

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

DATE OF INTERVIEW: May 18, 2011

LOCATION OF INTERVIEW: Hamilton, ON

NAME OF INTERVIEWEE: Elio Salciccioli (Al Salci)

NAME OF INTERVIEWER: Nadia Mior

NAME OF VIDEOGRAPHER: Vikki Cecchetto

TRANSCRIBED BY: Elissa D'Souza

DATE TRANSCRIBED: December 2011

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ABSTRACT

In this first interview, Elio Salciccioli (Al Salci) speaks about the experiences of Italian Canadians in Hamilton during World War II. Coming from a family of musicians, he speaks about his father and brothers, who played with the Sons of Italy band. He recalls his mother taking him to the Casa d'Italia in Hamilton from a very young age, to attend meetings and a rally. Soon after Benito Mussolini declared war on the Allies, he remembers the Royal Canadian Mounted Police (RCMP) raiding the Casa d'Italia and incarcerating members who were suspected of being fascists. He was also present when the RCMP searched his entire home in an attempt to discover evidence of fascist support. Although Italians faced discrimination, he recollects the Hamilton community he grew up in as being close-knit and friendly, and that despite the circumstance, life was good. He outlines his views on the internment experience, and believes that the internees got along well with each other. They kept themselves busy with a variety of activities such as card playing and woodworking. With regards to his music, he notes that he has played at a number of venues in and around Hamilton, and has had a good musical career overall.

INTERVIEW

ES: Elio Salciccioli, interviewee

CC: Chester Capponi, son of internee Girolamo (George) Capponi

NM: Nadia Mior, interviewer

VC: Vikki Cecchetto, videographer

[Title screen]

[Camera fades in at 00:00:09]

NM: I'm Nadia [someone clears throat in background] and I'm at the home of Chester here and, um, in Hamilton. So, could you give us your name please?

ES: Yes, uh, Elio Salciccioli. Uh...my professional name is Al Salci and, um, I come from a family of five boys. I was, uh, 11 years younger than my four brothers. My father came here in 1907 and, uh, we're a musical family. My father played the base horn [clears throat] and my, three of my brothers, uh, uh, one played the, uh, sax and clarinet, the other twins played the trumpet and trombone. And my father was always involved with the Sons of Italy band and, uh, in the early 30's, uh...I'm not, I'm not sure exactly what year the Casa d'Italia in Hamilton was built, through funds from the Italian government at the time which was the, uh, Mussolini and from the fascist, uh, uh regime. And consequently every Sunday, uh, uh—now I was born in 1932. And, uh...when I was about four or five years old I can remember my mother taking me to the Casa d'Italia...and, uh, there was a meeting going on upstairs in one of the meeting rooms.

NM: Hmm.

ES: And it didn't dawn on me until I was in school, that they were conducting a meeting, uh, with the president and the secretary. Now the president at the time was Donald [Donato] Oliveri...

NM: Mm hmm.

ES: ...and his wife [clears throat] Francis was the secretary. Now every Sunday my father would take my brothers and rehearse with the Italian band. Now I brought some pictures [reaches off to side to pick up photograph] of the Sons of Italy band. Uh, I don't know if you could... This one was taken—oops! [Drops photograph and picks it up]

NM: [Laughs] [Unclear]

ES: In 1923.

[Camera zooms out to show photographer. CC can be seen sitting at the left]

NM: [Unclear]

ES: And the maestro [points to someone in the photograph]...Tito Allega...uh, he was my [clears throat], he was my music teacher and also taught my brothers. [Holds photograph up higher]

NM: Oh yeah.

ES: And he conducted the, the band until about 1930 when he moved to Boston. And then...[pulls out another photograph to show camera] from 1930, Alfonso Borsellino took over the Italian band and that's... [Points to someone in the photograph]

NM: Oh.

ES: ...that's him right there.

NM: Oh yeah.

ES: Now...[wipes nose] uh, I remember attending—about 1936, I was about four years old, five years old, uh, my mother [voice breaks] took me to the Casa d'Italia, they were having a huge rally. I could remember on the stage there was the Union Jack on one side and the Italian flag on the other side [holds one hand out to the right and one out the left to indicate where flags were positioned] and all the men were pinning money [gestures as if pinning money on flag]...on the Italian flag to send back to Mussolini for the—to support the—

CC: [Unclear]

NM: Mm hmm.

ES: —to support the war in Ethiopia.

NM: Mm.

ES: And consequently in 1940 when Mussolini declared war on the Allies, uh, the first thing the RCMP did was they raided the Casa d'Italia and the organization there was the *dopolavore* [sic]. So whoever...was a member of the *dopolavore* [sic] was incarcerated.

NM: Mm hmm.

ES: Because I guess they, they thought that they were fascists and involved [gestures with hands], but [shakes head and rolls eyes] these were just ordinary, uh...[shrugs] people from villages. So, my father w-was not a member of the *dopolavore* [sic], but he worked at the Steel Company of Canada...

NM: Mm hmm.

ES: ...along with my oldest brother. At that time, all the Italians were locked out, for a couple of weeks until, they were cleared and then they went back to work. The ones—I can remember the RCMP, one day, coming to the house...from top to bottom [gestures up, then down] they went through all the drawers and everything to see if there was any possible link with the Fascist Party, but... [Shakes head and shrugs]

NM: Mm hmm. Now were you—

ES: ...our family was clean. I was about eight, nine years old at the ti—

NM: Were you home at the time?

ES: [Nods] I was at the time—yeah, I was home at the time. I can remember, going through all the drawers. Then my father was allowed to go back to work. And that—and in 1940, my second brother was drafted into the army. The oldest brother was deferred because he was on war work. The twins were, uh...not qualified—they were rejected. So, uh...[laughs] when my brother [laughs]...who was in the army was sent, uh, to, to British Columbia and then back to Petawawa around 1942 and the ironical part of it [laughs]...when he was doing sentinel duty he was guarding his *paesans* [sic].

NM: Oh!

VC: No!

CC: [Chuckles]

NM: Oh no! [Laughs]

ES: This is what... [Laughs]

NM: Oh.

ES: But anyway, uh...

[00:5:38]

CC: [Unclear]

ES: ...that was, uh, that was quite, uh... It wasn't a good time for the Italians a-at that time.
And, um... But that's about all, all I could tell you, uh...

NM: Mm.

ES: ...uh, A-Alfonso Borsellino along with a, a number of other, uh, people that happened to be
members, uh, were incarcerated and when he, uh, was—of course when Hi—that—when, uh,
Mussolini was deposed and then, uh, Italy joined the war against Germany, uh...

NM: Mm hmm.

ES: ...they were all released and, um, uh, then I started to take some lessons from...

NM: Oh.

ES: ...Alfonso Borsellino.

NM: Yeah.

ES: Yeah.

NM: They regrouped afterwards.

ES: Yeah.

NM: Every one of them.

VC: Did you suffer any, um, any discrimination at school during this time because you were Italian?

ES: Well there was always a, a certain amount of discrimination against, uh...

CC: Can I interrupt Al? [Speaks from off camera. Places hand on ES's shoulder]

ES: [Nods and looks to CC at left] Sure.

CC: Briefly. I went to the same school, St. Anne's—is that okay?

NM: Mm hmm.

CC: If I talk?

NM: Mm hmm.

CC: [Camera zooms out so show CC] And, um, Monseigneur Englard[?], who was German...

NM: Mm hmm.

CC: ...hated Italians, I remember that. We sat at the back of the class. [Gestures to the far right with hand] I'm sorry, now go ahead.

ES: I wouldn't say he hated—

CC: Do you remember the story?

ES: ...but may—he disliked them. [Smiles and laughs]

NM: [Laughs]

CC: [Smiles and laughs] Okay...

ES: [Laughs] I wouldn't use the word...

CC: [Smiles] ...check that out [makes hand motion to cut something out]...disliked.

ES: But, uh, just be—prior to me, uh, going to elementary school, uh, [camera zooms back in on ES] at St. Anne's was, uh, segregated. Uh, the Italians and Polish had to go to another [gestures off to the left]—uh, just a few years before that they had to go to another building and, uh, all the Irish were...yeah. [Looks to CC off camera]

CC: I didn't remember that. [Reflection of CC shaking head visible in mirror]

NM: Yeah. Now where did you grow up in Hamilton?

ES: Where?

NM: Was it an Italian neighbourhood?

ES: I-in the north, uh...

CC: Yeah.

ES: ...down the She—the Sherman, Brant...

NM: Mm hmm.

ES: ...area. And, um, uh, we, we had good times at that time, you know. [Nods] Uh, people were close, uh, uh...they were all within walking distance to work so that's why there was more, uh, fr—more friendly. And, um, as people moved away and they had automobiles, you don't have this closeness, uh. [Gestures with arms]

NM: Mm hmm.

ES: Uh, when people used to walk to work, y-you know you pass by somebody's, a neighbour's place you s-stop and talk and there was a lot a more, more, uh [gestures bringing hands close together]...uh...closeness there with, uh, with other people. And of course, uh...a number—you know belonging to a—the church there, uh...everybody knew everybody and, uh... [Nods]

NM: Mm hmm.

ES: It was—we had some good times...under the circumstances. [Nods]

NM: Mm hmm. Now your father wasn't interned but did he have to register or check in every week or...

ES: [Thinks for a moment then shakes head] No, no he didn't. And I don't—that I don't, don't recall.

NM: [Unclear]

ES: But, uh...of course he passed away in 1943 so.

NM: Oh...

VC: Oh...

ES: Uh, so he was...

NM: [Unclear]

ES: ...fifty-two years old at the time, so.

NM: Young.

ES: Yeah. So, uh...but we carried on.

NM: Hmm.

VC: And what about your brothers? You said that, um, that they were actually, um...

CC: [Clears throat]

VC: ...on sentinel duty with some of the—

ES: [Holds up one finger] Oh, just one, one brother.

VC: One. One brother.

ES: Yeah. Well he was, uh, um, he was stationed in Petawawa at the time. [Nods] So he would stop and [laughs] of course talk with his *paesans* [sic]. [Laughs and shakes head] It's...that, that always, uh...

VC: Did he ever talk about, um, what the, what the internees—

ES: [Shakes head] No, not really, no.

NM: Okay.

ES: But I think the, the internees, uh, to my knowledge, uh, got along very well. [Shrugs] They, you know, I guess they must have played Briscola—

NM: Mm hmm.

ES: —and a few other games... [Chuckles]

NM: [Laughs]

VC: [Laughs]

ES: ...at the time.

NM: Yeah.

VC: We've been hearing that the, uh, that the internees, um, actually, uh, started, uh, doing new things like sculpting and painting and growing, uh, vegetables. Was that also something—

ES: [Nods] Oh yeah, I'm sure they did yeah.

NM: Keeping...

CC: Well I think I can answer that—

ES: Well, what Italian doesn't grow vegetables? [Laughs]

VC: [Laughs]

ES: They all have gardens.

CC: My dad used to send back wooden—I don't know if he sent them back or he brought 'em back—but little wooden jewellery... [Camera pans to the left]

NM: A box.

CC: ...boxes and stuff. I says [laughs], "How'd you make that?" [Camera zooms out] He says [shakes head], "Well you learn everything."

ES: [Laughs]

NM: Yeah.

CC: You know...

NM: You keep busy, right?

ES: Yeah.

[TIME: 10:25]

ES: So...that's about it I guess.

VC: Yeah, okay.

NM: Well—

VC: So, you, you—what, what was your feeling of, uh, this whole experience? [People speaking in background] How do you view this whole experience?

ES: Well, I, I felt it—bad that Mussolini, um, had gotten involved in this mess, uh, which didn't help the Italians at all. And, um...if he'd have maybe stayed neutral it would have been [shakes head]—

VC: Yeah.

ES: —beneficial like Franco did in Spain.

VC: Yeah.

ES: And, uh, so through that he lost Libya...

VC: Mm hmm.

ES: ...and, uh [shakes head]...caused a lot of pain... [Gestures with hand]

VC: [Unclear]

ES: ...for a lot of people here...

VC: Hmm.

ES: ...due to that.

VC: Hmm. And were there—were—was there, uh, discrimination even after the war?

ES: Oh, there was always a certain amount of discrimination. Sure. [Nods]

NM: Hmm.

VC: Mm hmm.

ES: Oh yeah, you could feel it, uh, some, you know, little remarks, sometimes, uh...

NM: A reminder.

ES: Yeah...even with r-religious remarks, uh [camera zooms in as ES makes gesture with hand]...a little bit of discrimination there. That I guess never goes away...unless [shrugs] people smarten up.

VC: Yeah.

ES: We're just here for a short time.

VC: Exactly.

NM: And you carried on with your music? With the—

ES: Yes, uh, in fact, uh...I've made a career out of the music [nods] and, uh...in fa—in Toronto I've played at the Old Mill for about eight years and, uh...with the Argo Band too. [Laughs]

NM: [Laughs]

VC: [Laughs]

CC: Or at the Hamilton Centre.

ES: [Scoffs] And Hamilton Place.

CC: [Unclear]

NM: Yeah?

ES: [Nods] At the Hamilton Place, yeah.

NM: Oh really good.

ES: Yeah so I've enjoyed a, a very good musical career.

NM: Mm hmm. Yeah. That's wonderful.

ES: So...it's been good.

VC: Good.

ES: I can't complain. [Smiles]

VC: Alright, that's it?

ES: [Nods head affirmatively]

VC: Okay.



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[Camera fades out at 00:12:21]

[End of interview]