going back to the original Girardi family...

AG: Uh hmm.

RC: Uh, was your grandfather and grandmother—did they ever come here to Canada?

AG: Yeah, my grandfather and my grandmother, uh, immigrated to Canada, on my dad's side in the early 1900s. Okay? Uh, he was born in Selva del Montello in 1885. And I think my grandmother was born in 19—1891, and, uh, the Girardi and Foroneto[?]. Then...they stayed here, had their children, then went back to Italy in 19—in I think it was 1922. Just before the Italian depression. My, my grandfather thought he was a, a merchant so he went over there and he bought lots of properties, which he was lucky enough to save one, the final one that he lived in because things were so bad. [Gestures with hands]

RC: Yeah.

AG: And then my—so my father from 1922 lived in Italy with my uncle Attilio. And my father attended a nautical college in Venice, to become, uh, uh, uh, I think it was a boat captain. And he came back in 1935 before the fall of the government. Okay, and, um, therefore, that's why he was labeled as a fascist. [Says while shrugging] But my grandfather had said to him, "Bruno, if you say here, and we win the war, the Italians are gonna, are gonna shoot you because you're Canadian born. And if we loose the war, the Canad—the British will shoot you because you're a spy." [Gestures with hands and smiles]

RC: [Laughs]

AG: So, they sent him back here. So him and Attilio landed in Vancouver and went to stay at a house, um, owned by a guy by the name of Johnny Pastro, on Atlantic and Prior Street. He tried to attend sophomore school, it didn't work out. [Shrugs] So, those days it was tough. He, uh, he, uh, he had, ah, [unclear] he didn't have the, the—he had the newspaper. Him and my, my uncle I think, and your father got together and they had a, a newspaper, an Italian newspaper which his copies are here. [Points down to the table] And, um, you know, and that's what happened. This came out and they—the Canadian government figured that he was dangerous, so they arrested him. [Gestures with hands] They shipped him to Petawawa and they had him in front of a tribunal, where there was three judges. [Gestures with hands and holds up three fingers] Military Judges. And he was standing there, by himself. And he looked to his right, he looked to his left and the guys were saying to him, "Well Bruno, why are you doing that for?" He says, "Well, I don't understand. I'm arrested for writing in my newspaper. But the guys who own the [unclear] newspaper and the Star Weekly [Vancouver Sun and Vancouver Province] are not here." He says, "Why should they be?" He says, "I only translated what they wrote." [Gestures with hand and laughs]

[00:06:04]

RC: That's it. Yeah. Then—and he made that point. Didn't he?

AG: He made that point, yeah.

RC: And, ah—

AG: See my father had a habit, like me, of maintaining a, a, a memory, of a lot of stuff. [Touches head] And he would tell me about it.

RC: Yes. So, um, actually what happened then if we go back to, uh, when your father, ah, founded the, ah, *L'Eco D'Italia*—

AG: Yeah. [Nods]

RC: Uh, *Italo Canadese*.

AG: That's right.

RC: Um, that would have been around 1936.

AG: I believe it was '36 or '37. One of the two. Yeah.

RC: Yes. And, ah, so could you describe the newspaper? Was it a—

AG: It was a, it was a local paper, ah, printed and folded by hand to be delivered. There was English pages and Italian pages. There was a calendar in there for the Italian schools. There was like a, ah, birth announcements, marriage announcements. It was a local paper for the Italians.
[Gestures with hands]

RC: Yes.

AG: That's all it was. There was no ticker tape. No email, no website. No nothing. [Gestures with hands]

RC: No, not in those days.

AG: No, nothing. [Shrugs]

RC: So, your dad then, ah, really worked hard...by being the publisher, the editor, and, ah—

AG: [Holds out hands and shrugs] I don't even know if your mother got involved— like my mum used to go down there and fold the papers.

RC: Yeah. Well as you know my father wrote—

AG: Yeah. [Nods]

RC: —some of the, uh, articles.

AG: It's, it's mentioned in there. Yeah. [Nods, points to desk and picks up paper from desk]

RC: And, uh—but your dad was, ah, the one—for a young man—how old would he have been in 1936?

AG: Well, he was born in 1913. So, he would have been...

RC: Uh, uh, he would have been...

AG: Twenty...

RC: Twenty-three years old.

AG: [Nods] Yeah and he was—always liked to write. I got letters from him, uh, sent to my mother during the war and his hand script is fantastic. His English is fantastic. You know, he always pride himself, liked Hemmingway, he liked to publish, write, you know. [Gestures with hands]

RC: Yeah. Well of course and he did so as a publisher.

AG: Yeah. [Nods]

RC: Ah, was there any, uh, uh, concern that maybe some of the articles that appeared in the paper were too pro-Italy or too pro-fascist?

AG: I don't think he was aware of that because he only duplicated in Italian what was written in English.

RC: I see.

AG: So he didn't see what the problem would be. [Shrugs]

RC: That makes sense.

AG: You know, I mean, I can see if he created his own stories. Or he had a te—a te—a teletype come in and he, uh, you know, information or corresponded. But those days there's nothing was coming in, not even phone calls.

RC: So, the—

AG: [Coughs]

RC: Uh, was your uncle a part of the, uh—

AG: Not really. My uncle, my uncle, uh—if you notice there's a newspaper here [leans over and picks up a newspaper from the table] with my uncle's address—he was up in R, B & K Logging in Elk Bay.

RC: That's right.

AG: He, he, he used to send him a copy of the newspaper, up there, you know. No, my uncle was never involved.

RC: 'Cause, ah, he was working, I believe in the logging—

AG: Yeah, yeah. [Nods]

RC: Along with—

AG: My, my father for some reason tried to protect my uncle all the time. When he had a grocery store he'd bring him in. But my—it was not my uncle's game. He liked to be the maitre d' at the [unclear] Hotel.

RC: [Laughs]

AG: That's what he liked. [Laughs]

RC: That's good. [Says while laughing]

AG: He was a good-looking man and you know he had the suave attitude, you know.

RC: Yeah. Well going back to, uh, you—your own upbringing. Uh, when you came back from Italy...

AG: Yeah.

RC: Um, what did you do? Did you get, uh, some type of employment that you were looking for?

AG: Prior to going to Italy my father had—every time my father started a business, I was involved with them. [Gestures with hands]

RC: Oh.

AG: I went into the, uh, JD [unclear] Company with my father to do butchering, to supply fishing boats. I went from there in—into, um, ah, [unclear]. [Gestures with hands]

RC: Right.

AG: Okay. Which the office was in the Ford building. Then he opened a travel business. So, when I came back from Italy, I was in the travel agency business, called Girardi's Travel Bureau. [Gestures with hands]

[00:10:00]

RC: So that was around 1958.

AG: Uh...basically, no I would say '57. The latter, uh, part of '57 because in 1958 I was sent to Prince George in Fort St. John to open two offices, of the travel agency, where I lived up there for two years. And I married my wife Joan here and we went up to, to Prince George.

RC: I see.

AG: But my father was always, ah—he would start a business and wanted me to be involved.

RC: Yeah. And your mother was active as—

AG: My mother always was active. Uh, she'd go—uh, we all went along with my dad. If he made good, it was good, if we made bad, we went along anyway.

RC: Yeah. And so, then, ah, you were in the travel agency, and, ah, you pretty much stayed with—

AG: Yeah.

RC: —the, the family business for most of your career I think.

AG: [Gestures with hands] Yeah, what happened [clears throat] in 1956, there was an Italian gentleman who got charged with murder on a [unclear]. And the policeman could not find an interpreter. So they came down to the office and asked me to become an interpreter, which I was reluctant. They said, "Well, if you come, you can come, or we're going to bring you."

[Laughs]

RC: [Laughs]

AG: So, I went up there and I interpreted. And that was the start of a career of interpreting too.

RC: Ah!

AG: Which I worked for the courts, Provincial and Federal for many years, until 1965, '66. Plus I censored Italian movies for the VC Class Vacation board. Plus, I worked in the motor vehicle branch as an interpreter. Which I was brought in there by an inspector to eliminate another interpreter, that, that was not doing what they thought he should do. [Gestures with hands while holding a sheet of paper]

RC: So you've had a real varied, uh, career and most of your career is thanks to the fact that you, uh, understood Italian.

AG: [Nods] If I did not go to school in Italy, I might not have had a career.

RC: Yeah. And, and, ah, in a way you followed in your dad's footsteps.

AG: Basically, yeah.

RC: So, when he was a young man, uh, and he had the newspaper, uh, uh, he ended up, ah, ah, being arrested in 1940. And do you know why he was arrested?

AG: I am assuming that there was a list, published list prior to the war of the members of a club, which was not illegal at that time. And I was made to understand that a certain individual in our community submitted this list to Ottawa, to have them arrested because they were members of the Fascist Party, pro-fascism. But it was—I mean they didn't think—it was just a club. [Says with emphasis while waving right hand forward]

RC: Yes.

AG: They gave it a name. [Says while waving arms]

RC: What was the name?

AG: I think, uh, pfft [makes noise with mouth and looks down at papers]...

RC: Was it the Giulio Giordano [Giulio Giordani]?

AG: [Nods] Giulio Giordano [Giulio Giordani], yeah, society, yeah. Yeah, Circolo Giulio Giordano [Giulio Giordani]. Fascio di Vancouver. [Reads from document]

RC: So, it, it was a legal entity before the war.

AG: That's right.

RC: And then because there was a fascist connection it became illegal.

AG: Illegal. [Nods]

RC: So then that's when something dramatic happened with your dad. What happened?

AG: [Nods] I was quite young, okay, I was born in 1937 and I think I was three years old and, ah, my mum takes me by streetcar down to the immigration building at the foot of Burrard. And we're standing outside and there's the bars on the cells. [Motions bars with hands] And my mum's saying to me, I remember this, "There's your dad! There's your dad!"

RC: My God.

AG: And then they loaded them on a train and my mum was waving and everything else. [Waves hand goodbye] But thank God that my mother had her mother and father here.

RC: Right.

AG: Otherwise we would have starved or my mother would have had to do something to support us, that I don't know what she could have done because she was not educated. [Gestures with hands and then picks up paper from desk] The government, Canadian government in their wisdom refused to give us any assistance being that we are a family of enemy aliens, which I don't understand to this date. My father, my mother, myself, we're all

born in Vancouver. [Says while counting on fingers and then motioning down to the ground]

And we were born Canadians. Yet we were treated enemy aliens.

RC: Yes.

AG: Now alien means something from another country.

RC: That's right.

AG: Not from Canada. And that's what I don't understand. They refused us social assistance, any assistance and if I didn't live in Kitsilano, on I think it was Abbott Street or something with my grandparents, who God knows. What—thank God we did because I enjoyed my grandparents.

RC: Yeah. And what were their names? What were your grandpar—

AG: Uh, P[?], and I think hers was Lina. Simonetti.

RC: Ah, so that—

AG: He was a long shore man in those days.

RC: Your mother's parents?

AG: [Nods] That's right. Yeah.

RC: And, uh, while your, your dad I guess he from here on the train that you described, he probably went to Kananaskis?

AG: No, straight to Petawawa. [Points with finger]

RC: Straight to Petawawa?

AG: That was where the tribunal was. [Makes a circular motion with finger]

RC: Yeah.

AG: Then they dispersed them to where and they send them to Kananaskis after.

RC: I see.

AG: Which he enjoyed.

[00:15:10]

RC: How, how did he enjoy it? What did he say?

AG: Well, he said to me, many a time, he says, "Attilio," he says, "everybody it was a recession. No jobs. Everybody was starving to death. We're being fed. We had our own cook, which was Nino Sala, a famous guy from Vancouver, had his own restaurants here. He was our cook. The Germans on one side, we on the other side. We would exchange food. We would play soccer together or baseball. You know, we would do a lot of things. And then they were teaching us

how to use explosives and we were enemy aliens. We're blowing up rocks and trees to make bridges and pathways, all you see around Banff was built by us at that time."

RC: Mm hmm. So, when you mentioned the Germans, in the context of the soccer, it was quite a rivalry?

AG: Oh, of course. But the guards loved it. They loved it because they enjoyed the games every Sunday.

RC: Yeah.

AG: And then they would come in to eat, the Italian food or the German food. [Smiles]

RC: And isn't it true that your dad and uncle were very good players and, ah—

AG: [Nods] Extremely good.

RC: —the, the team really whipped the Germans.

AG: Oh yeah—

RC: And they—

AG: And my father enjoyed that because my father, even later on in life, sponsored for young Italians here. There was no, no assistance for anybody, not like today.

RC: Right.

AG: In those days if you didn't do it for somebody. Nothing was done. [Gestures with hands]

RC: Nothing was done. So, did he write to your mother during that time?

AG: [Nods] Yes, yes he did. I have letters, copies of letters.

RC: And, ah, now did he, ah, was he concerned about anything? Like what, what did he say to your mother?

AG: Okay, in one of the letters I re—I just read this morning, he said to my mother, "Look it's my birthday, but please take the money that you're going to buy me for my birthday and buy something for yourself and little Attilio." He said, "I'm doing fine here. I'm eating. I'll be out soon." He, he more or less knew...that he was going to be out because he spent 18 month...there and then they shipped him with a paid ticket and some money they owed him for what he earned in the camp, back to Vancouver.

RC: Now there's a story right there I believe. He—they paid him—

AG: Yeah.

RC: —just a paltry, paltry—

AG: Five dollars and 70 cents.

RC: —and what, [laughs], and what was the five dollars and 70 cents?

AG: They said in the letters that they paid him because it was money here he had earned in the camp. [Starts looking through letters on desk]

RC: And he got 20 cents a day or something?

AG: Something like that, yeah. Like they do prisoners today. Like, you know, like we used to do in Ocala and that when they made license plates. [Says while looking through papers]

RC: And so, ah, did he ever tell you—

AG: Yeah, five dollars and 70 cents. This is in Petawawa. [Says while reading from paper]

RC: And what's the date of that letter?

AG: The letter is 1942, the 30th of January.

RC: So your dad was released just before Pearl Harbour in 19—December of '41? Or do you, do you remember that at all?

AG: I, I know what you're talking about, yeah.

RC: Yeah, I think that's when he—

AG: Yeah. [Nods]

RC: Did he come home alone or was he with others?

AG: I don't know that.

RC: Yeah.

AG: But I know that he has a lot of cards that were written to him. Uh, and people would drop in after the war to visit him in the office and they said, "Bruno, remember me? I was [unclear]..." You know, he, he had created quite a friendship.

RC: Ah, it wasn't that easy at times for him because he was a feisty guy and he wasn't going to take...

AG: Well he, he was a defender. Uh, he was—I don't recall how many years, I think it was 10 years—he was the president of the Sons of Italy. Because nobody else would take the job and he did it. He organized picnics. Organized a lot of fundraisers. He helped build the new Sacred Heart Church. I mean he—that's the way my father was like. He, he was born Canadian, but he loved being Italian.

RC: Very good, yeah. That's, that's a wonderful way to put it.

AG: Yeah.

RC: And when he was with the Sacred Heart, uh, he seemed to, ah, ah to be, ah, involved in that, uh, assistance organization that he founded—

AG: [Nods] For immigrants.

RC: Yeah. And what was the name of that? Do you remember?

AG: Uh, Centro Assistenza per Italiani, you know, *immigrati*.

RC: And, and what did he have in the, uh, club? He had—

AG: He had a group of, of like representatives to, ah—he would bring in, uh, in, uh, workers—
employers like, uh, D'Appolonia or those kind of guys in to hire people. [Gestures with hands]

RC: Ah!

AG: And he would you know. And but the thing is what happened is one day an, an Italian said
to him, "I don't understand why you're the person Bruno." He said, "Why?" Well he says,
"You're not It—you're not Italian, you're born Canadian." So my father said, "Fine." He packed
up his bags and left.

RC: And left.

AG: But my father also pioneered the first Italian radio program, CKXX, *Musica Italiana*. Payed
for out of his pocket because in those days, nobody sponsored anything [shrugs].

RC: And, ah, was that a Sunday morning broadcast?

AG: I believe it was, with Jack Kyle.

RC: Yeah.

AG: Two hours.

[00:20:00]

RC: Yes. And, ah, ah, from there he, uh, continued to do things for the community?

AG: Always, always, always. He was a good friend of Father [Gioacchino] Bortignon, which was the head of the Sacred Heart Church. He was a good friend of the Consulate. Rader, Rader, Rader, I believe his name was.

RC: Italo?

AG: Yeah. He always made connections and he used those connections to help his—the people.

RC: Yeah. So, no matter what he went through, during the war, when came back he resumed—

AG: Oh, he, Ray, he never had any animosity. Um, in fact, he was always professing to say to Italians, "If you're not a Canadian citizen in five years, I would put you on a boat and send you back." You know he said, "You want to live in this country, become part of it." [Gestures with hands and finger]

RC: That's...

AG: That's why I could—I could never understand it. I never heard him say he was upset about it.

RC: I see. So, um, when he came back, did he want to start the newspaper again, do you think?

AG: This I don't know. I don't think so. I think he, he went to, ah, to work as a salesman for Canada Packers. Applied for a job. The individual said to him, "Your name is what? Bruno Girardi? I'm sorry, I can't—I don't know how to spell that so there's no job for you." Which my father told me in later years when he had his own place the same individual came in to sell him items, and he said to him, "Look it, I'm sorry, my name is still Bruno Girardi, and you can't spell it." [Laughs]

RC: Well, didn't they say that with when he came back from, uh, the internment camps he had a sense that the, the RCMP were still looking at, uh, uh...

AG: Always, he had to report monthly to the RCMP. He had, I had a letter here that he had to sign it, showing that he was ah—he had to fill this contract. Like most prisoners do. They go to their parole officer.

RC: Yes.

AG: And he had to, he filled it from 16th of December '41 till 26th of July '43.

RC: My God.

AG: He had to sign this. And you know, and also, um, there was always a lot of animosity. Because you've got to remember the...so-called...authorities that were at that time here were ex-British soldiers. You know, so I mean they had no feeling for Canada. I mean, ah, there was a group who, ah, who, ah, confiscated all of the Japanese fishing boats and sold them to themselves.

RC: You see.

AG: I mean this is it, people were exploited.

RC: Yeah.

AG: But they made us stronger. Because the Japanese formed the biggest fishing fleets in, in BC and made tons of money. The Italians formed most of the construction companies. You go around Vancouver there's hotels with Italian names on them because they wouldn't hire us, so we hired ourselves. [Gestures with hands]

RC: Yeah, yeah. [Says quietly] And, ah, what, ah, what businesses did, did he, and your uncle Attilio, uh, have together? What did they do?

AG: The only one that I know of that my father had a store on 505 Prior Street, Prior and Jackson. And he sold it to my uncle for one dollar. My uncle and him went into—he tried to bring my uncle into the, um, deep sea...boat, uh, ship chandlers. Okay, ah, the freighters. And my father formed Girardi's Ship Chandlers here in Vancouver and he formed North American Ship Supply in Long Beach, California. So, he said to my uncle, "Look, you take Girardi's Ship Chandlers over and I'll go down to Long Beach and come back and forth." Which he did. But one time my father served a ship for my uncle and he waited for his money and my uncle said, "I don't owe you nothing." So my dad said, "Okay." [Motions "done" with arms]

RC: Yeah. That was it.

AG: That was it. And then from then on he refused to call me by my first name, which is my uncle's name, 'cause he didn't like my uncle so he used to call me Max, Mack all the time.
[Laughs]

RC: That's pretty interesting. [Laughs]

AG: Yeah.

RC: Um, well, you know—I'd like to go back to the time of the internment...

AG: Yeah.

RC: Now, he was in hut 32—

AG: Yeah, which is the list right here. [Picks up sign that says "Hut 32" in black marker at the top, and a list of 12 names underneath]

RC: Yeah, and, uh, they—it was comprised of just your uncle and your dad—

AG: Yeah.

RC: —and the rest were Germans.

AG: If you notice my uncle's name was penciled in. [Holds up "Hut 32" sign]

RC: Yeah.

AG: My dad was there before and then my uncle was penciled in.

RC: And, ah, did your dad ever speak of how he got along in that—

AG: He, he, my father never said anything bad about his time of internment. He never had any enemies. In fact ah, this, uh, Newmieher[?], if I recall correctly my brother telling me that they're Vancouver residents and my, and my father and my brother used to do income tax for the same family. You know, so it's great.

RC: Yeah.

AG: And you know he has, like you see, he has a thing from in German, hand painted by one of the prisoners from Kananaskis. [Grabs painted sheet of paper] And there's a Paul Charlie Newmeiher[?]. And you know this kind of stuff on it. My father was—luckily my father kept all this stuff.

RC: Yes. And, ah, so, uh, it, it—there was a point when uh, he mentioned Antonio Cianci?

AG: Oh...

RC: Ah...

AG: The barber. Uh, uh, well that's what I'm saying; they had everybody they needed in the camp.

RC: Yeah.

[00:25:22]

AG: They had the barber, Cianci, to cut his hair. Nino Salle to cook the meals. And he said, eh, it was like being home. [Smiles and laughs]

RC: Now he did say that and I quote you that the person that really suffered was your mom.

AG: My mum. My mum luckily had her mother and father, which, they were happy to help us out because they didn't feel my father—my mother should have married my father at that time because he was like a rebel, eh, in those days, okay. But the reason my father married my mother, besides loving her, is that they used to work for Famous Foods, which is S[?] pasta place, on Clark and Hastings. My mother was the boss. And my father was an employee. So he said, "In order for me to have her not give me orders, I married her." [Laughs]

RC: That's a wonderful story. [Says while laughing]

AG: That was—he told me all the time.

RC: [Laughs]

AG: So, that's, you know, they go from there. And my mother always went along with what my father did. Good or bad. Lean times, fat times, always went along. But I don't recall ever being unhappy, suffering. Always warm, well fed, Christmas presents, birthday presents.

RC: Yeah.

AG: I never recall, you know.

RC: So you have to thank your mother and your grandparents probably?

AG: [Nods] Yeah, yeah, at the beginning.

RC: At the beginning.

AG: And my grandfather was great with me. Like, up, up until I was six years of age I didn't speak English because I used to sit on his knee and speak with him. Okay? And there's pictures of me with him, uh, we used to go along the track and pick mushrooms, you know, radicchio, you know, all this stuff, you know. And *cicoria*. And it was great.

RC: Yeah.

AG: He was a big bull of a man. [Nods] Oh yeah, my grandmother was about four foot 10 and he was about six foot four. He was a bull of a man. Oh yeah.

RC: Were they from the same part of—

AG: No, he was from the *Toscana* area, Ponte A Moriano, which is a small village outside of Lucca.

RC: I see. And, ah...

AG: And he was a hearty man too. When he immigrated to Canada it was five brothers. Noce and him, and three other brothers, which went to the States, I never met them. But they stayed in Vancouver. And Noce was a, a, a ladies man and bocce player and who—God knows what. And my grandfather was here. He went back three times to Italy before he married my grandmother during those days. [Gestures with hands and points finger]

RC: That's very good, yeah. And, ah, so that family, you know, your, your mom's family, did they have, um, uh, have to report to the RCMP?

AG: [Shakes head] No, not that I know of. I never—don't recall any of that kind of stuff.

RC: Did your mom have to go?

AG: [Shakes head] No, no, no, no. I think they were kind of—because, uh, my father said to me many a times, [clears throat] as he got older, um, when he got involved in import/export, he said, "Every time I ask the government for a permit, I'd get it. No questions, nothing." He says, "I'm wondering if they realized they were wrong and they had red-flagged my name." Because he had, uh, permits to bring stuff in from Italy, from all over the world and no, no, no problem. My uncle also, my uncle was one of the biggest importers of wine, liqueurs and, and, and foodstuffs. No problem.

RC: Well, when your dad was at, uh, Petawawa, and going to the tribunal where they asked him questions—

AG: [Nods] Mm hmm.

RC: —he was a, a guy to recon with—

AG: [Nods] Well [shrugs]—

RC: —I think he, ah—

AG: He was a—see the problem with my father and me, being an interpreter means you're a foreigner who speaks English. No, I was a Canadian who spoke Italian. And my father was the same way. So when he got in front of that tribunal, he was nobody's fool. [Gestures with hands]

RC: That's right. I'm sure.

AG: They couldn't, they couldn't fool him or, or, or create some baloney story that he would be, he would, you know, be snowballed.

RC: So, at one point, he ah, asked the tribunal, "What the hell am I doing here?"

AG: Exactly.

RC: And they sent him a letter, do you remember what the letter said at all?

AG: That, that you're, that, that you're, ah, [looks through pile of papers on table]... "I believe that's you're a member of the Italo Fascio abroad which organizes—was declared illegal in Canada by ordering Consul." Dated 12th of June, 1940. [Says while reading from paper on desk]

RC: And, and that he was a, a German sympathizer as well.

AG: [Gestures with hand] Exactly, oh, yeah, that too. Yeah, yeah, that was the best one. And I mean my father, pfft [makes sound with mouth]...

RC: Did he ever comment on that? What—

AG: No, no, no.

RC: How did they come up with that kind of...

AG: I don't know. [Reading from paper] It says here in 1940, the 19th of August, um... "I've been directed by the Committee appointed by the minister of Justice to deal with your objection to detention, to advise you that your detention has been deemed necessary in the interest of the State because representations have been made that, that you—"somebody made repre—some ques—information —"that you're a member of the Fascist Party and you're pro-German. In the view of the above you should—would be—appear to be disloyal." Not alleged, "Would be," okay.

RC: Ah, so there, there was somebody in the background.

AG: That's right. And I think we all know who he was. The guy's dead, so let's, let's leave it alone. [Smiles]

RC: And, ah, your dad however, ah, uh, said, ah, very convincingly that he admired Mussolini for introducing certain legislation in Italy.

[00:30:47]

AG: [Shrugs while Ray is talking] Benito Mussolini was a coal miner. He was a strong man, okay. Um, it was not hard to, to capture the Italian people, the faith. Because Vittorio Emanuele [III] had done nothing for them. He had separated the South and the North. The South was illiterate, they couldn't read or write. The North was supposed to be the intelligent group. He went in there and he made education, ah, ah obligatory or what you call it?

RC: For everyone.

AG: For everybody. He went into the fields and took the kids from the fields and put them in schools and told the parents, "If you don't let your kids be educated, I'll put you in jail." [Says while pointing both fingers] He made the trains run on time. He started family allowance for the mothers, when they have babies he would pay them. You know, he—medical. Everything was started by him. Because Mussolini in reality was a socialist. You know like—and he believed in, in, in assisting the poor people.

RC: Yeah.

AG: And which made him, not a friend of the North.

RC: So, when your dad was in Italy, he was a very young man?

AG: [Shakes head] Oh, so—

RC: So he must of, ah, he must have looked at all these things, ah—

AG: [Nods] That and I think in, uh, going to the, the neighbourhood, um, university I think he probably met a lot of people in there too.

RC: Yeah. And, uh, and so, around 1935 they left?

AG: [Makes gesture with hand] They came back.

RC: Yeah.

AG: They came back and I remember him showing, [clears throat]—I don't know what happened to it—but there was a piece of paper, just like this, [takes paper from the desk] with the, with his picture in the top corner of him and my uncle. And it said on the pict—on the [unclear], “This man is a Canadian citizen and this is a document that he can travel to Canada.” And that's all they—no passport, no nothing.

RC: I see. Um, one of the things he said, ah...when he was in front of the *congresso*, giving his, uh, opinion as to whether there should be, uh, retribution, he said that he was a fascist in, ah, 1940 and that he was still a fascist.

AG: [Nods] Yeah.

RC: That—what, what—did...

AG: Well, the thing is that he believed at those days that fascism liberated Italy. Okay, the Garibaldi society, they didn't care about Italy. I mean the unification that's all they ever did was unify Italy. But they, they forgot—actually the southern Italians should realize that fascism made them part of Italy. Because all of a sudden in 1956, everybody migrated to Torino, they work in the fact—Fiat factories from southern Italy.

RC: Um, in around, uh, 19, ah '82, '83, was the 100th anniversary of the birth of Mussolini.

AG: [Nods] Uh hmm.

RC: And, ah, I think your dad, uh, received a notification.

AG: [Nods] He received a document...from, uh, Mussolini—I think his name was Emanuele...

RC: Uh, Vittorio.

AG: [Nods] Vittorio. Okay.

RC: The son.

AG: Yeah. Uh, uh, you know, uh, uh, it's a, it's a, it's a notification admiring my father and he sent this long—like, like a postscript. [Gestures with hands]

RC: Yeah. And so, uh, could one conclude that your dad was still connected—

AG: I—not—I, I think he was on the list. I don't think, I don't ever recall my father, uh, talking to anybody, or you know, nothing like that, but you know I mean, who knows.

RC: It was just a personal thing.

AG: Who knows, yeah. Who knows.

RC: Yeah.

AG: Because I think my father, having served as a prisoner of war, the Italian government probably realized, like you know, he suffered because of being a prisoner of war. Italian. Uh, one time I approached the, um, uh, consulate here and I said, "Look, my father should be given Italian citizenship." He said, "Why?" I said, "Well, he was a prisoner of war." They refused it. [Says while half laughing]

RC: I see. Um, so one of the, uh, the other stories that I, I believe, believe you told me, ah, some time ago was that your dad, ah, got called up in the Canadian army after he, uh—

AG: [Raises arm] My father told me this he says, he, he, uh, he was, uh, sent a letter to appear at a conscription office to be, to serve in the military. So he went down with all his letters that he had—like I've got some here. He had a whole bunch of them, right [grabs for letter on desk]. And he went into the office and they said, uh—'cause my father used to write a letter every month to them, okay—so he said to them, uh, "I'm at Bruno Girardi and blah, blah..." Said, "Oh yeah, fine, sign here Mr. Girardi." "No, no," [says putting hand up to stop] "just a minute, I want to ask you a question. Am I an enemy alien, or am I a citizen of Canada?" [Raises arms in the air in defense] The guy says, "What are you talking about? You're a citizen of Canada." He says, "No, I got 18 letters saying I'm an enemy alien—forget it!" [Taps hand against paper and laughs]

[00:35:37]

RC: And that's—so that's why he was very bright that way.

AG: [Nods] Oh, he was— they could not put nothing over him. Because—

RC: They actually wanted him to join didn't they?

AG: [Nods and makes gesture with hands] Well that was part of the, uh, the conscription.

RC: Yeah.

AG: Because they had so many volunteers at that time because of the depression. You know going—but towards the end—I guess, I mean Angelo Branca was in the army. Filopponi was in the army. A lot of these guys that were not in prisoner of war camps joined the Canadian army.

RC: Yes. That's true.

AG: They became interpreters, as spies, against their own people.

RC: Gee wiz.

AG: And then—therefore they got high positions in, in BC as lawyers and this kind of stuff. And judges.

RC: So there was a, a real split in the community.

AG: [Gestures with hands] Well of course.

RC: Yeah, yeah. Um, the newspaper itself, uh, your dad's newspaper, uh, did any, uh, copies of the newspaper survive over all these—

AG: [Shrugs] I have three copies here, I understand you have a few copies.

RC: I do.

AG: But there, the large amount that I recall that my father had, have disappeared.

RC: Yeah.

AG: I don't know where they are and it's too bad because there's a lot of them there. Lucky you had the one copy that showed my birth announcement—

RC: Yeah.

AG: —otherwise I wouldn't even have that.

RC: Well I think your dad said that, ah, that tribunal, those three fellas, Robertson and...

AG: Well yeah.

RC: Uh, they had, uh, the bound volumes that they took from the, ah, from your dad when he was interned—

AG: Oh, is that right?

RC: —to, to look through it, to tell your dad that there were...

AG: Well see my father always like—there's one title on this newspaper here says [points to paper on table and begins reading], "*La Parola del Nostro Duce.*"

RC: Yeah.

AG: Yeah, but he says, "*Il Duce parla della situazione con l'agricoltura.*" He's talking about the farmers.

RC: Yeah.

AG: [Looks at paper on desk and gestures with hand] And it, ah, you know, not talking about war.

RC: War, no. So this—what you just said was this, these are the words of, um...

AG: Of Mussolini, yeah.

RC: Mussolini, yeah.

AG: *Il Duce*.

RC: Yeah. And—

AG: And he—but he's talking about is the situation of the farmers in the farms.

RC: Yeah. Did your father ever speak to you about his, ah, editor, uh, [Alberto] Boccini?

AG: No. [Shakes head]

RC: Alberto?

AG: [Shakes head] No, no.

RC: 'Cause he, uh, took over from your dad.

AG: [Nods] Oh, okay.

RC: Uh—

AG: I never knew what happened to it.

RC: Yeah and then my dad was a partner at Boccini.

AG: [Points finger at Ray] I think, I think—but also the newspaper finally became a Chinese newspaper, after, in that office there. Yeah, yeah, yeah.

RC: Oh...

AG: China News.

RC: I see.

AG: But I never knew what happened because you got to remember I was four years old.
[Gestures with hand]

RC: Yeah.

AG: I would have been 10 or 12 before I started to understand what was going on.

RC: Yeah. And, ah, when the war was over—and you've explained some of the things that your dad did—uh, tell us a little more about the, uh, sponsorships. He, he would have, uh, teams, uh—

AG: [Nods] The Columbus, uh, soccer club.

RC: Yeah?

AG: I mean you have a picture of all the group.

RC: Yes.

AG: And they're all prominent Italians that had businesses here. Played soccer down in, off of Prior Street. Fall[?] Street Park.

RC: So he continued this for years?

AG: [Nods] And he had the Girardi's soccer club, uh, jerseys [gestures to name written across shirt]. He'd pay for that.

RC: Yes.

AG: Oh yeah.

RC: And later in life he became involved with the Socred [Social Credit Party of Canada], uh, Party.

AG: Yeah, he was a good friend of [Bill] Vander Zalm. He liked Vander Zalm. And, uh, you know—and also he liked [Harold] Winch, which was a CCFer [Co-operative Commonwealth Federation].

RC: That's right.

AG: Because those guys were grass roots. They, they believed in what they did.

RC: Yeah.

AG: So, he, you know he liked Vander Zalm. They used to—he used to go to the garden shop, they used to talk about this and talk about [gestures with hands]—my father thought he was a avid planter, he would give Vander Zalm, ah, fig tree cuttings and Vander Zalm would give him other stuff.

RC: That's... [Laughs]

AG: In my father's garden I saw watermelon, cantaloupe, stuff growing in his garden. [Gestures hand to the ground]

RC: Isn't that amazing?

AG: [Smiles and nods] Yeah.

RC: So, he got along with those people? Didn't—then later on did he not become, uh, one, one, one of the people who organized the election in his, uh, area?

AG: [Shakes head] I don't know.

RC: Yeah.

AG: This I don't know.

RC: Yeah. Uh, what did they call them? Um, uh, returning officer.

AG: [Gestures uncertainty with head] I don't know, maybe.

RC: Yeah.

AG: [Shrugs] My father was always involved. [Clears throat] My father he—if you said there's a club, he'd join it.

RC: Yeah.

AG: You know and he never thought of, ah, of his well being for him or his family. [Gestures to himself and to the side]

[00:40:00]

RC: Yeah.

AG: When he was with the Italian Society, I never seen him. [Waves arms outward to indicate 'never'] We'd go to the festivals and I never seen him. [Waves arms outward to indicate 'never']

RC: Yeah.

AG: We go to the picnics, I never seen him. [Waves arms outward to indicate 'never']

RC: 'Cause he was always—

AG: Organizing, you know, this kind of stuff. [Gestures with hands]

RC: Yeah. And, uh, what is the legacy that you feel you've received from your father, if you were—

AG: Well, my legacy is with my father, I learned to, to get along with every nationality. I have no problem with anybody that I know as a friend, related to. And not to be afraid to walk into a dark room, even though you can't find the light switch. You know, a lot of people would open the door and [motions with hand feeling for light switch] they'd put the light on before they go in. No me, I walk right it [gestures walking through doorway]. And I think, and to, to get involved in businesses without a guarantee. That's why I'm still doing what I'm doing.

RC: Yes. And it's your heritage that you received from your dad who was a businessman and he tried—

AG: [Nods] Exactly. Well we all followed each other. I mean when I came down from Prince George, I said to him—up there I started an income tax business because up there was nobody there [gestures with hands]. So we did it down here and now my brother does quite well, I do quite well, and my father did quite well. [Gestures with hands]

RC: That's, that's—

AG: Because the travel business was, uh, dwindling up north. The, uh, Peace River, uh, did not open. So—that's what we were hoping for—so we came down here. And then three years ago or four years ago the airlines decided not to pay commissions. So I said that's it, I cancelled. Shut everything down and we moved up here. My father also, I forget to tell you was a, ah, distributor and importer of Italian newspapers and magazines—

RC: [Says quietly] Right.

AG: —throughout the lower mainland.

RC: Yes.

AG: And, ah, you know he had quite, he had about, pfft [makes noise with mouth], I would say 30 to 40, ah, selections of, ah, newspapers. [Gestures to indicate a large quantity]

RC: And this was, this was during the time you were working in—

AG: [Nods] Exactly. We, we started down on 123 East Hastings [points to his right with finger], then we moved up to, ah, 26 or 2700 block East Hastings [points finger behind his head]. And we had you know, magazines in there. And my brother still has it...in Richmond. [Points with finger]

RC: In Richmond. And, ah, I believe you—your dad and yourself, uh, perhaps pioneered the, the charter flights to—

AG: [Nods and gestures with arms] My, my father did. My father in conjunction with the Father Sordi from Lady of Sorrows started the, uh, flights, the, uh, Italian, uh, charters to Italy. Those days, I remember, never forget this, 350 bucks, return flight.

RC: [Laughs]

AG: You know and there was with Air France.

RC: Yeah.

AG: Which was you know, I mean we got that trophy over there from Air France and you know this kind of stuff. And my father had a real good relationship. But as everything does, a lot of times my father wouldn't sell a full plane and he would pay out of his own pocket.

RC: Yeah. [Sighs] You know when you mentioned the priest, Father Sordi...

AG: He's still, he's still alive.

RC: Still alive. Your father, as you said earlier in this interview, uh, was a great friend of Father Bortignon.

AG: [Nods] Oh yeah, totally.

RC: And wasn't Father Bortignon also politically—

AG: I, I believe Father Bortignon cut off his, his, his feet. Because they shipped him back to, uh, Thunder Bay [gestures behind him]. He lost the parish [gestures to Ray].

RC: In the war?

AG: [Nods] He lost the parish. No, I think after the war. I think in, ah, in, ah, late '40s, early '50s, yeah.

RC: Okay.

AG: 'Cause they had the Sacred Heart Church, which you remember? [Gestures with hand]

RC: Yeah.

AG: Across the alley was the school and the house was on the side. [Gestures with hands]

RC: Right.

AG: But you know during those days there if you didn't make friends, [shakes head] you had no chance.

RC: You had no chance. Um, I'm just going to go through the, the page here...

AG: [Picks up papers from desk and begins to flip through them] Yup. I was never involved in any social activities 'cause I learned from my father not to get involved. [Smiles and laughs]

RC: [Laughs] 'Cause he was too [emphasis on 'too'] involved.

AG: [Shrugs] He was too involved. I belonged to a football club, the Cats. At that time, which was [unclear] football.

RC: And now what year did you and Joan get married?

AG: In the first of August 1959. And we met her—I met her in high school.

RC: Oh [says in happy surprise].

AG: I was in grade 12 and she was in grade nine. She was quite tall and blonde and me I'm not that bright and she told me she, she was older than what she really was. [Smiles and laughs]

RC: [Laughs] That's a good story.

AG: And I believed it.

RC: [Laughs]

AG: Hmm. [Long pause] Yeah, no, I just see—you know it's a, it's a—and like a [ruffles through papers in hands]—I went to Italy, came back, I went up north, came back and we got back together and we got married.

RC: Um, wha—I'm just going to go back to June the 10th, 1940.

AG: Yup.

RC: Did your father ever tell you, uh, how, uh, he was approached by the RCMP to take him away?

AG: [Shakes head no] My mother said to me that just two men in big trench coats came to the house and told—and arrested my father with my—they were looking for my Uncle Attilio, and my father sent a message to somebody to tell Attilio to turn himself in before he gets arrested. [Gestures with hands]

RC: Oh, I see.

AG: [Nods]

[0045:16]

RC: [Long pause] And, um, do you, uh, personally have, ah, sort of animosity towards the Canadian government for what they did to your dad?

AG: [Shrugs] Uh, not so much [clears throat], my father, because my father never exploited any animosity in me. I'm more annoyed with the Canadian government and the authorities of that time for what they did to my mum and I. Which we were born Canadians. My father was born Canadian, but he sort of got wallowed in the mud a bit. [Gestures a circular motion with hand] So he got dirty. But we didn't. [Gestures to himself] And yet mother wherever she turned—thank god we had an Italian doctor, Ragona, so we had—didn't—wouldn't turn away from that.

RC: So, you felt pretty alone—

AG: Oh....

RC: —like your mother was a—felt abandoned by her own—

AG: [Nods and gestures with arms] Exactly. Luckily she's a, a member, member of her family of 13 kids. So she had sisters all over the place and brothers too. And my, my father only had one, Attilio [gestures with finger].

RC: Did your mother ever say that, ah, her Canadian friends turned against her a little?

AG: [Shakes head] No.

RC: Because she was a—

AG: Because we—

RC: —wife of a—

AG: —we always lived in an area where the people were, were not, uh, pro-Canadian. They were Russian, Chinese, Japanese, so we got along fine. [Smiles]

RC: Yeah, yeah.

AG: I mean Garry Lee, a kid I grew up with. You know him? [Gestures with hand]

RC: Oh yeah.

AG: He was Chinese, no problem at all. [Gestures with hand]

RC: But what I—what's really, uh, interesting about your dad after all this terrible experience, he bounces back and he becomes a leader of the [unclear] *Italia*.

AG: [Shrugs] Well it's no use looking back and saying, "I can't correct what happened. So let's go ahead and make new."

RC: Yeah.

AG: [Long pause, flips through papers in hand] And my father, you know my father like, those days there he liked being part of the Italian community. He, he enjoyed the members of the

community. We lived on Heatley and Keefer. Everybody lived within that area [makes a circle motion with hand]. Um, uh, Umpire Street, he had his grocery store, so they all come in, the Brandolinis, all the stuff came in, you know he got along fine. [Gestures with hand]

RC: Well, um, one further question, uh, if you had an opportunity to, uh, speak directly to the Canadian government about, uh, how you feel or whether you want, uh, compen—family compensated. What would you say?

AG: I would just say to them, you know please explain to me why you took it upon yourself as so-called our protectors, Canadian government, to declare us enemy aliens when we were born here and refuse us any assistance. [Gestures with hand and then point hand to his chest] That you would do that to a non-resident.

RC: That's excellent. And do you want them to do anything today?

AG: I don't know what can be done? My mother's passed away. I mean these are questions I've been holding for almost 70 years. You know, I just don't understand. You know I can see you, uh, if you're, if you sho—if you rob somebody and you're put in jail okay. But we were declared children of enemy alien, which they had no proof. He never went to trial. He was released after 18 months and sent back home.

RC: So they never revoked his, uh—

AG: [Shakes head] No.

RC: —Canadian citizenship?

AG: [Shakes head] Never. They couldn't, he was born Canadian.

RC: Yeah, that's right.

AG: And he travelled back and forth numerous times as, as an importer/exporter and did business with Italy various times.

RC: Attilio, thank you very much.

AG: No problem.

[Fades out at 00:49:09]

[End of interview]