

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

DATE OF INTERVIEW: July 19, 2011

LOCATION OF INTERVIEW: Toronto, ON

NAME OF INTERVIEWEE: James McCreath

NAME OF INTERVIEWER: Melina De Guglielmo

NAME OF VIDEOGRAPHER: Krystle Copeland

TRANSCRIBED BY: Melinda Richter

DATE TRANSCRIBED: December 26, 2011

ACCESSION No.: ICEA2011.0056.0001

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 has not edited this transcript for errors.

KEYWORDS/TAGS

McCreath, JamesMcCreath, JamesFranceschini, AnnieFranceschini, LeonardFranceschini, Franceschini, DufferinConstruction, Interned, Internee, Internees, internment, internments, EnemyAlien, EnemyAliens, Toronto, Mimico, MyrtleVilla, ExhibitionGrounds, CNE, CanadianNationalExhibition, Petawawa, CampPetawawa, camp, camps, CampLife, Canada, Canadian, Canadians, Italy, Italian, Italians, ItalianCanadian, ItalianCanadians, Family, Work, Politics, Politicians, Diefenbaker, MitchellHepburn, JohnDiefenbaker, Parliament, CanadianArmy, CanadianServices, SecondWorldWar, WWII, WW2, WorldWarTwo, war, RCMP, RoyalMountedPolice, MountedPolice, FamilyBusiness, immigrant, immigrants, immigration, immigrated, CanadianGovernment, Quebec, MontTremblant, Montreal, Roads, Construction, Millionaire, DoctorPancaro

ABSTRACT

James McCreath was born in Toronto on June 8, 1948 to Myrtle Franceschini and Ralph McCreath. Myrtle's father was James Franceschini, an Italian immigrant who came to Canada from Abbruzzi, Italy

(via Ellis Island) in 1905. James started Dufferin Construction, a wildly successful construction company which started as a house building company but flourished by getting into road building. Leonard Franceschini joined his brother in Canada in 1923 and helped start the family business (Dufferin Construction was officially registered as a business in 1926). James was a great lover of horses and an excellent business man. He made many powerful friends and connections and made and lost several fortunes throughout his life. In 1939 he began making minesweepers for the Canadian government for the war effort from his plant on Fleet Street. In 1940 he was interned at Camp Petawawa. James (McCreath) proposes that there was no evidence that his grandfather had done anything wrong and that he was detained because certain people held personal grudges against him. Leonard, as well as the family lawyer, worked hard to get James out of the camp. There were even discussions about his situation in the *Globe and Mail* and in Canadian Parliament. During his internment, James developed cancer. With the prompting of the camp doctor, as well as Member of Parliament, John Diefenbaker, and Premier of Ontario, Mitchell Hepburn, James was eventually released in 1941. James moved to Mont Tremblant where he continued to run parts of the business but he tried to stay out of the spotlight. He died in 1960.

INTERVIEW

JM: James McCreath, interviewee

MG: Melina De Guglielmo, interviewer

KC: Krystle Copeland, videographer

[Title screen]

[Fades in at 00:00:10]

[Text: James McCreath. Grandson of internee James Franceschini]

JM: Alright.

MG: And then we'll get into your family history, so—

JM: Fine. Yeah

MG: —when your grandfather was born—

JM: Yep. Yep. Yep.

MG: And then we'll take it from—

JM: Perfect.

MG: —take it from there.

JM: Let's go.

MG: Okay?

JM: Yep.

KC: Melina?

MG: Yep?

KC: I can see your, when you wave—

MG: Oh.

KC: —your hand.

MG: Okay. Then I won't— I'll try to keep them stapled down.

JM: We, we Italians—

MG: Yeah. [laughs]

JM: —speak with our hands, right?

MG: Yeah.

JM: *Mama mia.*

MG: Yeah. [laughs]

JM: Okay.

MG: Okay. Are we going? Oh good. Okay. Alright. This is Melina De Guglielmo on July 19, 2011. And I'm here at the Columbus Centre today. And first I will ask your first, uh, your full birth name, um, as well as where you were born and when.

JM: Okay. My name is James Scott McCreath. I was born in Toronto on June 8, 1948.

MG: Um, and tell me a bit about your early childhood and, uh, where you grew up and a little bit about, uh, yourself in your early years.

JM: Okay. Well, um, with a name like McCreath you wouldn't imagine I'd be sitting here talking about Italian heritage, but my mother's name was Myrtle Franceschini.

MG: Mmm.

JM: She was the only child of James Franceschini who was born in Casalamari[?], Italy in, in 19—1890.

MG: Mmmhmm.

JM: So I, I was raised in the west end of Toronto, in Etobicoke. Uh, my father was Ralph McCreath. He was a lawyer and, uh, we subsequently had, um, four children in the family. I was the eldest. I had two brothers and then finally a sister in 1960.

MG: And what are their names?

JM: Okay. They, their names, my, uh, next eldest brother is Martin. He was born in 1950, uh, Paul was born in 1957. And my sister, Michelle, was 1960.

MG: So tell me a bit about, um, your mom and, and, uh, tell me about Myrtle.

JM: Yeah.

MG: Yeah.

JM: Okay. Um, well Myrtle was born in 1921, um, in May of 1921. And as a mentioned, she was the only child of, of my grandfather, James Franceschini, who married Annie Lydia Pinkham in 1912. And, uh, she had tried to have children quite a long time, had had several miscarriages, but so Myrtle ended up being the only child. And she was raised in [laughs] quite a style because as James became a wealthy individual he lavished all his attention, or most of his attention in the family vein, on, on my mom. So she had, uh, she went to Havergal College and then went on to Macdonald College, University of, uh, McGill.

MG: Mmmhmm.

JM: And, uh, became a nurse during World War Two. And in 1946 married my dad, Ralph. And then the children came.

MG: Right.

JM: So—

MG: Sure.

JM: Yeah. Yeah. So we were all—Very tragically she died in 19, um, 1968 at the age of 46. So—

MG: Oh.

JM: —didn't have a happy ending but, uh, for the time we knew her she was a wonderful lady.

MG: Yeah. And, and, um, taking it back also to your grandfather, uh, James—

JM: Right.

MG: Franceschini.

JM: Yeah.

MG: Um, perhaps you could tell me a bit about, um, his immigration story—

JM: Sure.

MG: —and why, uh, he wound up in Toronto.

JM: Well, uh, he, he grew up in Abruzzi, right? And, and his father was a travelling porcelain salesman. He worked, uh, fairs and, and had a little shop and, uh, James didn't really like school all that much so I think one day when he was 13 or 14 he got caught skipping school. [laughs] His father decided that he'd come to work for him. And so his job was to look after the horses that, that pulled the carriage that held the porcelain goods. So that's where James' love of, of horses came. And, and he was known as Vincenzo there, okay? His f, his birth name was Vincenzo Franceschini.

MG: Oh, really?

JM: Okay. So that's—I should have said that in the beginning.

MG: Oh that's great.

JM: But anyway.

MM: I didn't know—

JM: So he was Vincenzo.

MG: Uh huh.

JM: So if I was his namesake I should be Vinny, I suppose.

MG: [laughs]

JM: But anyway. So, uh, Vincenzo, uh, worked for several years, uh, in the, in the porcelain trades looking after the horses, working with his father, but, but, um, times were tough in Italy and like so many Italian, uh, families, they decided to send the eldest son to North America, which wasn't uncommon.

MG: Mmmhmm.

JM: And, uh, Giuseppe, who was, uh, James', Vincenzo's father had a friend, uh, contact in Toronto, Canada and so, uh, in 9—June of 1905 he bought, uh, Vincenzo passage to, [Ellis Island records online show arrival date as June 5, 1906] uh, to New York and he sailed on a boat called the *Luciana* [Ellis

Island records online show ship's name as *Luisiana*]. And it took two weeks to get to, um, to Ellis Island in New York where he went through the process like millions of other immigrants and, uh, was, was sent to, um, a holding area because they, it was too late for the train. So the next day, I guess June the 6th, he took a train to Toronto and he was 15 years old at the time.

MG: Wow.

JM: So that was, yeah. And so, uh, he, uh, ended up in Toronto that first night and, uh, the person, uh, Signore Verrocchio, I think his name was, didn't show up to pick him up. So a policeman, uh, uh, took him in hand and took him to an Italian boarding house in what was Little Italy, which was, um, Elizabeth and Chestnut Street in downtown Toronto, just where the Dundas area where the bus station is these days. And he spent his first night, uh, first night there in, in Toronto.

MG: Yeah.

JM: And that's how he arrived. That's—

MG: And did he, did he ever speak to you about his first impressions of Toronto, the city?

JM: Uh, yeah, he loved Toronto. I mean, he, he loved Canada. He, all his life he, uh, he went back to Italy only once through the rest of his life and, and he, uh, that's when things were not going so well in Canada for him at the time and he just, um, he, he couldn't stand the bureaucracy and how long it took to get things done in, in Italy and he just ended up coming back to, to Toronto. So he, he settled on Dufferin Street—

MG: Mmmhmm.

JM: —which was the first house he ever built and that's why he called his company Dufferin Construction.

MG: Oh, so he built the house himself.

JM: [Nods]. He, he, uh, he actually started—His first job was at Canada Foundries where he started digging excavations for buildings and, and working in, in the sheet metal business and so, just but, but he, he, wasn't used to the heavy digging so he got an infection in his hands and ended up in the hospital and, uh, it was tough! You know, because he was 15 and he was homesick. He was terribly homesick. And, uh, he had to pay kickbacks to the foreman. Signore Verrochio was, was a little crooked, so, uh, he, uh, he had to pay to stay at his own boarding house. So he figured out fairly quickly that, that there might be better things to do. So his first job outside of the city, he took a job in Orangeville working for the Canadian National Railway and, and build, working with them where he could stay, uh, in a, in a coach house and, and get paid real money—

MG: Yeah.

JM: —but, but, uh, rather than kicking it back to his, to his owner. So he, he, worked as a labourer throughout Ontario for most of his youth.

MG: Yeah. And, and was his goal always to build, to build a home? Was it his, his primary or maybe—

JM: I, I think he just fell into that because, you know, the, he, he met some friends who were good labourers and, and, um, finally he was asked to, to—He saved enough money to buy, he had \$5 and he built two wheelbarrows. He bought two wheelbarrows, actually, and, and with those wheelbarrows

he, uh, he hired four men and they, they, built a house.

MG: Hmm.

JM: And they sold the house. They made a couple hundred dollars each. And, and that was the start of Dufferin Construction, just building one house.

MG: Wow. And, and, um, did he usually with, with Dufferin Construction, did he usually build always in Toronto or did—?

JM:: No. He, he, um, he eventually—He, he started getting jobs. Th, th, this is how he got—He got lucky actually. He, there was a, a leather company in Oshawa—

MG: Mmmhmm.

JM: —called the Robson Leather Company and through his various contacts he, um, built the foundation for the, uh, new plant at, at the Robson Company. And, uh, he did such a good job. He had what they call a perceptive eye or street smarts, so he could, what he did is he could, he could judge a job and cost a job and, and get it done on time for less money than, than the job was supposed to be done for. So that, that held him in great stead with most of the people he worked for.

MG: Mmmhmm.

JM: So, um, anyway, he did this job. He did a really good job for this guy, Mr. Robson, who was a friend of a gentleman by the name of Sam McLaughlin in, in Oshawa who was the head of General Motors. So, the next job that, uh, James—He was now called James. [laughing] He changed his name to James

once he got—Actually, the story about his name change—

MG: Sure!

JM: —if I could digress, is that the, uh, the Irish, uh, boss for one of his first jobs didn't really like Italians and by this time his brother, Leonard, had, had come over and was working, labouring with him. And, and this man had two sons, James and Leonard and he decided that instead of Vincenzo, Vincenzo and Ronaldo, which was James' brother's name, he'd, they'd be Jim and Leonard...or James and Leonard.

MG: Wow.

JM: So from that time on they became James and Leonard. So that's how the name changed.

MG: Wow.

JM: Yeah!

MG: Yeah, so your grandfather's brother, when did he come, uh?

JM: He came in 1923.

MG: Okay.

JM: A little, little while later. A few years later. But, but, um, and, and in any event, so they, they got this job with Sam McLaughlin to basically build a new GM plant. And, um, what, what Mr. McLaughlin

said to James was that, that he's, "building cars but roads in Ontario are so terrible if, if, if, if you could work this hard digging ditches, if I could teach you how to build roads, the kind of roads we need in Ontario, then, then we could go into partnership together."

MG: Wow.

JM: So that's how the road construction started.

MG: And, and I wonder how long that must have taken, uh, to build...?

JM: Well, he, his first job was, um, was the Dundas Highway, which, which, uh, and also what you had to do is, is get contracts, contracts to the government. And, and there was a government, it was the Farmer's Union, I believe, was the government. You never heard of that party anymore. But, I, I think the man's name was Dur, Drury, the Premier of Ontario. And, um, you know, through James' contacts that he built up in the construction industry he began to learn how to tender jobs. Because you didn't get anything for free. It was all, as much as he had Sam McLaughlin as, as a friend, he had to learn how to tender for jobs with the government. So he learned that process, became quite good at it and started building roads for Ontario. First one down in Hamilton and then all over Ontario and subsequently all across Canada.

MG: Wow. So tell me a little bit about his character, his personality.

JM: Oh he, he was an amazing guy. He, he was, um, serious at times but he loved to have fun, he loved to laugh. And he was tough, he was a boxer. He used his fists. He used his fist in any occasion that, that, that he didn't, uh—He didn't take any, uh, b.s. He was, and, and even as a kid, I remember, you know, like he, he used to say, you know, like, "You behave now." You never wanted to mess with him

because he had huge hands and he just, you know, you knew that he was a tough character.

MG: And is—

JM: He used to call himself a rough neck. You know, he says, “You want to be a rough neck like me?” you know, “Come on.” Because he a construct, a construction worker, right?

MG: Mmmhmm.

JM: But he, he had this gentle side. You know, he loved my grandmother. He adored my mother. And, and he was always lots of fun to be around when, when we were with him as his grandchildren. So, uh, but he, he was serious about his business and, and having been—He went bankrupt a couple of times. Things didn’t work out when in 1914 when Canada was at war all the road building stopped and everyone went into building munitions and boats and that kind of thing. And, and so he, he got in with a bad partner which was the last time he ever had a partner in his life. And, and, um, went to San Francisco for a while and went to a fortune teller that told him to go back to Canada and that he would make his fortune again, which he did.

MG: Wow.

JM: And that was 19—Yeah just 19—Around the end of the war.

MG: And, and when did he meet your grandmother?

JM: Uh, 1912.

MG: 1912.

JM: That's when they were married. So he left my grandmother and just decided that he had to get away.

MG: Yeah.

JM: You know, things were bad. He owed a lot of people. He owed \$100,000, which was a huge sum. And, uh, he came back and he eventually paid up all his debts and raised more money, started, started—Didn't start Dufferin Construction 'til 1926. That's when it was formed as a company.

MG: Mmmhmm.

JM: But, um, you know, just remade himself. Several times in his life he, he, his forte was remaking himself, bouncing back after tragedies that befell him, so. But, he, he, he was no nonsense.

MG: No nonsense.

JM: And he was a great judge of people. I mean, he, the people that, that worked with him stayed with him all their lives. But if he didn't like you, you were gone in an instant. So he, he, he was a tough customer but he was fair.

MG: Yeah.

JM: That's the best way I can describe him.

MG: And, and through the, um, you mentioned the company was, was founded in 1926.

JM: Yes.

MG: Through the Depression years, how did that...did anything change? Did his—?

JM: No. There was actually because of the Depression there was a huge amount of road building in, in Ontario and, and Quebec. He got into Quebec as well. So he managed to whether the storm and build his company, uh, right up until 1941 he was prospering. He, uh, he bought in 1923 the, a piece of land from the Dominion Ship Building on the harbour, Toronto Harbour. And um, so that his, and how he got—He was smart enough to realize when you're building roads you need certain raw materials. You need stone and crushed gravel and asphalt and you need trucks to move them and you need tires for the trucks. So he accumulated all these companies to cut out the middlemen. So by the time the Depression came he was able to undercut all his competitors because he didn't have to buy the raw materials or rent the trucks or you know, have tires blow out, he had a tire company. So he was smart enough to put all the pieces together to, um, to, to make it work through the Depression.

MG: Wow.

JM: Plus he, he knew how to bid and he, he was all—He worked with five different governments, five different Premiers over his, over his career. So he knew the bidding process. A lot of people said that there was payments under the table, that there was graft and I can't deny that but, but, you know, that's the way business was run back then and probably still is, so.

MG: And, um, how do you think that he learned all these business skills?

JM: Well, I, I, some of it from his father at a very young age. I mean, you know, Giuseppe ran a business, right? And, and, and, you know, “You're a tough bargainer and this, this vase is worth, I don't know, 300,000 *lira*.” “No I'll give you a hund—” You know, that way, you know? And, and so.

MG: [Unknown]

JM: Just, just I think he watched people. You know, he watched the corruption in the graft, and, you know, in, in the construction business and he wanted to be fair with people. So when he hired his own people to work with him, you know, he didn't take kick backs, you know. He just watched. He was very perceptive of, of people and, and life in general.

MG: Yeah. And was he involved, um, you, you mentioned his first home was in a Little Italy area.

JM: Yes. Yes.

MG: Um, was he very involved in the Italian community?

JM: I, you know, I would have to think so. Uh, uh, um, you know, the because that, that were, were his initial peer group, those were the people that, that, um, you know, that, that he hung out with and those were his guys. So, uh, on the other hand it, it, it's known that he became friends with a family called the Thompson family who were, um, Major Thompson was, uh, was in the First World War and, and was in previous wars and he, he was the one who sort of gave James his, his anglicization, if you may. He sort of taught him, you know, the finer, how to use a knife and fork properly and, and eat with white linen and it was through, uh, Mr. Thompson who had a daughter, Anne, that he met Annie Pinkham, who were—And Annie Pinkham and Anne, Anne Thompson were best friends.

MG: Oh.

JM: So, he, he became—That, that's the start of his sort of not leaving the Italian community as he never left the Italian community but he sort of, because he married an Anglo girl, you know, he, he had both sides of the, the culture which was a benefit to him.

MG: Yeah.

JM: So, but he was, he, he, I'm sure he was involved very deeply in the Italian community because he was, um, he donated things to Casa D'Italia and joined certain, certain organizations like the Dopolavoro?

MG: Dopolavoro?

JM: Dopolavoro, much to the dismay of some people later in his life but so, so, you know, it's noted that he was very active in the Italian community.

MG: Yeah.

JM: And, and, very, um, very, um, sort of, um, good at giving money to people in need. He liked to help people. He was a, a good benefactor to people in need and very generous. You know.

MG: Yeah. And what, what other, um, I, I understand that he was a great lover of horses.

JM: Oh yes. Yeah.

MG: So tell me all about his, his love of horses.

JM: Well that came from raising or looking after the horses for his dad and, uh, it continued to the point, to almost amazing degree that he, uh, in the early '20s started show his horses at the Royal Winter Fair., which was unheard of for an immigrant.

MG: Hmm.

JM: Uh, it was only, uh, the, uh, Toronto establishment families that, that and, and the people from New York. Like, the Royal Winter Fair was a world renowned horse show.

MG: Mmmhmm.

JM: And he became so good at it that when he won, um, first prize at Madison Square Gardens in New York, *Time Magazine* wrote an article about him in 1926.

MG: Oh.

JM: So he just, he was able to, again like in business, he had a keen eye for horses. He bred them. You know, he, he, um, would buy a horse from Kentucky or maybe England or something like that. When he, because he, it is said that he was Canada's first immigrant millionaire, okay? When he was 21, so that would be—

MG: Oh my gosh.

JM: —he made his first million by the time he, you know, by the early 1920s, you know? So, he had

money to spend. You know, he lost it again subsequently and made it back again. So he had money to spend on the finer things in life. And, you know, after he got married and learned the good life, you know, he, he had more fine suits and he was quite a peacock. I mean, he was, some of the pictures of him dressed in his finery. He had fine carriages for his horses and, uh—So it, it, it was just through his same perseverance and knowledge and a keen eye that he—He was driven, in anything he did he was driven. He wanted to be the best of anything he did.

MG: Wow. And, um, did, did he and his brother always see eye to eye on, on the different—?

JM: You know, I never heard of, like they were two peas in a pod.

MG: Mmmhmm.

JM: He, to the day that James died, Leonard, Leonard was at his side.

MG: Hmm.

JM: So it was an amazing relationship.

MG: Yeah.

JM: And, and Leonard had two sons, James and Leonard. And they, uh, they worked with Dufferin Construction, uh, for the better, until James died and, uh, and, and they were right at the right hand. So it was very much a family operation that, um—When James built his home in Mimico, it was in Myrtle Villa—

MG: Yeah.

JM: —which was quite a place, um.

MG: Yeah. Tell me all about it.

JM: Oh, well it was, um, originally the Orms, Ormsby Estate and, and James purchased it about 1925 and he called it Myrtle Villa.

MG: After his daughter.

JM: After his daughter and it was like eight or ten acres right on Lake Ontario.

MG: Hmm.

JM: And, and it had a main house and he built several other houses. He built a stable and, and gardens 'cause he loved to grow flowers, that was another passion of his. He loved, uh, he loved flowers. It's funny, for such a gruff guy that he, he loved—

MG: [Unknown]

JM: —the finer things in life and, and, uh, so he had seven greenhouses on the property.

MG: Wow.

JM: And he would, he was smart enough to ship flowers to the wives of politicians and people he was

doing business with. So that was the reason of, of, for the greenhouses. But I remember Mimico. I was there, uh, and, and, um, it, it was, it was unbelievable. It still exists, actually.

MG: Really?

JM: You can still there. You can walk around the property. It's, it's called Amatio[?] Court now and it's some low-rise, uh, rental apartments that don't look very nice.

MG: Yeah.

JM: But the gardens, some of the gardens and statues are still there and—

MG: They're still there.

JM: He tried to recreate Italy in, in, on the Lakeshore Boulevard.

MG: Wow.

JM: So. Yeah. It was an amazing place.

MG: Wow. And it being named after your mom, um, did she ever speak about, did she express great love for, for the estate?

JM: Oh yeah. Oh no. It was her home and it was, it was, but, but you know, like they're weren't many girls. Like, she was driven by a chauffeur to Havergal College every day which was quite a trek. You can imagine. It's, A, A, you know, Avenue Road And Lawrence.

MG: Yeah.

JM: It would take at least an hour. And the roads, you know, there were no expressways, right? So maybe, maybe two hours. I'm not sure. But to drive that far and back to school each day was, you know. She'd probably leave at six in the morning.

MG: Wow.

JM: You know, and rush hour wasn't as bad but then they didn't have the Gardiner Expressway—

MG: No.

JM: —or anything. But no, but she loved it. She had, she had a big dog called Bismark, which was a, not a Germ, uh, uh, uh, not a German Shepard but a, a huge dog. Uh, you know, and, and lots of pets and, and her friends loved to come over and play. So she had a very happy childhood. She was very close with Leonard's two children, uh, Jimmy and Lenny.

MG: Uh huh.

JM: And they lived on the same compound.

MG: Oh.

JM: So there, so there were lots of kids around and, uh, it was great.

MG: Yeah.

JM: Quite, quite a different way to grow up.

MG: Yeah.

JM: She was spoiled actually.

MG: Geez. [laugh]

JM: She was absolutely spoiled.

MG: Ah.

JM: But, you know, that's, that's, wasn't her fault. I mean, you know, she just, uh, she loved it.

MG: Yeah.

JM: And James loved her, just, you know, worshipped her, so.

MG: And your grandmother, what would she do on, I guess...?

JM: She was there. She would, uh, you know, she kept the home, and, and, um, they threw very elaborate parties. They had a party, um, there's newspaper clippings stating they had 600 people for tea. It was, um, the wives of the Shriners were there, in town. And 300 people for the, um, uh, the British Empire Loyalists Society. And, and, um, so they, so they entertained a lot. I mean, that, that

was, James was known as, you know—And it all sort of came back to him in, in business.

MG: Yeah.

JM: So it was a very social life. It was, you know, they, they, you know, they, they, really enjoyed themselves and, and, uh, had a, had a good time.

MG: Yeah. And, uh, did you want to take a break before we get into World War Two?

JM: Uh, sure or we can just keep going. Sure, we might as well keep going.

MG: Sure.

JM: Okay.

MG: Okay. So now, um, leading, okay, so the late, um, '30s and going into the 1940s, what happened to your, your grandfather during time in terms of, um, his business and, or, um, with, with the world war breaking out?

JM: Mmmhmm.

MG: What happened to him during...?

JM: Well, this business flourished, um [looks to his right] right up until, um, uh, 1940, uh. Sorry.

MG: That's okay.

JM: You know, uh, his business flourished right up until 1940. He had actually, uh, uh, decided that when war was declared, uh, with, with Germany initially in 1939, in September of 1939, he, um, wrote a letter to the Prime Minister of Canada offering all his assets, all his, all his factories, everything he owned, uh, to the Canadian government and subsequently was given a contract in 1939 to build minesweepers at his plant in, in, in, the front of Toronto, on, on Fleet Street in Toronto.

MG: So he offered it up to help with the war effort.

JM: Absolutely. Yeah, he was a, he became a Canadian citizen in 1913 and, and was very proud to be a Canadian and, and, um, had meetings with the Minister of Defence, C.D. Howe.

MG: Hmm.

JM: And, um, no, was—So he set about to um, to um, get, go into the ship, minesweeping business. But what happened was, he had a lot of enemies. Okay? The, the happy part of the story is, is, is up until now but, but you upset a lot of people if you do well in business, especially if you're an immigrant, especially if you're an Italian immigrant, as it turns out. So there were a lot of people, his competitors and other politicians from opposing parties, anxious people that were not pleased with James' success. And, um, he was in Ottawa one winter night in 1939 and a man met him in the lobby that he didn't know and said he wanted to have a talk with him. So they went up to the man's room. And he basically threatened him to get out of the, uh, out of the ship building, out of the minesweeping business because his price was undercutting by \$200,000 the price that, that the, um, the established shipbuilders, uh, were, were making. I think, uh, James set a price of \$500,000 per minesweeper and the going rate, the other, his competitors were getting was \$750,000. So he was basically threatened on that day, uh, uh, in 1939 that he if he didn't get out of the shipbuilding

business there would be consequences. So, um, uh, from there, he, he disregarded, he, you know, he felt bad about that but he, he wasn't going to let it stop him and he started to produce his minesweepers up until, um, June 13, 1940, when, um—Actually he was, he was in New Brunswick and his wife Anne called him and he was, um, with the Premier of New Brunswick doing, uh, going over some roads that were being built. And the, uh, his wife called him and said that two RCMP officers had come to Mimico, to his home, to, um, to, asking for him. And that same day, um, they had been to his office in Toronto. So he took the train home to Toronto and, um, on June 13th he was at his office and two RCMP officers came to his office and said, “Are you James Franceschini?” And he said, “Yes.” And, and he thought they were there to, to talk about security for the shipbuilding. I mean, he had no idea. You know, he knew it was the, it was the Premier of New Brunswick that told him that, when he was there that on June the 10th that Italy was at war with Canada. Okay? And, and then that same day the RCMP showed up at his office and his home. So when he got home, uh, took him a couple of days and so on the 13th he was sitting in his office and the two RCMP officers came in and, um, said, “Are you James Franceschini?” He said, “Yes.” “Are you an Italian?,” or “You were born in Italy?”

MG: Yeah.

JM: He said, “Yes.” So they said, “Get your hat and coat. You're coming with us.” And so he still didn't clue in. He thought it was, they were taking him to RCMP headquarters because they didn't want to discuss private business about the security of what he was doing for the government of Canada and, and, um, he was interrogated, uh, by those two officers and, at RCMP headquarters and subsequently driven to the Canadian National Exhibition grounds where he was put in a room with 40 other people at the time and spent the night with no bed, nothing. And, and so he, he was able to get a, a word out to Leonard, his brother that, that this was what was going on and Leonard somehow was able to meet him that first night in, in internment, um, but there were men with guns and bayonets and soldiers. He was guarded by soldiers and, um, when Leonard went to give him a handkerchief, 'cause he didn't

have a handkerchief, apparently the soldier nearby slapped his hand away and, and said, “You can't, you can't get anything. You are, you are a prisoner of war now.”

MG: Wow.

JM: So he spent a week at, at, uh, at the CNE. Uh, the first night everybody was in this room. Nobody got a bed.

MG: Mmmhmm.

JM: The next day they were stripped naked and, and paraded out in front of the public to the, uh, to the showers. Their jobs was, were to clean the latrines and, and you had to go, you couldn't go to the washroom, it was just latrines or outside washrooms, like outhouses, that sort of thing. And, and at night they were paraded in front of the, uh, thousands of people that were driving on Lake Shore Boulevard, past the CNE going home to Mimico or wherever, like where he lived. And so the only contact he had with the outside was that one meeting with his brother, Leonard, and that was it. And, um, they were given a mattress and, and I guess they had cots and that kind of thing but they were treated very harshly by the, um, not physically abused but just emotionally abused by...[inhales] by, uh, by the guards and, and the public cat-calling, calling them, you know, traitors and, oh, you can imagine the names. So, um, they were there about a week and then, uh, one night they were loaded into trucks and taken to, put on a train and set off to Petawawa.

MG: And, uh, did your grandfather tell you these stories later on? Is this how you—?

JM: No, you know, we, we never talked about it. Like, I was 12 when he died so I knew him for the first 12 years of his life and he was at his, other than his illness the cancer that he had, he was at the prime

of his life. And it's quite well known. He referred to his years in Petawawa as his days in college. He, he, he [laughs] he, right off the bat when he, when he eventually got released—

MG: Yeah.

JM: —he just started, he put it out of his mind. He never looked back. Um, you know, he, he changed as a person dramatically but he, he never discussed that, you know, with anyone apparently, you know. So it was just, uh, some of the people he met in Petawawa ended up working with him and, and, uh, but no, he never discussed that.

MG: Yeah.

JM: So, why, why there's knowledge of what happened is that there were two biographies written, one while he was still alive in 1957—

MG: Yeah.

JM: —and the other we, or my family commissioned in, in the 1990s, who, who interviewed the people that were still alive. But the one that was written in 1957 actually interviewed the people that, that were with him at the time—

MG: Yeah.

JM: —so he was still alive with them. So that's, that's why I know these things.

MG: Yeah. And, and what, um, what happened to, to your grandmother and your mom at that time?

JM: Well, you can imagine how, how they would be. I mean, it, it, it only got worse. Um, you know, the, the eventually the custodian of the alien property took over all his businesses and cleared out the, the greenhouses. They didn't cease, uh, the Myrtle Villa but they, they cleaned out gar, all the, um, took all the horses. Sold them. Um, cleaned out the greenhouses, took all his companies, uh, or ran them. Let's say. He ran them so that he didn't make any money from them. He never, you know, they sold off a lot of things but he ended up getting back Dufferin Construction. But, I mean, the trauma for the family. And, and it was Leonard's job to hire lawyers right away and, and start the process to, to see what the charges were because under the decree that was given by the Prime Minister at the time, the Minister of, of Defence or the Minister of Justice had the right to intern anyone that he through was, was a threat to the country.

MG: Yeah.

JM: And, and I get that. I understand that, you know, 'cause Canada was at war. My dad was a major in the Canadian Army. He was fighting. Not, he was never in Italy but he was in France and North Africa. So I wonder, you know, how, how did he feel about this?

MG: Yeah.

JM: I mean, he, he respected James immensely.

MG: Yeah.

JM: But, you know, he's fighting for the other side now.

MG: Oh my gosh.

JM: So there was, you can imagine—Now my mom and dad weren't married in, in 1940.

MG: Yeah.

JM: But they, they knew each other.

MG: They knew each other.

JM: And, um, so it was a real mixed bag of emotions for sure. None of them good.

MG: Yeah.

JM: So, uh, you know, the life at Myrtle Villa continued with Leonard being the mainstay of, of trying to get a, a reason that, that James was interned. And, and he asked the commandant of, of Petawawa where James ended up, if, if they could come up and meet and it was refused absolutely. No one ever got to see James other than Justice, Justice Hyman[?].

MG: Wow.

JM: You know, so it, it was—You know and, and James was fortunate, uh, compared to so many of the other people that were taken away. I mean, he had the resources to, to, to fight, you know, but some, some poor people were taken off the street.

MG: Mmmhmm.

JM: You know, and small shop keepers, or, or writers, journalists, you know, anybody that was accused, I mean, they, they wouldn't have the resources that James had. So, you know, and in a way it, it's an unusual case because until he was released in 1941 he was, in, in the background there were people fighting to, to make sure that he would, number one know what the charges were against him, but number two, you know, get him out of there. So...

MG: Yeah.

JM: So, it was very, very difficult. I can't imagine, you know, what it was for everyone involved.

MG: Yeah. And, and you mentioned that the government took over some of his companies. So would they send representatives to then work in the, the different offices?

JM: Uh, yes, they do. It was all civil servants, all of his companies were run by civil servants of the federal government of Canada and, and, and they didn't do a very good job. You know, the, the, their production of minesweepers went, uh, you know, went right off the boards, uh, you know, they, they just, they just didn't do a very good job. But they sold, they had fire sales. Everything they sold went for cents on the dollar. And, and it was, it was just horrible. But they, they had to keep the, the, the, the minesweeping going—

MG: Mmmhmm.

JM: —so they couldn't shut down any of the things. Like, James' Dufferin Paving was, was paving airstrips for the airforce. Well, they couldn't stop that. When he was interned—So he was working for the Canadian Navy and the Canadian Airforce and they still threw him in jail.

MG: Wow.

JM: So, you know, anyway. It, it, uh, so you can imagine what he thought and why he was there but there just weren't any answers.

MG: Mmmhmm.

JM: Yeah.

MG: And, and so Leonard was also forced to sort of take a back seat and to—?

JM: Oh, oh yes as far as running the comp—And the reason Leonard was interned was he a pain in the butt to the people that, that wanted James in jail. Like he, he, they said, “Enough of this guy. You're a pain in the rear end and you're going to jail too.”

MG: Wow. And, and when was that?

JM: Uh, that, that was in, in, later in, like—James was June, Leonard, I think, the following September. Yeah. Everything happened very quickly. I mean, when he was in Petawawa it was a fairly short time frame. It was a year—

MG: Mmmhmm.

JM: —really—

MG: Yeah.

JM: —but 'til he was released, so everything, you know, days seemed like months—

MG: Oh my goodness.

JM: —when you're, when you're in that situation.

MG: Yeah. And I wonder if they wound up meeting up in the camp.

JM: Oh yes, absolutely. No, they were very close. They were in the same hut.

MG: Oh they were.

JM: Hut number five. I think, James was prisoner 328.

MG: Okay.

JM: And, um, they were in the same hut and, and, and James actually when he was in Petawawa became the foreman of the, of, of, of the, the team. What their job was was to go out and clear property, clear the land for the army base because they had 43,000 soldiers at Petawawa as well as the thousand or so inmates in the, in the detention area. So they would go out into the bush and they would build roads and they would, they would, you know, they would, you know, sort of clear the land and so that's what they did. The strong men. The weaker men did clerical stuff in Petawawa and in, in the camp itself but the strong men would go out and go physical labour.

MG: And there was a story that, that, um, that, in speaking with you before and I think it was a good idea to probably clear up.

JM: Yeah.

MG: Uh, the story about your grandfather sending a horse—

JM: Right!

MG: —to Italy—

JM: Right.

MG: —to Mussolini.

JM: Right. Okay yeah.

MG: So tell me about this story.

JM: I think this guy's name was Perinni[?] that came. It was an emissary. He was a minister of, of culture for foreigners in, in that weren't in Italy or something, something. So there was a reception, right? Um, in, in Toronto, that, that the leaders of government and business were at. It wasn't just my grandfather and he had a habit of giving away horses 'cause he had so many horses that, and it was 1934, I'm pretty sure it was 1934, so years before Canada was at war with Italy. So, uh, he had a habit of giving away horses just to find a home for them because he only kept the best horses that were the show horses and his favourite, so he gave horses to all kinds of people and, and he, there was a night

that he and Perinni[?] were together at this reception and they got along quite well because he, James was Italian and here's a visiting dignitary and he mentioned that, uh, Benito Mussolini liked horses. So sure enough, two horses went over with Perinni[?] and one ended up going, one he kept for himself, Mr. Perinni[?], Signore Perinni[?] and the other went to Mussolini. But it wasn't a direct gift to Mr. Mussolini or, you know, *Il Duce*, it was, it was a, a gift to Signore Perinni[?] and, and it ended up with Mussolini. So I mean that was, sure! He gave horses to, but, but it was 1934.

MG: Yeah.

JM: You know, and Fascism, I mean, there were so many, Communism, Fascism, Socialism, I mean, you know, there was a mixed bag of political intricacies in Canada at the time, all fighting for—

MG: —for to be noticed and, and the fact there was a fascist in Italy and a dictator in, in, in Germany and, and a socialist in Russia, I mean, the world was a crazy place back then.

MG: Yeah. And what, did your grandfather ever, um, follow Fascism or become a Fascist?

JM: No. Absolutely not. Never. Never. He was, he was—The only politics he was interested in was people who could do him good in, in the construction business, whether it's a, when he moved to Montreal he became friends, well, he had a lot of trouble initially with Camillien Houle, Houde, who was mayor of Montreal. But, but, you know, you just, just, that's the only politics he was ever interested in. He was never a fascist.

MG: Yeah.

JM: No. He believed in capitalism. He was, he was the penultimate capitalist. You know, build low, sell

high, you know? It's, it's ridiculous. And, and it proved to be ridiculous that, that all the allegations that were said against him.

MG: Uh huh. And, and, uh, I believe, you just mentioned Camille Houde, that James and Camille met—

JM: In, yes.

MG: —in—

JM: In detention.

MG: —camp.

JM: And became friends. Like, they were terrible, bitter enemies when, when Camillien was the Houde, the, uh, mayor of, um, of Montreal but because again, there was the, uh, Italo, Italophobia—

MG: Mmmhmm.

JM: —we haven't talked about. But, I mean, you know, it was very relevant in, in the French Canadian society as much as in the Anglo society and in, in, in Toronto. So, you know, he had to fight against that wherever he went. But, you know, he eventually was judged for his virtues and, and, and, and he, you know, he made friends with so many people that were once his enemies, so.

MG: Yeah. And the lawyer that was working for your grandfather—

JM: Mmmhmm.

MG: —and his brother—

JM: Right.

MG: What did he ever, uh, discover or, um, provoke, you know, out of the government in terms of uh, figuring out what charges were...?

JM: Well, okay, so I guess it was July, late July in 1940, right? That, uh, not too long after, he was, he was granted an audience with, um, Justice Hyman[?]

MG: Mmmhmm.

JM: —in Pembroke. He was driven down to Pembroke. And Justice Hyman[?] had a series of questions, several questions, but, uh, um, through the accusations—All that was stated, the charges that were given to the lawyers were just that he was a threat to the country, that, that, that accusations had been made against him by unknown people that stated that he was a threat to the country, and that he had given money to the Casa D'Italia, that he was a fascist, that he was part of the Dopolavoro?

MG: Dopolavoro.

JM: Yeah. And, and, uh, that he had given horses to Mussolini, that he'd sent gold to Italy to back the war effort, all, all this stuff.

MG: Mmmhmm.

JM: Uh, one particular, um, editor of a small newspaper in Montreal, *L'Otto*[], was most vehement. They called him an outright fascist. So it was all rumour and hearsay and this guy, this, this editor from Montreal was the only witness the government ever had against him.

MG: Really.

JM: And when Hyman[] interviewed him he was found to be totally discredited and, and, um. So what the lawyers did was, when after the meeting with Justice Hyman[], they, and, and his lawyer was there, his name was Forsyth, the lawyer, um, he, he wrote a rebuttal to, to all, or, not a rebuttal, yeah, I guess it was a rebuttal, to all the questions that, or answers to all the questions that, that Justice Hyman[] had asked James. And only James could answer the questions, okay? So each and every point was dealt with and, and, and Justice Hyman[] subsequently went, had this guy, the editor of the, uh, the newspaper in Montreal, sit before him and, and that was the last point. There was no evidence. It was, it was all hearsay. He was supposed to have given, you know, some \$15,000 to Casa D'Italia in Toronto. The truth was he gave \$100 to Casa D'Italia in Hamilton because one of his employees was from Hamilton. He did it as a favour to him.

MG: Right.

JM: So, ever, everything, that was what the lawyers were able to do. And, and when Justice Hyman's[] report was released subsequently to the Minister of Justice, Ernest Lapointe, it was ignored.

MG: Hmm.

JM: Totally ignored. So James went back and he was, after they had, you know, after, after seeing

Justice Hyman[?] and he wasn't...he was still worried, you know, but he thought it went well and, and of course he again had the wherewithal to have people working in the background on his behalf, but he was notified a few weeks later that he would continue to stay in prison and, and no reason was given. Whereas Mr. Lapointe, by then the Minister of Justice had Mr. Hyman's[?] report but he had the power to ignore it. It was totally subjective. It was up to him. And behind the scenes, the, uh, the, the mechanism of, of the man that met him in Ottawa, the ship building people, his competitors, they wanted him to stay in jail. They didn't want him to get out.

MG: Wow.

JM: There were people—He had enemies! He had enemies in the press. The edit—*The Globe and Mail* was the most, most, um, sort of fair in, in its judgement of, of the situation. 'Cause, you know, don't forget, Canada was at war. I mean, Canadian soldiers were dying in Italy. And I get that. I mean, you know, like, and so did James, I'm sure. I mean, it was a terrible situation for anyone to be in, especially an Italian Canadian.

MG: Yeah.

JM: 'Cause they're fighting in the streets of Italy and, and Canadian boys are dying there. So, my dad's over there. So, you know, and, and, and, um, you know, so it was awful. But, but, um, uh, *The Globe and Mail*, you know did several editorials about the injustice of, not just James but the whole process of one man having authority to judge who should, who should come and go, 'cause hundreds of, of internees at Petawawa got out—

MG: Mmmhmm.

JM: —while James was still held and everyday they would have their meeting with, not Justice Hyman[?], but they'd have their interview or assessment and they'd be let go. So all James' friends were getting out and getting out and, and he was there.

MG: Wow.

JM: And, and there were forces at work in the press.

MG: Uh huh.

JM: You know, because honestly the press had every right to think that this guy was a subversive and believe the rumours and, you know, it wasn't like it is today with the internet and it's so easy to rebut something, and, but your word is your, your, your life. And, you know, he was Italian, so, and we were at war, so. There were factors behind the scene, pro and against.

MG: Wow. And meanwhile did your, did your grandmother receive any letters or...?

JM: Yes. Oh, he was able to write. But James was not terrible literate in the letter writing. Don't forget he dropped out of school in grade six so he had, um, there was a young fellow who ended up working from Montreal, I think his name was Amelio Sabraggia[?], uh, that, that, uh, was the postmaster at Petawawa and was, uh, just graduated from, from business school. And, uh, he was fluent in French and Italian and English. And he became James' right hand man in Petawawa and subsequently worked for him the rest of his life in Montreal. And, and so he would, would write for James and, and do all that kind of work and, and send letters, but they were able to get packages. Like, they were able— And life in Petawawa, from what I've studied was the food was half decent, you know, the guards weren't brutal, the camp, uh, commandant was relatively fair, they had some medical, you know,

facilities there, which is another topic we should ta, talk about, but, um, you know, the, the food, they had activities to do. Um, you know, they had an orchestra, they played soccer, they played bocce, uh, there, there, the men could entertain in their little huts, you know, so, so it was horrible but it wasn't like you see in the concentration camps in Europe.

MG: Yeah.

JM: Okay? It was a far cry from that. But still, I mean, it was—The Germans basically stayed to themselves. The Italians stayed to themselves. The Jews, you know, the people, the Ukrainians, all the people that, that—It was pretty much you, you know—'Cause the Germans and the Italians—

MG: Yeah.

JM: —were then at war, you know. So it was, it was, it was, an interesting mix of people—

MG: People.

JM: —and communities. So, so there were packages that would come almost every week and James, I think, got a lot more packages than some of the people because his employees would send them and, and they were all, all thoroughly looked through and, and looked at by the authorities but, you know, that, that was a little glimmer of hope at home.

MG: Yeah. Yeah.

JM: Yeah.

MG: And, um, you just touched upon the, uh, medical—

JM: Yeah.

MG: —uh—

JM: Yeah. Well, that's the greatest tragedy of the whole thing because, I mean, he, he, uh, he had some heart problems before he went in and, and, you know, he, because he worked hard all his life, but I don't imagine his diet was great and they don't take the vitamins that you do now and you know. You just weren't as conscious of your health. And, and he began to feel the cold and get, uh, tired. In the late Fall of, of, of 1940, his health started to fail. And he'd asked—There was, there was, um, a doctor there from Sudbury and his name was, um, I wish I could remember.

MG: Dr. Pancaro.

JM: Dr. Pancaro, who was his good friend. He had two or three really good Italian friends there. And, and Dr. Pancaro was the first to notice that, that, that there was a, you know, he was ill. And, and, uh, so he was looked at by the camp doctor but, but and given some warmer clothes but finally Dr. Pancaro noticed the, the lump on his neck. He formed a lump and told them he had cancer. So he, Dr. Pancaro, went right to the camp commandant and, and, and, um, you know, he was, he was seen by a military doctor then that came up from Pembroke and, and, uh, meanwhile this, this storm was building in parliament about him being detained and, and, you know, like, there was, that things just weren't right and what are the reasons, through mainly the editorials in *The Globe and Mail*.

MG: Mmmhmm.

JM: And, and he was basically dying, you know, between the, the, the cold weather, you know, now it's the winter, you know, of 1941 and, and, um, so he, he, you know, it was horrible. And, and he also found out that, that, you know, the custodian had started selling his property about the same time, so it was the worst, worst time of his life, through that, that winter on 1941 when he got the lump and he was ill. He couldn't work outside anymore. So he was just ruminating on his, on his, um, you know. And Leonard, Leonard would write letters home and to, to the lawyer saying, "This is the state of affairs, that he's terribly ill." And, uh, so that, that was probably the worst time of it all—

MG: Mmmhmm.

JM: —so.

MG: And what happened, um...?

JM: Well, uh, finally, it was the premier of Ontario, a guy by the name of Mitch Hepburn, who made a call, who was a good friend of James', uh, because they'd done road work together. And Mitch Hepburn called Ernest Lapointe, who was still the Minister of Justice, and said, "Look, uh, James Franceschini is dying and unless you release him for medical care this story's going to come out. You've got no grounds." You know, he knew about Justice—Like, Justice Hyman's[?], um, uh, uh, findings were not made public at all. It was only Ernest Lapointe that knew about them. So they were not made public. The parliamentarians knew. But it wasn't in the press, it wasn't, you know. So as far as the public was concerned James was still guilty of everything that he was accused of, okay? So, uh, Mitch Hepburn called Justice Lapointe and said, "We're going to, I'm going to release the Hyman findings—"

MG: Hmm.

JM: “—unless you release James Franceschini right away 'cause he's dying and, and it's going to hit the fan,” right? So with the next day, uh, uh, James, in his prisoners' uniform, goes with Dr. Pancaro and another fella, he's driven to the military hospital in Toronto on Christie Street in, in Toronto. So that's almost a year after he was interned. It was June of 19, um, 1941, I believe, was, was when he arrived in Toronto. And, and, um...So that, so that's how—And he was a—So there was a statement made by, uh, Mr. Lapointe—

MG: Mmmhmm.

JM: —that, uh, that he was released on compassionate grounds because he was ill...which started a huge fur, fury in the press for the, for the anti-Italian people saying, “He should be in a military hospital, uh, uh, not—In, in, Petawawa. You know, you know. He's a war criminal. You don't let people out just 'cause they're sick.” Uh, so at the same time there's a guy in parliament by the name of John Diefenbaker—

MG: Hmm.

JM: —who is, um, a civil rights lawyer and, and starts asking questions of, of the government about James Franceschini in particular and why he's there and what is the proof? So, that was in May, uh, and it was part of the reason, along with Mitch Hepburn that, that, that James was released because—And, and all of a sudden Ernest, Ernest Lapointe dies. Okay? He dies in right around the time James is released. He just can't—He dies. And a guy by the name of Louis St. Laurent is the new Justice Minister, okay?

MG: Mmmhmm. Mmmhmm.

JM: So it, it, it's in the month of June that everything really happens in 1941. Uh, James has his operation, first off, but then he, he, he's transferred to Toronto General Hospital.

MG: Mmmhmm.

JM: Uh, his surgeon says, "You gotta have this operation or you're going to die." He says, "I'm not having the operation unless Leonard's let out of, out of Petawawa. I won't go under the knife." So sure enough Leonard's let out of Peta, Petawawa. The next day he goes under the knife, almost dies. And, um, on June 25th, Louis St. Laurent announces that James is completely exonerated, two days before the operation or three days, James is completely exonerated, article in the newspaper that there were never any findings, that, that he had done anything wrong, that he shouldn't have been interned, and, uh, so he was completely exonerated as of, as of that point—

MG: Wow.

JM: —because of the pressure of, you know, John Diefenbaker and, and Mitch Hepburn.

MG: Wow.

JM: Again, an unusual situation. I mean, the, the normal common man that was interned didn't have those resources.

MG: Access. Yeah.

JM: You know and so, you know, this is a unique situation and I, I really feel for the people, the shop keepers, that the custodian took their businesses and, and, and never recovered, I mean, you know.

But they were let out perhaps a lot earlier. There weren't those subversive forces—

MG: Yeah.

JM: —behind it. They were just accused because plain and simply they were Italian.

MG: They were Italian or a lot of them were, um, involved in the Casa D'Italia—

JM: Of course!

MG: —part of the Order of Sons of Italy,—

JM: Of course!

MG: —um, different, um—

JM: Of course! Of course! As were Shriners and, and the Empire Club in, in Toronto. I mean, they, they weren't fascist organizations, I mean, trying to blow up Union Station. I mean, they, they were Italians. They needed a connection to Italy—

MG: Mmmhmm.

JM: —you know, and, and part of their homeland. And, and, uh, you know, James was involved in the Chamb, Ita, Italian Chamber of Commerce to keep his employees informed, informed about what was going on in Italy.

MG: Mmmhmm.

JM: You know, and, and 'cause he had so many Italian employees. So, it, it, none of it. It was all—

MG: Yeah, well I—

JM: —just—

MG: —I would imagine that it was probably quite difficult not to have a relationship with Italy in some form—

JM: Of course.

MG: —when you were employing—

JM: Of course.

MG: —when you yourself were Italian—

JM: Of course.

MG: —and you were employing so many Italians.

JM: Of course.

MG: So, uh—

JM: So, but I understand the climate of the times.

MG: Yeah.

JM: It was rumour and innuendo and, and there wasn't the mass communication and, and the accessibility to the press that there is now and, and news travelled so slowly and if it was in the newspaper, it had to be real.

MG: Yeah.

JM: It had to be right. I mean, look what happened in news of the world just now. I mean, we know that newspapers—

MG: Yeah.

JM: —don't always tell the truth.

MG: Yeah.

JM: So, so, you know, I, I accept the climate at the times and, and the spirit in which things happened, you know?

MG: So, um, after he was released—

JM: Mmmhmm.

MG: —and he underwent his surgery—

JM: Mmmhmm.

MG: —and, uh, subsequent, subsequent recovery—

JM: Right.

MG: —um, what happened to all of the assets that were taken?

JM: Well, the lowest point, he, in August of 1941, um, uh, he was back building minesweepers, uh, for, for the government again and, and he was able to reclaim Dufferin Construction although in a much smaller form, um, because it was sort of not, not very well managed. And, and, uh, he, um, a fellow came to his office in August 1941 and said, um, “We're, we're nationalizing. We're taking your, your shipbuilding away from you. We're nationalizing. The government of Canada wants to own the shipbuilding so we'll give you this price and that's it. You're finished.”

MG: Wow.

JM: Yeah. So he was distraught at that because he was, it, it was just another instance of, of, you know, “Alright, you're not, you're not a war criminal but we aren't going to do business with you anymore.” So, so that was it. So that was probably the lowest point after he got out that, that—So what he did was, um, and he had to have another operation too. So there was a second operation in, in that time frame. I think it was, you know, in, in September or something like that. But, um, what happened was Mitch Hepburn and, and a guy named J.P. Bickell, who was the pres, chairman of Maple Leaf Gardens,

the, the hockey team, right, uh, took him up a trip, on a trip to Quebec, said, “The mountain air will, will, you know, sort of reinvigorate you and you need a holiday.” So they took him up to Mont Tremblant, the Laurentians and they stayed there a week and they partied, they had some fun. And James fell in love with the place. And what he, what he needed to do was just get away from the hornet's nest—

MG: Mmmhmm.

JM: —that surrounded him and, and so he stayed for over a month. He had Annie and Myrtle come up and stay with him. And, and, uh, and he decided to build a home there, which he did through 1941, 1942. And he put all his resources then to moving the bulk of his business to Quebec, out of Ontario, and, and into Quebec, just, just to get under the radar and he subsequently became friends with Maurice Duplessis who ended up being the Premier of Quebec in, in the 1950s. But he, he became, um, much more introverted, um, as, as far as his social, like he wouldn't talk to the press.

MG: Mmmhmm.

JM: You know, he just had nothing to say. And, and, and still the fervour around him continued. They, they, in parliament they asked the Minister of Defence if they'd given steel for James Franceschini to create a bunker in the mountains of Quebec so that he could spy on Canada from Quebec.

MG: Oh my goodness.

JM: Yeah, I mean, it was insane. I mean, but, but that's again, Canada's at war. And, and, and, and it's a tough war and Canadian boys are dying.

MG: Mmmhmm.

JM: And, and so it didn't stop once he was out of jail. But, at least he had, had the ability to get away.

MG: Yeah.

JM: So he, he, his, his business ran, Leonard basically ran the business in Toronto.

MG: [Unknown]

JM: And, and, and James, James ran the business from, from Montreal.

MG: Mmmhmm.

JM: He had a place. He already had a quarry in Montreal. So he moved his home to Montreal.

MG: Yeah.

JM: But the thing that really, and this is very strange, really put him back on his feet—

MG: Uh huh.

JM: —was the U.S. Government contracted him, of all people, who were just at war with Japan. Pearl Harbour was bombed in, in 1940, 41, I guess. And, and they wanted to build a highway, um, from, from Alaska, through Alaska to the, the proper United States to, to, for supplies for their troops in case Japan invaded Alaska 'cause they were so close. And they, they asked James Franceschini to bid on the

project. And so it, it was a process of, of James digging up all the people that he'd done business with before he was interred and having them write letters to the Minister of Defence in, in, in the United States, proving his character. Like it was, like, all the, like Mitch Hepburn and the, and the premiers of all the provinces, New Brunswick and Nova Scotia, British Columbia. Everybody he could, bankers, businessmen, he had to go through this whole dog and pony show of proving he was a reputable citizen. So he got the job. He, he built part of the Alaska Highway. And he had Myrtle and Annie go up there. I've got pictures of them on the Alaska Highway. But that's what, that's what cleared his name and, and in the name of Canadian businesses and the government's back in Canada that if he was good enough to work for the United States in war time there was no way he was a war criminal, 'cause they sussed him out 100%. So that's really what started things and it was, I would say, the best time of his life his last 15 years, when he really flourished. 'Cause Dufferin Construction became so huge. He, he did part of the St. Lawrence Seaway. He did, you know, bigger, bigger and better projects than he, than he ever—And his horses were—He, he, he just reinvented himself again, you know.

MG: Yeah.

JM: So, so that, that's how he got back on his feet. It was really from the U.S. government, not the Canadian government.

MG: And did he ever, uh, sue the government?

JM: No.

MG: Or...?

JM: No. He loved Canada. He always said it was the politicians and the police that were at fault. It

wasn't the people of Canada. And, and you know, so it was people, it was the time, so I mean, the politicians at the time, what the Prime Minister did, you know, with creating the act, interned the Italian citizens, I guess was, was, was the proper thing to do at the time when the panic was going on and, and you know, it just—We didn't have the resources here in Canada at the time, like the FBI and the CIA and all the spy planes and everything like that and the wiretapping. I mean, it just didn't exist. So, the only thing you could do was herd people around, up and see who was guilty and not. It. it basically killed him thought. I mean, the cancer that he got in, in Petawawa was the reason that he didn't live past 70.

MG: Yeah.

JM: But he made the best of those final years.

MG: Yeah. And, and when did, um, when did your mom and dad get married?

JM: They got married in 1946.

MG: '46.

JM: And a big wedding at, at Myrtle Villa.

MG: I would imagine.

JM: Huge wedding. As a matter, if you've ever seen the movie, *The Godfather Part One*, which is, there's a lot of analogies between the Godfather and, and James because, uh, Vito Corleone comes on a boat from Italy, goes to Ellis Island and, and makes his fortune in the, in the oil biz, olive oil business,

right? Okay. And, and, and, uh, and Vito's eldest son, Sonny, is married at their huge estate in, in Long Island or where he is. And the wedding scene in that movie, *The Godfather*, is very much like my, my, uh, grandfather's wedding he threw for Myrtle and Ralph.

MG: Oh wow.

JM: And there was a film of the wedding. It was quite—I have pictures of it. It was amazing. And obviously, and all her bridesmaids were girls from Havergal, that, that, you know, that, that she—I mean, she must have had, my mom, I mean, must have had a terrible time. She wasn't allowed to graduate from Havergal.

MG: Oh yeah.

JM: Yeah. They had a public ceremony in, in 1940 when James was in prison because she had to, she got her diploma separately.

MG: Why?

JM: Uh, because she was Italian. 'Cause she was the daughter of a war criminal.

MG: Wow.

JM: She suffered more than anyone would ever realize. Her love, first of all the person she loves most in the whole world is, is in jail and he's sick. And second of all, th Italophobia pe, penetrated the [air quotes] Anglo halls of, of, you know, private school, Ontario. And, and they were just nervous that they would create bad, you know, bad press or a bad reputation so she got her diploma privately in the

ceremony but her friends—The thing is, like, James' friends stuck with him, all his employees that, that even when he was in Petawawa, stayed with him...the ones that mattered.

MG: Yeah.

JM: And, and the people that came to work with him after he got out stayed with him and my mom's friends stayed with her. She had the greatest group of friends until the day she died. And most of them were Havergal girls that she went to school with.

MG: Yeah.

JM: So, you know, like, she just, um, you know, and, and it was, it was quite an amazing time for her.

MG: Yeah.

JM: But she did suffer, you know, a lot.

MG: And did she tell you any stories about, about that time?

JM: No. No, you know, because James never talked about it, it's just, and, and you know, it's like my dad, he never talked about the war. I was very inquisitive about the war. I knew that he was a major. I knew that, that, that he'd fought in North Africa and, and, and France and, um, you know, was well liked. I have all his war, I have his old army uniform, his medals, lots of pictures, but it, it, it just, it took something out of them when they came back. You know, and that's, that's why the '50s were, like they partied so hard.

MG: Really?

JM: Oh gosh yeah.

MG: [laughs]

JM: They, they partied so hard. Life was good.

MG: Yeah.

JM: And it was for James too. Anybody that went through the war, whether you were a prisoner of war or whether you were a soldier, if you got out of it alive—

MG: Mmmhmm.

JM: —you made every minute count.

MG: There was a lot to celebrate.

JM: And women and then women and that's why the baby boom. That's why it happened. I mean, you know, all my generation, you know, from the minute sailors hit the shore the population exploded right?

MG: Yeah.

JM: So, so it was a great time.

MG: Yeah.

JM: It was a fabulous time. So, but no one ever talked about that. There was too many good things going on.

MG: They, they didn't want to think about that.

JM: It, it just, it just, in our family it was never mentioned. You know, Leonard moved in with James and, and you know, it just, there was much to go for, and James loved Canada. He absolutely was a Canadian until the day he died. And, and, um, you know, just...you know, that's the why it, it went, so.

MG: Yeah, yeah. And did your, your grandmother, um, live much longer than your grandfather?

JM: Well, see they actually separated. They were never divorced but, but she, um, she wanted to stay in Toronto with the family. She, you know, she, she always had a house that was a block or so away from us and she was a gracious, gracious lady. And Annie Thompson, um, was her best friend and they lived together. Like, I grew up with two grandmothers. Like my dad's, the McCreath grandmother, grandparents I never knew. They were gone before, uh—

MG: Before.

JM: —before I was born. But, but so Annie Thompson and Annie Franceschini lived together for until Annie Franceschini died in 1978. So I had two grandmothers, which was, which was great and, and she followed us around. When we moved to our, our home in York Mills, um, she bought a house there and that's where she died. So—

MG: Yeah.

JM: —so it was great, so. But they always stayed in communication, she and James and, and, um, he looked after her. He was certainly a beneficiary of her will and, and my mom always looked after her too, so.

MG: Yeah.

JM: Yeah.

MG: Wow. And the, and your, and James remained in, in Montreal for the rest of—

JM: Yeah. He, he, um, he had homes in Toronto. He built us a home in Toronto and, and for my mom, and, and that's actually where he, he had a wing for himself because he, when he was quite ill and was dying he, he lived there when he wasn't in hospital. So that was part of the reason he built this large house in Toronto and, and, uh, but he had a beautiful home in Florida.

MG: Mmmhmm.

JM: He, he would take a train, he had a private railway car and he'd, he'd take his train down to Florida and the only thing, I guess, he missed was his horses in the wintertime. But, but, uh, I have movies of this house and we, see we were able to go to, but we'd spend a month in the summer in Mont Tremblant. My mom hated to fly so we, the boys and I and, and sometimes my dad would take a train down and spend a month in Florida at his home there. And, uh, my mother or sorry, my brother Martin, who had asthma, ended living in Mont Tremblant for five years—

MG: Mmmhmm.

JM: —uh, for this asthma. So he spent a lot more time with James physically than, than I did. Uh, he was a little younger so he, you know, but he has great memories of him and, and, uh, there's pictures of us in the boat in Miami and, and we used to play at his, um, not too far from here is Dufferin Stock Farms, just at, at Sheppard and Dufferin. Well, the plant was just down the road here at Lawrence, you know, just south of Lawrence.

MG: Uh huh.

JM: And, and but the farm with the horses was, uh, up at Dufferin Street at Sheppard. And we would go. I had a horse when I was two. And I'd ride and, you know, and go in the shows with the Royal Winter Fair and all that kind of stuff. And, and, uh, so it was great. I'd play in the dump trucks and the hay loft and for a kid and the carriages were like, you know, I was a cowboy. Right, I watched cowboy movies and television at 10, 11, 12 years old. It was, it was magnificent. It was quite a life. And I was— We all reaped the rewards of, of, of James' success—

MG: Mmmhmm.

JM: —you know?

MG: And what was, what is it like for you carrying James' name?

JM: Oh, it's great. It's great. I mean, he, he and my dad were the two greatest men I ever met. My dad was a championship figure—.

MG: And James. They're both James.

JM: Both James. Well Dad, my dad was Ralph.

MG: Oh Ralph.

JM: Yeah. My dad was—

MG: I'm very sorry.

JM: —no. My dad was Ralph.

MG: That's my bad.

JM: No, that's alright. My dad was Ralph. But he, he was an amazing guy. I mean, he was an international figure skating champion.

MG: Yes.

JM: Yeah, a soldier, a lawyer, and just a really good dad. And he worked for James for a while but he wanted to go out on his own and, and, uh. You know, he, after my mom died he raised my sister and my brothers and I, so.

MG: Yeah.

JM: Yeah. So it was, it was great. Oh it's fine. I, I, I really love my Italian heritage. I've been to Italy. I wish I spoke Italian. That's my great downfall. You just, in our house—And we would see our Italian cousins 'cause James had four sisters. Three of them remained in Canada. And Leonard's children uh, you know, were, were all, they'd all come to the big house on Christmas Day and we'd party and we had the big family reunion a few years back. And, and, you know, so—Celebrating 50 years of prosperity in Canada.

MG: Yeah.

JM: So it, it, it's great to have that Italian heritage. And it, uh, I love it. I'm very proud of it.

MG: And, and are the company, is Dufferin Construction still owned by the family?

JM: No. No. My mom sold it. The, the thing that happened to my mom which is so tragic is that she uh, she was pregnant with my sister when James died in September, uh, 1960. And, and my sister was born three months premature a month later. And, uh, and, and then my mom was the sole heir of, of James' estate so right away she inherited Dufferin Construction and everything that went with it and all. So I, I can remember growing up the, James' board of directors which were like senators and presidents of banks coming to our house to have board meetings and smoking cigars. Uncle Leonard always, and James and Leonard, everybody smoked cigars. So, uh, so it, it she was thrust in from being just a mother and, and enjoying her children to being a businesswoman that, that, um—And my dad helped out and, and, and James Franceschini Jr., like Jimmy, Jimmy Franceschini, Leonard's eldest son—

MG: Uh huh. Yeah.

JM: —was Myrtle's best friend and was an amazing help, ended up being president of, of Dufferin Construction before, before it was sold and then president of our, our, our private family company for, for 20 years. So he, uh, my mother had help but it was, it was very difficult. Dufferin was Construction was sold right away to Canada Cement in 1961. But then what do you do with the money? So she still had, it was, it was, there were trusts set up and there were, it was very, very complicated for a lady that—

MG: Yeah.

JM: —had grown up in a privileged lifestyle and hadn't gone to business school and, and the pressure just became too much for her and, and subsequently she passed away in 1968. So, yeah—

MG: So eight years after—

JM: Yeah.

MG: —your grandfather died.

JM: Yeah, at age 46. Terrible. And she had great plans of what to do. I mean, she, she bought a lot of real estate. She made some very sound investments but, but, uh, it was just ended up to be too much for her.

MG: Yeah.

JM: Which was the sad part.

MG: Mmmhmm. And, and your dad after she died he sort of picked up the pieces.

JM: Oh yeah, no. He, he did. He was great. He raised my brother. He was only seven when my mom died.

MG: Yeah.

JM: If you can imagine. So, uh, you know and my other brother was 12 and then Martin was 17. I was 19. It was, it changed our lives totally. It really did. But, you know, you just get on with it and, and, uh, so my dad was great. And it was sad to see him go in 19, uh, 1998 he passed away.

MG: '98.

JM: Yeah.

MG: Yeah.

JM: But he was a great guy.

MG: And so now looking back on, on this family history—

JM: Yeah.

MG: —what are your, um—How has, how has, um, your grandfather's legacy and your mom's life and also that of your grandmother and your dad—

JM: Yeah.

MG: —how has this shaped your perspective?

JM: Oh totally. I mean, you know, like it's again, I'm very proud of my Italian heritage. I'm very proud of my Scots heritage. I wear a kilt quite often and got married in my kilt so I can—They say, “What is the S stand for in my name?” I say, “Well sometimes it's Scott and sometimes it's spaghetti.”

MG: [laughs]

JM: [laughs] 'Cause it's, you know, I have that dual heritage and, and I'm very proud of it. So, uh, I've had a, you know, what an amazing time to look back on and just, you know, like my dad's family came from Scotland and settled in Goderich. And my dad, my grandfather that I never knew was a home builder in Toronto and supposedly a wonderful man too, so.

MG: Wow.

JM: I've got a lot to draw on.

MG: [laughs]

JM: I'm very proud of both sides of my family, so. But, but, you know, the Italian side in particular had, had more of the, the trauma involved, not that going to war and being a soldier wasn't a trauma, but, but it was, you know, what we're talking about here sort of is more relevant but it, it's sort of the mix of the two has made me the Scottish Italian that I am or the Italian Scot that I am. One or the other, you know?

MG: And is it important for you now to, uh, pass this history or these stories on to your own children?

JM: Oh it is, and I'm, I'm with a, with an Italian journalist I've met Frank Giorno, who's a great fellow, we're writing, uh, James' biography. It should be out there. This story has to be told. 'Cause it's a great story of perseverance and, and, and, um, you know, the Petawawa, the experience in Petawawa wasn't the—it was the worst experience he ever had but it wasn't the first.

MG: Mmmhmm.

JM: You know, and just how he was so resilient of getting up, and, and, from the first day he arrived. And, well, from dropping out of school in Italy and working for his father and then getting put on a boat and coming here, not knowing anybody, making a fortune, losing it, getting, making another one, getting thrown in jail, making another one, you know, dying of cancer, you know.

MG: Yeah.

JM: But he went with a smile on his face, I know.

MG: Yeah. And are there any other stories that, that you'd like to share, perhaps that we didn't touch on?

JM: Yeah, I don't know. I think I've covered it pretty much. I mean, he was a party animal. I can, I can— He had huge parties at, at Mont Tremblant. He had one, one was the international mayors convention for 200 mayors of, of all over North America and, and, and some in England and Europe. What he'd do at Mont Tremblant is he had a huge horse ring outside and he'd put tables and, and buffet and bars in

the middle and the horses would go around, these ornate carriages would go around. He'd bring everybody up by buses. They'd fly to Montreal and he'd bring them up by buses. So the parties were world famous. And I have a book, a guest book.

MG: Oh.

JM: It was started, it was, uh, September 1953 at this mayors convention. So the guest book starts with September 1953 and I, I, I kept it going 'til we sold the place in, in 2000. We, we had it ourselves or my brothers and sister and I for 30 years enjoyed the benefits of James' hard work.

MG: Yeah.

JM: So, yeah, so, it was great.

MG: Wow. And, and how did it feel then to close that, close that home, that...?

JM: Well, you know, it, it, it, I, I, I, personally I never felt it was mine. It was always his. And, and, you know, you had to make a choice. I have a summer home close to Toronto and Mont Tremblant is seven hours' drive and my kids' friends were—You can only be at one place at one time. And we, we did a little development there, and you know, but we're, we're, we were Toronto people. You know, just, we wanted to be closer to home and, and my brother at that time, my sister was living in Vancouver, one brother in Phoenix.

MG: Mmmhmm.

JM: So it wasn't getting used that much and, and it's still the most beautiful place in Canada that I've

ever seen, you know? Mont Tremblant in general is a great place to go.

MG: Wow.

JM: And, and, but this estate was, like out of a fairy tale. It was just a paradise for horses, paradise for humans, you know?

MG: Yeah.

JM: It a g, bygone era. I'm sure's places like that now but what, what made it so special is that it was difficult to get to. You know, you had to drive from Toronto. He built the road from Montreal to Mont Tremblant, the, the, the, uh, the Laurentian autoroute [laughing] so he could get up there faster. He got the contract to do that. So he was still doing business in Quebec while he relaxing but he, he sort of was much less in the limelight after he got out of Peta, Petawawa, a little under the radar. He just wanted to do his business quietly and, um—

MG: Be left alone.

JM: Yeah. Be left alone—

MG: Yeah.

JM: —to enjoy himself, which he certainly did.

MG: Yeah. Well thank you so much for sharing—

JM: Okay! I didn't even need my notes or anything like that.

MG: No, no. You were fantastic.

JM: Well, you know, just it's, uh, it's, uh, you know, I hope, uh—

MG: It's a story you seem to know very, very well—

JM: Well, I've lived it for—

MG: Yeah.

JM: —63 years now. So, it's, its, I didn't—Yeah. I just brushed up last night. But I hope you like it.

MG: It was fantastic.

JM: Yeah.

MG: Real good.

JM: Yeah.

MG: Yeah.

JM: Okay.



***Italian Canadians as Enemy Aliens:
Memories of World War II***
901 Lawrence Ave. West
Toronto, ON M6A 1C3
T: 416-789-7011 F: 416-789-3951

MG: Alright, thanks!

JM: Alright!

[fades out at 01:17:03]