

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

DATE OF INTERVIEW: August 11, 2011

LOCATION OF INTERVIEW: Hamilton, ON

NAME OF INTERVIEWEE: Elio Salciccioli (Al Salci)

NAME OF INTERVIEWER: Vikki Cecchetto

NAME OF VIDEOGRAPHER: Nadia Mior

TRANSCRIBED BY: Emily Rondel

DATE TRANSCRIBED: November 9, 2011

ACCESSION No.: ICEA2011.0021.0002

ABSTRACT

This is the second interview with Elio Salciccioli (Al Salci). Elio Salciccioli grew up in Hamilton, the son of Teofilo Salciccioli, an Italian who immigrated to Canada in 1907, and Antonina Salciccioli, who came to Canada in 1917. They had five sons. Teofilo and Antonina were not members of any of the Italian fascist organizations that were formed during Mussolini's rise to power. However, Teofilo and three of his sons were musicians who played with the band at the Casa d'Italia and active members of the Italian community in Hamilton. None of Elio's family members were arrested as enemy aliens in 1940, but they knew people in their community who were interned, including Alfonso Borsellino, who was the leader of the band at Casa d'Italia. Elio's father was under suspicion, but was cleared after a few weeks without being sent to an internment camp. Elio's brother, Dolindo, worked at the internment camp at Petawawa and was responsible for guarding Italians there, some of whom he knew personally. In this interview, Elio mentions a degree of discrimination against Italians in Hamilton during his childhood. He also mentions that those who were interned tended to keep their experiences private after they were released. He mentions the need Italians felt to preserve their culture and points to that as the reason that nationalistic fascist organizations were started around the war, rather than an ideological tie to fascism. He also mentions that while Italian cultural activities, such as processions and language lessons, were promoted before the war, they were

no longer practiced after the war broke out. Elio Saliccioli passed away suddenly a few days after this interview was recorded.

INTERVIEW

ES: Elio Saliccioli, interviewee

VC: Vikki Cecchetto, interviewer

NM: Nadia Mior, videographer

[Title screen]

[Camera fades in at 00:00:09]

VC: Okay, we're here today, uh, with Mr. Elio Saliccioli...

ES: Mm hmm.

VC: ...who, um, is going to tell us a little bit more about, uh, what it was like growing up, uh, in Hamilton during the time of the time of the Second World War, just before the Second World War, just after the Second World War.

ES: [Nods] Okay. [Clears throat]

VC: Can you tell us a little bit, um, when you born? Uh, if you were born here in Hamilton— were you born—

VC: —here in Hamilton?

ES: Well my father came in 1907. And, um, in 1917 he had called for my mother.

VC: Mm hmm. And you father's name was?

ES: Teofilo.

VC: Mm hmm.

ES: And, uh, my mother, it was during the First World War that she made the trip across the Atlantic.

VC: Oh wow.

ES: Actually, the only reason she was able to come was she made an excuse that, uh, she was to attend to a sick uncle. Otherwise, uh, there were German U-boats at the time. So they got married in '17 and, uh, they had, uh, four children. Uh, the last two were twins.

VC: Mm hmm.

ES: And then, uh, my mother returned to Italy about 1925, uh, because my grandfather was kind of urging my father to go back, but she went back with the four boys...

VC: Uh huh.

ES: And—

VC: And what was your mother's name?

ES: Antonina.

VC: And the four boys were?

ES: Elvezio, Dolindo, Tristano, and Ovilando.

VC: Wow.

ES: Yeah.

VC: Very, very literary names. [Laughs]

ES: [Laughs] So, um, she stayed there about 10 months and then came back to, uh, Canada. And I wasn't born till '32.

VC: Mm hmm.

ES: Now at that time [sniffles]...I think that was about the time that they had built new Casa d'Italia.

VC: Mm hmm.

ES: Now the Italian immigrants in that time, [camera zooms in] I mean they wanted to maintain their culture and ties to the old country.

VC: Right.

ES: And when Mussolini came into power in 1922, he did a lot of good things for Italy at the time.

VC: Mm hmm.

ES: And he was well respected, but even throughout Europe. Uh, I believe the king of England even bestowed a title on him as a—like a peacemaker. So, uh, consequently a lot of clubs were formed...

VC: Mm hmm.

ES: ...to—uh, especially in the working areas.

VC: Right.

ES: Uh, so, uh, so they had the Sons of Italy and the *dopolavore* [*sic*] and, uh, had the ties to Italy... [Camera zooms out]

VC: Mm hmm.

ES: ...but, um, these clubs at that time, a lot of funds came from, um, from Italy.

VC: Mm hmm.

ES: And, uh, consequently, when Mussolini got involved with the war [chuckles and shakes his head], uh, it was unfortunate for all these immigrants that belonged to these clubs because,

um, in a way you can't blame the government because, um, I guess in their eyes they were fascists...

VC: Mm hmm.

ES: ...and, uh, being tied [waves hand back and forth], you know, accordingly.

VC: Mm hmm.

ES: So they were rounded up—uh, whoever was a member of these clubs were rounded up and sent to Petawawa. And, uh, in 1942, my f—my—one of my brothers was, um, in the army [clears throat] and he was stationed in Petawawa and—

VC: And what was his name?

ES: Dolindo.

VC: Dolindo.

ES: And, uh, whenever he had to do sentinel duties, [chuckles and shrugs] he was guarding his *paesans* [sic].

VC: Oh.

ES: [Shakes head] I mean they were no fascists, uh.

VC: Yeah.

ES: I mean all they were was people from the country that came over and, uh, just wanted to maintain, uh, like I say their culture and traditions.

VC: And did they—

ES: And in that time, we—uh, in the '30s I can remember we used to have processions for feast of St. Anthony and the different feasts for the saints and, uh, processions down the streets [gestures outward with hand], but when the war broke out [shakes head] all this was kaput [gestures with hand to indicate everything ending].

VC: Oh.

ES: Um, I remember [clears throat] I wa—I was going to take my first [camera zooms in]—I had one lesson in Italian... [Holds up one finger]

VC: [Laughs]

NM: [Laughs]

ES: ...and when—

NM: Oh dear.

ES: —and when the war broke out that was kaput... [Gestures outward in a slicing motion]

VC: That was the end.

ES: ...you couldn't even speak it. Yeah, uh, there was a lot of discrimination at the time. [Nods]
It's, it's unfortunate so, but that's the way it was.

VC: And, uh, going back to your brother who was, um, who was in the army, was he able to talk
to the, uh, prisoners?

ES: I, I believe so. [Nods] I, I think—I, I can't say for sure, but I'm sure he did. You know.

VC: Mm hmm. And did—would they have known him from—

ES: Oh yeah. [Nods]

VC: —from here?

ES: Oh yeah. [Nods]

VC: So, uh—

ES: Well, the s—the ones from Hamilton—

VC: Right.

ES: —that were encamped—

VC: Yeah.

ES: —uh, yes, he knew them. They were—

VC: Right.

ES: —they were *paesans* [sic] actually. [Shrugs and smiles]

VC: Yeah. And did, did he ever tell you about what was going on in the, in the camp during that time...

ES: No. [Shakes head]

VC: ...even afterwards?

[00:05:43]

ES: No, because I, I was, uh, 10 years old at the time. And, uh, sometimes I'd write him letters and he'd write me back [gestures back and forth with hand] and, uh—but, uh...yeah it was, uh, not a good time at that time.

VC: Not a good time. Now I know that they said, uh—other people have said that the Casa d'Italia, um—I think just before the war—had a band. The—

[Camera zooms out]

ES: [Nods] Yes, they did.

VC: —they had a, uh, a band and I know you showed us pictures of it, um, the last time.

ES: [Nods] Yeah, yeah, the Sons of—

VC: Can you tell us a little more about that band?

ES: Well...actually the, uh—when the RCMP [Royal Canadian Mounted Police] took over the Casa d'Italia they confiscated any instruments that were there

VC: Oh.

ES: And, um, Alfonso Borsellino, who, who was the conductor...

VC: Mm hmm.

ES: ...uh, the bandmaster at the time, uh, he was incarcerated. And, uh, so [shakes head] we didn't have a band for...for a while. [Nods]

VC: A long, long time.

ES: Yeah.

VC: And what about, uh, do you remember going to the Casa d'Italia, uh, to, uh, to, to do any other activities, either with your family—

ES: I can remember—see I was born in '32...

VC: Mm hmm.

ES: ...so I think I was about four years old, but I still have a memory of my mother taking me [pauses and rubs nose]...upstairs to the s-second floor and it was—it didn't dawn on me till later that they were actually having a meeting, like with the president, the secretary—

VC: Ah!

ES: —and, uh, those people [chuckles and shakes head]—now my mother—we didn't belong to the *dopolavore* [*sic*], otherwise my father would have been incarcerated too.

VC: Right.

ES: But, uh, he was just active in the, in the band, as three of my brothers were musicians and, uh, they used to go every Sunday to rehearse with the, with the band until that [gestures with hand] broke out. So, uh, I could remember her taking me to one meeting. And, uh, then around 1936, thereabouts, there was, uh, a big rally...

VC: Oh.

ES: ...at the Casa d'Italia and on the stage [clears throat] they had a Union Jack on one side and the Italian flag on the other side. [Flips hand back and forth] And the...the men were pinning money on the Italian flag to send money back to—

VC: Oh.

ES: —Mussolini for the war in—

VC: Okay.

ES: —to support the war in Ethiopia.

VC: Mm hmm.

ES: So this is where I think, uh, the RCMP became kind of suspicious that they are supporting the Fascist Party.

VC: Right.

ES: And, uh, they had no idea—[shakes head] the Italians here had no idea that Mussolini would enter the Second World War.

VC: Right.

ES: Which made a very difficult for all the Italians, uh, in Canada.

VC: Mm hmm, mm hmm. And what about after the war, um, what was the situation? Was it very—you said your father was not interned. He was not—

ES: No.

VC: —incarcerated.

ES: He worked at the Steel Company and, um, he was let out for a couple of weeks until he got cleared.

VC: Okay.

ES: Uh, th-the RCMP came to the house and they searched top to bottom for any possible affiliation with the Fascist Party, uh, or, uh, being a member of any of the clubs. So he was, he was cleared and, uh, he kept working.

VC: Okay.

ES: Unfortunately he passed away in '43 so.

[Beeping sound in background]

VC: Ah. And did—was he designated as an enemy alien? Did he have to go and check in?

ES: [Shakes head] No, not that I can remember. No.

VC: Okay, okay.

ES: No.

VC: That-that's good.

ES: Mm hmm.

VC: Um, and what about—you said your brothers were in the, uh, in the army.

ES: [Holds up one finger] One of, one of my brothers—

VC: One of, one of the brothers.

ES: Two of them were rejected.

VC: Okay.

ES: And one was—they needed him for steelwork—um, for war work.

VC: Okay.

ES: The oldest brother was, uh, involved with, uh, war work. [Nods]

VC: Okay. And his name was?

ES: Elvezio.

VC: Elvezio. And, um, so do you, uh, do you have any sense—I know that you weren't very old at the time of—that this happened about—you were about 10 years old maybe—

ES: [Nods] Yeah.

VC: —uh, 10 years old. Um, do you remember any of your neighbours being taken away or, um, others, uh—

ES: [Nods] Uh, yeah.

VC: —other families having, uh, problems?

ES: Well, uh, th-there were a few neighbors that were incarcerated...

VC: Mm hmm.

ES: ...uh, because, um, one was the president of the *dopolavore* [*sic*] and his wife was the secretary, but they let her out after a couple of weeks.

VC: Mm hmm. And would you—

ES: 'Cause she had—

VC: be able to give us his name?

ES: Yeah, Donato Olivieri.

VC: Okay.

[00:10:54]

ES: And, um, because they had three children. And, uh...so. [Shrugs]

VC: And what—where, uh, where did you grow up in Hamilton, what area of Hamilton did you grow up?

ES: Around the [coughs] north, north end of the city.

VC: Mm hmm.

ES: Uh, Sherman—around Sherman Avenue North.

VC: Mm hmm, mm hmm.

ES: All the Italians, uh, they all settled in those areas because it was walking distance to the steel mills.

[Beeping sound in background]

VC: Right.

ES: So.

VC: Right, right.

ES: And there, there was [beeping sound in background] a point where, uh...the foreigners were not allowed to live past a certain area. [Gestures with hand]

VC: Oh really?

ES: Yeah. [Nods]

VC: Oh.

ES: Like in Hamilton, uh, I think on the other side of Canon or King Street.

VC: Okay.

ES: That I, I ki-kinda hardly remember, but, uh, that, that was done away with, uh, by the time I started to grow up.

VC: Mm hmm, mm hmm.

ES: But... [Nods]

VC: And, um, at this time y-you would have been going to school.

ES: Oh, I was in school yeah. [Nods]

VC: Right. What, what was it like going to school? Wa-was it problematic, were there—

ES: No, not really. But, um, there was—well you sensed some discrimination because you're Italian.

VC: Okay.

ES: At, at the time, you know.

VC: Um, and so which school did you go to?

ES: Uh, St. Anne's.

VC: Oh St. Anne's.

ES: Yeah.

VC: So there, there were a lot of Italians in that—

ES: Oh yeah, yeah.

VC: —in that area.

VC: Uh, were there al—were there also other ethnic groups in the—

ES: [Nods] Oh yes. Polish—

VC: Uh huh.

ES: Polish, Italians. Now—and Irish.

VC: Mm hmm.

ES: But, uh, just bef—a few years before I b-began school they were segregated. The Italians and Polish were relegated to one school and the Irish in another school. [Gestures back and forth with hand]

VC: Oh really?

ES: [Nods] Yeah.

VC: So which school did the Italians and the Polish end up in?

ES: It was next to St. Anne's. [Gestures with hand]

VC: Okay.

ES: It was near there, but, uh, they were segregated.

VC: Okay. And so the Irish got St. Anne's?

ES: [Nods] Yeah.

VC: Oh.

ES: And then eventually we all started to go to St. Anne's.

VC: Okay.

ES: Yeah. [Nods]

VC: And, and do you remember the time after the war, after these people came home, um, what was it like, uh, growing up in, in, in Hamilton at that time? Was there still a lot of, uh—

ES: Well for, for a few years, you know, because, uh, um...especially because the Italians then turned around and declared war on Germany... [Twirls hands in a circular motion]

VC: Right.

ES: ...they, they st—you know. You got this, uh, this went on for a little while. But, uh, gradually, uh, it petered out you know.

VC: Mm hmm, mm hmm. And, um, uh, what do you—wh-wh—do you have any, um...any idea of what the internment, um, meant to people who were interned? Did you hear about it as you were growing up? Did you hear any of these people who were interned, did they say anything about it?

ES: No, you—

VC: Did they tell you stories about it?

ES: [Shakes head] No, you know, I think most of them just, uh, didn't talk about it. Uh, they didn't talk about it, so... I think they were treated well...

VC: Mm hmm.

ES: ...but, uh...they, they didn't talk about it.

VC: Yeah. Do you think it was because they were still afraid?

ES: I'm not sure.

VC: Okay.

ES: Not sure.

VC: And, and what do you think might have—might be, uh, some of the, uh, some of the repercussions of this on the community? Um, were there any differences on the community? Did the community—did the Italian community change in any way?

ES: Um...ah, [shrugs] I can't remember really.

[00:15:04]

VC: Mm hmm.

ES: But, um, I know when the [clears throat]—when Alfonso Borsellino was released—

VC: Yes.

ES: —about a year later, I began taking some music lessons from him.

VC: Okay.

ES: So, uh... [Nods]

VC: And he, and he—did he ever talk to you about this time—

ES: [Shakes head] No, he never discussed it. No.

VC: Okay.

EC: No.

VC: So it was, it was over. We go on and we—

ES: [Nods] They just carried on, yeah.

VC: Uh, they just carried on.

ES: Yeah, yeah.

VC: And so the b—the band was resurrected then?

ES: Um...no. [Shakes head]

VC: Oh, okay.

ES: Not really. It was a number of years later when, uh, the It—a lot of immigrants came a-after the war...

VC: Mm hmm.

ES: ...that they did form a band...

VC: Mm hmm, mm hmm.

ES: ...some years later. But...

VC: But not the one—

ES: [Shakes head] Not the—

VC: —that was there before.

ES: Not the—no.

VC: Uh, so what happened to the instruments?

ES: Well—

VC: That the—

ES: [Clears throat]

VC: —that were confiscated?

ES: [Shakes head] O-only the in—only like the, uh—whatever instruments were at the hall—

VC: Right.

ES: I, I don't know what they did with them, but, uh...

VC: Oh okay.

ES: I know they sold the hall or they—

VC: Yeah.

ES: —it became the Polish Hall, the Polish Alliance Hall or something.

VC: Right.

ES: But, uh, at the time—

VC: That's interesting. It would be interesting to find out what—where those instruments went.

ES: Well, th-they were—no, usually the musicians brought their instruments home—

VC: Oh, I see.

ES: —it was jut maybe the drums, the cymbals— [Mimes playing drums]

VC: Okay.

ES: —and whatever... [Shrugs]

VC: So i-it wasn't—

ES: No, no, it was probably percussion instruments that were—

VC: Okay.

ES: —at the hall, that's what I say.

VC: Right.

ES: [Nods] Yeah.

VC: Okay.

ES: Everything was confiscated, uh.

VC: Yeah. Yeah, yeah.

ES: Unfortunately. It was a nice hall—

VC: Yeah.

ES: —at the time, you know. [Nods]

VC: Um, and how long was your brother then in the army? Did he finished the whole—

ES: Well, then he—no, he was discharged around the end of '43.

VC: Okay.

ES: Yeah.

VC: And, and you older brother who was doing the war work was he—

ES: Well, he worked, uh, he worked, um, at Stelco in the sheet mill, which was, uh, an imp—you know, important war work—

VC: Yeah.

ES: —at the time. [Nods]

VC: And so—

ES: Uh—

VC: —he just continued?

ES: Oh yeah. He, he kept up working there. [Nods]

VC: Okay. And then what, uh—where did your brother who was in army, did he come back to Hamilton or—

ES: [Nods] Yeah.

VC: —did he move away?

ES: [Nods] No, he, he came back to Hamilton and then they formed an orchestra.

VC: Ah!

ES: A dance orchestra.

VC: Okay.

ES: So they had a 13 piece orchestra at the time, yeah.

VC: Together with the other brothers who were—

ES: [Nods] The other two brothers, yeah.

VC: Oh wow!

ES: Yeah.

VC: And what was the orchestra called?

ES: Len Salci Orchestra...

VC: Alright.

ES: ...at the time.

VC: And when did you join them? Did you join them?

ES: Oh, I was t—no, I was in school and they were having a good time. [Laughs]

VC: [Laughs]

NM: [Laughs]

ES: Actually—

VC: But I know that you—you're also—you also, uh, became a mu—a musician.

ES: Yes. I, uh, began playing, uh, with an orchestra in 19...47.

VC: Wow.

ES: Yeah, so I was 15 at the time.[Nods] And, uh, eventually played in the Toronto area, at the Old Mill—

VC: Right.

ES: —for about eight years.

VC: Right.

ES: With the Ellis McLintock Orchestra.

VC: Right.

ES: And, um, it was quite an experience. [Nods]

VC: Yeah. Uh, piano?

ES: [Nods] Yeah, yeah.

VC: Mm hmm. And do you also—do you still play now in Hamilton?

ES: [Smiles] No, no I've retired, but I play—I make some CDs and, uh...

VC: Oh great.

ES: ...and I play at home for my—you know, myself.

VC: Sure. That's beautiful. Alright. I think that's, that's okay.

ES: Do you want to hear a number? [Smiles]

VC: Sure! [Speaks to NM] Hey, no, keep, keep—

NM: Yeah.

VC: —keep doing it. Yeah!

[Camera zooms out as ES adjusts himself at piano]

VC: Just, just a sec.

[ES plays piano, camera moves slightly throughout performance]

ES: [Stops playing and looks at VC] Okay? [Smiles and chuckles]

VC: [Claps]

NM: Oh, beautiful.

VC: Oh, that's beautiful! I love that song. *An-anema e core*.

ES: [Nods and smiles] Yeah, yeah.

VC: Oh, that's gorgeous.

ES: [Says quietly] Thank you.

VC: That's really beautiful.

NM: Thank you very much.

VC: Thank you so much!

ES: You're very welcome.

VC: That's so, so nice.

ES: Thank you.

[Camera fades out at 20:37]

[End of interview]