

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

DATE OF INTERVIEW: June 6, 2011

LOCATION OF INTERVIEW: New Westminster, BC

NAME OF INTERVIEWEE: Nellie Cavell

NAME OF INTERVIEWER: Raymond Culos

NAME OF VIDEOGRAPHER: Anna Wilkinson

TRANSCRIBED BY: Krystle Copeland

DATE TRANSCRIBED: September 7, 8, 9, 12, 2011

ACCESSION No.: ICEA2011.0006.0002

PROJECT NOTE:

Please note that all interviews have been transcribed verbatim. The language in this transcript is as it was provided by the transcriptionist noted above. The project staff have not edited this transcript for errors.

ABSTRACT

Nellie Cavell was born in Italy and was forced to report to the RCMP as an enemy alien during World War II. In this follow-up interview, Nellie explains her job in greater detail as a stenographer with the Italian Consulate in Dr. Brancucci's Vancouver office. Nellie recounts her relationship with Dr. Brancucci in greater detail, and explains that she did not share his fascist views although she did join the Ciccolo Roma when he asked her to. She and her family members were very patriotic and proud Canadians, and had no interest in fascist organizations. In this second interview, Nellie and Raymond discuss many individuals in the Italian-Canadian community during the war years, as well as family friends and Japanese-Canadians in the Vancouver area. She discusses her opinions on the treatment of the Japanese Canadians in the Vancouver area, and expresses her views about enemy alien internment during the Second World War.

INTERVIEW

NC: Nellie Cavell, interviewee

RC: Raymond Culos, interviewer

[Title screen]

[Fades in at 00:00:10]

RC: Uh, this is Raymond Culos, uh, uh speaking with Nellie Cavell. Today, uh, Monday June the 6, 2011. And the project title is Italian Canadians as Enemy Aliens: Memories of World War Two. And this is our second installment. And uh, Nellie, uh one of the things that uh is very interesting is where we grew up.

NC: Yes. [Leans back in couch]

RC: And, and you mentioned the last time we were together uh, that there was no problem for you and most of your friends to get along with those that uh lived in the neighbourhood. Uh—

NC: None whatsoever, no.

RC: Uh, do you have any examples of uh, the people that you uh that you knew and befriended and how you guys all got along well?

NC: Well, firstly you know we met a lot of them in school. Strathcona School. And uh there was a large contingent of Italians. Of Jewish in fact, there were so many Jews that they had their own synagogue just around the corner from the Catholic Church.

RC: That's true.

NC: Do you remember that? Yes.

RC: Yes, at Pender and Heatley Avenue.

NC: Yes. Yes. Which later, which later when everybody moved out of the area, was converted into condominiums. And very, very high class condo— condominiums. Isn't that amazing?

RC: It is amazing.

NC: And then there were uh, Japanese...

RC: Yes.

NC: Chinese, Yugoslav...we all grew up together. There were a few black families. I don't know if you remember the Gibson family?

RC: Yes.

NC: Very talented, very talented. Musically.

RC: Yes.

NC: Still going.

RC: Yes.

NC: Yes.

RC: And Nellie, do you recall uh, the Vice Chicken uh [unclear]?

NC: Yes, absolutely.

RC: What are do you remember about that?

NC: I just, I never went in there. I just remember it was there and it was a place where everybody went.

RC: Yes, and that was not too far from your house.

NC: No, not far a few blocks.

RC: Yes, and uh, uh the uh Gibson family lived on Georgia I believe.

NC: Okay.

RC: And there's two or three of them that were very talented.

NC: There's Selma, Leonard. Leonard was a tap dancer.

RC: Yes. [Says quietly]

NC: And uh, I forget who the others are. But when we had these Strathcona School reunion, quite a few years ago, two of them were there.

RC: Well, [Boston] was the third, the other one.

NC: Oh, okay, that name I don't recall.

RC: Yes, he was my age.

NC: Uh huh.

RC: And uh, so right around the corner. From Scottie's grocery store I think was the church.

NC: The big church. Yeah, we often used to go by there on Sunday morning and listen to them singing because it was that nice, revival singing that we just loved. Yes.

RC: Across the street from that church, uh was a grocery uh store that was owned and operated by George O'Mei.

NC: O'Mei. We only called him O'Mei. I didn't even know his name was George. I didn't even know he had a first name. [Smiles]

RC: And who was he to you Nellie? What—

NC: Well he was the corner grocer. He was such a nice guy. The kids at that age when they were getting into their teenaged years, they were starting to smoke.

RC: Yes.

NC: And he'd sell them one cigarette.

RC: [laughs]

NC: And if you couldn't pay, he'd put your name in a book. [Motions writing in a book] It didn't matter to him. Eventually you would pay. You know. But that was sort of a, a hub, a gathering. We'd gather outside the store.

RC: He was Japanese?

NC: Japanese.

RC: And what happened uh, or can you recall? What happened to him when uh, the Japanese were interned?

NC: Well, he left you know. That was the funny era. We had Japanese friends; we had one called, nicknamed "soup". His real name was Bob. And we used to hang around with him. And one day, we didn't see him. We'd see all these kids practically every day. You know, up at the park, or here or there. And one day we didn't see him, and then the next day we didn't see him and then we opened the paper and there it said, Japanese rounded up and put in Hastings Park.

RC: Yes.

NC: And there we thought, that must be where Bob is. We were upset.

RC: And if I recall correctly, uh, when you mentioned Hastings Park, the uh Japanese families were actually behind a wire fence.

NC: Yes. They were, they were like animals. Herded. They were herded in there. So we all felt bad you know. Because—and we heard that their assets had been sold. And then I was thinking in these few days, were there any of the Italians who were interned who had their assets sold? I haven't heard of any. Had you?

RC: Well, uh, the short answer is no. But when you learn about the uh Santo Pasqualini situation.

NC: Yes.

[5:28.3]

RC: They um, the government um seized some of his properties uh, not the property from his house but uh, a truck and so on, to be sold to pay his debts you know. Uh, uh, the Paris Bakery.

NC: Oh, to pay his own debts. Not for the government?

RC: Not for the government.

NC: Okay, so in other words, his assets weren't sold [unbenounced]. Which I think is what happened to the Japanese.

RC: Yes.

NC: [looks at camera as video fades out at 6:04.6]

RC: At Strathcona. Um, the Japanese were some of the students. But I suppose it was when you were uh attending the Grandview School of Commerce, that the Japanese were interned. Would that have been about right? 19—

NC: I can't remember the time.

RC: Yes, 1942, uh, January, February.

NC: No, well then I graduated in 1936.

RC: '36. Well—

NC: So it was after that.

RC: Okay. Thank you. And um, uh, did you have any personal friends, like a neighbour or someone living across the street that was Japanese that you felt badly because—

NC: Well, Soup was the one. Soup was the one because he was, he was the kind of a guy that was uh, jolly. Good company. He mixed with anyone and we just loved him. So he's the one that I remember particularly. Soup. And since he was interned, he remained back east but I believe he came back from time to time and kept in touch with some our our kids.

RC: Yes.

NC: Yeah.

RC: There's a wonderful story about uh, uh involves a few of your friends— our friends. That after the war went to Greenwood and they found our O'Mei.

NC: Oh, they found him. Yes, I heard that too. Yeah.

RC: Yeah. And then he came to a Prior Street reunion and that [unclear].

NC: That's right.

RC: Were you there—did you happen to be there?

NC: I was there. I was at all the reunions. Yes.

RC: And did you get a chance to connect with him?

NC: No, I didn't. No, because there were so many people after him you know, everybody knew him.

RC: And he was uh, he was loved by people.

NC: He was loved by everybody. Because as I say, he would sell you a cigarette for ten cents, you know. You got to love that, right? [Smiles]

RC: [laughs] And he, he could speak Italian.

NC: He could speak Italian.

RC: Yeah. So, in uh, graduating from uh school in 1936, uh, it wasn't too long after that that you went to work for the Italian Counsel.

NC: Yes, I had one little job in between. Looking for work was, was not easy. And I worked in a delicatessen. But we didn't get along. I didn't get along with the delicatessen work. And so I only lasted a week. That was my big effort into the [laughs] work place. You know.

RC: It was depression days.

NC: Yeah, it was. It was. And then I got this call from Dr. Brancucci's office. And so that's how I got started there.

RC: Can you describe uh, physically and intellectually, who this Doctor Brancucci was, to you?

NC: He was the representative of Italy here. He was the Royal Italian Vice Consul. So this was the Vice Consulate that was opened in Vancouver, and he was an extremely personable person. Very good looking. Very Italian looking. Handsome. Wonderful personality. People were just drawn to him. You know, like flies to honey. He was very, very well received. And he was, he came to our parish church on Sundays, you know? And uh, he was a man that really tried to attract the people and he did. Very handsome.

RC: So you enjoyed the years you worked?

NC: Oh, absolutely, it was a fine job. I learned every day, something. Something I learned. Yeah.

RC: Yeah. And uh, uh tell us about the uh, Olivetti uh electric typewriter.

NC: Oh, my goodness. [Says with nostalgia] Don't remind me, I keep wondering, who got that typewriter? [Says while shaking both hands together] I was the proudest person in the world when that package came, that crate with a brand new Olivetti typewriter in there. Electric typewriter. My god. I was so— I just wouldn't touch it for days you know. I was so— but once I got on it, I loved it. That was the first thing I thought of when they closed down the office. Who has that Olivetti? [Shrugs] I don't know what—

RC: It was one of the first I think.

NC: Yes. It was.

RC: Oh, my God.

NC: I was the first person to have one. I just don't know who might have had it. And if they loved it as much as I did. [Laughs and smiles]

RC: Well, during your year—three years I think with the—

NC: Yeah.

[10:36.7]

RC: Uh, Dr. Brancucci. Uh, did you get to meet his wife and children?

NC: Oh, absolutely. His wife was a wonderful, gentle lady. Very gracious. Very, very gracious. She was, I don't know how to describe her, other than that. A gentlewoman.

RC: A gentlewoman.

NC: Yes.

RC: And they had two sons.

NC: Two boys, both very handsome. Very nice boys. Very polite always. Beautifully spoken.
Yeah.

RC: And uh, I think they were from [Basilicata] weren't they?

NC: I don't know where were from.

RC: Yeah.

NC: I thought she was from New York, I don't know whether she was from—Yonkers.

RC: Yonkers.

NC: They have relatives there I think. I think so, I don't know whether— but that's where she was from. Before that, I don't know where she was from.

RC: Oh. And um, so one of uh, Brancucci's responsibilities would have been in to uh, oversee the [Circolo Giulio Giordano (Giordani)] and the uh, [Circolo Roma] club probably?

NC: Yes, yes. Yes.

RC: And uh, so. I believe you were telling us earlier about some of the people who were uh, in the ladies auxiliary. The [Circolo Roma]. Could you uh, tell us again who in particular you remember being involved?

NC: Well, I remember Rose Puchetti at that time.

RC: Yes.

NC: Rose Chanchi.

RC: Yes.

NC: And I remember Mrs. Fabri. And who else do I remember? Remember, I was very green. At that time. I was very, just out of school you know. I knew nothing about anything. Certainly not about politics. And I quickly learned that this little group was quite political.

RC: Yeah.

NC: And not understanding politics, especially foreign politics, I paid them no mind. I went there, had my coffee, came home and that was it.

RC: And ah, so, Rose Puchetti...

NC: Yes.

RC: Uh, was one of the uh, teachers, instructors at the Italian Language School.

NC: Yes, she was.

RC: And uh, I think later, became a very ah, strong, if you like member of the Legga Feminille.

NC: Absolutely. Absolutely.

RC: And you, of course were in the Legga.

NC: Yes.

RC: And do you remember the exact name or you know the formal name of that uh, the Legga.

NC: I always thought it was *Legga Feminille Italiana*.

RC: Yes.

NC: That's what I thought it was.

RC: I believe so, and it was affiliated with which group?

NC: With the *Filgi D'Italia*.

RC: That's it. [Says very quietly] So, and the, can you recall when you joined that club and—

NC: Well, I must have been around 16.

RC: Yeah.

NC: I guess my mother, my mother... [Motions an introduction with her hand out]

RC: Introduced you to it probably?

NC: Yes, my mother volunteered me. That's the word I was trying to think. [Smiles]

RC: So, because the two clubs, uh, uh, weren't open to uh, like the men's club wasn't open to the women and the women's club wasn't open to the men. Your father must have belonged then to the Figli d'Italia.

NC: He did, he did. Yes.

RC: And uh, I think he was an [*oratore*]?

NC: He was the [*oratore*]. I don't know why they picked him as [*oratori*], I never thought of my father as that, but I was quite surprised. That uh, he was quite learned that way.

RC: Yes, I see. And can— just off the top of your head can you uh, sort of uh, define uh what an [*oratore*] is in English?

NC: Well, an [*oratore*] at the club at that time is a person that when you had a banquet or a function, that person was designated to get up and make a speech to orate. And therefore, uh, it would be maybe a speech about whatever the banquet was about that night, or anything.

RC: And, there was one occasion, maybe at the uh Italian Veterans Association banquet that your father spoke and he spoke pro-Canadian I think. Pro-Canada. Do, do you remember that?

NC: Oh, I remember because my father was intensely Canadian. Very proud of his Canadian citizenship. And although he always was Italian, he was very, very Canadian. And he wanted us to be, he wanted us to learn good English and he wanted us to get a good education. He was fierce about that. And uh, yes he did, he made a speech: pro-Canada. Probably anti-fascist, because that's what he was, and the counsel got to hear about it and called him up on the carpet. Told me to phone my father and have him come up to the office. And uh, he really frightened me. I was really upset. I thought, I wonder what happened here? And so, uh, Ms. Forte was in the office and uh, when I phoned my father, and uh, I was crying and she bawled out the consul. She said, "What has she got to do with it?" You know.

RC: Yes.

[15:57.0]

NC: So he, he softened up a bit, I said—. I called my dad and I said, "Dr. Brancucci would like you to come down to the office. Can you come right away?" And he came. Behind closed doors, they came out, he went home, everything was fine.

RC: My God.

NC: Yeah.

RC: Well, that uh, likely was a time when uh, Dr. Brancucchi fell off his regular, gentle self, and became—

NC: Became what he was. [Nods] You know. Yeah. A true representative of his country and of the politics of the day.

RC: Yes. When you mentioned Ms. Forte, can you describe who she was at the time?

NC: Oh, she was, she came from Italy expressly to teach Italian to the Canadians. And I was one of her first pupils. I just loved her to death. She was so smart. She spoke such beautiful Italian. From that day, even 'till today, when I hear somebody like Anna Pan, speaking, when I read her books, I'm just thrilled with the language.

RC: Yes.

NC: Just thrilled. And she was like that.

RC: And she, uh, would have come to the office just to do some of her paperwork—

NC: Oh, she was there a lot. Yes. Yes, she was there a lot.

RC: Yes, so. So uh, she uh, she would have been um, a member of the Circolo Roma.

NC: Yes. And the other person I remember, now that you mention the Circolo, Dora Rocco.

RC: Dora Rocco.

NC: [nods]

RC: And uh, so Dora was uh, at this time I think married to W.G. Rocco.

NC: Right. Yes.

RC: Uh, do you remember how uh, how, uh what his involvement was with the Legga for example?

NC: Well, he was the president I believe of the Figli d'Italia. His wife was a member and an officer. I forget what role she played, but she was an officer. And uh, he often came for special occasions. The interesting thing there was that Dora, and Mr. Rocco, were diametrically opposed. No matter what [smiles.] He had his views, she had hers, and she didn't mind voicing them. I always got the biggest bang out of this married couple that were always against each other in, in whatever they were doing at the time you know. It was funny. And do you remember Innis [Valchonni]? Her sister.

RC: Her sister.

NC: Yeah, she worked not for Dr. Brancucci, but for...

RC: Angelo Branca?

NC: And didn't she work for the other, uh, Pietro—

RC: Oh yes, [Corvetaldo]—

NC: [Covetaldo] yeah. [Points to RC and smiles]

RC: Yeah.

NC: Yeah.

RC: Well, isn't that interesting? And they lived in north Vancouver I think.

NC: Yeah, yeah. [Nods]

RC: The [Valchoni] family.

NC: Yeah.

RC: Now if uh, if you will. Would you describe um W.G. Ruocco's role in the Italian community at that time?

NC: I think he had a very major role. He was always in the midst of things.

RC: Yes.

NC: He was not a very big man. He was kind of short. But he was very, I don't know what to say. Impressive.

RC: Yeah.

NC: Strong.

RC: He had been a member of uh, the Sons of Italy. And then it's President for it.

NC: For a long time.

RC: 12 years I think, something like that.

NC: Yeah, yeah.

RC: Um—

NC: Yeah, he was a very major strong part of the community.

RC: And uh, could you uh, tell us again, of that one occasion when uh W.G. Rocco and Dora took you with them, after uh—

NC: Oh, yes. [Smiles and looks over shoulder]

RC: I think it was uh—

NC: New Year's Eve. At the Consul's residence. In Shaunessey. They sent a taxi for me, Sammy Valenti.

RC: Yes.

NC: He ran a service taxi.

RC: Or, yes, okay. Or Empress.

NC: Yes, Empress.

RC: Yes. [Unclear]

NC: And then he phoned me he said, "Nellie, I have to pick you up at such and such a time. Be ready." So, I said, "okay. I don't know why I was invited." And so, anyway, he picked me up, deposited me there. And there was Dora, and, and um, and Rocco, and Mrs. Fabri. You know, the cult.

[20:30.9]

RC: Yes of course.

NC: And so uh, so I was like a fish out of water. Believe me. I didn't want to be there. I was not comfortable there. They were all speaking this beautiful, high Italian. And I was drooling, you know, wishing I could speak like them. In time I learned. But uh, I felt like a fish out of water. But they treated me very nice. We had a nice evening. We were there until about five in the morning. And then Mr. Rocco said, "come on, Nellie, we're going to go to breakfast at the Vancouver Hotel." Well, [smiles and looks up nostalgically.] So, that's what we did. Five o'clock in the morning we went to the old Vancouver Hotel. And had a beautiful breakfast. And then they took me home.

RC: Wonderful. Uh, W.G. Ruocco's, first marriage, was with the daughter of Angelo [Calori.]

NC: Yes. I didn't know him then of course.

RC: Uh hmm.

NC: Yeah.

RC: Uh, did you have a connection at all with Mr.[Calori]?

NC: None whatsoever. I only knew the hotel that—

RC: Yes.

RC: Well, uh, at the party, at the New Year's Eve party, Mrs. Fabri was there. And at one time I think she was the uh President of the Italian Red Cross in Vancouver.

NC: Oh, okay.

RC: And she did that community, a sense of community uh—

NC: Yeah.

RC: Uh, and her husband was the sculptor, I believe.

NC: Allemando.

RC: Allemando.

NC: That is such a name, I've never heard it since. Allemando.

RC: Had you ever met him?

NC: Yes, I did meet him. Yes.

RC: And uh—

NC: He was a big man.

RC: Yes.

NC: And there was his son, Victor. I met him. And of course, dear Grace.

RC: Grace. Now Grace worked with you at—

NC: She worked with me at, she was the opposite of me. She spoke exquisite Italian. Exquisite. So she was there for the, you know. [Waved hand in the air and laughs] and I was there for the work. [Laughs] Let's put it that way.

RC: And you may have told us this story before, but it's so, so uh, interesting. Uh, on the day following the uh, the declaration of war, you and Grace are in the office, alone, because Mr. Brancucci was away. I think he's leaving town. [Laughs] And you spotted her, looking out of the window.

NC: Yes, looking out of the back window. We were in the Marine Building up on maybe the 12th or 13th floor. And our offices looked down on the Immigration Building down there where the CPR docks.

RC: Where, down on Berrard.

NC: Oh, yeah. We could just spit across. And I says, "what are you doing Grace?" And she says, "I'm—" I saw her waving so I said, "who are you waving?" She says, "my father." She says, "They've been interned." [Points with finger]

RC: Isn't that [unclear].

NC: I was shocked.

RC: Yeah. 'Cause you really didn't get a sense of all this, 'cause you were very young at the time.

NC: No, no. Nope, I didn't. No, I was not political. I'm not political today. And uh, I didn't understand a lot of these things. Why these things were going on. I mean, you know.

RC: But uh, uh, Giuseppe Brancucci actually encouraged you to attend uh one or more of the Circolo Roma—

NC: Oh yes, and I had to do it. You know. So, I said, "okay. No, I'm not going to join it because you have to be fascist."

RC: Yes.

NC: Because uh, I had read somewhere that I think he wanted me to join. But then, I wasn't 21, so I wasn't eligible. And I thought, by the time I'm 21 I can maybe speak up better.

RC: Uh hmm.

NC: You know, be more sure of myself.

RC: Yes.

NC: And it so happened that I got out of it because they went to war in June or I forget when it was, and my birthday was in September.

RC: You just made it.

NC: Oh man. [Looks up and rolls eyes with a sigh]

RC: So, did you actually come in the office, the day following, attending a meeting of the Circolo Roma and uh, tell Mr. Brancucci what you had heard?

NC: Yes, he would ask me. And "did I enjoy it?" I think he was just asking to see how I was getting along with those, with those people. You know.

RC: Right.

NC: 'Cause I guess he could read me.

RC: Yes.

NC: He really taught me a lot. He taught me Italian expressions, he taught me about the consular people, the consular community. Their language. They have a language of diplomacy; I learned that. And uh, the wearing of badges and decorations—the colours, that's what they'd call it. And if was invited to a function, he would have me phone and ask, "Are they wearing colours?" Well, I didn't know what it meant, you know. But I asked it. [Laughs] So, anyhow, I learned that. I learned a lot of things.

[25:37.7]

RC: Do you have any mementos, at all that uh, came from that era? Did, you know—

NC: I can't think of anything.

RC: Yeah.

NC: No.

RC: Because there's precious little out there in terms of artifacts.

NC: I know. I'm sure, I'm sure I would have kept that typewriter. [Laughs] I would have kept the typewriter Raymond. [Laughs and smiles]

RC: That's wonderful. Uh, gosh. Uh, now, Bruno Girardi was uh ah, a close friend of the Italian community because he was Italian, but uh, when did you first meet him Nellie?

NC: I guess, uh, uh didn't he live in the neighbourhood?

RC: Yes.

NC: Yeah, well I must have met him in the neighbourhood, and then, didn't he publish a newspaper?

RC: He, he published [Little Italo Canadese.] Yeah.

NC: That's right, so everybody was involved with that. Everybody read it, everybody took it. And then, he used to come into the office a lot. I think the Consul General was very also involved in what was going out in the media, you know. No doubt.

RC: No doubt.

NC: So, if he was involved with what one person had to say at a, at a banquet, he would certainly see what was in the newspaper and going out all over.

RC: Yes.

NC: So that's where I met him. I always found him a very nice person. Very nice.

RC: Uh, he had um, [clears throat] he and his brother had, were born in Vancouver on the 200 block Prior Street.

NC: Okay.

RC: Uh, not too far from where you live.

NC: Yeah.

RC: And um, I think he was born in 19 uh, 13, 14. Somewhere in there. And they went to, they moved back to Italy in 1922.

NC: Yeah. [Says quietly]

RC: Then he returned in maybe '35.

NC: Yeah.

RC: Um, were you um, at all interested in, in what he, in what the newspaper was reporting in those days?

NC: Uh, I was interested in everything that was in the newspaper because I was interested in reading the words.

RC: Ah, yes.

NC: And learning. From the newspaper. You know, that's a good place to learn.

RC: Yes.

NC: And uh, I, I did read the newspaper from stem to stern. I did. And I found it interesting. Uh, uh, it told you what was going on in the Italian community but also what was going on back in Italy or down in San Francisco. Whatever the newses where of the Italian colonies.

RC: Um, my uh, you might recall, my dad was involved with the Italian language newspaper as well, and uh, if you were to describe my dad's activities at that time or who he was in the—in terms of the community, how would you do that Nellie, what would you say?

NC: Well, I would say he was an integral part of the community. I would say he was very uh, outspoken. He said his mind no matter where, no matter to whom.

RC: Uh hmm.

NC: And uh, he was very active, as well as in sports.

RC: Yes.

NC: In the Italian community, I think they ran races and things like that. I can remember that. Before I got to know him well you know. but he was always outspoken. Always outspoken.

RC: So uh, for um, for the camera it was uh, my dad was Marino Culos and my mother uh?

NC: You mom, your mum was my dearest friend. Phyllis. And my dad used to call her, "Phliss." Phliss. And sometimes I'd call her Phliss and she'd say, "Only your dad can call me that." [Says while laughing] "Nobody else." [Smiles]

RC: [laughs] Uh, so, you uh, you and my mother got along really well and uh you did things together in the community.

NC: Oh, yeah. We were really, really close yeah. Really close.

RC: Yeah. And we didn't live that far apart from one another—

NC: No, no.

RC: Because you would walk from home.

NC: Yeah, yeah.

RC: Yeah. And uh, in the neighbourhood Nellie. Could you describe you know, just closing your eyes and thinking, uh, what was in our community that uh, related to um, uh, things that Italians would like to purchase. Uh, you know, grocery stores, meat markets, that type of— could you go through the repertoire? Who was there?

[30:14.0]

NC: Well, clo—close to me there was the um, well there's the Benny family and one aspect of it was the Gerriatto's. They uh, who married ah relative of the Benny's. I don't know how she—

RC: One, one of [unclear] Benedetti's sister.

NC: Okay. She married Mr. [Guriatto] and he had a big store. Which got bigger and bigger. And then the end of that block there was—

RC: Scotties.

NC: Scotties. I didn't know them too well, or his store too well. But—

RC: Fortunato.

NC: And then the next block was the Benny's store.

RC: Yeah.

NC: And that was a big store. And that's where we did a lot of our shopping too. And it was the gathering place after mass on Sunday. Because they would be open on Sunday, and everybody would go there to get their cold cuts and stuff for their breakfasts and stuff.

RC: And [unclear]—

NC: Behind them, was the bakery, the Italian bakery.

RC: Yeah, Venice—

NC: And the aroma of the bread would bring people from all over. We'd have to go there and buy a loaf of [moscani] bread we called it moscani bread. It was the Venice Bakery. And before we got home, we had eaten half the bread. Those were the days.

RC: Those were the days.

NC: Yes.

RC: And uh, that was the um, uh, Battestoni family.

NC: Yes. [Nods] Big family.

RC: Yeah.

NC: Big family.

RC: I think there was three brothers that actually ran the bakery.

NC: Yes. [Pause] They were all thin-ish. Weren't they? They were all kind of skinny and tall.

[Motions height with hand]

RC: Oh, yeah.

NC: Oh yeah.

RC: Peter in particular.

NC: Yes, yes.

RC: And when you were uh, a teenager Nellie. Um, across the street was the Venice would have been the Union Grocery Store.

NC: Yes, and that store, I didn't know much of, I don't think it was open all that much. I remember it as being an empty place.

RC: Well, my grandfather opened at at San Minichello.

NC: Yes.

RC: Uh, in 1912, and it shut down as soon as Mussolini declared war, it just fell apart.

NC: Well you know—

RC: In 1940.

NC: Yes, that's why I remember it being empty.

RC: Empty, yeah.

NC: Yeah, I do. And then next door, one or two doors was the...that big family?

RC: Uh, Tetti.

NC: The Tetti family yes. That big family. They were a big part of the Legga, the ladies.

RC: Yes.

NC: And he of course went onto night club fame. Isn't he the same one that owns one of the—

RC: Uh...

NC: One of the grandchildren?

RC: Yes, that's correct.

NC: Yeah.

RC: Uh...[pause] Tetti um, owns the Shark Club.

NC: That's right, that's right.

RC: Uh, John Tetti.

NC: That's right, that's him yeah.

RC: And uh, I think um, one of the Rocco's married a daughter, you know, like Peter Rocco.

NC: Oh yeah, that's right, who were those sisters?

RC: Uh, they were the Tate sisters.

NC: They were the Tate sisters. Was that their name?

RC: There was [unclear]. Uh, well Tetti is the Italian name, and Tate was the Anglicized version.

NC: Yeah, there was Annie.

RC: Yeah, Annie was married to Scott, the person who owns Scottie's groceries.

NC: Oh. Okay.

RC: And uh, uh, Mrs. Benny was one of the sisters.

NC: That's right.

RC: Um, and—

NC: And Mrs. Rocco was one—

RC: Mrs. Rocco was one.

NC: Was she Italian too? Mrs. Rocco, or was she not?

RC: Yes, uh, Mrs. Rocco, Peter's wife was one of the Tates.

NC: Was she, she also was one of the Tate sisters, yeah.

RC: And then uh, one married a Peeni.

NC: That's right. 'Cause they had the restaurant.

RC: They had the restaurant.

NC: Right.

RC: Yeah.

NC: And across from the Minnetello's that way was the Barrattoni's.

RC: The— yeah, Charlie.

NC: Wasn't that the [Narcisso], Narcissco.

RC: Yes.

NC: One of them went to University and we were all in awe. He went to university.

RC: Was Narcissco?

NC: Yeah. I remember I was in awe of that fact.

RC: Uh, did you follow what—uh his uh career at all Nellie?

NC: Not too much, no.

RC: He uh, became a professor at the University of Chicago.

NC: Is that what happened to him, yeah.

RC: Yeah.

NC: Did he stay in Chicago, and die in Chicago? Or what happened?

RC: Well, I don't know, if he died there, but he certainly left Vancouver for academia.

NC: Yeah.

RC: And never came back. Not to my knowledge.

NC: Holy. Then the other youngest one was involved in a hotel. Lamar hotel on—was that Powell?

RC: Lamar Hotel yeah—was that Charlie?

NC: Powell.

RC: [unclear]

NC: He played the accordion.

RC: Yeah. And—

NC: Yeah.

RC: It hit— yeah his band was called um, the Melody Kings.

NC: Talk about nostalgia. [Smiles]

RC: [laughs]

NC: Wow. And then they had this hotel. This kind of seedy hotel on— well it went seedy. It probably wasn't at the beginning. On Powell Street across from the Powell Street grounds.

RC: Yeah, that was Lamar—

NC: On [unclear]

RC: That was the Lamar hotel.

NC: That's what they owned.

RC: Yes, Lamar hotel.

NC: Yeah, I remember that too.

RC: What happened on Powell, the Powell Street grounds that you recall?

[35:45.4]

NC: Oh, I recall that um, well we were about six or seven blocks from the grounds, and we used to go down on the summer evenings to watch them play baseball. And that was Japanese town. And the Japanese decided that they would make up a team and join that league. And by george, if they didn't win every tournament. They were marvelous. And we would all go down there and watch them play.

RC: Yes.

NC: It was the way to go on a summer evening.

RC: And—

NC: It was wonderful.

RC: And they did they won every league.

NC: Yeah, they did! They did!

RC: They were just marvelous.

NC: Yeah. Yup.

RC: Wow, and so who would you walk with then? Uh, Nellie, to go down to—

NC: Well, our family, my sisters, the neighbour kids. [Points]

RC: Yeah.

NC: We'd be a, a bunch you know. A big bunch of us would go down.

RC: In those days, Nellie, uh, it was more the rule than uh not, uh, uh, that young women would have a chaperone, or go to the dances put on by the societies.

NC: Yes yes, yeah. [Nods]

RC: Was that your experience?

NC: Oh yes. Yes. Yeah.

RC: Any incident that you recall? [Laughs]

NC: I can't recall and incidents that I care to talk about. I don't know. But uh, I got to go with my mother and dad, or I'd go with my aunt, or I'd go with a friend. But, never alone. Never alone.

RC: About your dad, um, there's that incident that took place as you describe a few minutes ago where uh he was reprimanded by Dr. Brancucci for saying what we believe were some anti-fascist rhetoric. And then um, the day of the declaration of war, and everything is disrupted. He phones you! Dr. Brancucci phones you and asks, that what was that story?

NC: Well, that was uh, after a few days, they were, they were sort of under house arrest in their Shaunessey home. And uh, and I guess uh, they were tired of cooking or something. They phone my dad and ask him, would he mind cooking a dinner for them. They said what they wanted, and that they would send Sammy, the taxi driver to pick it up. And so my dad did.

RC: And uh, he was obviously uh the type of person who uh, was prepared to forget that earlier incident.

NC: [shrugs] It didn't bother him in the least. Because it didn't change him.

RC: No.

NC: You know.

RC: Did he ever comment about uh, gee whiz, out of the blue we get this phone call?

NC: Well, he did. Actually he did. And I did! I did, I questioned it, I says, now why would Dr. Brancucchi phone you? You're not a, ah cook. He catered sometimes at the banquets, but he was not a cook. He didn't work in the restaurant. Why did he call him? I questioned it. But I thought, well, because of me maybe they thought, you know that uh, he wouldn't mind. And he didn't.

RC: Yeah, I see.

NC: He was proud to do it, you know.

RC: Yeah, interesting. So—

NC: It was a funny thing.

RC: Yeah. I know that uh, over the years your dad, uh, was a fisherman.

NC: Yes, he was.

RC: And uh, if you can think back in those days, what would have been the longest serving job that he might uh have had. Was he in the fishing industry?

NC: Well, he fished a few seasons. Remember it was depression time. Jobs were not easy to come by. He never worked in the woods, which a lot of our people [points to chest] did. A lot of the Italians were loggers.

RC: Uh hmm.

NC: Uh, he got the fishing job on the fishing boat quite by chance, he, he applied to one of the or many of the Italian fisherman who had their own boats, and he applied to someone who had a boat. If they had a place for him. And they said, "well, we've got our crew all fixed, but we need a cook." "Oh, he says, you've got the right guy. I'm a good cook." He says, "Can you make pies." "Oh, sure, I can make pies." He comes home and he says, "I got a job on the fish boat, they want me to make pies." So here we had to teach my father how to make a piecrust, and I told him, you can make practically anything in it. And you know, they had to depend on the boat on dried things. And, and, you know. It wasn't in the city where you could go and buy some apples and stuff like that. He learned how to make a fig pie. Out of dried figs. And it was the best thing that they liked. Now we had never heard of a fig pie. We had never tasted a fig pie, and there was my dad, who had never baked a pie, makes this thing [unclear] fig pie! [Laughs] We got the biggest bang out of that. The biggest bang.

[41:04.8]

RC: Oh, that's wonderful. [Says with a laugh]

NC: Yeah.

RC: And um—

NC: And then he worked in a couple of the beer parlors.

RC: Uh hmm.

NC: And um, hmm, then he was sick a lot. And he died young, he was only 43.

RC: Yes, and that was during the war Nellie?

NC: Yes. [Nods]

RC: 1943?

NC: Yeah, I think it was around that time.

RC: Oh yeah, I do. I remember the day.

NC: Yeah, I remember I came down to your dad and told him.

RC: Oh, golly.

NC: 'Cause I knew he'd know what to do. You know.

RC: Yes. And that was something that my dad did. Quite well.

NC: Yes.

RC: He would organize uh—

NC: Yeah, he knew what to do. He knew exactly what to do. Who to contact, even my relatives, he asked for their addresses and he contacted them. Our relatives in Portland.

RC: Yes.

NC: And uh, yeah, he did the needful. He did.

RC: Oh God, yeah. And about my dad uh, and his athletic prowess. Uh he, would run in the marathon at the park across the [unclear]—

NC: Yeah, Maclean Park, Maclean Park. Yeah, that's right.

RC: And do you recall ever uh, being there witnessing that?

NC: I must have been. We were right across the street from the park. Anything that went on in the park, we were there.

RC: It was part of the Christopher Columbus Celebration, wasn't it?

NC: Oh, well, then I was there. I was there at all the things. Anything that went on in the park.

RC: Nellie, with regard to um, all the things that you've experienced uh in your lifetime, uh, uh up to that the time of the war—

NC: Yeah.

RC: Uh, did the fact that uh, the war came at a time when you were really enjoying what you were doing. Did it ever change your outlook towards the Italian community to have gone through that experience?

NC: No, no, I uh, I felt for them. Especially those that were interned. I felt for me because I had to report to the RCMP. I thought that that was very unfair. And I felt kind of demeaned. I didn't want anybody to know that I was going up there once a month. I went with your dad for a while. The two of us would go together. And then I got a job at the Catholic Children's aid. Which was on 15th Avenue just west of Main. And my lunch hour was like an hour and a half. And there was a bus that, a trolley that went by on 16th Street, one street up. And I was able to go on my lunch hour, so I'd go on my own. And go as far as Oak. Oak to 33rd, and climb that hill.

RC: Right. To the RCMP Headquarters.

NC: Yes, yeah. Yes.

RC: Uh, so you really didn't want anybody to see you?

NC: I didn't. I didn't want anybody to know that that was happening to me.

RC: And today, Nellie, uh with all that is being publicized through this project. Uh, do you have ah, a sense of what you might say to the Minister of Immigration, who's behind this. In respect to those events. That we've just talked about?

NC: Well, I don't know what I would say. I would just say that um, that to pick out people like myself and your dad, and say you have to report once a month. What for? What harm were we doing the country? We were Canadians. We were brought up here. We paid our taxes here, we went to school here. Why put this indignity on us. Because I felt...I felt demeaned. That's one thing I would certainly say.

RC: And Nellie, uh, how, express that thought, if you could influence a recourse, what would you ask the government to do today to help compensate for that demeaning if you like?

NC: I wouldn't, I would not expect to be compensated. I'm not of that school that thinks for every little thing that goes on you have to be compensated. Right? I would certainly, like to see them compensate the Japanese. I thought that was thoroughly unfair that they sold their boats, their fishing boats— they were great fishermen. That was their big thing, to go out and fish. And they all had boats in which they had invested big bucks, and to come home and find that they had all been sold. And their houses sold. Now, if that isn't a bad thing— I don't know, that is the one thing that has always stayed with me. I didn't think, I didn't know of any Italians who were interned, who had that happen to them. Why did they do that to the Japanese? It was their stuff. [Says with emphasis]

RC: Yeah. I think uh, my opinion, I don't know that it's officially recognized—

NC: Yeah.

RC: But it was uh, a prime example of discrimination.

NC: [sighs] I know.

RC: Um, some people. Italians, especially the young people, the children of the internees, made me— have made me feel that they have mental scars. Relating to the fact that when they were young, their father was taken away from them and uh it just wasn't easy to—

NC: No, well you see I didn't have that experience. If that had happened to me, I might feel differently.

RC: Yes.

NC: But it didn't happen to me. Just that one thing that I had to go and report. Which I didn't like. Uh, that's all and uh as far as for the people that were interned. I haven't heard of anything bad happening to them while they were out in—being interned.

RC: I think that—

NC: Some of them had different careers.

RC: Yes.

NC: Like I imagine, [Santine] must have been a baker.

RC: Uh, he was a baker and I think he, he ended up being a cook in the internment camps.

NC: That's what I mean. Yeah. So I think they were put to useful things, and I imagine they got used to things. Except they were away from their families.

RC: Exactly, yeah.

NC: Which wasn't good.

RC: [pause] Nellie, this is, again, this has just been really wonderful. Uh, to get this additional information. And thank you, thank you very much.

NC: You're very welcome. You're very welcome. Yeah.

[Camera fades out at 47:55.8]

[End of Interview]