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Italian Canadians as Enemy Aliens:
Memories of World War II
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NAME OF PROJECT: *Italian Canadians as Enemy Aliens: Memories of WWII*
DATE OF INTERVIEW: May 19, 2011
LOCATION OF INTERVIEW: Edmonton, AB
NAME OF INTERVIEWEE: Peter H. Butti
NAME OF INTERVIEWER: Adriana Davies
NAME OF VIDEOGRAPHER: David Bates
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

Peter Henry Lawrence Butti was born on July 30, 1935 in Edmonton, Alberta. His grandfather was the first in his family to come to Canada from Italy in 1912 under a mining work contract as an electrical engineer. After he had established a life in Canada, his wife and children (Peter's grandmother, father, and aunt Rosina) were able to join him in 1917. Peter's father also worked in the mines, counting cars when he was just 15 or 16 years old before the family moved to Edmonton in 1925. Peter's parents were married in 1929 and had three children: Peter, Rosemarie, and Josephine. His parents were very involved in community life as his father helped build the Italian church and his mother established the Edmonton Dante Alighieri and taught Italian to children there. Peter recounts his fond memories of his childhood in Edmonton, including stories of US officers staying at the Butti family home; encounters with scarlet fever; and helping his dad with his work in the refrigeration business. Peter also explains that he played on a hockey team associated with the Detroit Red Wings, against teams such as the Toronto Maple Leafs. When Peter was only about six years old his parents were both

designated as enemy aliens, and he recounts going to the RCMP (Royal Canadian Mounted Police) headquarters with parents for their monthly reporting and being asked questions about his parents' behavior. Peter explains that his father was a proud Canadian, hated Benito Mussolini, and that they were classified as enemy aliens because of a misunderstanding about their citizenship. Following the footsteps of his father and grandfather, Peter was also trained as an electrician at SAIT (Southern Alberta Institute of Technology), Alberta. He and his wife Olivia were married in 1955 and together they have two children (Barry and Corrine), and nine grandchildren.

INTERVIEW

PB: Peter Butti, interviewee
AD: Adriana Davies, interviewer
DB: David Bates, videographer

[Title screen]

[Fades in at 00:00:10]

AD: Um, Adriana Davies, um, interviewing Peter, um, Butti for the, uh, Italian Canadians World War Two enemy alien designation and internment project. Peter can you tell me a bit about your, um, family history?

PB: Well, I was born in 1935 to Italian immigrant parents. Who—my father immigrated to Canada in 1917; my mother came in 1911. And we grew up as a, an Italian family, but we were Canadians all the way. And, uh, we went to church and we followed all the rules of the country and we were—we never knew that—we never knew—or I never knew being six and seven

years old during the war that there was such a thing as an alien until the—until we were notified that my parents had to report to the RCMP.

DB: [Unclear]

[Fades out at 00:01:15]

[Fades in at 00:01:16]

[Camera shakes while videographer is adjusting the framing]

DB: [Unclear]

AD: My name is Adriana Davies and I'm, uh, interviewing Peter, uh, Butti for the Columbus Centre, uh, Villa Caritas, World War Two project. It is,um, 10:15 on, uh, May the 19th, uh, in the city of Edmonton. Peter can you state your full name and date and place of birth?

PB: My name is Peter Butti. Peter Henry Lawrence Butti. I was born July 30th, 1935 in Edmonton.

AD: Peter, can you tell me a little bit about your family beginning with your, um, grandfather, um, Enrico, I believe, Butti, who came to Canada in 1912?

PB: That's correct, my grandfather came by himself and it was 1912 that he came from Italy and, uh, I think the intention was that he was gonna come and set himself up and then bring his wife, my grandmother, and their children over to make a home in Canada. Uh, apparently they came over in 1917, who was my grandmother, my father and his sister, Rosina. And, uh,

Rosina—well they were—when they arrived to Canada they settled in the coal branch up in Nordegg and, uh—I'm sorry they settled in Canmore to start with. And, uh, my grandfather was hired by the mine in Canmore to electrify the mine because electricity was just starting and to electrify the town as well. My dad being about 11 years old or you know, he just tagged along with his grandfather and he went to school. He was—he came over—I think he was in grade four when he came over from Italy and they put him into grade one to start to learn the language. And so anyway, you know it was a, it was a hard, it was a hard life for those people. It wasn't only my, my parents and my grandparents, it was all the immigrants that came over suffered, suffered, you know, some real hardships along the way. And, uh, I know my grandfather was a hard worker, but he was, he was—he had unsettled feet. He couldn't stay in one place too long. My grandmother was the stable one undoubtedly in the family. Uh, my dad of course being young, he went along with it. And my aunt Rosina was very ill when she came over and you know, along the way she passed away about two years later, uh, from cancer in Calgary. And it was hard on my, my grandparents, especially my grandmother, she never did get over that. They, uh—my dad, you know, learned English and he worked in the mine part time. He was 15, 16 and they gave him a job on the tip hill counting the cars that were coming up. And he had to, he had to keep track of who—what cars came from which miner so they could get paid and credited for it. And like being, you know, 15 he did not have to work in the mine, he was fortunate. And then they moved on, and they went, they went to Trail to work in the smelter. Uh, he thought there was a, you know, there was a better opportunity for him there and, and you know, and from there he had another opportunity back in Hillcrest. And you know, he moved around quite a bit and it appeared that as soon as they would get settled, you know, he'd get itchy feet again to move on. And, uh, and, uh, you know it was, it was a tough life for them. And it was tough on my grandmother. My grandmother was the stable one as I said. And, uh, then my grandfather through—with my father he learnt the trade, uh, with, with his dad and they were both electricians. My grandfather was a steam engineer as well as electrical engineer. So he had a lot of, you know, he was, he was, uh, able to seek employment

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any place he wanted. But I think it was about 1924, '25 they decided to move to Edmonton—I think it was '25—and start their own little electrical company. And—but unfortunately times were pretty tough, there was not a lot of work to do and, uh, they struggled it out for a few years and then my dad decided to take up the refrigeration trade as well because there appeared to be a better opportunity. More demand for that at that time. As refrigeration was just starting to come into its own, where restaurants and, and, you know, grocery stores and so and an so forth were starting to get refrigeration in them. And he saw the opportunity there and he took up that trade and he worked at that probably most of our early life, as well he did electrical work as well, but most of his job was in the refrigeration. Uh [clears throat], and I think it was 1932 or '33 my grandfather died. Uh, well before that actually my dad met my mother who was, uh, from Ofena, uh, she came from Abruzzi. And, uh, and, uh, she was—they got married in 1929. I think she was 20 years old and he was 22 or something and, uh, and they lived with my grandmother and grandfather. And I guess in those days like I said things were tough. So they lived together and then my grandfather died. And my grandmother lived with us our whole life, her whole life, the rest of her life and with us. And, uh, my grandmother spoke to us in Italian. She always spoke to the kids in Italian and we spoke to her in English. So, I mean she could speak English, there wasn't a problem with her English, but she always spoke to us in—I understand Italian, I cannot speak it very well, but I can understand Italian and so can my sisters. My older sister speaks it quite well as well. And, uh, and we just grew up and, uh, you know our parents were certainly caring parents, they provided us with everything we needed. Uh, we didn't have all the extras in the world, but we were fine, you know. And, uh, of course we all went to church on Sundays. There was no such thing as missing church on Sundays. There was no excuse that I'm tired and I came in late or anything like that we went. And that's about as far as our childhood goes. We—I had an older sister, Rosemarie, she's now McCurnin[?,] she lives in Cupertino, California. And I have a younger sister, Josephine and she lives in Pacifica, just south of San Francisco, California. And there—they've been there going on 40 some years. And they're settled and we keep in, we keep in contact with them, in fact I was

just there about a month ago and had a nice visit with them. And, uh, and we're all doing fine and—

DB: [Unclear]

[Fades out at 00:08:39]

[Fades in at 00:08:40]

AD: Now, Peter, your grandfather was there at one of the—at the time it was the largest mine disaster in, in Canadian history. He was the chief electrician at, uh, the Bellevue Mine when there was the major cave in at, uh, the Hillcrest Mine.

PB: Mm hmm.

AD: Um, did you ever hear anything about this?

PB: Well, my dad used to tell us about it. My dad, uh, it was—he was really—they were really upset about this. My dad was very upset that there was no recognition and no—very little recording or, you know, or recognition to the people that lost their lives in that disaster to the—I, I know he wrote letters to the government or to the newspapers asking for some money to put up some memorials for the, for the miners that lost their lives. And, uh, I know they did some, they did very little. And I, I don't know it to this day how much they have done, but I don't believe they've done anywhere what they could do to recognize how, how dire that disaster was because there was numerous lives lost. I think it was over 100. I think there was 108.

AD: One hundred and eighty-nine—

PB: Yeah.

AD: —died and I think 39 of them were Italians.

PB: Yeah. [Nods]

AD: Which shows, you know, the number of Italians who, who worked in, in the Crows Nest Pass. I believe in 1919, 15 percent of the work force in the Crows Nest Pass was Italian. And so your father I, I gather was—your grandfather was one of the first people to arrive and, and to assist.

[00:10:24]

PB: [Nods] Right. He was there for—my, my dad said that—my dad always talked about that mine disaster. Was that his friend, uh, his, his dad, and his grandfather—my friend’s—uh, my dad's friend's grandfather and his two uncles all got killed in that mine. And they were all good friends; they were very close family friends. And that's why my dad was upset because of nothing being recognized for them. Other than that, he, you know, he just said it was a dangerous job. I mean, you know, the safety conditions weren't there, they were getting paid by every car that came out of that mine and you know whatever it took to make, uh, to make a living. I think they were getting in the neighbourhood—I know there was times that it was like two dollars a car and they were pretty good sized cars, if you had to fill one up I'll tell you that. Because I, I went with him once to Nordegg, uh, before they shut the mine down, uh, before that last explosion there at Nordegg. And, uh, he took me into the mine about, I don't know maybe a block, maybe a half a block, as far as you could walk and boy it was dark and I'll tell

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you it was—I was only probably seven or eight years old, but it was not a pleasant place to go down, I'll tell you. And, uh, so like I said I mean it was tough and it was—and I think he felt bad for the people that didn't get recognized. Because they were, they were really, they were explorers in, in, in this country for that, you know, they were providing a necessity. Coal was highly in demand. And, uh, and they were providing the coal to heat and to electrify, everything was done with coal in those days, so. [Looks over to David]

DB: [Unclear]

[Fades out at 00:12:10]

[Fades in at 00:12:12]

DB: And we're rolling.

PB: [Clears throat]

AD: Peter, in Edmonton your father helped a lot of, of, of Italians and was involved in the building of the church. Can you tell me a bit about that work that he did in Edmonton?

PB: Well, dur—after the war when the immigrants started to arrive, there wasn't a lot of Italian families. I think most of the Italian families were probably retired miners or you know that type of people that came to the city to retire. And, uh, and my dad was, uh, he was running a business of course so, he was well known, and all the Italians came to see him and, uh, he did a lot of, he did a lot of interpreting for these immigrants. Uh, you know several of them came with some type of training and, uh, they wanted to get into apprenticeships and, and trades. Or he helped them find jobs; he hired several of them. And, uh, they had gone through their

apprenticeships and became electricians as well. And, uh, but he did a lot of interpreting for their exams. A lot of them got tradesmen qualifications as mechanics and that. And they were allowed to take a—bring an interviewer with them because their, their, their handle of the language was not that, uh, precise or that complete that they could pass an exam. So, and they needed workers, so they, they, they were pretty lenient with these immigrants and they gave them all the opportunities to, to better themselves and to, and to get their qualifications. And he, he certainly helped them. I know our basement had a whole line of Millefiori, which was a liqueur, an Italian liqueur. Because of course he never got paid for any of these interviews, but he—everybody would bring a bottle of Millefiori and we had Millefiori in our house all lined up over the cupboards. [Smiles] And, and even my wife remembers the Millefiori, you know.

AD: Now, um, tell me about—of his involvement of the building of the Italian church, Santa Maria Gorretti.

PB: Well, what happened with the immigrants when they came and some of the, the older Italians that were here. We never had an Italian church that what I can remember in, in Edmonton. And you know, and there, there was like, there was sort of a, a group of, of the old Italians that used to play bocce all the time and this and that. There was Mr. Segatti had a bocce court in his backyard. And, uh, and there was, you know—and I guess they were talking that we should have an Italian church. And there was, uh—and the immigrants of course, you know, everybody went to church. And, uh, so he organized the committee. And there was Pat Giannone who was, uh, he started off in the construction business and then he started building hotels and running hotels. And, uh, and him and Pat Giannone and, uh, and I can't remember who else was involved. There was, there was a couple others that were involved as well that were interested that got together and, uh, and, uh, they went to the bishop and they were able to bring in two Italian priests from Chicago and, uh, we got together and they built this church. And it wasn't a fancy church, but it was a very nice church for the 1950s and, uh, and they—uh,

uh, immediately we became a strong parish, a very viable parish and, and it was quite a success. And if you look at the, if you look at the church and the hall they have, and the, the drop in senior centres they have, the rectories they've built there. It’s, it’s quite a nice establishment.

[00:15:55]

AD: Now your mother also played an important role in the Italian community. Um, do you want to tell me a bit about her work [unclear]?

PB: Well, after—as the church was being built, there was a lot of volunteers that became involved, including the younger people. And the younger, the younger Italians, the new immigrants were raising families, having families and they wanted, they wanted their children to learn Italian or to learn something about the Italian culture and history. And especially the language, you know. So, they started a club called the Dante Alighieri and, uh, and they taught Italian to the, the children of these new immigrants and you know and sort of taught them the history of Italy. And you know it's easier for a stranger to do it than their parents. You know, it seems that you’ll listen to someone else, but you don't want to listen to your parents. So they—there, there was—I can't remember all the ladies, but there was a group of them and they did very well with that and, uh, and it was successful. And in fact they had a, they had an honourary, uh, banquet for my mother and several of the other ladies that were involved in this. I think it was about 19…I think it was in the ‘80…5 or ’90, in that area that they had a nice banquet for them and, uh, honoured them for their involvement with the Dante Alighieri.

AD: Peter, tell me a little bit about your childhood, um, where did you go to school, you know, did you play sports, what did you do?

PB: Well, we—I started off in, I started off in, uh, St. Alphonsus. I took my grade one in Edmonton at St. Alphonsus parish. And then we moved and, uh, uh, from then on to grade nine I went to Sacred Heart. And from there I went on to St. Joe's, Joseph’s High. In school, yes I was very involved in sports. I was, I was a pretty good hockey player if I do say so myself. To the fact that I belonged—I had to sign up with the EAC, which was called the Edmonton, uh, Athletic Club. Which a fella by the name of Leo Le Clerc, which is well known in Edmonton was managing this whole organization. And, uh, we had some—we had a pretty good hockey team in those days. Uh, we would play against the Maple Leafs, which was Normie Ullman and all this group, which everybody knows of these players. But our team, under the EAC was affilliated with Detroit Red Wings. And there's one thing I really miss, that my dad had to sign a, a release for me to be property of the Detroit Red Wings to play for this EAC team in Edmonton. And my dad has kept all the papers, I, uh, I think I've shown you some of the documents that he has. But that's one document that isn't around and I, I really miss that one. So, uh, we played hockey and then as we got older I, I didn't make it as a hockey player, but, uh, I started curling and we were quite successful in curling. And, and we did a lot of hunting and fishing when we were growing up. And we were involved in all kinds of activities.

AD: Uh, now your father was also instrumental in setting up a, a soccer club. Can you tell me a bit about that?

[00:19:19]

PB: Well, again we go back to the, the, the mid 50s, '55, '56, '57. With all the immigrant Italians. They were all certainly soccer players. That was the only sport as far as the Europeans were concerned was soccer. And, uh, and there was a few of them and that he got to know that were playing soccer. In fact there was a, there was a, a fella by the name of Johnny Gerotto. And he was playing for, uh, Canadian Chemical I think. And, uh, there was a, you know, intermediate

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amateur team here in town—league. And he was playing for them and he got to know Johnny and, and, uh, there was a few others came Fidenzio Pasqua, who was probably one of the, one of the best players plus one of the, the best supporters and—uh, for soccer in Edmonton. And, uh, so he took an interest in it and, uh, they formed a team called the Christofero Colombo. Christopher Columbus team and, uh, they were—they had a good team, very, very adamant, very dedicated soccer players and serious at their game. And, uh, from then they, they went on and, uh, then my dad of course he be—he got sick and he was, you know, there was younger people coming in, uh, Frank Spinelli became in there, they changed the team to the Ital Canadians, which was probably a lot easier to pronounce and it was, you know, it was more significant to the Italian community. And, uh, from then on, they're history, they—they've got a good team, they're still operational. So, he—but he was, he was a type of a—he was a manager at large. He did a lot of pacifying. Uh, [unclear], the Italian team, when they would play Edmonton Scottish or one of the other teams it got to the point where they had to have the police down there to patrol the games. [Laughs] And, uh, I know one time the Ital Canadians—or the Christopher Columbo were disqualified for, for something that went on in the field and I don't even remember what it was. But I know my dad, my dad was quite a cool, calm person, went up to the soccer society and got them another chance and it continued on good. And it's—it shows for it now how successful the organization is.

[Fades out at 00:21:40]

[Fades in at 00:21:41]

AD: In your family there's a g—a tradition of wo—being electricians or working in that area. Tell me a little bit about your own career and your trade, your trade.

PB: Well when I, when I completed high school, uh, I went on and took my apprenticeship as—in the electrical trade. Uh, I had to go to Calgary; we didn't have a, a technical school here. It was, uh, Southern Alberta Institute of Technology, which is SAIT. And we spent our four years taking our apprenticeship in Calgary and then I worked with my father for about ten years. [Pauses as Adriana coughs]

AD: [Coughs] Sorry.

PB: [Chuckles]

AD: [Coughs]

PB: I thought I was the only one allowed to do that. [Smiles]

AD: [Laughs] Sorry.

PB: [Clears throat]

AD: [Unclear and coughs]

PB: [Scratches the back of his neck]

[Woman speaks in background, unclear]

PB: No problem.

[Woman speaks in background, unclear]

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AD: It might, yeah, thanks.

PB: Uh, there's some here. [Looks down to the right]

[Fades out at 00:22:47]

[Fades in at 00:22:48]

PB: When I finished high school, uh, I decided that I wanted to be an electrician, follow in my grandfather's and father's steps. So I took up my apprenticeship, which entailed going to SAIT in Calgary for a four-year apprenticeship. And, uh, on completion of that I worked with my father for about 10 years. And my dad he was getting ready to retire and he was thinking of selling his share of the little business. So I moved on into the industrial field. I went in and worked in a, in an industrial plant for a few years. And then I went on and I got a job with the City of Edmonton as an electrical inspector and I worked there for about 12 years. And then I decided I'd like to try being my own boss for a change and, and with the support of my family I started my own company in 1978 and, uh, which was very successful for us. Uh, you know we became quite an, an established electrical firm in town. We had a crew of running between 15 and 20 on a regular base and up to 35 when we were busy. And I sold and retired in 2000. And did a hobby that I liked was building houses. I build the odd house. In fact I'm in the process of building one right now, and that's where I am right now.

AD: Um, when did you marry and how did you meet the woman who would become your wife?

PB: Well, I met Olivia in 1955, '56 area. Uh, there was a group of us fellas that, you know, chummed around together and, and somebody would get a girlfriend and she'd have a girlfriend and so we just met through mutual friends. We, you know and we met and one day

for some reason or another…we started going out together and we got married in 1957. We had two children. I had a boy named Barry and a girl Corrine. Barry has five children aged from 18 to I think 10. And my daughter has four children from 25 to 16. 17 now I guess. And, uh, and that's where our family is, is right now. None of my grandchildren are married, and, uh…

[00:25:24]

AD: Now, Olivia is quite, um, an Edmonton personality. She served on City Council for a number of years. Do you want to talk about her career because clearly you supported that?

PB: Well, Olivia was a person that has to be involved in everything. She can't sit on the outside and, and let things happen. She has to, she has to be—she has to have input to it. And as the children was going up she was president of the PTA [Parent Teachers' Association]. She was, you know—or the, uh, children's, parent's, children, the PTA and all the rest of that stuff. And, and as she was going people would tell her you know, "You should get into politics, you should get into politics. You can organize, you should do this." And after our children were into, probably I think they were in grade seven or eight or nine, that area, she decided to try to get elected to City Council. And I think, uh, she said, "Well, you know, you have to try it a few times to get elected, so I think I'll give it a try." And, uh, fortunate enough or whatever way you want to look at it, she, she was elected on her first try and she maintained her, her, her position on Council for 12 years until she decided to retire and, and to move onto other…

AD: [Long pause] And now in, in terms of your, um, growing up, can you tell me a little bit about the areas of Edmonton where your, your family lived? Um, and, and also any social activities that you did?

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PB: Well, where we—I can remember back and I'm sure I couldn't have been more than about three years old. But I can remember we lived in an apartment block, which is on just about 95th Street and Jasper on the South East corner. There was, uh, uh, an apartment block. And I can remember—I don't know how old I was, I couldn't have been over four—that during the fireworks at the Exhibition, my dad used to push me up through the trap door on the roof and we used to sit on the roof watching the fireworks at, at, at the Exhibition. We—I don't know how long we'd lived there, but I know we moved out of there when I was about three or four to 90—between 90—it was between 93rd and 95th Street on [unclear] Avenue. And we lived in a little house there and, uh, just east of 95th Street. And we were there for I guess about three or four years and then we moved to 89th Street and 113th Avenue and that's where I started school. And we only lived there for a year and then we moved into 94th Street and 114th Avenue, all in the north, Norwood, Spruce Avenue area, in there. And that's where I went to school until I went to high school; we moved to 106th Street and 114th Avenue. So we stayed in that whole area all our life. And right now where our house, our last house was, is where Kingsway Garden Mall is. The houses were all moved out of there to build a mall. Uh, our social activities when we were growing up was probably…as a family it was visiting. That's—there wasn't a lot of money to do anything else. Uh, it was visiting relatives. I know my aunt and uncle; I had one down the flats. I had one on 110th Avenue and 93rd Street. And, you know, that was really our social activity was visiting. And, uh, and, uh, when my dad was still in the refrigeration business he used to have to travel to all these little towns and if he ever had to go on a Saturday, and a long trip was St. Albert was a trip to go to on Saturday, in a 1929 Nash, and I'd go with him. And things like that. During the war I would—during the war, uh, things were rationed. You couldn't, you couldn't get ice cream or stuff like that, but they did have coolers. But I can remember going with him on a Saturday afternoon and, uh, in a grocery store not far from where we lived. And those days it was not very—there wasn't any Safeway—there was a Safeway, but there was very few of them and there was no supermarkets. They were all corner stores, about every third block there was corner stores all over. And I can remember being in—

down in a, in a crawl space in one of these stores, and in those days all the, all the refrigeration was ammonia gas, so it was used in refrigeration. And I remember his hose coming off his tank and I can remember him throwing me out of that trap door and I don't know how we ever got out because when we got hit with a dose of that ammonia, I mean we just couldn't breathe, our, our lungs just stopped right there. So from then on, it was—I didn't go down anymore trap doors. [Smiles]

AD: [Laughs]

[Fades out at 00:30:20]

[Fades in at 00:30:21]

AD: —organization that, that you know of that your father belonged to, you know, even in the 30s or the 40s? Uh…

PB: Well, I wouldn't remember it from the 30s, but I don't remember—I remember that he—I remember that there was a group of them that would have—a group of the men would get together once or, I don't know how often, every few months and that, but they were friends. Because like I said there was only a few families that were, that were living in Edmonton. I don't remember how many, but I, I, I don't think there was more than 20 of them that were that were social—like where my father his group was maybe there was 15 or 20 of the families that we used to visit. And, uh, and I think the men used to sometimes have, you know, meetings and, and talk. You know, I don't—I think they had a society that, sort of like a…a benevolent society. You know, it was a club. And I think—I don't know if they were associated with anybody. I know, I know that, uh…like I said it wasn't, it wasn't a real prevalent thing in our, in our childhood.

AD: Um, did your family attend, uh, Santa Maria Gorretti parish when it was opened in, in, in '58?

PB: Did they attend that?

AD: Yes.

PB: Well, absolutely. They, they built the church so they, they were certainly attended. In fact even after we were married we went there for the first five or six years of our life then we built a house and moved away from there. And then we…

[Long pause]

AD: Now your father was designated as an enemy alien. Um, and I know that you were young, but could you tell me a little bit about that?

PB: Well, uh, the war started I think 1940, '41, in that area is when the war got into it. Uh, what I can remember—I mean I, I had, I didn't know what an enemy alien was. Uh, I knew that we were Italian and I knew that, that we were in the war against Canada and the United States and whatever. I knew that we, uh…but you know my dad never considered himself…an alien. I mean I don't think he ever considered himself. He was a Canadian true and true. He, uh, he, uh, hated [Benito] Mussolini. I mean I remember Mussolini's name coming up. He used to call Mussolini a jackass when he, when he joined in with—when they went in to Tripoli and these places and, and when he joined in with [Adolf] Hitler. Because he, you know, he thought that Italy was gonna be on, on the side of Canada and, and America. And, uh, like I said, he had a nickname of Mussolini was jackass because he, he couldn't stand Mussolini. And, and neither did—like these friends of his that we used to associate were all upset about the war that being that. But other

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than that I mean, I mean he was, he was [shakes head]—you know he never said much, like we never said much about the war around the home. He, uh—the only thing I remember is as you said he was designated an alien. Well what happened was when he arrived in 1917 he was 11 years old. And as soon as the First World War was over—well in 1926 or '27 my grandfather and grandmother became Canadian citizens and my, my father thought that he was going to be—he was a Canadian citizen as well. Well as it was in those years, you had to be 21 before you were age of—and he thought he had—he was a Canadian citizen. And, uh, he didn't realize that he wasn't a Canadian citizen until he got a letter or a visit from the RCMP. And, uh, and he had to go down to the RCMP barracks, and he had to register and he was fingerprinted and all the rest of the stuff; as well as my mother. But my mother came over when she was—I think she was four or five years old. And she—and her father became a Canadian citizen before he moved to Detroit. So she was a Canadian. But when she married my father she gave up, she gave up her Canadian citizenship and became a Can—an Italian automatically again because she asked for this as an Italian. So she became an Italian citizen as well and lost her Canadian citizenship. So she was as well, designated as an alien enemy. But…in those days, like my grand—as I told you before, my grandmother lived with us as we were growing up and there wasn't any such thing as babysitters. It was a matter that if your parents went somewhere you went with them. And I had a younger sister and she was only two or three years old so she used to stay home with my grandmother—as I said, my grandmother was a Canadian citizen. And I—and my older sister Rosemarie and myself we used to go with my parents to the RCMP barracks. And, uh, I, I don't remember if it was every month, I think it was more, it was more often at the beginning and then it tapered off later on. But they did have to go, I think it was at least every three months and register and they'd ask them where they were. And I can always remember one RCMP looking at me and asking me, "Did—did we—did your dad go to any meetings?" And, "Who have you visited?" And all of this stuff. And I can remember being really scared. I can remember that. And, uh, and that's, that's about, that's about the only thing I remember about it because my dad I mean his friends—

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DB: Sorry, [unclear]

[Fades out at 00:36:14]

[Fades in at 00:36:15]

DB: Okay, go ahead.

AD: So Peter you've told me about your father and mother having to report, um, to the RCMP. Do you, uh, do you want to talk a bit more about that?

PB: Well, I, I think I've explained pretty well all that I can remember. I—all I—you know, it ended up by then the war was getting, you know, was winding down and I think after a couple of years, I don't remember how many years, but I think they've relented a lot on it and I think that they just told them not to bother coming back. But you know during the war my father was in the refrigeration repair business. And, uh, at the same time that he was being scrutinized as an enemy alien, he, uh, he had clearance for security with the US [United States] Airbase. During the war when they were building the Alaska Highway, they were building the Alaska Highway—and actually mile one is Edmonton, not the Yukon border. All the stations—all the equipment was all brought into Edmonton and it was all built out of Edmonton. And, uh, housing was a shortage at that time and we used to live in an old house on 94th Street that had five little bedrooms in it. And they'd come around knocking on the door to see how many people lived in the house and, and, you know, how many bedrooms you had. And there was one bathroom, I remember that. [Laughs] And, uh, they, uh, said you know you might, you might have room to, uh, billet a US, uh, officer that's—they were engineers and technicians working on the Alaska Highway. And I don't know what they paid him, maybe a few dollars a month or something. But anyway, they would—they almost made you that you had to billet

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these if you had room for them. So I can remember my dad getting two army bunks and my older sister and I got into a little bedroom and to pacify us he bought us a crystal set, with a set of earphones, that he took apart so we each had one on our pillow that we used to sit up—and now this is 1941—and we'd sit up listening to KSL Salt Lake City on a crystal set. Our clothesline was our antennae. My younger sister moved into my grandmother's room, and they were in one room. And my mother and dad had the other room and we had a US Airforce officer in the other room. And he was only—it was really only a, a, a place to stay. He would eat at the base, but he had, he had a lot of suppers with us. And, uh, and it, it was a good deal for my dad because you couldn't buy cigarettes during the war, but they were allowed two cartons a week each at the base and I think they were like 35 cents a carton and most of them didn't smoke and, uh, and they would buy them all and bring them to my dad. And our closest was full from—or my dad's closest was full from floor to ceiling with American cigarettes. And it was illegal to have an American cigarette with a US Army, uh, seal on it. But they had these cases that they'd take out the cigarettes, everybody was doing it, I mean it was a common thing. So it was a good deal and we liked it too because they, they would bring chocolate bars. We couldn't get a chocolate bar in the store. They'd bring us candy and stuff like that. And I think we had three or four of these officers over a period of three or four years. And one of them was really—I got along really good with him, he was a young guy. And Sunday morning we'd, we'd come home from church and he'd get up and he'd, he'd take me to the base and we'd have breakfast at the base and he'd show me around. And I can always remember one day we went there and there was two little bear cubs, that I guess got separated from the mother or something while they were building the highway. But they had brought them down there and I spent all day playing with these two little bear cubs. I can remember that. You know and these were the things that went on. And also during the war, in 1941 this was again, my sister contacted scarlet fever. Uh, in those days when you got scarlet fever your house was quarantined. They would come and pound a big sign on your door that nobody could come in and we lived in an old house and they'd put a sign on the house, a sign on the fence. And there

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was a, there was a grocery store kiddy corner from where we lived. And as I said, my sister was in the hospital and then about a week or so later my mother got scarlet fever and she went into the hospital. So it was my grandmother looking after the three of us. And I was in grade one, and my older sister would have been in grade six I think, or five or six. And, uh, my younger sister was only three, two or three. And my dad was working. And my grandmother—or my dad, we used to phone the store across the street—I can always—I can see this today—order groceries, bread, milk, whatever it was and, and the fellow would come across the street and he'd put the bags—this was January—he'd put the bags on the road and run like heck across the street back to the place. He didn't even want to stop in front of the house, you know. And then [chuckles] about two weeks later I got scarlet fever and I ended up in the isolation hospital with my sister and my mother. Well in those days the isolation hospital was 28 days for scarlet fever, no visitors, no visitors of any kind [says no with emphasis]. No contact. And I was six years old and I can remember really being home sick. And I can remember my dad throwing pebbles at the window outside my room there on the second floor waving to me. And he'd bring us a colouring book. And stuff like that. But you had to stay in bed for 21 days before they'd let you out of bed. And those 21 days, I swore to myself I would never end up in a hospital again. If I had any choice I'd die on the street before I'd ever want to go in a hospital. The treatment that I got in that hospital, from the thermometers in both ends that you can never remember they—it was just horrible. [Laughs and shakes head] But then they moved me on my third week into a room and I think there was about six or seven, maybe even more beds in that room and they were all US soldiers that were there working that had got scarlet fever. And they were all smoking in bed and playing poker and I was the runner because I was able to get out of bed that last week. And I would run the cards back and forth and cigarettes back and forth and I learned how to smoke. I was six years old…in the hospital. [Laughs] And I can remember the day I went home, that my dad pulled out a cigarette and I says, "Well, I want one of those." He says, "What do you mean you want one of those?" I says, "Well I can smoke now. I learned how to smoke in the hospital." I can remember when, when, when he let go I landed

against the wall. I never smoked again for a long time after that. [Laughs] So, that, that's my, that’s, that's the experiences we had. My sister, she was the same way that I was. We stayed in, both of us, stayed the whole 28 days. My mother, they let her out earlier for some reason or another.

[00:43:25]

AD: So, how did your father feel, I mean did he ever talk about you know that enemy alien or internment, uh—because three Albertans were interned. Did you ever hear him talk about this?

PB: You know I never heard my father talk about internment. I never heard him talk about the way they were treated. Like I said, because when, when the RCMP came to the door that time I said to him, "Are you going to go to jail?" "No, no, no, no," he says, "we just have to, you know, we have to let them know what we're doing. We have to, you know." And I don’t remember that much about that. But he was, you know, he was a, he was a staunch Canadian I mean. He, he was a proud Italian, I mean of heritage. Uh, his grandfather was a Redshirt with Garibaldi and we have photos of him and all the history and the dates of where he was and all that. He fought in the liberation of, of Italy from the church and all the rest of them from Sicily and that. And, uh, he, you know we got all his records of, of him. So according to Italian law, we are Garibaldisti here, that if we ever went to Italy we would be recognized as Garibaldisti because we’re decedents of people that fought the original 1080 soldiers. And, and it's, it’s all available on the internet. His name is there, Alesandro, uh, Butti. And, uh, so like I said, so my dad was proud of these things, you know, these are the things he was proud of. But he was a Canadian all the way. I mean I think he would always tell you, "You know,” he says, “I have blue eyes and I'm fair skinned and everything else." So, like I said, but he wanted to maintain his Italian Heritage.

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[00:45:06]

AD: Is there anything else that you want to share with me? Any memories of that period or, or growing up Italian or being Italian?

PB: Well, I, I think I pretty well explained most of it. To me, I, I had no discrimination of any kind. Uh, you know like I said, I mean you know we just didn't have any—we did not have any problems as far as the war goes. And like, like I say, other than that my father was classified as an Italian—or an enemy alien, there wasn't anything. That was the only thing and he had to report. But other than that I mean he was treated good, and he had no remorse or any, any resentment of any kind. He was—it was wonderful, we had, we had a wonderful childhood, you know. We, we did everything. I mean, we didn't have lots of money, but you know we did without. You know we always had food and clothes and, and you know my dad was a real sportsman. He was—he had a love for baseball, that was his sport. And, uh, in fact, uh, there's pictures over there of my grandfather and him, they built the first radio in Nordic in 1922, out of mail order parts. So they could listen to the World Series and they'd sit out there with the headphones on and they'd tell everybody what was going on. Because there wasn't much; I mean that was a big thing for the miners up there to listen to the World Series. They were interested in sports. You know they were just, you know like I said I don't think we did anything exceptional. I don't think he did anything exceptional but they endured it all and you know they, they were always there for us and uh, you know they tried to teach us the values of life and our responsibility as citizens and you know, and that's all you know I just— we were happy, we were lucky, we were fortunate.

AD: Thank you very much for uh talking with me about your family's history.

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PB: Well thank you, and I'd like to thank the Columbo Association and I'd like to thank the help I got from my sisters, my wife, and my family helping me with this information. I hope, I hope its—makes somebody happy or smile along the way. Thank you.

AD: Thanks so much Peter.

[Camera fades out at 47:20.5]

[End of Interview]