

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

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**NAME OF INTERVIEWEE:** Doug Brombal

**NAME OF INTERVIEWER:** Cristina Pietropaolo

**NAME OF VIDEOGRAPHER:** Travis Tomchuk

**TRANSCRIBED BY:** Stefanie Petrilli

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## **ABSTRACT**

Douglas Nereo Brombal was born in Windsor, Ontario in 1930. His father Nereo Brombal was born in 1896 in Treviso, Italy. Doug recounts his father's early life working in Northern Ontario, where he met his future wife, a German immigrant. The couple married and moved to Windsor, Ontario where they built their family home and raised their two children. Doug's mother was an accomplished seamstress, while his father joined the Windsor Police Department. It was at some point after Italy declared war on Britain and France that the Brombal family felt the effects of the war. Nereo Brombal was dismissed from the police force. Despite the fact that the RCMP (Royal Canadian Mounted Police) found no evidence that Nereo was a threat to Canada, he was no longer able to work for the police. Doug recounts that it was very difficult for his father and he took odd jobs until he was hired by a gentleman by the name of Mr. Anderson to tend to his garden. Doug and his cousin also faced discrimination during the war since they were of Italian and German heritage. Both children often fought their way to and from school and avoided many of the children due to the bullying they faced. Despite these hardships, the family was able to make ends meet with the help of their Italian neighbours. Although Doug and his father understood the measures that the Canadian government took during World War II, Nereo never went back to the police force and refused to return to Italy. The family was given an apology by the police commission, where they were presented with a

plaque honouring Nereo. The Windsor Police Commission also began a camp for underprivileged children, which they named Camp Brombal in honour of Nereo.

## INTERVIEW

**DB: Doug Brombal, interviewee**

**CP: Cristina Pietropaolo, interviewer**

[Title screen]

[Fades in at 00:00:08]

CP: So, first your full name.

DB: My full name is Douglas Nereo Brombal.

CP: Nereo after your father?

DB: [Nods] Named Nereo after my father, which is very often called Nero and many forms and letters and so on. F—the Anglos in the country seem to end up calling it Nero. My father was nicknamed Nero. So... [Shrugs]

CP: And, um, when were you born and where?

DB: I was born in Windsor, Ontario. And, uh, May the 18, 1930. In the house that my dad built.

[Clears throat and gives a slight smile]

CP: Um, where was the house? Do you remember?

DB: It was on McEwan Avenue in Windsor. And, uh, he and my uncle and grandfather and so on, they built it.

CP: And the rest of your family? Your parents, your siblings...

DB: I had a sister who's since, uh, deceased. And she was born, uh, [shrugs] 1922. She was born before me. And, uh, she's since passed away. And that's the only sibling I had.

[Cross-dissolve between clips 00:01:17]

CP: Okay. And can you tell me about—you said your mum was German?

DB: My mother was German. [Nods] And, um, well she was born in Germany. And, uh, my—both my father—uh, my father came over he ended up in Northern Ontario working in the mines and in the bush up there. And, uh, my mother and her family came to Ottawa from Germany. And when the First World War started they moved up to Northern Ontario. And that's where they met. And then they were married and moved to Windsor and built a house and had kids. So... [Smiles]

CP: And did your uncle and your grandfather live in the same neighbourhood or in the same house?

DB: [Nods] Yes. We lived across the street and next door. [Gestures with hand] And, uh, they were German. I had no Italian relatives in Canada at the time. Didn't have any that I knew of until around [shrugs] 10 or 15 years ago, around 1990, somewhere in there. And, uh, then we

discovered them; they live in Guelph. Just by accident that I happened to find out they were there and we've since become quite friendly. [Smiles] And, uh, they're cousins. So...but that's the only relatives that I know of in Canada. [Nods and scratches face]

CP: And, uh, maybe could you tell me briefly about the discrimination that your grandfather and your uncle—I think you mentioned also—faced?

DB: The German side? [Gestures hand out to his right]

CP: Yeah.

DB: Almost the same as with my father. They, all three of them, were working. My father was on the police force. My grandfather was, uh, working at the Windsor lumber yard, he was superintendent. And my uncle was the manager of Canadian Battery and Bonalite; they made battery cases and so on, all in Windsor. And when that [says "that" with emphasis] happened—I think it was [William Lyon] Mackenzie King who created the problem of enemy aliens and so on that we're talking about here. Anyway, he—when he made that declaration they were all dismissed. [Makes sweeping motion with hand to indicate dismissal] And out of work. And up until then [looks up] they were probably amongst the only three in the neighbourhood that had worked during the Depression. And then they were out of work. And now all of a sudden everybody else is working because the war started and they were working in factories. So we then—[makes circular gesture with hands] there was a reversal of roles with our family and the neighbours. Other than the Italian neighbours; there were some Italian neighbours who had the same problem as my dad.

CP: Um, so was there—how did non-Italian neighbours then feel about—

DB: [Sighs] Oh, there were a number of, uh, uh—basically they were all fine. Uh, there was one as I recall in particular whom—we had a large garden [gestures to size with hands] and during the Depression my dad used to [gestures with hands] pick vegetables and so on and I'd take them over as a child to the next door neighbours to give them to them and so on. Gave some to this particular neighbour as well. And when he read in the paper—and there is an article in the paper that it shows in one of these, uh, um, releases here—um, when he read about that he came over and knocked on the door and said something to my mother to the effect that he hoped that his—this immigrant family, an enemy alien family, would starve to death...after what we had done for him. My dad, my mother had to hold back that night when she told him because I think he'd have gone over and gladly punched him out. [Laughs] But, uh—and it was, it was interesting with the, uh, German side of the family and the Italian side. Like just my dad and my mother German and her father and her brother were there. She had sisters and so on in Windsor, but not right in our neighbourhood. And, uh, so my cousin lived across the street and he and I went to school together. And, uh, because we were of both enemy aliens, uh, German and Italian, um, it was not too pleasant. We did a lot of fighting to and from school; were called a lot of names, you know, the old dago, wop, kraut, squarehead, you name it. And we ran into that sort of thing daily for a little while. It slowly dropped off when we were able to fight our way as well as some of the others [laughs] and, uh, managed to do it. And I'm still in touch with my cousin who lives in Florida now. But, uh, but I think we were the only two in the neighbourhood that really had that particular problem, as I remember. Of course you remember what happens to you more than to others. But, uh, yeah.

[00:05:58]

CP: How old were you?

DB: Uh, well [scratches face and looks up thinking], I think that letter was 1941...42 [leans forward to confirm date on paper in front of him]. So I was 12 [nods]...when that happened. And up until then—like my father had bought me an accordion and I was taking lessons and when that happened he said he had to send it back...’cause he couldn’t afford it any longer and it really upset him. And I said, uh, no, I’d go to work and I’d make enough money to pay for it myself. And so I did by selling tomatoes and strawberries and stuff from the garden to pay my lessons and help pay for the accordion. And, uh...but that was ’42 and then in 1944, uh...you had to have, um, registration cards to get a job and you had to be 16 to get one. And in 1944, in the summer, I remember coming home one day and my dad was mentioning something about—he was finally—he had finally got a job, uh, working for a gentleman in Windsor, uh, by the name Anderson, who owned a company called Godfredson, who made fire trucks. And he hired my dad as a gardener because he couldn’t have him working in the factory during the war. And in 1944 as the tide turned in Europe [makes circular gesture with hands], he could hire him; so he hired him in the company. And my dad mentioned something to me, he said, “One of these days you’ll be able to get a job there.” And I was 14 then and I said, “Well, I’m gonna get one this summer. When I’m out of school I’ll get one.” So I did and worked in the factory. And, uh, when the fall came I quit school and went to school at nights in Detroit and worked in the factory during the day. So that’s [spreads arms out in a line]...how that sort of started. I remember seeing the principal of my high school on the bus to Detroit a couple of time and smiled and said hello and worried about him finding out that I wasn’t going to school anymore. [Laughs] So... [Shrugs] I finished my high school at nights in Detroit and, uh, worked in the factory until all the soldiers came back from the army and then they filled the jobs and they let me go and I had to do—scramble around and get other jobs, so. But, uh, that was it. When I was—as I—before that when I was 12 to 14 I worked in an Italian grocery store, delivering groceries and so on and [shrugs] trying to make enough money to help the family basically, that’s what it was.

CP: Do you remember the name of the grocery store?

DB: Yup. Ji-Jimmy—uh, we called him Jimmy, I don't think that was his name, but I can't remember what his first name was, Italian name, but it was Di Vittori. And, uh, Di Vittori's Grocery Store. And that was, uh, Jimmy, the owner and his brother Tarquinio and, uh, his other brother, uh, Luigi; the three of them ran the store. [Counts on fingers]

CP: And whereabouts in the city was that?

DB: Well that was on the corner of [looks up thinking] McKay and, uh, Pelletier, in Windsor. Or in Windsor-talk Pelture. [Laughs and then coughs]

CP: I guess—I mean, uh, I'm assuming that they probably had to deal with their fair share of—

DB: Oh, they did. Um...

CP: —discrimination at the time too.

DB: Yes, they did. And I know that during the Depression, Di Vittori, uh, sort of—I don't know how you'd put it—but fed many of the people. And the Italians in the neighbourhood who used him as their grocery store, uh, he didn't collect money from them for, some of them for years, let them get their groceries. And then when they got to work, they started to pay him back. And when I was a grocery...boy at the time, delivery boy, Saturday morning it was my job to go out and collect money from them. [Gestures going from house to house] And I can remember as 12 and 13 years of age coming home with 1500 dollars in my pocket, from collecting 100 from this one, 100 from that one [gestures counting out bills]. Take their order [gestures writing on pad of paper] and collect money from the previous what they owed and then come back and dole it

all out [gestures counting bills] and make sure we recorded who paid what and everything like that. So...but it was, it was sort of a tight-knit, little Italian community there and, um...they were all basically friends and [shrugs] company. So...

[00:10:28]

CP: And I guess your father came alone...to Canada?

DB: [Nods] He came alone to Canada and he was [looks off to his right in thought]...I would say—well, in 1914 was when he arrived...um...he was 18 because he was born 1896. And, um, he came alone. And the family I gather, um, wanted him to come and make his million and he always said all he ever got was cooties. [Smiles and laughs] You know, so he never wanted to go back. He was upset with the way they wanted him leave and come over here, so he never went back. [Shakes head]

CP: And from where, where was his—where was he born?

DB: Near Treviso; a little town of, uh, um, Maser. Um, which is again near [shakes hand in more or less gesture] Montebelluna and it's just south of—or north I should say of Venice.

CP: Hmm. Have you visited there?

DB: A number of times. Yeah, in fact I might go back this year. Yeah. [Nods] No, my wife and I have been back—I first went over [looks up in thought] in 197...8, I think, '78 or '79, with my sister. And, uh, we had to search because we didn't even know where they were exactly. And I remember hiring a car and going up to Treviso and looking around and finally found somebody that recognized the name and had difficulty because there were not many English speaking



people in Italy in the 70s. And now they seem to be all over the place there, they're really quite good. But, uh, meeting my aunt and having a very emotional reception. [Smiles] And, uh, they're all still there, a number of them. We still keep in touch, just a little bit. They—none of them have ever been here. And, uh—but I've been back probably four times to the hometown. Back to Italy probably a dozen or more times. So... [Nods]

CP: Okay. So, I think...um [long pause]...just to sort of finish the basic part of it—

DB: Mm hmm.

CP: Um, can you tell me...um, when did you—about your family? Like when did you marry? And how did you meet your wife? And...

DB: Oh...well, um, this is my second marriage that I'm on here now. But I was, uh, working at the Ford Motor Company in Windsor. Um, I started there in 1949, um, as a mail boy, at 98—a large sum of 98 dollar a month. [Laughs] Uh, worked as a mail boy and, uh, my first wife I met, she was working at the Ford Motor Company then. And, uh, met and eventually married, and we married in Windsor. And, uh, had a, a son and then a daughter. And, uh, my son's now living in Dallas and my daughter living in Toronto and both happy and healthy and doing well.

CP: Yeah.

DB: But that's sort of the family of my own. And then, uh, I moved to Ottawa in '72. And, uh, I was working at the University of Windsor at the time and left there to go to the Carleton University here. And I worked there until I retired. And, uh, my first wife was not happy in Ottawa and whether there were other reasons or not, but she moved back to Windsor

eventually. And I remarried five or six years later and there we are. She's happy in Windsor and I'm happy here. [Smiles] So...

CP: And do you have grandkids?

DB: Sorry?

CP: Do you have grandkids?

DB: Oh yeah. I have, uh [looks up in thought and breathes in heavily]...three grandchildren, uh...two boys and a girl in Dallas. And two great-granddaughters in Dallas, with—my granddaughter has the two daughters. Uh, one of them is seven next month and one is three. And, uh, then I have, uh, four step-grandchildren—or four stepchildren I should say. And, uh, each one of them has a grandchild. So we have a—between us we have a number of children and grandchildren. [Smiles and clears throat]

CP: Um, just to go back to Windsor for a minute.

DB: Mm hmm.

CP: Um, I wanted to ask you were you—or do you remember your father being involved with any kind of organizations when he was—

DB: No, he was not. And I think that was one of the main reasons why he was not interned. Um, the—I remember...the Mounties, uh, the RCMP, uh, tore the house apart looking for something at one point. I came home, my mother was in tears, the house was upside, upside down and, uh, which they had come in to inspect or look something and couldn't find it. And as a result

they could find no reason to intern my father, you know. I think a number of them that were interned were—it was done so because they found a receipt or something from Italy...for whatever, money or gold, whatever they sent home to protect their family or to help their family and was taken at the border by, uh...uh, people that check through the mail and, uh, did that kind of thing and then got receipts for it and so on. And I think that's what led to some of them—and I think Windsor was probably the worst city in Canada for that, as I would think because of its proximity to the States and the number of people that were there trying to get to the US. And, uh...but that was all...I can think of about that particular problem. [Clears throat]

[00:16:03]

CP: When did your father, uh, begin working for the police department?

DB: Uh [sighs]...I can't tell you the exact year, but it would have been around, would have been around, uh, 19...what would it be, let me just think now. [Looks down in thought] I'm not sure the exact timing because I thought he said he had pu—been at the police department 18 years and the letter from the Chief says something about 12. [Leans over and picks up document from table] And that was in 1942, so that would have been 1930. And I know he had worked at the same Canadian Battery and Bonalite shop [places document down on table] prior to going on the police force. So I'm not sure what year he joined the force. I would have said anywhere from 1925 to 1930, somewhere in that area. And, uh, by that letter, I would say 1930, but I understood from him it was 16 or 18 years. And he had been a citizen for a long—he was a citizen before he joined the police force. So...

CP: Do you remember when he was naturalized?

DB: I don't, but, uh, his naturalization certificate is here, so...it probably says on it. [Leans forward and begins going through documents on table, picks up naturalization certificate and sits back] It says 1927. So... [Place document back on table] That would be—I don't know whether you're interested in that one or not—but that's, that's the date on it, so I assume—I would say probably 1930 that he joined the police force.

CP: Mm hmm.

DB: I recall it as 18 because I was a kid at the time, I don't really—can't remember anything changing my mind. [Laughs and clears throat]

CP: And do you remember, um, when the war broke out was your father concerned or...

DB: Oh, he was concerned. Um, but he—I, I don't think he was basically concerned about his job. That was 1939 and [unclear] three years later when they—when this happened, so. And I don't know when they started the internment, I can't remember, I don't know the, the date that Mackenzie King made that pronouncement or whatever. And so, I don't know whether it was '41 or '42, it was in that general period.

CP: I think in '40, maybe around then.

DB: It was in the 40s, yeah, early 40s, but I don't know whether it was '40, '41 or '42.

CP: Yeah. Um, and when, when Mackenzie King designated like enemy alien and when—did your father have—know of anyone in town who was being interned? Did he start to worry then about—

DB: Oh yeah. His best friend was interned. Uh, a, a fella named Guido Sansalito[?] was a very good friend of ours. He travelled with us and so on. And, uh, he was interned. And, uh, he had a wife and two sons, uh, in Windsor who were friends of ours. And we saw them, but as a result of the problems, uh, most of the families of the interns that we knew, uh, didn't want to mix with others too much because they would see it as another possible problem and they might end up having more trouble. So they tended to more or less stay by themselves. And, uh...but, um...I remember—I don't know where Mr. Sansalito[?] was, I think he was in Petawawa, but, uh, everybody was very upset. Certainly my father was. And, uh, yeah.

CP: And what about your father's own dismissal? Was there any warning before he got that letter? Or was that—

DB: Not that I'm aware of. [Shakes head] Uh, all I can remember is him at home talking to me out in the front of the house and telling me that he was now out of work and was have to—going to have to return my accordion and how upset he was and so on. And, uh, at that point now, I was what, as I say 12. And I, I remember, but I, I don't remember all of the details around it at all.

[00:20:12]

CP: And how was he treated by the police after that?

DB: [Sighs] Uh, not very well. Uh, some of them were friends prior. Some of them stayed friends and many of them didn't. Um, and I don't—I think that the police were like most other employers in Windsor; uh, the word was that they couldn't hire enemy aliens. And so he went and he'd find jobs, fortunately his—our name doesn't sound Italian too much, and, uh, he'd find jobs and as soon as they found out he was Italian, by somebody would say so or tell them,

he'd be out of work again. So most of his jobs were catch as catch can kind of thing. He worked driving a bulldozer, he worked for a contractor—happened to be an Italian contractor—um, as a watchman, night watchman, various things like that, just enough to try and make money to keep things going. And, um...um...but it was—did the b—the fella that treated him the best was this gentleman by the name of Anderson and he hired him as gardener for his house. And I remember going out with my dad to help him garden and do things like that and he did house repairs and gardening work and so on. And then when the pressure re—got less, uh, he hired him on in the factory. And once he started work in the factory, uh, he didn't have any particular qualifications; he went out and got his, uh, fourth class stationary engineer papers. And, uh, I don't know what year he did that, but he did that so that he'd, he'd have qualifications and would be able to continue work. And he was the last employee that Godfredson's had. They closed the factory after the war and he became a watchman and he was the last one there. [Laughs] And the factory's since been shut down and torn down. And, uh...

CP: And, um, do you remember what kind of evidence the authorities had to justify your father's dismissal?

DB: [Shrugs and shakes head]

CP: I, I mean I know you said they searched—

DB: Just that he born in Italy. [Nods] I think that's all. I'm not sure that there was anything else. I think, uh, if you were born in Italy or born in Germany you were considered an enemy alien and that was enough...at that time.

CP: And were there any other restrictions placed on him? Like did he—

DB: Any other? [Turns head to hear]

CP: Restrictions placed on him? Did he have to...

DB: Not that I'm aware of. And I, I don't know whether he had to report or not. I really don't. I don't recall anything like that, but he could have, but I, I, I really don't know.

CP: Um, what about, um, in terms of work, I know you said he had to kind of take what he could when he could find it.

DB: Mm hmm.

CP: But, um, and I know you said you, you worked as well. Did you mum or your sister—like what was it like at home after that?

DB: Well my mother, uh, she was a great seamstress. And she made quite a bit of money, uh, during the tough time with my dad, making clothes for friends, clothing she made. She knitted for, uh—I remember her knitting a dress for one of my teachers and she made children's clothes. And she did that for years even afterwards. Everybody—some of the people that she made clothes for as a baby came back to have children [clothing] made for their kids. So you know, she was a, a great seamstress and spent a lot of time and made en-enough to help keep the family together by doing that. And then my sister got her, uh, I guess stenographers, uh...papers or whatever they are, uh, in high school. And she went to work for a lawyer and so on and so. But that—I'm trying to think of, um—yeah, she would have been about 19 then, and, uh, so she went out to work as soon as she could. And that was basically the—and nobody made a lot of money in the 40s. [Laughs] Not that it cost that much to live anymore, you know, but, uh, it was all relative.

CP: And, um...what did—did you find—I mean you said you were picked on, um, by kids in the neighbourhood or at school.

DB: Mm hmm.

CP: And your father clearly experienced discrimination. But what about the rest of your family, did they—

DB: [Sighs] Not real—uh, well, I, I don't think—my sister was older, as I said she was seven years older than I am. And, um, she went to work—or went to school and went to work and I don't think—she had a bunch of girl friends and so on. There didn't seem to be—she didn't seem to have much—she was older and with a much more mature group of kids I guess. And, uh, my mother was pretty well at home, so there was no problem. We had relatives and friends that would still come around. But, uh, my cousin and I walked to school, uh, which was a fair walk, close to a mile. And, uh, we used to walk in the morning and come home at noon 'cause we didn't want to stay at school. And go back at noon and come home and have lunch and then go back, rather than stay there and eat. And the first year, maybe not even a full year, but that first year, uh, that all of this happened was probably the toughest. That was when we were really—everybody found out about it and of course they were knowing who it was and pointing and so on. And that's when we sort of felt the worst and the two of us were almost back-to-back fighting our way to school the odd time. [Mimics punching with hands] But, uh, that dribbled off [makes wavy water motion with hand] after a while and it was just—at that point then it was just my cousin and I and we went to school together and back and that was it.

[00:26:11]

CP: And the teachers at school, did they do anything?



DB: [Shakes head] No, not at all. They were all, they were all fine. I never had a problem with any teachers or anything like that. No.

CP: It was just the kids.

DB: [Clears throat] Hmm? [Smiles]

CP: Just the kids.

DB: Just the kids basically. [Nods] Yeah, typical child-childhood thing I guess. They hear their parents talking, I'm sure that's all it was, and they'd find out about it and then point and say, "Oh, they're the guys." [Points with fingers] And they get two or three of them together and try and punch it out and you know. So...

CP: Do you remember your father ever talking about how he felt or like—

DB: He was not [sighs], he was not a very voluble man. He didn't talk a lot about his feelings or anything like that. Um, I know he was awfully upset and angry, for a least the first year, it really bothered him. But after that, once he, he started to get the odd job and so on and we were living, we were managing with our garden and with my sister and I working and all that. Um, he managed and he was, he was always a relatively happy man. And he was a big man, he was, uh, six foot, six foot one and 200 pounds and so on. So he was a big, happy kind of a guy. [Smiles] And, uh, but I don't remember him ever being a real deep anger other than at that brief point in time when it happened. So... [Clears throat]

CP: And what happened, um, kind of after 1943, which I think is when they started letting the majority of internees go? Did, I don't know, the atmosphere of the neighbourhood or, or the city change for you?

DB: [Sighs heavily] Yeah, uh, well when the pronouncement or whatever it was was made and people started losing their jobs of course the neighbourhood was changing because there was three or four—well, mine, my uncle, my father, my grandfather and then a couple of the neighbours were all out of work. And, uh, it became a...a much more depressed and subdued kind of neighbourhood certainly. But, uh, the few local Italian kids and so on, we got out, we had a lot of fun. You know, we played regardless of the other kids. You find a way around it when you're a kid. But, uh, I don't remember anything really—and it didn't, it didn't continue more than, much, much more than the first year. Then it dropped off. And there were still comments, but not really to that serious a degree.

CP: And after the war was over? What was it like then for you and your family?

DB: Uh, very little problem after the war. Uh, well the biggest problem I had then, of course I was working and the veterans are returning. So when they came back, we were out of work. They, they were taking their jobs back, which is what they were promised and what they deserved. So then I had to go and find other jobs and which I did. And one of them being Ford Motor Company at 98 bucks a month. [Laughs] So...but other jobs I worked during that—uh, driving a truck and delivering tobacco and stuff like that. Whatever you could get.

CP: And did people sort of ease up...

DB: Oh yeah.

CP: ...in terms of how they—

DB: [Nods] Yeah. Once the war was over it was, it was over. I mean we had won. [Shrugs and smiles] Uh, people were not concerned about enemy aliens much anymore. Um, no, it was quite, quite acceptable after the war. It didn't, uh... So it was basically about a three-year period there, '42, the end of '41, '42, 3, 4 and 5. And once it was over things sort of returned back to normal. And, uh...

[00:30:00]

CP: Um, did—so, I know you said your father stayed at the, the factory and then became the night watchman, but did he ever express a desire to work for the poli—or to join the force again? Or could he?

DB: [Shakes head] No. He, he—in fact he expressed just the opposite, he didn't want to go back to work again. He said, “No, they didn't want me when I was, you know, when I was there. [Throws hand up in the air] So I'm not interested.” He was happy then and, uh, I think he felt too that Mr. Anderson had treated him pretty well. Amongst all the people that could give him jobs, this guy had hired him and given him a job and treated him fairly well. [Shrugs] And so he was happy to stay there and work as long as he could. [Nods] I can't remember the year they closed the factory and finally wound it up, but it was quite a little while after the war. And, uh, then he found other little jobs too, again, back as watchman and stuff like that. But, uh...yeah.

CP: What other kinds of things do you remember, stories do you have from that period?

DB: [Sighs and looks off to his right in thought] Not a lot. Uh, I guess only self—mainly self-centred. [Laughs] You know, you think about what's happening to you. Uh, I don't remember

that much of, uh, other neighbourhoods or other kids, so on, in, in other areas. Just, uh, just our own little, little area. And by the time I was—when the war was over, of course I was 15, 16 and, um, you know, beginning—then working full-time I wasn't thinking much about the other problems. So...

CP: Um, when—what year did your dad pass away?

DB: Uh [looks off to his right in thought]...1974.

CP: Okay.

DB: Yeah.

CP: Um, so d—how do you think he might have felt about [Brian] Mulroney and the redress and...

DB: I think he would have been happy. I really do. And, uh—'cause I recall at one point, uh, I had been working quite a while and was still not married and I, I asked him, I said, "Look, I'd like to take you back to Italy and see your sisters." A couple of them were born, one after he left I think and one just before he left, so he really didn't know them. And he said, "I'm not interested in going [holds both hands out in front in stopping gesture], but I'd be really happy if you went and met them...and saw them and introduced yourself." But, uh, he wasn't interested in going at all. So...his constant response was, "They didn't want me when I was there, so...I'm not interested."

CP: And how did you feel about that, uh—the Mulroney and the redress?

DB: Oh, I was quite, quite happy. Especially when they made the presentation. I thought, Oh this is, at least, uh, recognition of not just of what they did to my dad, but what they did to Italians in general. And then the, uh, presentation by the city and, and, uh, the police commission was [shrugs], well, very well received. I was really happy with it. And, uh, it was strange at that point in time—and I don't know who they were, I've always thought that they were probably, uh, uh, people from the CBC [Canadian Broadcast Corporation], when I came out, were trying to get me to say that I wanted money like the Japanese got. And I can remember saying, "Well, you know, I'm not interested in money." And none of these people were here when it happened. You know [shrugs], there was, there was war scare all over, why in the heck would you expect to be paid for that? I mean it was one of those things that happens. And, uh...so just sort of a little discussion in the hall before I walked out. [Laughs] But, uh...

CP: And can you tell me about, um, the story that you told earlier about the camp and...

DB: Oh. Yeah, well it was, um—I can't remember the year it started [looks off to his right thinking]...um [exhales heavily]...I would say it's probably...2000, just after the year 2000 or so that they, they, they did that, they, uh, started the camp. And the first year there were two weeks, I think, and, uh, they had a camp—a week of different children each—and they're underprivileged children. They ran the first camp was at Point Pelee National Park and my daughter and I went down to the—and my wife—went down to the opening of it. And, uh, since then they've run it every year. And I think they've cut it down now to one week. And each of the schools in Windsor recommends two or three children and the police department choose from that group the ones that they feel are the most deserving. And they pick 30 of them. And then they run this one-week camp. And, uh, now it's, it's more or less permanent every year. And the, the police department—it's all volunteer—the police department members volunteer for it and so on. And, uh, I think the only one that isn't volunteer is the one that's in charge at

the forest all the time and then they get volunteer police officers and so on. And I've been down a couple of times—I still go down to Windsor, I don't have any relatives there at all anymore, that I'm aware of anyway, I probably have cousins that I don't know. But I go down to Windsor once in a while, every few years and, uh, I still have some old friends there. And usually go into the police department, meet them, thank them and very happy and, uh, make a donation every year when they come up. And so, but the, the man runs a, uh, a butcher shop—I'm trying to remember the name of it now—but his name is Ted Farron and he runs a butcher shop in Windsor, south Windsor. And, uh, just a-an amazing guy and he run—he ran this camp and the first year presented a bicycle to the child that was, uh, designated the, the best in the group. And he was really pleased with the reaction of the child that got it and terribly disappointed and disturbed from those that didn't get it. He said, "I can't do that again." So now he gives one to everybody, every year. [Gestures handing out bicycles to everyone] [Unclear] He's a great guy. [Smiles and clears throat]

[00:36:18]

CP: And the camp was—it's, it's called?

DB: Camp Brombal. [Nods] Yeah.

CP: Um, how did they—did they just call you up and tell you that that's what they were going to organize?

DB: [Exhales heavily and shakes head] No, they just did it. And, uh, I forget who now, somebody called me and asked me if I was interested in going down to the opening of it. And, and I did. [Shrugs] But, uh, no, they had—it was all more or less self-, uh, driven within the police force. I don't know who the first one was that had the idea or wanted to get it going, but somebody,

uh, I guess must have read about the presentations in paper and so on and worked on it and finally got it going.

CP: Okay. Um...I think you've kind of answered most of the questions that is laid out here.

DB: Mm hmm.

CP: But, um, I wondered if I could maybe get you to read the letter that they sent your dad?

DB: Oh sure. [Leans forward to grab letter off of table]

CP: If that's okay.

DB: [Clears throat and pulls out glasses from inside shirt pocket] Head of the City of Windsor Police Department. And, uh, um...“To whom it may concern, re:,” and as I mentioned earlier, “Nero Brombal.” Not Nereo. And uh, “This is to certify that I have known the above name for the past 12 years. He being a member of this department, which he has served faithfully. The reason that he is not a member of this department now is on account of him being of Italian birth. Anything that you can do to assist this man will be appreciated by me. Yours truly, C. Renaud, Chief Constable.” And, uh, end of story. It was sort of brief and to the point, but, uh, yeah.

CP: It's—that must have been a disappointment, I mean never mind the anger that probably came with it, but after working for them—

DB: Oh. [Looks up and removes glasses]

CP: —for so long, to get that kind of—

DB: I think he was devastated.

CP: Yeah.

DB: He really was. And, uh, I [shakes head and puts down letter]...can't recall ever seeing him in those moods, he was not a very moody man, but, uh, certainly he was very upset and, and angry for a while. But...had to turn in the uniform and all that stuff and...you know, it was very, very upsetting.

CP: One thing I think I missed, was he ever taken into, um, the police station and questioned?  
Or...

DB: I don't know. I really don't. I, I have a feeling that he probably was by the RCMP, but I really don't know. Because I know they came to the house and did the search of the house. But what they did about him, I don't know. And he didn't—as I say, he never really talked a lot about that or a lot of other things either, he never talked about home, about Italy or anything like that. It was a...so...

CP: And then my last question, I'm just—is the house still there, the house that you grew up in?

DB: Oh yeah. The house—actually, uh, he and my uncle and my grandfather built the house. It's at 1258 McEwan, in Windsor. And then, I'm trying to remember the year, it was right after the war, about '45, '46, uh, he bought the lot next door, which had an old shack on it, an old house, that we tore down and doubled the size of the house. And I know my cousin and I and my dad did it. And it took us a year to dig the basement out because we dug it by hand, with a



wheelbarrow and a shovel. [Mimics digging a hole and smiles] And, uh, that's why my arms are so long because I handled the wheelbarrow with, oh, all of the dirt and put in on a lot in behind our house. And then my cousin bought the lot and built his house on it. So we actually had a little commune of our own there. [Laughs] And, uh...but the house is still there, uh, we sold it when my mother died—uh, I'm trying to remember what year she died, '86 or '87. And, uh, we sold it and every time I go back to Windsor I drive by it. So it's a typical Italian home, with a cobblestone arch and fence out in front and a cobblestone fishpond in the backyard with a little waterfall in the back and so on. Really quite a, a very nice place, a nice place to grow up. [Clears throat]

[00:40:44]

CP: Um, I just thought of something else. That grocery store, uh, is that still around or...

DB: Uh, the building is still there, but, uh, the Di Vittori's all passed away years ago. The two brothers, uh, two of the brothers, Jimmy and Tarquinio, were bachelors and, uh, Luigi was married. And I don't know whether his children are around or not, I, I don't know.

CP: Did it survive the war—

DB: Oh yeah. [Nods] Oh yeah. They all survived the war. And the store ran for quite a long time after. It was a very nice store and they were a great, great guys to work for, they really were. I remember in those years—uh, I'm talking now 194...1 and 2, I worked there, I think it could have been '43—uh, they paid me 18 dollars a week. And that was a lot of money then. But I got the same amount when I worked nights after school and Saturdays and when I worked in the summer full-time, I still got 18 bucks a week. But on the weekend, when I finished up my work on Saturday night, he said, "Okay, now pick out your groceries for your mom and take them

home. Take them home.” You know, he was just that kind of a guy, he was a very nice... And he was upset—so was I—but I quit and went to work in the factory and, uh, he was not pleased. [Laughs] But, uh...no, he was a great guy. When I—as I mentioned earlier—he took care of many of that Italian community during the Depression, who couldn’t afford to buy their groceries and he kept track of them and then afterwards they paid him back. And they became very loyal customers too, I’ll tell you. So...

CP: And...yeah, I think that’s it in terms of the questions that I have. So...

DB: Okay.

CP: ...unless there’s anything that you can think of that I missed or...

DB: No, I can’t think of anything else. Uh, of anything that might have been of consequence or interest. Uh, just...no. Um, people, a lot of people have asked me since, uh, if I have any real nagging hard feelings or animosities or anything like that and I really don’t. I think, uh—and I thank my mom and dad for that. I think they were—they never showed any really themselves and wouldn’t have put up with it I don’t think if I’d have grown up with it, you know. They were very good about it. So...it was just one of those times, everybody has a time in their life when you run into problems and that was it for us. [Smiles] Since then it’s been smooth sailing and good going. So...

[Fades out at 00:43:23]

**[End of interview]**