

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

DATE OF INTERVIEW: December 9, 2010

LOCATION OF INTERVIEW: Toronto, ON

NAME OF INTERVIEWEE: Antonia Maria (Ninetta) Ricci

NAME OF INTERVIEWER: Melina De Guglielmo

NAME OF VIDEOGRAPHER: Travis Tomchuk

TRANSCRIBED BY: Antonella De Guglielmo

DATE TRANSCRIBED: January 2012

ACCESSION No.: ICEA2010.0005.0001

ABSTRACT

Antonia Maria (Ninetta) Ricci (née Frenza) was born in Ripabottoni, Campobasso, Molise, Italy in October of 1926. She immigrated to Montreal, Quebec (via Ellis Island) with her mother, Assunta Frenza (née Sauro), to join her father, Leonardo Frenza. Leonardo had immigrated to Canada six years earlier. In this first interview, Ninetta recounts the events of June 10, 1940 when her father was arrested and subsequently interned at Camp. Ninetta vividly recounts the effect that her father's absence had on the family, and the lengths her mother had to go to in order to provide for her and her younger sister, Edda. Ninetta recalls stories regarding neighbours who helped her struggling mother during the time that the government cut off the family's relief. Notably, Ninetta also recounts the story of her father's return from the camp. After the war, in 1946, Ninetta married Galileo Ricci, who had been designated an enemy alien during World War II and was ordered to report monthly.

INTERVIEW

AMR: Antonia Maria Ricci, interviewee

GR: Galileo Ricci, husband of Antonia Maria Ricci

MDG: Melina De Guglielmo, interviewer

TT: Travis Tomchuk, videographer

[Title screen]

[Fades in at 00:00:09]

MDG: So, this is Melina De Guglielmo interviewing Ninetta Ricci, um, née Frenza, um, on December the ninth, 2010.

AMR: That's correct.

MDG: At her home...in Toronto. So, um, can you please state your name?

AMR: Act—

MDG: Your—

AMR: Actually my birth name—

MDG: Your birth name.

AMR: —is Antonia Maria Frenza.

MDG: [Unclear, speaking softly in background]

AMR: But I'm known as Ninetta [nods] and course my married name, Ricci.

[Sound of papers shuffling in background]

MDG: Okay, when were you born and where?

AMR: I was born on October 31, 1926. [Pauses and smiles]

MDG: [Laughs]

AMR: In Ripabottoni, Campobasso—province of Campobasso—in the region of Molise.

MDG: Yes.

AMR: And, uh, in Italy.

MDG: Great. Um, okay, so we'll start with your early life. So tell me about your, uh, early life in Italy. Um, and what you remember about, about living in Italy, if you do.

AMR: Well, uh, I was in Italy up until the age of six years old. My father, uh, married in 1925, uh, and, uh, I was born in 1926.

MDG: Hmm.

AMR: Six months after my birth, my father immigrated to Canada—Montreal.

MDG: And that was alone. He came on his own.

AMR: And he came on his own, yes. [Nods] He was called by his, uh—some relatives of ours. And for six years, my mother and I lived alone in Italy. And, uh, of course my—her mother and father lived there—

MDG: Mm hmm.

AMR: —and we had a great relationship with our family. My, uh, grandfather owned, um, uh— what do you call it? A *cantina*. Where he sold wine. My grandmother used to cater to all the sales, uh, people that used to come into the town to sell their goods. [Gestures with hand] So they—my mother was very involved in helping her, her mother. And in those days she used to go fetch water at the fountain because there was n-no running water and no bathrooms. And, um, uh, so my mother was very busy—

MDG: Mm hmm.

AMR: —with her grand—with her parents. And of course, uh, every morning my grandmother used to take me with my little cup [gestures to indicate the size of the cup with hand] to the café across the street where the—and I used to have a little café latte. [Smiles]

MDG: Nice. Great.

AMR: Then of course, when I was six years old, we immigrated to Canada...

MDG: Mm hmm.

AMR: ...in Montreal. And—but we came via Ellis Island.

MDG: Oh! Okay.

AMR: Yeah. [Nods]

MDG: And what—do you remember the name of the sh—did you come by ship?

AMR: [Nods] *Volcania*.

MDG: Yes. *Volcania*.

AMR: Yes.

MDG: And do you remember life on the ship at all? Or—

AMR: Yes [nods], we were there for 12 days. We traveled 12 days on the ship. My mother was as sick as a dog. [Gestures with hand]

MDG: Oh no!

TT: [Clears throat]

AMR: She was in bed the whole time... [Says with a little laugh]

MDG: Oh!

AMR: ...of our voyage. And I was running up and down the ship. [Gestures back and forth with hand and laughs] And I had some very nice people, a family of four, that were looking after me while my mother was trying to recover from her illness, uh, her, her, her seasickness. [Laughs]

MDG: Yeah.

AMR: Yeah. So we got to El-Ellis Island and my uncle who was living in, uh, New York—he was living in the Bronx at the time—he came and, uh, he got us—he came to pick us up and we stayed three days with him and his family and then he put us on a train and came to Canada.

MDG: Wow. So what were your first impressions of Canada?

AMR: Well, the first impression was, when we got off the train and we were walking towards the stair—the terminal [gestures with hand flat and pointing straight ahead], there was my father, who I didn't know [shakes head]—I only knew him through pictures—and, uh, my uncle—one of my uncles, my mother's brother. And, uh...of course they were happy to see me and, uh, I was happy to see them. [Smiles and nods] And that's about what I remember. [Pushes hands out in front in a stopping gesture]

MDG: Yeah.

AMR: My uncle had a car in those days and he drove us home.

[00:05:00]

MDG: Oh, and, and what year was this?

AMR: This was in, uh, 1932.

MDG: [Repeats quietly] 1932.

AMR: So then in—[shakes head] we didn't have a place to stay, so there was a, a lady who owned—a, a couple, who had no children, and they had a very nice home. And by those days standards it was a lovely home. They even had a radio and a telephone. [Gestures with hand]

MDG: Oh.

AMR: Which was very, very unusual. And, uh, we stayed with them for 11 months.

MDG: Oh. And this was in Montreal?

AMR: In Montreal. [Nods]

MDG: And where in Montreal, um...

AMR: On Cartier Street.

MDG: Okay.

AMR: Cartier Street in Montreal. Cartier and St. Zotique. And, um, so we, uh, stayed there for—un-until my father was able to kind of, you know, get the ho—a little house together. So we moved across the street from where we were boarding. [Gestures with hand] And it was a very tiny place. [Shakes head and makes a face] I was sleeping in the kitchen.

MDG: Oh.

AMR: Wi—in a sofa bed. And my parents were in a room half of this size. [Gestures to indicate size of room with hand] That was the bedroom. We had no living room, no dining room. Just the kitchen and, and a hallway. [Gestures with hands]

MDG: And so this was you and your, your—

AMR: Just myself—uh, my mother and father and myself.

MDG: And you. Okay.

AMR: [Nods]

MDG: Yeah.

AMR: Then my sister, uh, was born in 1934.

MDG: And her name?

AMR: Her name is Edda.

MDG: Oh.

AMR: E-D-D-A, Edda.

MDG: Yeah. Oh.

AMR: And, uh, she was born in 1934.

MDG: Okay.

AMR: And that's it, I have no other siblings.

MDG: No.

AMR: No.

MDG: And what, and what do you, uh, remember from, from sort of getting this new sibling in, in the home? Do you, um—

AMR: Well, there was quite a bit of difference between us, you know.

MDG: Yeah.

AMR: There were eight years difference.

MDG: Yeah, because you were—yeah.

AMR: Yeah.

MDG: Yeah.

AMR: And it, it was a little bit—I felt a little abandoned...

MDG: Hmm.

AMR: ...for a while. [Laughs]

MDG: [Laughs]

AMR: [Shrugs] But then I got used to it, you know.

MDG: Yeah.

AMR: I, I loved my sister, of course.

MDG: Yeah.

AMR: And I got used to her.

MDG: Yeah.

AMR: And, uh, yeah. And I went to school—there was a school right across the street, it was called Amherst School. And that went up to fourth grade. So up to fourth grade—well, we arrived I think it was around the third of September, and on the seventh of September I went to school.

MDG: Wow.

AMR: Yeah.

MDG: So very quickly.

AMR: Very quickly. [Nods]

MDG: Yeah.

AMR: And I had to get used to the language and—

MDG: And—

AMR: —I felt like a fish out of water.

MDG: Well sure.

AMR: But, uh—for a few, for a few months.

MDG: Yeah. So you only spoke Italian, obviously.

AMR: [Shrugs] Of course. [Laughs]

MDG: And then you had to—

AMR: And I had to learn English and then there were French people also in the—that area was a melting pot. It was very nice because they had all different nationalities, predominately Italian, but there were all different nationalities.

MDG: Yeah.

AMR: And, uh, so you know, you, you adapt.

MDG: Yeah. Did you—

AMR: As a child, you adapt.

MDG: Sure, yeah. And did you like school as a, as a ch—

AMR: Oh I loved it.

MDG: Yeah.

AMR: I loved school.

MDG: Uh huh. And what, what was your favourite, what was your favourite subject or...

AMR: All my—all the li—

MDG: Everything.

AMR: All the subjects when you're, when you're a kid at that age everything is interesting, you know.

MDG: Yeah.

AMR: And, uh, actually I was very good at school, uh, considering that I was an immigrant and not knowing the language very much, I was one of the first in the class, so... [Laughs]

MDG: Wow.

AMR: ...you know, it was, uh—

MDG: And did they, did they put you back at all or in terms of years—

AMR: [Shakes head] No, no they just put me in first grade.

MDG: First grade.

AMR: Oh yes.

MDG: Yeah.

AMR: [Nods] In first grade, yes.

MDG: Wow, that's great.

AMR: Yeah.

MDG: Okay.

AMR: And then of course, after that I went to Peace Centennial School which is near the Casa d'Italia. [Points to the left with finger and smiles]

MDG: Okay. Wow.

AMR: [Nods] Yeah, right near there, yeah.

MDG: And was that an, uh, an Italian community even at the time?

AMR: [Makes smacking noise with mouth] No.

MDG: Or—

AMR: There, no. Peace Centennial was quite a ways. It was around—it was, um, near St. Hubert Street...

MDG: Okay.

AMR: ...and, uh, Jean Talon I think. [Looks off to the right and asks GR] Was it Jean Talon [unclear]?

GR: I think so, yes.

AMR: Yeah, I think it was Jean Talon, I don't remember now exactly.

GR: Or St. Zotique. One of the two.

AMR: [Looks off camera and speaks to GR and shakes head] No, no, not St. Zotique. It wasn't. [GR speaking in background, unclear] I think it was Jean Talon.

MDG: Oh, okay.

AMR: And, uh—

MDG: Yeah.

AMR: Yeah. [Nods] So I—the rest of my, uh, elementary school was there.

MDG: Mm hmm.

AMR: And then I went to high school at the William Dawson High and that was on Saint Joseph Boulevard and, uh, oh gosh, um, I don't remember. [Looks up and shakes head] It was about—it was a good half hour walk from where we were. [Nods]

MDG: Yeah.

AMR: Where we were living.

MDG: Wow.

[GR speaks in background, unclear]

AMR: [Points with finger] But we were still living, we were still living on Cartier Street.

MDG: Still living on the same street.

AMR: [Nods] Yeah, we lived on Cartier Street, uh, most of our...most of the years.

MDG: And—

AMR: My—

MDG: And—

AMR: My youth.

MDG: Oh. And, and, your mom and dad at, at the same time as you were in school, uh, your dad was working.

AMR: [Nods] Well, on and off.

MDG: On and off.

AMR: In those days—it was during Depression, don't forget, in 1932 was during Depression. So my father was on and off. Most of the time he wasn't working. And as a matter of fact, uh, when I was in high school, I was, uh—and I was 13 years of age that's when my father was interned. [Gestures with finger] In June the 10th of 1940...he was interned. And we were on relief at the time, which we call now welfare, but in those days it was—'cause he used to go—he was a shoemaker and he used to go to work—uh, tending to work, intending to work—but what happened is, uh, there was no work and they used to send him home. [Shrugs] In those days of course there was no unions. [Shrugs]

[00:10:47]

MDG: Mm hmm.

AMR: So...

MDG: Yeah.

AMR: And, uh, so we were on relief. But when my father got—was interned [wipes nose]...they cut the relief. So we had nothing. [Gestures both hands out to the sides]

MDG: [Says quietly] Wow.

AMR: Nothing to live on. And, uh, fortunately we were helped by our neighbours, uh, our neighbour friends.

MDG: Mm hmm.

AMR: *Paesani*,

MDG: Yeah.

AMR: We were—by this family that we lived with when we first arrived into Canada. [Gestures with hand] And, uh, we were helped a little bit financially and my mother in, in turn would help them with their chores in their home and do some—a little housekeeping.

[Sound of papers rustling the background]

MDG: Yeah. So, um, yeah, uh, before, just before your dad was taken to camp, did you guys, as a family or y-yourself, did you notice, um, any sort of discrimination against Italians or was the community more, um, welcoming or, um—

AMR: No, uh, a—i—in my case... [Gestures toward her chest]

MDG: Mm hmm.

AMR: ...at that time, there was no—[shakes head] I didn't notice any discrimination because most of us were Italian [says with a small laugh], you know, and, uh, somehow we all got along. There were a few Jewish people, and we got along.

MDG: Yeah.

AMR: So there was really no discrimination like it exists today. [Gestures with hands]

MDG: [Says quietly] Yeah.

AMR: You know?

MDG: Yeah.

AMR: I felt a little bit of discrimination when I went to high school because there was more predominately Anglo-Saxon, and of course at that time I didn't tell them that my father was interned.

MDG: Mm hmm.

AMR: I wouldn't dare. You know.

MDG: Yeah. So, um, we'll take it back, uh, to June 10, 1940.

AMR: [Nods] Yes, yes.

MDG: And I know from our previous conversations that you remember...

AMR: [Nods] Yes.

MDG: ...that day.

AMR: Well, what happened is we had had dinner and, uh, my mother and father went to visit this, uh, couple that we lived with, you know, which was across the street from us. And, uh, they were there, and I was, uh, visiting with a friend of mine next door to where we were living. And all of a sudden I see these two men coming up the stairs—it was, you know, those spiral, uh, staircases, uh, outside [makes winding gesture with hand in an upward motion]—have you been to Montreal?

MDG: Mm hmm.

AMR: Yeah. You know what they—uh, what those stairs are like, eh. So they were going up these stairs and as soon as I saw these two men I knew they were coming for my father because there was so much talk about people being interned. So I ran across the street and got my dad. [Gesturing with hands] And of course he came across and he went up the stairs and, uh, and before you knew it, he put on his jacket [gestures to indicate putting on jacket] and off he—they took him. Uh, uh, and they—now my father, uh, as I had mentioned to you was the secretary of Order Sons of Italy.

MDG: Yeah.

AMR: So he had all kinds of paperwork and, uh, and they took all that with them, plus my father. [Gestures outward with hands]

MDG: Mm hmm.

AMR: And off he went. We didn't know where he was going or an—nothing. But they were nice. They were not unkind. [Gestures with finger]

MDG: Okay.

AMR: They were very nice. [Nods] They didn't, uh, push him around or anything. And of course my father just went along. You know, he knew that there was nothing he could do.

MDG: Wow.

MDG: And, uh, anyway, then we didn't hear from my father for oh, [looks up in thought] two, three weeks. We didn't know where he was, what happened to him. It was—and, uh, as I said, immediately they cut our relief. [Makes slight chopping gesture with hand] So we were penniless and, uh, and, uh, troubled by the—his absence.

MDG: Oh my gosh. And how did your mom—do you—

AMR: [Nods] Well, my mom, of course, uh, she couldn't go out to work, uh, because she couldn't leave my sister who was six years old. And, uh...so what happened is little by little—well she got he—a little help like I said from the neighbours, uh, the friends.

MDG: Mm hmm.

AMR: And, um, and then, uh, uh, she managed to get a few people she worked for in the home, but she had to be very quiet about it because if they fo—if the government found out...

MDG: Yeah.

AMR: ...that would have been the end of the relief.

MDG: Wow.

[00:15:23]

AMR: Now it came to one point, before she really started to work this way, it came to a point where the landlady where we were living wanted to evict us. So then again, our neighbour friends, uh, *paesan'*...

MDG: Mm hmm.

AMR: ...helped out.

MDG: Yeah.

AMR: They begged her, uh, this lady, not to evict us.

MDG: And what were the, the grounds? Simply because you couldn't pay the rent or—

AMR: Well—

MDG: —was it because you were Italian? Or was it—

AMR: Even before, even before my—no she was Italian too.

MDG: Oh, she was Italian as well. Okay.

AMR: And she was supposed to be a religious person. [Smiles]

MDG: Oh dear.

AMR: [Says with a small laugh] But she was doing all the opposite of what her religion was teaching her, you know. But anyway, uh, so we managed. Then little by little, my mother was—managed, but I'm telling you it was—it al—it was always with the help of these few neighbours that we had.

MDG: That you had.

AMR: And we had one, uh, couple, another couple who was living downstairs from us who were renting us as well. We were upstairs and they were downstairs. [Gestures up and down with hand] And this couple had one, one daughter with whom I was very good friends because we were neighbours, you know. And she—her husband used to work for the CPR [Canadian Pacific Railway] and, uh, of course in those days, working for the CPR, he got, uh—he was pretty well off, you know. He had a steady income. And so every week, they would buy a chicken, my mother would clean up, uh, uh—kill the chicken and clean it up and so on and then she would al—give us half. And with that chicken my mother made a thousand meals. [Laughs]

MDG: [Laughs] Wow.

AMR: Yeah. [Smiles] So that's, uh—that was—yeah. So my father was in camp for—oh yes, finally, we heard from him after a few weeks, two, three weeks.

MDG: And how did you hear from him?

AMR: [Nods] He wrote us a letter.

MDG: He wrote you a letter.

AMR: And it was censored of course, you know.

MDG: Mm hmm.

AMR: Uh...but at least we knew where he was. And he was in Petawawa.

MDG: [Says quietly] Yeah.

AMR: And, uh, he, he said that he was...he was doing okay, you know, not to worry and, uh—his worry was us. You know, he worried mo—a lot about us. But otherwise, when he was in camp, he wasn't too badly off, because he chose to work in the kitchen because he was a very fussy eater. So he figured, well if I can get myself in the kitchen at least I can cook what I want.

MDG: Yeah.

AMR: So, yeah [nods], and he worked in the kitchen.

MDG: Okay.

AMR: And I think they were paying him 20 cents a day if I'm not mistaken.

MDG: Oh wow.

AMR: I'm not sure.

MDG: Okay.

AMR: Yeah. And, uh—yeah. [Nods] So he was there from, uh, June the 10th and until March the second. They released him on March the second of 1942.

MDG: Oh wow.

AMR: So he was there almost two years.

MDG: Almost two years.

AMR: Yeah.

MDG: And the whole time your, your family back at home—your relief was cut off and you guys were—

AMR: But then the relief started again—

MDG: Oh okay.

AMR: —because we wrote a letter—well a friend of ours wrote a letter to the government and said that, uh, you know, we were getting the relief before and why was it cut off and, uh, so anyway, then they started the relief.

MDG: Okay.

AMR: That was of—about two months later, two, three months later they started the relief again.

MDG: And, and—

AMR: But we were getting four dollars, uh, four dollars a week.

MDG: Wow.

AMR: Yeah, with four dollars a week you could hardly even eat.

MDG: Sure.

AMR: You know.

MDG: And, and did you get to visit your dad?

AMR: [Nods] And then, yes, at one point—now I don't remember exactly, I know it was in the winter.

MDG: Mm hmm.

AMR: At one point, we were told that, uh, we were allowed to visit. So again, our friends got together and they encouraged, uh, us to go and visit him. So they paid for the fare of the train from Montreal to Petawawa. And we were able to see—so my mother and I and my sister, my sister was six years old at the time. And, uh, so we went and we were able to see him only for half an hour, but we weren't allowed to touch him. Like we weren't allowed to embrace or

anything. So at least we saw that he was well enough and, uh, and I remember my sister asking him, “Papa,” he says, “Can you give me one cent?” [Laughs]

MDG: Oh! Just for—because she wanted to—

AMR: She wanted a penny. [Gestures with hand and laughs]

MDG: She wanted the penny.

AMR: She wanted to buy coconut balls. [Laughs]

MDG: Oh!

AMR: [Makes a circular gesture with hand to indicate size of coconut balls] In those days they used to give two coconut balls for a penny. [Laughs]

MDG: Oh!

AMR: [Laughs]

MDG: And did—was he able to give her anything or no?

AMR: [Shakes head] No, no he didn’t have the cash. [GR speaking at same time in background, unclear]

MDG: Oh, okay. I know you—

AMR: They were giving him tickets. [Rubs fingers together]

MDG: Oh, and—

AMR: Twenty cents, uh, uh—like, uh—the, the tickets were val—uh, val-valid 20 cents each.

MDG: Okay.

AMR: So he couldn't give her a ce— [Smiles and shakes head]

MDG: He couldn't give her—

AMR: He didn't have cash. [Laughs]

MDG: Oh! [Laughs] Oh dear.

AMR: Yeah.

MDG: Yeah, so after whe—

AMR: And then—

MDG: Yeah.

AMR: —uh, March the second...

MDG: Mm hmm.

AMR: ...I was getting ready to go to school and all of a sudden the doorbell rings. And it was cold, it was very cold. Now my—remember my father left just with his little jacket. [Gestures toward her chest]

MDG: [Says quietly] Yeah.

AMR: You know, his suit.

MDG: Yeah.

[00:21:07]

AMR: And it was the second of March, and it—in Montreal the second of March is cold.

MDG: Yeah.

AMR: And, uh, the be—the doorbell rings and, uh, my mother said, “Who’s this at seven o’clock in the morning?” You know. We go to the door and there was my father sh-sh-shivering [shakes her arms by her side as if she is cold and laughs] because he was only in his suit.

MDG: Wow.

AMR: And, yeah, and that was such a surprise. It was a—I didn’t go to school that day. [Throws hands up in the air]

MDG: Yeah.

AMR: We celebrated.

MDG: You celebrated.

AMR: His return.

MDG: Yeah.

AMR: [Smiles and nods] Yeah.

MDG: And, and, um...I guess he didn't send any notice that he was coming back—

AMR: No, nothing, nothing. [Shakes hand out the side in front of her]

MDG: —so you had no idea.

AMR: We had no idea. They just—he didn't even know he was gonna be released.

MDG: Wow.

AMR: Yeah, because there were others that were still in the camp when he left, you know.

MDG: Okay.

AMR: Some stayed more than two years.

MDG: Yeah, [unclear] years, yeah.

AMR: Some stayed till the end of the war.

MDG: And why was he—did he ever say why he was released early?

AMR: Eh, uh, no. The reason, I don't know. I guess they realized that, uh, he had done absolutely no—[shakes head] you know, it's difficult to say why they were interned in the first place, because he was certainly not a fascist.

MDG: Mm hmm.

AMR: At least he wasn't a fascist then. He was brought up during the fascism when he was, uh—when he was in Italy. But he was not a fascist. And, uh, it was just unexplicable...

MDG: Yeah.

AMR: ...why the interned certain people. Some people were ev—they didn't know how to read and write. You know.

MDG: Oh my god.

AMR: My father used to have to write letters for them when he was in camp. You know. He was writing—he was doing their correspondence. He was reading their, their letters to them because they didn't know how to read or write. And yet they were interned, you know.

MDG: Yes.

AMR: So...there was no rhyme or reason.

MDG: Yeah. And was there a certain stigma attached with being Italian, so if you, for example, you went to school and you, you mentioned you were afraid to or reluctant to say your dad had been interned—

AMR: Oh yeah, I wouldn't dare!

MDG: Was that more because of a stigma that then your family was a fascist family or a threat—

AMR: Well yes, of course, that was the stigma. [Nods] And in those days, uh, when I was in high school and it was during the war and the teacher insisted on us reading the newspaper every night because the next day we would have to report what we read and express our opinion. And so this conversation took place every single morning and I was so embarrassed, I was so afraid to—and I couldn't even afford to buy a newspaper, I used to have to go to the corner store, to this little Jewish lady who owned a little two by two store who had the newspaper and I would read the newspaper [holds hands out in front as if holding a newspaper] and tell what I read the next day, you know. And, uh, and then this conversation would be taking place for a good hour, every day, about the war and about Mussolini and about, uh—and, you know, I was Italian and I [tenses with scared expression on her face], I was so afraid that they would find out about my father. And it was, it was a little intimidating.

MDG: Mm hmm.

AMR: But, uh, other than that I didn't have a problem.

MDG: Yeah. And, and when your dad got back did—was he able to find a, find a job?

AMR: [Nods] Oh yeah, right away.

MDG: Really.

AMR: When he got—yeah, because then after the war the—well, during the war there was a lot of work too because of the, um, ammunition plants and they—and uniforms they were ma—uh, uh, uh, making and so on. So there was work, uh, but after the war then there was a lot of work. [Says with emphasis on “a lot”] And he worked 14, 15 hours a day to make up for lost time.

MDG: Yeah.

AMR: As a matter of fact, uh, we were still living on Cartier Street and he used to go all the way to Saint-Lambert. I mean he didn't have a car or anything. And he went all the way to Saint-Lambert to help, um, uh, there was someone who owned, uh, a shoe repair shop and he would go there to moonlight...

MDG: Oh.

AMR: ...so that he could, uh, make up for all the time lost [MDG speaking in background, unclear], uh, financially.

MDG: Oh.

AMR: You know.

MDG: And, and was he bitter about the time that he was—

AMR: No, he wasn't bitter. Not really bitter, no, because he was not mistreated in the camp. They were—they didn't have their freedom, of course, they had no freedom, but they were free to do certain things. They had an orchestra, uh, they had a library and my father who loved to read, he spent a lot of time reading. And, uh, so it was kind of an experience for him. The only bad experience was the loss of his family. That was his—he said, "That was my only bad experience." Because he says, "Other than that," he said, uh, "I learned a lot about human, human—about humans, you know. About people, the way they react to things." And so he wasn't really bitter, no [shakes head], I, I can't say he was bitter.

[00:26:32]

MDG: Mm hmm. And how did it—how did that experience affect you, later, after the war and in your, in your own—

AMR: Well, uh, you know, when you're young you're very resilient.

MDG: Yeah.

AMR: And I didn't have any [shakes head]...I didn't have any resentment either, you know. It was—we just went on with our lives.

MDG: Yeah.

AMR: Because then things got so much better, we didn't have to worry too much about money because he was getting a, a good salary. My mother of course stopped, uh, her housekeeping. [Gestures in a stopping motion with hand] She, you know, she, she looked after the household.

And, uh, things went pretty well. We started to buy a little bit of furniture and, you know, so things were progressing [gestures in a forward motion with hands], uh, for the better.

MDG: Right.

AMR: So there was really no resentment.

MDG: Mm hmm.

AMR: Not really.

MDG: And, um, and then you, you continued to grow up and—on, on the same street and with—

AMR: [Nods] Yes.

MDG: Yeah.

AMR: And even when, uh, I got married. And then I, uh, met my husband, later on of course. And, uh, I was still living on Cartier Street. And, uh, we got married and, uh, we moved to Louis Hébert, which was about seven blocks away. We got married in 1946...shortly after the war. I was very young when I got married. I was—

MDG: How old, how old were you?

AMR: I was, uh, 20.

MDG: Oh wow.

AMR: Yeah.

MDG: Yeah.

AMR: And then my son was born when I was 21.

MDG: Oh okay.

AMR: Yeah. [Smiles]

MDG: [Says quietly] So...

AMR: And, uh...

MDG: [Says quietly] Yeah.

AMR: ...so that's—yeah, I guess—

MDG: And then—and slowly you, you raised your family in Montreal? And, and—

AMR: Yeah, I only had one son.

MDG: One son.

AMR: [Coughs] And, uh, raised my fam—our family, yes, in Montreal.

MDG: Yeah.

AMR: Then, uh, in, uh [looks up in thought], 19...67 [looks off camera to GR for confirmation], you moved [points to GR off camera] because of your—because—

GR: In 1968 we moved to Toronto.

AMR: Yeah, 1968, we moved to Toronto because of the politics in the province of Quebec.

MDG: Mm hmm.

AMR: As we all know...

MDG: Yeah.

AMR: ...with the French, uh, uh, French separatism and that. Well, the—he was working for a plant, an American plant—an American branch and, uh, so, uh, they decided to move the off—the, the company to Toronto.

MDG: Yeah.

AMR: And we've been living since 1968, we've been living in Toronto.

MDG: [Says quietly] Okay, very good. And are there any other—that's basically it for the coverage of, of, you know, um, of the war experience, of, of your experience during that time. Is there anything else you'd like to, you'd like to share that you can remember?

AMR: I can't think, I can't think of anything else that I can remember [looks up in thought], uh, I mean I, those are the predominant things that I remember.

MDG: Uh huh.

AMR: They, uh—nope, can't think of anything else.

MDG: Alright, well what we'll do is we'll continue to follow up and, and—

AMR: Yes.

MDG: —you know, it's a process, so we'll have a few, a few interviews together, so there will be the formal one in, in January. Um, and then, you know, as, as you remember things, you know, one day you might think, Oh, I should have shared that story, then we'll definitely come back and continue on. So, um, yeah, that was, that was a great, a great first run and I'd like to thank you for participating—

AMR: Oh, your wel—

MDG: —in the project—

AMR: Your very welcome.

MDG: It's my pleasure too. [Laughs]

AMR: It brings back a lot of memories I'll tell you. [Smiles]

MDG: Yeah, yeah. Great.

AMR: Yeah, but you know, they're memories which at the time was a little devastating.

MDG: Yeah.

AMR: But when you're a teenager, you don't feel that it's as devastating as it would have been—as it was for my mother.

MDG: Yeah.

AMR: Because it was my mother that was going through all those problems. We knew—I knew she was having problems, but when you're a teenager, you don't take it the same way.

MDG: Yes, yeah. You, um, probably would try and forget about it as you're, as you're, as you're, young and try and, and move on. There's other things that you want to do. And you wanna—

AMR: [Nods] Exactly. This is—yeah, exactly.

MDG: Yeah, yeah.

AMR: You just move on, you know. It's, uh...

MDG: Yeah. It's interesting, huh.

AMR: Yeah. [Smiles]



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MDG: Wow. Great.

[Fades out at 00:30:53]

[End of interview]