

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

DATE OF INTERVIEW: April 15, 2011

LOCATION OF INTERVIEW: Lachine, QC

NAME OF INTERVIEWEE: Victor Di Battista & Gerard Di Battista

NAME OF INTERVIEWER: Joyce Pillarella

NAME OF VIDEOGRAPHER: Adriana Rinaldi

TRANSCRIBED BY: Emily Rondel

DATE TRANSCRIBED: October 27, 2011

ACCESSION No.: ICEA2011.0005.0001

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 have not edited this transcript for errors.

ABSTRACT

Victor and Gerard Di Battista are the sons of Luigi Di Battista, an Italian immigrant who came to Canada in 1913. Luigi married a woman 10 years his junior in 1919 and together they had nine children. The family ran a store in Lachine and Luigi operated a barber shop business. Both Gerard and Victor, along with the other Di Battista children, were born in Lachine and grew up in that multi-ethnic neighbourhood before their father was interned. Luigi self identified himself as fascist during the early days of Mussolini's reign. A musical man, he often played fascist nationalist Italian songs on his piano and had his children learn them as well. His son Gerard also went to the fascist sleepover camp at Rawdon run by Dieni Gentile. On June 10th 1940, Luigi was arrested and interned at Petawawa as an enemy alien. His family found itself in difficult financial circumstances as a result of this. They relocated to Saint-Henri, Montreal, and lived in small accommodations infested with rodents. Eventually, the older Di Battista children found work and the family improved its situation. It was at this time that Gerard enlisted in the Canadian army, although the war ended before he saw any fighting. While his son was away on

training, Luigi was released from custody and came home. He found work as a barber again. Both Victor and Gerard believe that their father was different after he came out of the internment camp, particularly in the privacy of his home. They describe him as quiet and taciturn in private, although he was a popular figure in public, particularly due to his involvement with the Order of Buffaloes, an organization with members from a variety of ethnicities. They believe that the Canadian government has neglected the issue of Italian internment during World War II, and that families should be compensated for the difficulties the internments caused.

INTERVIEW

JP: Joyce Pillarella, interviewer

VDB: Victor Di Battista, interviewee

GDB: Gerard Di Battista, interviewee

[Title screen]

JP: Uh, introduce the time, are you ready? Ok, um, we're here at um-oh the address here in Lachine is-what's your address here?

VDB: Two-eighty-two.

GDB: What?

JP: [unclear] Avenue in Lachine-

GDB: Oh, 53rd, yeah.

JP: Um, the two people being interviewed right now, we have uh Victor Di Battista, on the-your left. We have Gerry Di Battista on the right, today is April 15th-

VDB: Yeah.

JP: -2011-

GDB: Ok.

JP: -my name is Joyce Pillarella-

VDB: Uh-

JP: -and the videographer on this is Adriana Rinaldi-

VDB: Ok.

JP: -and this is for the project, [Italian phrase], and I think that's about it. And we're in Lachine, Montreal, Quebec. So, I think we're ready to start. So why don't we start off with-just tell me who you are and about your family, your dad, just give me an overall idea of your family [unclear].

GDB: Well, do you know why they call this Lachine? It's because the people from Europe when they came here, they we-they wanted to go to China. And when they saw the Indians here, uh they-they thought they were in China, so they called it Lachine, you know.

VDB: [nods]. Yep. Lachine.

GDB: That's it [laughs].

JP: What about your family? Tell me about your dad, whether he was born here, or if he's from Italy, and your mum.

VDB: Uh, my father came from Italy, in 19-uh13. Uh, when he came here, till they got married, there's not much story there, because uh, [points to GDB] maybe he heard more, but I didn't.

GDB: No, I uh, no.

VDB: There's not more in between that, he worked I suppose, and then he met my mum. Uh, they got married in 1919.

GDB: Well, I remember my mother saying that my grandmother threw him out twice. Because she didn't think he was serious enough. But the third time, he-he made a hit with the grandmother, and that was it. You now, so she was uh, 16, that-no she was 15 and he was 25. So ten years difference, that's the norm for Italians, you know.

JP: And you were both born here in Montreal.

GDB: Yeah, in-in La-Lachine. Yeah.

JP: What years?

VDB: 1904-

GDB: No-no-no-no.

VDB: Is that what you mean?

JP: No, when were you born?

VDB: Oh me?

JP: Yeah.

VDB: You're asking me, oh my god.

JP: You're important too-

VDB: I don't even remember. No, I was born uh June 14th, 1932. A long long time ago.

GDB: I was born 6th of January, 1925, uh in the dead of winter. And what happened when I was born, there was an earthquake in Japan, and there was 25,000 people dying. And the reason I know that, cause every time I was a bad boy, my mother says, "No wonder they had a-a earthquake on your day."

VDB: [laughs].

GDB: So.

JP: And your sisters, brothers, like the whole family?

VDB: Uh-

JP: How many brothers, how many sisters?

VDB: Uh, I know, we were three brothers, uh and six sisters. Uh, there's uh, the three first ones were Adeline, Mary, Yolanda, they were the three first ones in the family. And uh, they're the ones that uh produced food. My sister Adeline when she made-she was cooking. She showed me how to make the uh potatoes with-like a French fry but with-it was uh from potatoes mixed with other ingredients. And she used to fry that on the stove. Also, if I wan-the wash day-the dishes after, cause I was always one of the youngest, so you had to do things. These guys [points to GDB] used to run away.

GDB: We-the reason we run away-we didn't run away, we had to change the cinders in the stove. In those days we had cinders. So me and Dominic, we had to do that job. And that was not a heavy job, but it was a dirty job. So, we had to do that, so we-uh-we left a little things ch-ach-chicken uh-not chicken, but kitchen uh work to the young ones. That's it.

VDB: Yeah, I remember this, and then I took over when these guys started going out with girls, cause they were older than I am so-much older. So they went out, and I had to take over. So, we used to take-you had to turn with a-with a handle, at the bottom of the stove, to get all the cinders to go though. Then, pull it out, go outside, put them in uh a-a long ba-like a type of a basket. And you had like a long handle and you used to pull it back and forth [shows hand motion] till the cinders came out and you only had some little pieces of coal left, So when you made-if you wanted to start a fire again, you had the little coal.

JP: What was it like in Lachine when you were growing up?

GDB: We-we had a good life, to tell you the truth, we had a very good life. Uh, we had good neighbours. French, Italian, uh Irish. But we had a good life till the war came. And when the- when the war came, it changed uh-the whole-the whole family structure.

JP: So, why don't you start before. Tell me about Lachine, your dad's store, uh and what it was like as kids here, and then you can move on to-before the change.

GDB: Well, you know, what do you-at that age everything was fun. Because you-you didn't have to think about-I used to go caddy at the golf course. I used to get 50 cents a round. And the first time I did, I-I caddied for two women, and it took them 45 minutes to tell each other what they-what they had bought and how much they had paid for it, the clothes you know.

VDB: Yeah, I remember.

GDB: And then, I-I-I was a rookie, uh I was a rookie at that time, and uh when I got to the ninth hole, she says to me, "What club should I take?" So, I didn't know what to answer at first. But then I-I remember seeing somebody hitting a nine iron, and so I said, "Oh, a nine iron's pretty good." So she hit the ball, and she got about six feet from the pin, so she was so happy that she paid me a coke and a cupcake, which was five cents each at that time.

VDB: [whistles].

GDB: That's nice, and she thought, uh she spend the whole world for me. You know.

JP: Did you have to work at your dad's store? Like, tell me about the store that he had and what he did for a living.

GDB: Well uh-

VDB: [points to GDB] He opened the store in the morning.

JP: Store was in the picture you showed me.

GDB: My-my sisters, they-they used to take turns of-at the store. But I opened the store in the morning.

[BREAK]

VDB: [in mid-sentence] No, on Seventh Avenue, uh Seventh Avenue, we had a four room apartment, for 11 people so uh. The girls were fortunate, they slept, uh five of them in one room. The boys slept in the living room, and they uh-well, not me. Me, I was sleeping in my mother-next to my mother and father, and my sister Pauline. We were uh-then from there, it was some activities there, but uh, we were young, and my friend uh-living four doors away, f-uh. Then we moved from there to Notre Dame Street, that's when things changed. Because then we had a yard of our own, and we had four bedrooms upstairs. We had a big-and a huge-bathroom. It was uh, new old English cottage, you know, so uh. So when you went in, there was like an entry in one side, with uh big doors, you climbed up stairs and there's these big doors. Inside was like a hall-a hallway, and my father had his barber shop there. But there was also a door that you can go next door, to the uh, *Depanneur*, today we call it uh. And also one thing I wanted to mention was the-the uh, since we were also English speaking, we had song hits, the hit parade, all the songs of the day. Uh so, and then, just through that little corner, where you could see the kids in the corner uh just behind that, there was a piano, so my father used to make us sing the Italian songs of-the *fascista* songs. But also, when he-when he left, the other ones-my sisters would play-would sing uh the modern hit parade...of those days yeah.

JP: This was all in the store, in Lachine.

VDB: Yeah, oh yeah. This was on a-on a Notre Dame Street.

GDB: But uh when he got married, and after he got married he-he owned a-a restaurant and a barbershop in the corner of Sixth avenue. Of the-

VDB: Oh yeah, yeah.

GDB: -on the corner-excuse me.

VDB: I forgot that.

GDB: On the corner of Sixth avenue. And uh, we used to live in the corner of seventh avenue, we had a-a big house there again, and we had chickens, uh and uh one pig, and uh-uh and *chevre*, what do you call that, and *chevre*-

JP: Goat.

VDB: Goat.

GDB: Goat. Yeah, a goat. We had a goat there. And uh-one-one time-I remember the time -I remember that my grandmother from Italy, my father's mother, she came in, and she only stays with us two month-two months, and then she would go to Sault Ste. Marie after. Well, while she was at our house, she had us, singing and going around in a circle, every day for a couple of hours you know. And they used to put a needle on a gramophone would last for only one song, you know you changed the needle again for the other song. Always the Italian songs of

course. Um, but by this time, when the two months were up, my mother was relieved, It was- you know it was so much noise in the house with all that singing, and-and the going around the living room you know.

JP: What did you speak at home, what language?

GDB: At that time, we used to speak Italian.

VDB: Yeah.

GDB: Yeah, at-at-at that time you know? Till we started going to school. Once we started going to school, most of the time was French.

JP: And on the street, what did you speak?

GDB: Uh, the three languages. French, Italian, and English. I learned to speak English delivering the *Montreal Star*. And you learned, you know-you know how it is, you learned through the streets you know.

JP: And your parents, what language did they speak to each other?

GDB: Uh, when they didn't want us to hear, they used to talk Italian, but uh, they spoke English to each other. You know.

JP: And to the kids?

GDB: Uh-

VDB: Uh, my mum would speak more English because uh she used to speak to the girls, you know. And uh, the girls, they were mostly English speaking, and yet they went to French school.

JP: And did you feel like an Italian family compared to the other families, or-

GDB: Well, yeah, it was just for uh-

JP: -did you feel Canadian or Italian?

GDB: No, we felt like an Italian family because the food was Italian, every time we ate, you know, uh gnocchis, or uh what do you call that with the cheese there? Uh ravioli-

VDB: Yeah.

GDB: Yeah, we used to make ravioli and uh especially uh-uh what do you call that uh that thing with the-the yellow-uh yellow flour there uh-

VDB: Oh. *La Polenta*.

GDB: *La Polenta*, ah-

VDB: Ah, with the tomato sauce-

GDB: Yeah.

TIME: 12:52.3

VDB: Hot sauce-

GDB: Eventually, I started eating at-at my in-laws, and they used to make a game out of it you know? They used to put the-uh *la polenta* in the middle-

VDB: Yeah.

GDB: -they had some uh, some [unclear], and uh-um little, what do you call that there-
breastbones they call them? You know? Little black bone. And the first one that got to the
middle, used to win-was the winner. So, the-the small ears they used to- always be the-the-
the-the leaders in that because, th-they ate so fast because-I don't know why, but they ate so
fast. They always beat us anyway, you know.

JP: What else, what else distinguished your family as being Italian in the neighborhood? When
you-I'm still talking in Lachine right now. Like before the war um, I guess-oh, we're-we're talking
thir-1930s.

VDB: Mmm.

JP: With-cause your friends were obviously Italian, English, French-

GDB: Well-

JP: -they were all kinds of-what-what else besides the food made your family feel-

VDB: Well, there was a lot of Italians come at the house.

GDB: That was Little Italy there-

VDB: Ah yeah.

GDB: -Seventh Avenue, Eighth Avenue, and Sixth Avenue-

VDB: Oh yeah.

GDB: -was all Italian, you know.

VDB: The Garganos [?]. There must have been a couple of hundred of them.

GDB: Well, there was 18 of them living in that house with only four rooms...So the-you can.

JP: So it was the social-the social networks that your parents kept that-

GDB: Yeah.

JP: -were Italian

GDB and VDB: [in unison] Oh yeah.

JP: And amongst their friends they spoke Italian?

GDB: Oh yeah.

VDB: They uh-most of the-the old-the old gang uh, no matter where you went, they'd say, "Hey, [Italian phrase]." So right away, they knew who we were, so it must have had something to do with being of Italian origin, because the French Canadians wouldn't recognize us easy like the Italians. Italians, were-so we must have had something there. [to GDB] Would you-

JP: What about um, were there other um, were there ever events such uh as you know, things with the church? Or did you go on picnics, or, any type of activity that-

VDB: Yeah.

JP:-distinguished you, that as more Italian, lets say, than your-your other friends?

VDB: [to GDB] Oh, remember uh-you were uh-well you were old enough-

GDB: Well, the picnics we used to have w-was always where there was no water. See, they didn't like to see their girls with bathing suits, so uh when we used to go to Villa Sal [?] which at that time wasn't built, and there was a big field there, and-and that was it. Uh, you know, we-we had a good time, you know, it's just that, they didn't want the girls be in bathing suits.

VDB: Girls. [laughs]

GDB: You know-

JP: So, the values were a bit different-

GDB: Yeah.

JP: -than your friends-

GDB: Yeah, a it-

VDB: [nodding] Uh huh.

JP: And you noticed that. in that way, made you feel a bit feel a bit different, like-that you knew you were a different ethnicity, let's say.

GDB: Yeah, yeah uh-

JP: Was there anything else that was Italian [unclear]?

GDB: It-it-it's funny, we-we didn't have any Italian church uh there, at that time.

VDB: No.

GDB: No-no Italian church. We used to go to a French church eh?

VDB: Yeah.

GDB: And the people, the uh Italian people that went to the English school, they went to uh, English church-

VDB: Yeah.

GDB: Which there were not many of that too. You know, because they had them in schools, you know the massive schools.

JP: Did they have a *massa Italiana* [?]?

GDB: Italian mass?

JP: *Massa Italiana* [?], at the French church?

GDB: No, no, no, they didn't.

VDB: Oh, that started only in uh, when the new Italians came after '47. Slowly uh they got a- they took an old uh fireman's uh building and uh-they got uh-

GDB: Now, now they have one now, at the corner of 44th and Broadway. That's only two months ago the opened the one there.

VDB: Yeah, now they have a real Italian church.

GDB: And it took them uh, 40 years to build that-to get the money for that. They used to-oh- they used to have a place there, where the fire-where-what do you call uh, the-the fire people you know-where-firemen you know, and they used to have a little hall-they had a-

VDB: Yeah, that was on Third Avenue-

GDB: Yeah, Third Avenue. Yeah.

JP: Did your father have anything in the house, that was Italian, like flags or little Madonna statues or um.

VDB: No, Italian sheet music-

JP: Souvenirs-what?

VDB: Italian sheet music.

JP: That's what he had in the house?

VDB: Yeah, you had to. But there was-there was nothing special uh about it being Italian, but uh I was young then. But when he came back, after the war, there was nothing Italian in the house.

JP: And neither before too much, from what you told me except for the sheet music.

VDB: No, it's because of the people around where we were living, they were all Italian-

GDB: Again.

JP: But what about your experience, didn't you go to uh the camp in Rawdon? The Rawdon camp that you went to.

GDB: Well, I was uh-uh I think it-that is was a made up camp, because uh there was nothing special about it you know? All we did, was uh cut the branches from the tree, they looked like a rifle. And uh and every time uh Gentile used to say, "*a basso*" we used to throw ourself on the-

on the grass. We made sure to get dirty, you know. Uh, and then we had spaghetti every day, or French fry every day. And that's about it. We never went in the water because the water was too dangerous to go. I could swim, but they wouldn't let me go in the water.

JP: And so what did they do? Like Gen-this was Gentile, and I guess there was like we're talking Dieni Gentile.

GDB: Yeah. He used to talk a lot about uh uh Abyssinia. There was a war, you know uh in 1936, and this was 1937, when I went with Spidali [?] and Frank Avilla [?] and he talked about the war, why the war was and all that, but I don't remember exactly what he said, you know?

JP: No.

GDB: Oh, it's such a long time-

JP: But this-but this was after he went, that he-he was telling you this. Was this before he went because he did go.

GDB: He was-he was already there. He-he came back-

JP: This was in [unclear].

GDB: -to-to-to get some people uh join up uh-

VDB: Yeah.

GDB: Uh, you know?

JP: And the kids, like when you went to this camp, was it like a day camp, or was it like a weekend?

GDB: It was around three weeks, without stop.

JP: You went away for three weeks without stop.

GDB: Yeah.

JP: It was free right?

GDB: Oh yeah, we didn't pay. We didn't pay. And Mr. Spidali [?] drove us up there. He-he was the only one with a car. We didn't have a car and Frank Avilla didn't have a car Frank Avilla used to drive the truck for the Baylean Bridge [?], but he didn't have a car, so he drove us there, came and pick us up after. Well, his son was with us eh? John.

JP: What was it like, the camp? Did it feel like a camp experience for the kids, or did it feel like, there was like an Italian camp experience?

GDB: Well, to tell you the truth, uh I don't remember too much uh, you know, I remember this guy [unclear] D'Anna who used to eat three-four dishes of spaghetti, for supper, and he was skinny like this [hold hands close together] too, well you know. And uh, the boys that were supposed to look after us they used to g out at night and we were scared, heck like with all the wolves, there was a lot of wolves there eh? Wooo [imitates wolf] at night time. But, the-the guys were saying that they were across the river, but I think wolves can swim, you know.

JP: [laughs]

GDB: You know? So-

VDB: They travel pretty quickly.

GDB: And they had dates with girls eh? They went out, well they came in about 9.30-10.00 o'clock, I suppose. I don't know, and-

JP: And your sister-sorry.

GDB: Pardon?

JP: Sorry.

GDB: You know.

JP: I'm telling you sorry. I didn't mean to interrupt you.

GDB: They-they came in about 9.30-10.00 o'clock at night, and-but we didn't-I didn't see them because I fell asleep, you know. You know, I don't know what I did during the day, but I-uh-at that age you're active eh?

JP: Your sister had a good experience too, except to Italy?

GDB: We used to play ball, we used to play ball, softball you know? You didn't have-you didn't need-at that time, nobody had mitts when you played softball. Just a first baseman and a catcher.

VDB: Yeah.

GDB: And the catcher didn't even have a mask. You know. What if you hit the ball here?
[points to his own face]. You know so-that-that's it. That's all I remember. I don't remember
more.

JP: Your sister? She went to Italy.

VDB: I was too young to-for that.

JP: Oh.

VDB: I was only what four years old. You w-you were a little older.

GDB: Yeah.

JP: Tell me about your sister's experience, she had a really special experience.

GDB: Well, my sister Adeline, she-she won a trip in 1936 to go to Italy, you know. She came
first in her-we had the Italian class-well I w-I used to go to the Italian classes too you know.

JP: The Italian school.

GDB: yeah, the teacher's name was Di Genario [?], and uh, he was very strict. He says, "Don't
fool around. Fool around, out you go." He just want serious people there.

VDB: [laughs] [Italian phrase].

GDB: No, yeah, you know. It cost them money to rent the hall and all that anyway.

JP: This was a Saturday morning time in school, or was it during the week?

GDB: It-it was during the week, at night time you know?

JP: Do you remember what they taught you? Was it grammar, or did they also do culture?

GDB: We used to go on our own. I had an uncle, Nick, Uncle Nick, he-he used to be our guardian, more or less you know?

JP: And what did they talk about in class?

GDB: Oh, they'd teach us all about the uh-learning to speak Italian. Yeah, you'd go to the front, and you'd say what you want to say at-at the front of the, you know. We were a little shy then, you know. But uh-by-uh- all my sisters, Mary, Yolanda, and myself, and Dominic. Dominic came too, yeah that's right. Dominic came too. Oh, we learned to speak Italian, but you know, when you go to French school, and you gotta learn all those uh dictations and all that, you tend to forget it a little bit uh the language. You know. But we-we-we always we had my grandmother, she-the only thing she knew in French or English was, "Son of the bitch", you know so-

VDB: And, "Go to hell."

GDB: And, "Go to hell." [laughs]

JP: And just-what was your sister's experience in Italy, where did they take her? What did she do?

GDB: Well, you know, she uh-she talked about meeting Mussolini, the Pope, I think it was Pope-Pope the XII, at that time?

VDB: [unclear]

GDB: Oh-P-P XI, at the-the-the-anyway, she met the Pope, and she went to Rome, uh she saw the-the all about Rome, and uh-she went to-to uh Pescara, and then she went to [unclear] to meet the relatives there, you know. And they had uh-when you go in the house, they had like little-little *catena* [?] you know, so while you walk in there you made noise. So they didn't need to knock on the door. You know? But [unclear] four legged animal, eh? Come in here, when I went. "Oh no" he says. "Not here", he says. It's all, you know, there's no wood there eh? It's all cement. It's all cement, so uh the-the mice or whatever, they can't make any of the holes in there you know?

JP: So your family life, from what it sounds like, up until 1940, I mean you just basically had a really good childhood, and did you-did you ever feel poor, or you were missing anything? Did you feel-

VDB: It got-it got to be better 1936-'37. When we moved on Notre Dame. When we had the, with the store, my father cutting-having his own barber shop. It changed. You could see there was a change like with the-he had uh air conditioned shoes. Cause, the-the uh-

JP: I think you'll have to explain that. [laughs]

VDB: The uh the-the last-which is the top, was up from the-from the bottom part. Uh but, I had new shoes, when I-when was uh-yeah, when I got to be in the same position, I have a picture with new shoes and a new suit.

GDB: Well I got a-I got a job next door. One-one year anyway. It was an ice cream parlour.

VDB: Ah.

GDB: All we did-sell is ice cream. You know? I used to make six dollars the week, and I worked 12 hours a day. And I worked seven days a week. You know. But I enjoyed it, because I used to eat there three times a day. You know? And my dessert was always ice cream. Of course, you know? And then I used to go across the street, to the theatre, and I'd just walk in there free because, they used to have what they call revival nights in those days. After the-the double header they used to show you, they had like [unclear] 11 o'clock, so it used to finish about 1 o'clock. And all the customers used to come across the street, and spend their 15 cents on-on a sundae. You know? And so-I'd finish about two o'clock Saturday night.

VDB: That's true.

JP: So, at this point, uh, the children that are in school age are in school right?

GDB: Yeah.

JP: We're in Lachine right now, the kids are in school, uh you have part time jobs-

GDB: Yeah.

JP: -full time jobs-

GDB: Sure.

JP: The people-the-the-you're working. The children are in school, your dad is running a business, he's also a barber.

VDB: My mother's running a business.

JP: Your mother's running a business?

VDB: Sure.

JP: What was she doing? She was [unclear]

GDB: She-was uh sometimes-

VDB: She was in the dépanneur, which was separated by a wall, so you know, it was only a door on one side to get in, but uh, it was completely separated.

[BREAK]

JP: We're recording. Ok, So-

GDB: Well, as far as fascists, he never told us that he was a member of the fascists. But he was a member of the Sons of Italy, which was a Canadian organization you know?

VDB: Mhmm.

GDB: They had uh, 500 dollars insurance if you died tomorrow, you got-they paid-at that time it was 500 dollars, yeah, good money. You know? Uh, so that's why they joined mostly you know

and then to get together with the people you know. Uh, it's always good to get together for the people. I come from a section Italy that you came from. You know. And even today I notice that they have a lot of guys that's uh getting together with the Calabrese, with the [unclear]. It was- it was the same thing at that time, but not as elaborate as it is today. Today they have more money, you know. But uh, no. he was not a- I don't think he was a- a real *fasciste*.

JP: The Sons of Italy the-

GDB: He-he knew Gentile, Gentile knew him. You know. So I don't know if Gentile talked to him about sending me to a summer camp, eventually being-being a soldier of an Italian. Oh I gotta-I gotta tell you this. When the war came in 1914, my father knew that. He came here in 1913. So he-he-he-he, well he was not a war mongerer you know? So he came here because he wanted-and then he got letters from Italy, to report to somebody there. In fact my uncle Dominic was a sergeant in the Italian army. At that time, in 19-uh six-uh-15. And-but he didn't send any letters but the-the government sent money-uh letters to my father, and he didn't want to go of course, you know.

JP: He didn't want to go to fight.

GDB: No-

JP: Uh-the war. On behalf of Italy.

GDB: He was not a fighter, he was a lover.

VDB: [laughs] Which is good.

GDB: You know.

JP: So they-they ordered the Sons of Italy, from what you remembered attracted people because of that insurance plan right? That they-you were saying they had this insurance plan?

GDB: Yeah.

JP: So that was the-

GDB: Five hundred dollars.

JP: -attraction, to that um-

GDB: Yeah, yeah.

JP: -for membership as a membership drive.

GDB: Well I was not a member, because I was too young. But uh starting with Mary, and Adeline, they had insurance. Five hundred dollars each. My mother, you know.

JP: What about the *Dopolavoro*, they were present here in Lachine.

GDB: Uh, *Dopolavoro* yeah, it was a sport-

VDB: it was uh-

GDB: -organization eh? It was a sport organization. And uh-it sup-to play after work, you know, *Dopolavoro*.

VDB: *Dopolavoro*, yeah.

GDB: Yeah, so they used to have games between Italians in Lachine and Sainte Anna [?], and I'm sure Sainte Anna [?] had games with *Ville au Nord* you know. But uh, after the war I think it settled down. I don't think-I-I never heard anymore.

JP: Did you ever participate in anything there at the *Dopolavoro*? Any games, or uh-

GDB: Uh-

JP: -did they bring any kids also, or was it just basically the older men?

GDB: Well today people have money, so they play bowling, in Lachine, they-they have a bowling league, all Italians. That's where I get my paper, yeah, the Italian paper. Somebody brings it there on Tuesday. Uh, there's-there's about 60 names there. But I try to get the names, but I think they're all from out of town.

JP: Were there any uh parades, going through out with the *Bande Gentile*, um playing either for the *la festa de Santo Antonio* or-

GDB: Yeah.

JP: [unclear].

GDB: Yeah, *Santo Antonio*, that uh Saint Anthony, I remember that part.

VDB: Yeah.

GDB: Saint Anthony would-

VDB: Saint Anthony I remember.

GDB: *Santo Antonio*. There was another one. And I remember uh-a lot of people, Lattoni, Mr. Lattoni, uh one of the organizer you know. And, I-I remember one time, I-I moved to NDG [Notre Dame de Grâce], I moved to Patricia Avenue, and uh-so we said to our neighbour, "If you could mind our kids, we-we wanna go to the *spada* [?]." You know? He says, "Sure." Cause we used to help them out, so-so help each other, but when we came back-you see, we-we didn't want to use the car because we couldn't park there, so we went home by streetcar, and everybody was looking at us. What the heck with you, you know. Well, when I got home, George, the guy who used to look after the kids, he started laughing. We were dark-dark dark, from the [unclear], you know The wind blew all the dust-

VDB: Oh, yeah, yeah.

GDB: -to us, [laughs].

VDB: The suit, it was a-it wasn't the same type of suit.

GDB: Yeah, well my mother used to put all our shirts for dry outside, they were black by the time they finished. So, so, at first, then she cut it off.

JP: Yeah. But there were-you don't remember any parades

GDB: Yeah.

JP:-of like the *fascistas* going through the streets, do you remember that?

GDB: Yeah, yeah, they had the-the Saint Antonio, you know somebody was in the front,
holding-

JP: Oh, the religious piece, yeah. What about the-the fascists themselves-

GDB: No.

JP: -they had black shirts?

GDB: No.

JP: Did you ever see that?

GDB: No, I don't-I don't-

JP: -parading through the neighborhood.

GDB: I never, I never once saw a parade of the *fascistes*. Cause they were dark eh? Dark shirt
everything dark.

VDB: Yeah. They had the band. Some of them may have had the band.

GDB: I don't know.

JP: Were they scary for the kids? Like if you would see them in dre-in that uniform, did they scare the kids?

VDB: I wouldn't know.

GDB: You know, I don't remember that.

VDB: I never seen them when I was a kid.

GDB: The only one I went to was the religious parade, you know. Everybody was more religious then eh?

VDB: Yeah, the Italians were mixed up They were-they were in there too eh.

GDB: In fact, I-I got to church every Sunday, not because I'm more religious than you are. I go there because I feel good about it. So that's why I go. If I don't go, I don't feel good. You know. That's it.

VDB: Yeah.

JP: And the songs. You brought up earlier that your daddy had the piano, and he used to play uh-you knew the *Giovinazza*.

VDB: [starts singing *Giovinazza*]. [to GDB] Remember?

[Both VDB and GDB start singing together].

JP: What does that song mean to you?

GDB: Yeah.

JP: When you hear it, what do you think about?

VDB: Well it's-its uh the young eh?

GDB: Most of us, we used to sing "*O sole mio*",

VDB: Eh.

GDB: If somebody asked you to sing, you'd sing "*O sole mio*". Everybody knew that song. I-we used to live on uh Seventh Avenue, facing, it was-uh the shop you know, but this-that time, he was [pointing to VDB] just a kid. And uh there was a guy, his name was Gautier [?], he used to walk on 18th-on Eighth Avenue, and he used to get the bus on St. Louis Avenue, and I used to have a soprano voice. So we had a-like a shed about six feet deep, but very long shed, and my mother said, "Hey, he coming now, he's coming." So I used to sing *O sole mio*. You know? And the guy just went by, you know, so she said to me, "The next time I'll tell you, you'll sing outside and not in the shed, he'll hear you." So I did the same thing, and uh-they guy never stopped, he just kept going, so I told my mother, "That's it, that's it." I used to sing in church, you know in the choir, not the lead singer, but I was in the choir, but uh I-I would never sing uh in the shed anymore, or outside.

VDB: Yeah.

JP: Where did you hear that song, that you knew the words?

GDB: *O sole mio*.

VDB: *O sole mio*

JP: No, um, the *Giovinezza*.

GDB: I used to know it by heart.

VDB: My father used to play the piano, and there was like [points as though to people around the piano], Adeline, Mary, Yolanda, Gerry, Dominic. Big, big, you know, it used to go like this [traces a grand piano shape], in the line, and uh, and then he'd start playing [mimes playing and singing]. *Giovinezza*, and the other one too, uh-

JP: *Faccetta Nera*.

GDB: *Faccetta Nera*

VDB: Uh, *Faccetta Nera*, especially that one. He-I guess he-he must have had something that was good you know? Because the music interested him more, and quite a bit because he was a musician, he played the guitar, and the mandolin, uh-

GDB: What I read now is that he-Mussolini thought he was the next-next uh-the best uh-general or army man, since, uh, what's his name there, the one that said, "*Veni, vidi, vici*."

VDB: Ok, uh Ceasar.

GDB: Ceasar.

VDB: On 2.30 on a Tuesday morning.

GDB: He thought that he was the best soldier ever since Ceasar. You know. I forgot what his name was, I remember the-reading about it and uh-

JP: So then, we go to June 10th, 1940.

GDB: Mmm?

JP: Lets go to June 10th, 1940. Tell me about that day.

GDB: That was a terrible day. You know, when two policemen came in, with the beautiful hats on-

JP: Do you want to tell me what happened in the morning the day the men were interned?

GDB: Well, it was-it was not that much you know. Its, "Where's your father?" I say, "He's not here." So he says, "Do you know where he is?" "Well, I think so." So I went to get him, and that's about it. Then they took him away right away. You know, then uh, I ran in the back, told my mother about it. She says, "How did they look?" I say, "They look like detectives." You know I said to her. You know, they look uh, the whole, look you see in the movies eh? And that was it.

VDB: [to GDB] But outside, was there a car or something? No, you didn't see-

ND: I didn't see a car.

VDB: Cause, it-in Montreal, uh, they took the people, and uh the guy who was uh, baking uh bread, and uh they called him outside, and [whistles to indicate he was gone fast] right in the truck with his apron. Right into the truck, they made a movie out of that, and they copied that exactly what happened. I heard from people that's exactly what happened. We used to get people [hikes thumb and clicks, to show they were gone]. Right into the-see they didn't bother finding out of they had kids in the back, or something you know. They just said, "Hey." And-

[TIME: 0:38:14.0]

JP: So when-you were at the store. Your dad was where at the moment? Where did you go get him?

GDB: Well, I had to stay in the store you know, I don't think-I don't think-I don't remember if I went to school that day. But from that day on, I-I lost concentration in school. I lost the year. You know, because they were-we had to move out the first of uh April '41? You know? So I had to work in the store in the morning, and then after school I uh-help out you know my mother, you know, she was-she was a little woman uh-

VDB: Yeah.

GDB: -and there was always people trying to steal in the store, you know and so you had to-I was not big, but you know-

VDB: Uh-

GDB: So anyway, I lost concentration at school you know. So, that was the only year that I didn't have good grades.

JP: That-that day when your father left, did you have the impression that he was coming home that night? Like, what did the policemen tell you, when uh, when they came and they said, they wa-they wanted to fi-they were looking for your father, did they give you a reason?

GDB: No, nothing. There was no word spoken. None at all. I went to get my father. He came there, and I said, "There's the two policemen there." A few words they talked between each other, and that's it. Then he said uh, "Tell your mother I'm going downtown." And that's it. You know, you're going to Montreal. At that time when you went to Montreal it was a big thing, you know for us. You know.

JP: Did he have time to go in the house, to get a sweater or-

GDB: They just took him away, just like that-

JP: -cigarettes, anything?

GDB: -just like that, they just took him away like that.

VDB: I believe it.

JP: Did he have-

GDB: Well, he was dressed up eh? It was summertime, well, May, you know.

JP: Did he have time to go talk to your mother?

GDB: No, no he never spoke to my mother. No, because uh-

VDB: They did that to everybody else.

GDB: She asked of me, she asked of me about who they were you know. I told her they were detectives. You know. I said, "They had hats on and everything."

JP: And-

GDB: It was done so quick you know, it's unbelievable, you know. I-I was scared to tell you the truth. I was scared uh...

JP: Did your mother give you the impression she was scared? [GDB looks at her not hearing]
Your mother, did she give you the impression she was scared, or did she-do you think she handled herself in a way not to make the children-

GDB: Well-

JP: -scared?

GDB: F-I don't remember too well, but I remember she saying that he-he-"They're gonna send him back here, tonight, maybe." You know. "They're gonna ask him questions." You know? But he never came back, you know.

JP: And the next day what happened? When you woke up and-the children and your mother realized that he didn't come back?

GDB: Well, that's what uh everybody started panicking, then my grandmother came over, Aunt Pauline came over, they lived not too far from us, you know. And there were a lot of things spoken between themselves you know.

JP: Was it something that was dis-in the immediate days after, and I realize that's really hard, cause we're talking about something that happened 70 years ago, but do you remember was the di-were the discussions mostly among the adults, and very-or was it shared with the children? When they started talking ok, your Aunt Pauline comes over-

GDB: Yeah, they talked about-

JP: -uh, your grandmother.

GDB: Oh they talked among themselves you know.

VDB: Well, we were in school during the day so, that's when they came in-they started talking about it. Cause I never saw any-you know even young, there's a lot of people in the house at supptime. But nobody, nobody, there was nobody around.

GDB: Well, they had to go to work too eh? My uncle Nick worked at the steel plant.

VDB: Yeah.

GDB: My Aunt Pauline worked a the Saxonian[?] foods uh place you know. So they had to go to work so the only help we had was ourselves, you know. My sisters, they uh, they took turns.

JP: So what changed in the family structure, in that one year before the-the lease-

GDB: Well-

JP: -and you had to change to Sainte-Henri? What-what happened from June 10th-

GDB: Well there was one girl working, Adeline was working, you know, and the others they shared the work in the store. Mary Yolanda, me, and uh Dominic you know, so-but sometimes there was two of us working in the store, sometimes there was just one you know. At nighttime it was two all the time. But we used to close early you know, nine o'clock, boom [turns to VDB] That's why I-my store I had there, I closed nine o'clock at night. I remember that, you know.

JP: And what happened, you said for one year you lost concentration in school, and that was the only year you had bad marks, did it-was everybody in the family able to continue school, or did anybody have to give up school?

GDB: No, the-the girls were not going to school anymore by that time. Oh no. Adeline was-

JP: Because of your dad's-

GDB: Well-

JP: -arrest or-

GDB: Mary, she quit at s-seventh grade, and Yolanda she didn't go more than the eight grade, I don't think so. Uh-uh, the two girls were not-uh-they were not either working outside, they couldn't get a job. You know? So they-they helped out in the store with me, and my mother you know. That-it was a-nine-11 months of it you know. Then, when they got to Montreal, uh

Yolanda got a job at the-oh Mary, Mary got-got a job a the uh the place there, Rolly Products
[?], she got a job at Rolly Products [?].

VDB: That's true, that's true.

GDB: Not right away though, but uh she got a job there, and Yolanda got a job at the railroad,
washing engines.

VDB: Yes.

JP: So, the family, had to adapt, all of a sudden your father's gone.

GDB: Yeah.

JP: He's the main breadwinner.

VDB: Right.

JP: He's cutting hair, he's got this job, he's got the store, he's got-he's maintaining the family.
He did-he's gone. You don't even know when he's coming back right?

GDB: Right.

JP: How does the family jump into action?

GDB: Well-

VDB: Mmm?

GDB: We more or less lived the best we could I don't know you know. Uh, uh there was uh 61 dollars a month coming, but the store itself there, my mother used to look after the uh-uh the finance. I don't think it-that we made that much money in those days. Because, uh she used to have uh five cent stuff, 10 cent stuff, 15-20 cent stuff, so she didn't make a big profit you know.

VDB: Yeah, the candies were one cent, and five for one cent and, it wasn't, it took a lot of money to get up to a dollar you had to sell. Five-five for one cent, so you sold one, you sold another one, it was two cents, and then three cents, four cents. That was a-five cents was a hell of a lot of money in that saying those days.

GDB: Well, you know.

VDB: You count the hell in there, I'm sorry.

GDB: Well, when we moved out of there 11 months later, that 11 months went every fast. Because, uh everybody was so busy all the time you know, we're not making money but we were busy. We were in school, the-the store and all that?

JP: How did you compensate-what things sis you do to like-

GDB: Well, I-I-

JP: -to find coal or to-

GDB: I uh-I lost that year, to tell you the truth. I had uh-I had no concentration at all. No. The same thing as my father when he came back. He was not the same guy after you know. I was lucky that I got a job later on, uh-at the Harmond Tito [?] diner, I learned to be a machinist you know. That-that 11 months was uh-I recall a dead month, a dead 11 months. [to VDB] You don't remember too much about it?

VDB: No.

GDB: No?

VDB: Nnn. [shakes head].

JP: You call it dead-

GDB: He was young.

JP: -but yet you were so active, what do you mean?

GDB: Huh?

JP: Explain to me, cause you said that 11 months, it was like a dead 11 months.

GDB: Yeah, you know, there was no-no life, it was-we didn't go to anywhere, no uh-uh Italian festivals, nothing like that you know. Yeah, there was no st-the store was open seven days a week, you know.

JP: Did you get any-did you have any problems from other kids, or other Italians during those 11 month period in Lachine-cause you're living in a neighbourhood where everybody knows you. I'm-I'm guessing they knew your dad had been picked up-

GDB: Yeah.

VDB: Yeah.

JP: Is that correct?

GDB: Yeah, but uh-

VDB: No.

GDB: -the occasional guy tried to say something in the store, was, "Hey," the young people eh? But very occasional. At that time it was not like today you know? Everybody had more respect for each other, you know? Like we had a policeman that used to go walk in Notre Dame Street. On one side, another policeman. [to VDB] He used to live over here, the guy here. He told me all about it you know. And he said you know that you had more protection that you get today.

JP: Did you have any problems, like any kind of discrimination, or kids prejudiced against you? Did you have any problems them saying, "Hey, where's your father?" Did anyone tell you your father had been arrested-

GDB: No, no, not a-

JP: -in school?

GDB: Not about my father. They used to call us macaroon, spaghetti, but I used to call them uh pea soup cause-so-even-even Steven. [laughs]. No, and in fact a lot of the kids I used to go to school with I was friends with them, [to VDB], like you did right, you know.

JP: But nobody said anything to you about your father, "Hey, your father was arrested."

GDB: No, the only one thing I noticed, I never got invited to an Itali-uh-a French-Canadian house. To-to-uh suppose I was friends with their son, I never got invited uh in their house. You know, to play with them in the house, or to have a-a little sandwich, I never did.

JP: Did your mother invite them to come to your house?

GDB: Uh-[looks at VDB].

VDB: I don't remember.

GDB Maybe uh Mrs. Mitchell's sons?

VDB: Oh yeah.

GDB: We had a Mrs. Mitchell, she was a Polish woman, you know. She was the same age as my mother. They were both married at 16-uh-15, you know? And they were-both their husbands were 25 year-uh-10 years young-older than them. And they both bought, she bought the-uh the magazine called, *All of Story and Love Story*, so they used to be 10 cents. And they used to change each other you know?

VDB: [Holds his thumb and forefinger an inch apart]. A-about that thick.

GDB: Yeah, that's how she learned to speak English, my mother. Reading *The Whole Story and Love Story*, yeah. She had three boys though; Joe, Edward, and the youngest one-

VDB: I-we said his name yesterday and I forgot today.

GDB: [laughs]

JP: Did you have-did you have any problems with the store, did people refuse to sell merchandise to the store after your father was arrested, did you have any problems with uh-

GDB: Uh no, no. No, oh no.

JP: So-so-

GDB: These people sympathized with us.

JP: Did the Italians kick in any help? The Italians, like your father's buddies?

GDB: No, no, no. No. Not me anyway. I don't remember. They-they Italians come-they didn't- they never came to our store anyway to buy anyway. It was always the other people, the English you know, or the French. The [unclear] bridge was down the street from us eh? You know we were here between Eight and Ninth and [unclear] bridge was Sixth Avenue, so they they went for lunch home for one hour, so they used to drop in. You know, and that's it.

VDB: Well, I know there was people coming in to see Adeline.

GDB: Oh yeah.

VDB: I think Adeline was uh,

GDB: Mike Benotto [?].

VDB: -a big one [laughs].

GDB: Mike Benotto, he used to say, "How's your-how's your mother?" He didn't come in there for my mother. [laughs]

JP: So, overall, the effects of that-after that happened-your father's in. Did they-were you ever told as to why he was arrested?

GDB: Well they-by this time I think everybody knew. Because it was-it was in the French papers eh? *Le Messager Lachine, La Press*, We had a-uh French paper at that time called, [unclear], it was a morning paper, you know? So everybody knew about it-uh-but nobody bothered us, no.

VDB: No.

JP: How did you find it. Do you remember when you found out that your dad had been interned?

VDB: Uh-

JP: Do you remember?

VDB: When you're-when you're-I think I mentioned before, about 10 years old. When you're 10, or nine, or eight, nothing [shakes head].

JP: And Gerry, do you remember?

VDB: it really starts coming in when you're around 12 years old, 11-12, then I started I can-I-I can tell you things that happened when I was 12, but at eight years old? No.

GDB: Don't remember.

JP: Gerry do you remember when you found out that your dad was arrested? Like, when you knew what was going on, that he was in an internment camp?

GDB: That I-that I knew after you know?

JP: But what?

GDB: Not that-not that very moment, no oh, no.

JP: And at that point, how did you react to that?

GDB: We found out the next day. My mother found out you know? So then she told us. So she says, "We-we have to-to stick together because we gotta get out of here the first of uh-uh-uh A-A-April, 1941." You know? So uh-meanwhile she says, "Uh, Nanni, Nanni's [?] gonna take us in." So we're 16 in that house there for uh one month. She was very good, she never complained my grandmother at that time. And then after [unclear] we found that house in uh-uh Notre Dame Street, we moved there.

JP: I-I mean Sainte-Henri.

VDB: Sainte-Henri.

GDB: Yeah.

JP: What was that like?

GDB: We-

JP: How-how come you ended up there?

VDB: Oh yeah-

GDB: Well-well-

VDB: It has to do with the- [points to GDB]—he knows the-

GDB: Well, my mother couldn't sign a lease, she couldn't sign a lease, so she couldn't get a house in Lachine.

VDB: Yeah.

GDB: And uh-so she-through a Mr. Tallarico [?] from Ville au Nord, he says, "I got something for you." And that's the house, we lived there, and uh it had more four legged animals there than I have ever seen in my life.

VDB: There were-there were-we were 10, and they were about 500.

GDB: Yeah.

VDB: The rat-the rodents. Rodents.

GDB: But, you know-

VDB: I don't want to call them rats because it's not nice.

GDB: That part I don't forget, I forget-I don't remember what she paid rent. But I'm sure she paid less than 18. You know, you can't. You couldn't pay uh more than 18, that's for sure, for that house.

JP: And she couldn't sign the lease because?

GDB: She was a woman. She couldn't sign-at that time the law was a woman couldn't sign a lease. So uh-

VDB: Uh. I gotta look it up, when uh the ladies started to sign. Yeah.

JP: And what was that like there, in Sainte-Henri for you? Did you have uh-describe what the neighbourhood was like and what family life was like. Because at this point, you're in Sainte-Henri-you moved to Sainte-Henri, your dad has been at Petawawa now for going on a year. You've gone to this place-h-so life continues without father, what was that like?

VDB: I can remember quite a bit about Notre Dame street because then I was like 9 years old. And u-the schooling and the people around me-we looked for Italian people around. Not many. As soon as we found out there was a store, and Italian store, Vittorio's sotre [?], that was an

Italian store, we used to walk all the way there. Uh, but around where we lived there was no Italians. Polish, a lot of Polish people, and French Canadians of course. Uh, we lived-it was a beautiful house, it had air conditioning and uh-uh

JP: Describe the air conditioning a bit. [laughs]

VDB: The air conditioning was like-every-every corner of the house uh at the bottom, there was a nice hole about maybe a foot high or something. Uh, if you-if you-oh there was a noise. If there was uh-if you pulled a drawer, I forgot that part-when you pulled a drawer with the-with the-the uh knives and forks, there was a-there was-it was eaten away in the back because maybe, there was food left in the-on the-so everything, we had to boil everything later. I remember my mum saying later, she used to boil everything. She had to put it in the boiling water and leave it there for uh-as far as possible. You know, as long as possible. So that they would be-because everything was touched. The rats used to go all over the place. There's too many.

JP: And when you slept you must have heard them.

VDB: [to GDB] I-I don't remember if you-something-I don't know if you were bitten, but I remember your yelling one time and you jumped up in bed.

GDB: No, it wasn't there.

VDB: Where-

GDB: It was on uh-

VDB: On Walnut?[?]

GDB: Walnut.

VDB: On Walnut.

GDB: But there they used to crawl-they used to go up and down the walls you know. At night time, I couldn't sleep, you know. The were going up and down the-the whole room you know.

JP: How did you manage to-

GDB: One time I had a sore t-tooth, you know? And uh, somehow, my sore tooth was gone. I was thinking more about them, than the tooth you know? Unbelievable you know.

VDB: C'mon, thee was uh rodents in uh-In the back we had a shed. In the shed there was a-practically nothing anyway, but just a place to cut wood, because to start the fire for the winter you had to get wood first and then the coal. That's where I started learning how to cut wood and uh make a fire in the-the stove. But, just in the back of that, maybe another 50 feet back of the house, was a huge pile of junk. And there, uh, one of the friends, uh his brother was like five or six years older, and uh, he was also from Lachine. The one upstairs was from Lachine. And there was uh-an empty field, and next to the empty field there was another house, a little further, and the guy would come over with his uh brother, and then they came over and they said, "You wanna see some rats move?" So he picked up a stone and he threw it, and the rats flew out from where he'd threw the stone. But, just flew out of there like crazy you know? But he said, "Don't [Italian phrase]." "Don't get close to that, cause they're they're dangerous."

JP: How did your mother manage-sorry-go ahead.

VDB: No, the-the-the rats are always dangerous, you know, but you learn-oh yeah, I killed one. So my brother Dominic told me he says, "Watch, he's gonna come out of the corner." Because we were-we must have been eating or something. Because, they-they wouldn't come out just like that. And uh, the kitchen with th-the-the-it was uh-anyway he was right in the corner there and we had c-the table here, so he picked up the poker from the stove and he gave it t me, and he held my arm, and he said, "When you see his head stick out, do it." Because he had stuck out his head before, and then he went back in. So as soon as he stuck his head I went bam. I got him just behind the head. I killed it, my first rat [rubs hands together]. I never-never was afraid rats anymore after. I used to run after them. I ra after-well I had boots. With boots I would kick them you know, they wouldn't do anything. But of course they were smaller. The big ones, uh you run away from.

GDB: Oh we-oh-the railroad was the ties, what they call ties there. They were-they were all made of wood eh?

VDB: Yeah.

GDB: And they used to make holes-that's why there was so many rats at-t the railroad because they-they made themselves a house in-into the wood. Then that's why they changed that to steel. And that's why there were no more rats after.

VDB: Well, I remember skates. Well, I got a pair of skates. The boot was worn a bit, but I could fit my feet in it there, as far as I could remember. Well, they weren't nice. I was nine years old, they weren't beautiful. So, underneath, the uh-uh blade was eaten with-with what's holding the blade, and it was even with it, so there was no more blade in other words. So they throw-throw them-and there's a lane, where we were there was no lane, but on the other side there was a lane. So I used to walk in the back with this other guy who was a garbage collector. A

young fellow, he used to pick up anything that was made out of metal or-but that was something else-but I picked up these skates. And then the wint-when the winter came, all I remember about skating was-we had uh, remember-you know the ice, the street was full of ice, like a 16th of an inch, an eighth of an inch nor something. It had rained and it had frozen. And I was skating, but as far as Notre Dame Street was concerned in my life, I-to me I try to push it away. Because that was a very ugly part.

GDB: Hmm.

JP: How did your mother manage to maintain sanity in that house?

GDB: My-my mother never complained.

VDB: [laughs]

GDB: I gotta tell you the truth, she doesn't complain. And she-"Things are gonna get better", she used to say all the time you know? She used to make eight lunches every morning. She got up at four o'clock in the morning to make eight lunches. This is-of course we're talking about after the war. [to JP] So uh-that's not what you want to hear eh?

JP: I wanna hear everything. It's all good. [laughs]

GDB: You know?

JP: It's all good.

GDB: So she used to get up at four o'clock, make 8 lunches and uh-every day every day, and uh.

VDB: Well.

JP: Did you get relief for anything, Like where would you go to get the bread, or did you-did you-

GDB: Well, by this time I started to work eh? '41? I started to work. Uh, Yolanda started to work, Mary. There were four of us. Two-uh four uh-uh working, so there was a little bit more money coming in, and you know.

JP: Did you work because your father was interned and you couldn't go to school, you had to give up school?

GDB: I-I uh-

JP: Is that why you started working? Because-

GDB: Well-

JP: -you needed that extra income to support-

VDB: You had to uh-

GDB: I uh-I-I-I started to work at 16 years old, you know? At that time you were allowed to work when you were 16. So I got a job at Hallington [?] tool and dye, and then I learned to be a machinist. You know, work on the weights, they called it, you know. So I worked there. First they give you 25 cents an hour, yeah. The-the following-the biggest pay there was 50 dollars a

week. Uh-uh he was a machinist ultra. They called him, you know, he used to make it roll sideways. [to VDB] You never heard of that eh? A drill you know, that's the way the-

VDB: Mmm.

GDB: It was for the-the war effort, you know?

JP: Did you go any place to get uh food or extra things, because you had some places in Sainte-Henri for that.

GDB: Not-[unclear].

JP: You know if you needed relief for uh, food-

GDB: No uh-

JP: -bread.

GDB: No, we never asked. [points to VDB] He-he-he remembers, he remembers the food. The bread.

VDB: Yeah, we had this store, not-not far away from the house there was a uh-I took uh-[leans to GDB and says something in Italian]-

GDB: Pillowcase.

VDB: Pillowcase, pillowcase.

GDB: Pillowcase.

VDB: I keep forgetting, I mean I uh-I think it's old age. Uh, I used to take a pillowcase and my mum would come in-I'm sure she came in with me to tell me where it was and then after that, I remember going alone. So I used to hold up the pillowcase, which was about this high [measure about 2 feet with hands], we used to hold it up and the guy used to put in bread, stake bread, stale cakes, fill it up right up to the-almost to the top, and then I'd give him 25 cents, and I'd take that and I'd bring it home. Then my mum would cut off the top-well my mum, I guess-

GDB: Cut off the-the green that had-

[both VDB and GDB laugh]

VDB: The-the the green stuff-and the cakes, they had to cut even more off. A cake that was big [measures a circle], well in those days, my hands were small so they must have been-but the cake-used to cut off almost three quarters of the cake to eat-the really-the centre. But we had three of them, so we had enough for everybody. And uh, I don't know how long it happened, how long-cause I cou-I couldn't go-but I think possibly when you started to work. I know that the money was coming in, and so we didn't go there anymore.

GDB: Mother-

VDB: But, the [unclear], you know I wrote that down in my private papers at home, seven of the brothers and sisters had no teeth by the time they were, what 25?

JP: From what?

VDB: From eating bad food uh-uh during the depression-

JP: Oh.

VDB: -and then in Sainte-Henri-and then when they started to work, four of them started to work, the money was coming in, then life got better, but it was too late, I mean already our-our system [unclear name]'s sister dies of cancer at 64, three of them, and died at that age so9. And Mary had no teeth-

GDB: Uh-

VDB: Yolanda had no teeth uh, and uh-

GDB: Uh-uh-

VDB: -Helen had all her teeth, her and Angela, I don't know how-how it happened but they had their teeth till they died.

JP: So, when your father was in the camp, did you get any correspondence? Did you get any updates? Did your mother tell you any of the updates?

GDB: No my mother never said anything, she just wrote it to him and he wrote back. Although she never told us anything about it, so-

JP: So as a kid-

GDB: She was very busy woman you know. Uh, I guess-She-she liked writing because she-she used to write to Italy a long letter and put money in besides that.

VDB: Yeah-yep.

GDB: You know.

VDB: Well that was after the money started to come in.

GDB: yeah, because when I went over to Italy, uh he said to me-[to VDB] Gino? He says, “[Italian phrase].” Yeah, I told my mother, I said-Uh-uh-no not my mother I told that to Adeline. I said-and Adeline says to me, “Why sure, she used to put money in it-in the letters.”

JP: So, what happened when your father came out finally?

GDB: Well, I wasn't there, so [to VDB] you go-

JP: Who was there?

GDB: uh-

JP: At the house?

GDB: [points to VDB] He was.

JP: Did you have any-any [unclear].

GDB: Well, everybody was there except me. I was uh-oversea.

JP: Oh yeah.

GDB: I was a soldier you know?

JP: Do you want to talk about that first, and then we'll talk about uh-

VDB: Yeah, that was later when he came out you know. Like uh-

JP: Okay, so lets talk about uh-the experiences in the army.

GDB: I-didn't see uh-I didn't see any action, first of all. You know, when I got there, there was two months left for uh-but I had to do a one month training in England, so by the time I got to Germany, there-was-there was only five days left for the-for the end of the war, you know?

JP: Just to-just to-so we introduce it for anybody who's watching this. You enlisted in the Canadian army while your father was arrested.

GDB: Yeah and-

JP: Interned by the Canadian government.

GDB: And I says to him, I says, "I wanna be an officer." You know? [laughs]. He-he says uh, "[Italian phrase]". "[Italian phrase]", he said. Start at the bottom. You know? I-I never got to be an officer anyway. I got to the advance corporal, and-but uh I didn't see any action, but I saw the suffering of the German people. You know, the-the one thing I remember-when I was on

my training in England, I went for a route march, 15 miles you know. One day we came upon a bunch of prisoners you know. In England, and they were all Italian. Yeah, they were all Italian uh prisoner of war. So, I started singing uh-[starts singing Italian song, VDB joins in some parts]. The guys looking at me, like [Italian word] you know? We talked for about three-four minutes and then we had to walk on [laughs]. It was funny the way it happened you know? Uh-

JP: how-when you-did you go to Petawawa at all while you were um-after you enlisted in the Canadian army?

GDB: Ah, I was in Petawawa for uh there, what do you call that, for two weeks, you know.

TIME: 1:09:09.5

JP: Was your-you didn't know if your father was there at the time do you?

GDB: No, no. And uh-

JP: Did it ever occur to you to ask?

GDB: yeah, but t was not the same place anyway. Petawawa is big. Oh, you eve been to Petawawa?

JP: Yes, I have as a matter of fact.

GDB: Yeah. It's big.

JP: Yeah, I know, you're right, absolutely.

DB: Yeah.

JP: But, did it ever occur to you, once you were in the Canadian military that-to ask questions-like it ever cross your mind-even if you didn't do it, but did it cross your mind?

GDB: Well, I found out from somebody else uh-a guy from Montreal, he said, "Don't ask." He said. They gonna-they gonna tell you no. He was Italian.

JP: And he told you not to ask?

GDB: No, the asking you see, they won't let you go.

JP: To see him.

GDB: Yeah.

JP: Were you-

GDB: But-but uh-by that time, you know I was-I looked at my papers. By that time I uh-he wasn't there anyway. You know, so.

JP: But did-did it ever occur to you, that to find out why he was uh picked up or anything-to find out through your connection for anything?

GDB: One thing I know about them is that-the only story I hear from them-from there is that he was sleeping in the bottom bed. And when Camillien Houde came, he says, "Louie La Battista." He says, "You've got to sleep up, and I sleep down here." Any my father looked at him, and he

says, "That's your problem." He says, "Because I pee at bed you know." And he says, "That's ok." [laughs]. That's the only story I heard-9that I heard he was barber to uh-Camillien Houde yeah?

JP: At the camp.

GDB: At the time, yeah.

JP: Did your father-when he came back did he tell you any stories about the camp?

GDB: No. No. No. Nothing at all. Not to me anyway.

VDB: Well, when he-when he came out of uh-a little later Camillien Houde came on our street on uh Walnut, and uh I was on the gallery, then I heard that Camillien Houde was coming and see my father. And uh-well let's say uh-I'm sure it must have been over 1000 persons that came in, took about 15 minutes to fill up all the-the street-that was a little-where we used to play softball in the front. The lane, the street-Walnut street right up to Cazalais was filled up with people from uh they mayor coming over. [laughs] He came up. He offered my dad a job. He says-how come you're-some-the mayor comes to see you-your dad? He could have been important, but I don't know what happened, because he just stayed the way he was. My father never went up in any way. He stayed the way he was. He was the barber and he got-got himself a job as a barber and that was it. But, it was good. Later on though, something happened I don't know if Mary got the uh-the job or work-he must have played cards or something because we had brand new furniture in all the rooms in the house-from then on-the it was good. When they were all working, it started to get better, especially on Walnut Street. You know, we were missing nothing.

GDB: No.

VDB: We had fruits, we had everything. But we had an icebox. Where you put the ice on top? That when my father –uh-won this money, we had a Frigidaire. Eh? [whistles]. Frigidaire, we had a beautiful dining room table, beautiful chairs. We were set.

JP: When was this all-like what-what period?

VDB: This was-

JP: The forties or the fifties?

VDB: No, the forties, it must have been a year after some '44-'45. Not-not much more than that because when you came, [to GDB] you came back in '47?

GDB: Forty six.

VDB: Forty six. It was already there.

GDB: Yeah.

VDB: It was uh-and I still have the chairs.

GDB: We were supposed to go into business together eh? I mean my father was supposed to go and get it together, so he-he asked me to go and work in a tavern, to learn how-how to make beer and all that [mimes pouring a pint from a keg]. He was uh-he needed a license to buy that uh-uh-uh tavern on the corner of Sixth and Notre Dame in Lachine. He used to own, across the

street before that. Well, my mother said to him, Louie [French phrase]. And my father got the money from the Buffalos. They-the-they were lend-lending him the money from the Buffalo.

JP: Uh Buffalo's is the-

GDB: The club that you belonged to you know?

VDB: Yeah.

GDB: It's non-religion, non-you know. And uh-[clears throat]-but Camill-uh-mayor Carignan wouldn't come through with it, he wouldn't give him a license. And that was a uh-the-a good deal because there was a tavern, on top there was around 6 rooms upstairs.

VDB: Yeah.

GDB: [to VDB] Did you ever go upstairs?

VDB: No, but I knew people who lived there.

GDB: Yeah. They had six rooms eh?

VDB: Yeah, it was pretty big.

GDB: [looks at JP and shrugs].

JP: Do you think that had anything to do with [clears throat] the fact that he was interned?

GDB: That part that I-I-I ask questions about that.

JP: Whether he was refused a license-

GDB: Yeah.

JP: -because of the internment?

GDB: He was a very uh-very-he was a man of [unclear] like you know what I mean, uh Carignan?
[French phrase]. He was a-he was a bad type you know?

JP: What was the-

GDB: He was the mayor for many years too, you know? Uh apparently he was very good in the
city of Lachine, uh-1938, he had the people working.

VDB: Yeah, they named the arena, the Lachine arena under-

GDB: They took the bricks from Notre Dame Street, the brick, the building.

VDB: And they made an arena. We still have it. We still have the arena.

GDB: And then, they built that park, you have-

VDB: You had La Salle Park yeah.

GDB: La Salle Park

VDB: And uh-

JP: Tell me about your dad after and before.

[BREAK]

TIME: 1:15:45.0

JP: Okay.

GDB: OK, [points to VDB]. So he was talking first. [laughs]

VDB: Don't-shoot.

JP: Okay, um I'll start then. Um lets-lets pick it up from uh-um your dad, when he came out. First of all, I guess the questions that I'm curious about are first of all, were you given any advance notice that your dad was coming out? What was it like-like when he came out? What was it like at the dinner table? What was the reaction with the kids? Did you ask him questions? Did he answer those questions? That kind of um-

VDB: We weren't allowed to ask questions. As-my mum would ask him privately you know, and she'd tell us a bit about-you know, but not much. Not much. He never told her much about what went on there. Well, it's every day life. You get up in the morning, you do uh-what you do one day you do it the next day. So, there was nothing in the-in the-

GDB: He didn't say nothing like oh-they had to go for a walk every day or something?

VDB: There was-uh every day life was like uh-like any other place-like the Germans uh-uh-

GDB: Cause I know the Germans there where I was at [unclear] they went for a walk every morning.

VDB: Yeah.

GDB: As a group.

VDB: Oh, they must have walked there too. But uh there was nothing much about that. We were happy to see him at the head of the table. That's one thing.

JP: The-uh yeah.

VDB: Yeah, I remember that by seeing, you know. Ooh. But it took a little while to come in you know? Like-he comes in, and uh-oh! [makes amazed expression]. Like him [points to GDB], when he came in, was the same thing, and when he came in from the war, after forty uh '47, it was the same thing, you know eh! We don't see each other for a long time and all of a sudden, he's there. You know, so it um-

JP: What was it like at the dinner table when he came back?

VDB: Oh, well it was the same thing as before. My father was-he ate with us, he looked at us as if to say, "Look, you got food, you got"-you know? I see to I that you have food on the table. Uh-a mind like that-because person who is-has something outside, like a-a politician, is not necessarily the best person in the house. You know? The-they can't talk in the house, they don't know how to say anything because they're-they have another way.

JP: Can you give me an example?

VDB: Well, when I –when we went t the uh-uh Order of Buffaloes. You walk in there, and-uh-like God just walked in. Because another person walked in after us, and it was uh somebody that had been there for years. They say, “Hi, hi, hi.” But, my father, everybody clapped. So he must have been one of the first that might have started it. And even the guy playing the piano uh who was the manager of a-of a uh food store. He was a pretty big shot, but he used to play the piano, and say, “Hey, c’mon, let’s play and lets sing.” You know? And when my father came in, he stopped playing, went over, they shook hands, and uh then my father said a few words, you know, and everybody got quiet. So in other words, you bring him back into the house, not the same person.

JP: What was his energy like when he came back?

VDB: In the house it was quiet. It was only outside uh later, when I found out what he was, you know? And it took a long time. It took-1952 or ’53, because he died in ’54, so it had to be-be just a year. And I had the business in ’52 so-it has to be between ’52 and ’53.

JP: Is he a changed man then, after the war? When he came back-I mean after the internment?

VDB: Oh, not-not with the people that he knew. Politically, but at the house, he was quiet.

JP: Did he have-what kind of a relationship did you have with your dad? What did he want for you?

VDB: Uh, my dad would uh talk to me and he-when he spoke to me in the years, when uh-I dunno, when he was cutting the hair, and uh, he would say to me, “You have to read the, certain newspaper about the war.” Uh because ’44 and ’45 the war was still on, so I had to find out what was going in uh where the Allies were uh-reached, or had to learn about Japanese

also, the American war. So in other words, as I went along, I was learning geography without going to school. You know. So I-So he gave me a lot of uh tips on-and I used to read uh also the English newspaper and the French newspaper. So and uh French newspapers [points to GDB]. This guy here would uh give me five cents to go and get the *Patrie de la Journal* [unclear].

GDB: Oh, that's just to cut pictures of the hockey players.

VDB: [laughs] We used to have uh a lot of-a lot of sports in-uh after the war. But, that's way after the war. But before the war, because of my father being in the concentration camp, uh in prison I should say, uh-

GDB: Well, you know, somebody that runs in politics, sometimes, he's very good in politics, but he forgets he has a home. You know sometimes. So, I don't know what happened after-when he came back, but I know he was very quiet, you know?

JP: Did you notice the rela-how was the relationship between your mother and your father when he came back?

GDB: Well, there-there-they were not the type to kiss each other in front of people, you know what I mean? They-she had nine kids with him, 10, because 1 died at a year old you know.

VDB: Yeah.

GDB: And uh-you know, it's-uh-I don't know what to say there you know?

JP; Can I ask you another question?

VDB: [to GDB] We-we-what was her name?

GDB: Hey?

VDB: What was her name?

GDB: Fasciste

JP: The girl that died. That was her name?

GDB: Fasciste.

JP: Really?

GDB: Yeah, so when-

JP: When was she born, in what year?

GDB: Here in Lachine.

JP: No, when?

GDB: Oh-

VDB: Uh-

GDB: 1920-

VDB: Twenty something.

GDB: Twenty six-'28.

JP: He named her Fascista?

GDB: Fasciste, but at-at the cemetery we just put Maria F. Di Battista. [laughs]

JP: Why did you do that?

GDB: Well, at that time, the Fasciste party was growing up eh? I think the Fasciste party started in 1922? But, with Mussolini, who was a writer eh?

VDB: Yeah, '22.

GDB: And somehow when he was writing these things, he-he lift up some Italian people, so he called her Fasciste.

JP: Wait.

GDB: But then afterward-

JP: That's a really god point-sorry?

GDB: But after that uh-uh who was born, she was born '28, Yolán-Pa-uh Angela was born and he called her Angela. So he didn't call her any uh-you know. Uh-

JP: What do you think it meant to be a fascist in those days. How do you think it tied in with being Italian?

GDB: Well, it's hard to say uh you know because-

JP: Did it satisfy any kind of need?

GDB: Uh I never really involved myself with those things, you know, I used to follow the-the uh Union Nationale and Liberals. One would be saying that this one cheats, the other one say this one cheats. Well you know Taschereau Boulevard, well the guy who was Prime Minister at that time, his name was Taschereau, and he overcharged the province about 75 percent to build that road, we paid 75 percent more. So, Union Nationale says, this guy-

VDB: Is a crook.

GDB: -is a crook! Why are you gonna vote for him, so he comes him, then 1940 this guy Duplessis was a crook, so the Liberals came in, you know. You followed that. [laughs]

JP: Can I ask you a question? Do you think that your father was a threat to Canada?

VDB: Nah.

GDB: I-I-physically no. Physically no. No way.

VDB: No way.

GDB: No.

VDB: He loved too much the people he knew.

GDB: No way.

VDB: We had Ukrainians come into the store 10 years after he died, in the sixties, they were old, getting older also, they-they still, in their sixties, late sixties, some of them in their eighties came over.

GDB: Hey, 60, they're young.

VDB: Yeah. Sure. [laughs]

GDB: [laughs]

VDB: They came over to the store eh? One of them especially, a little Ukrainian guy, "Your father, oh, your father." He couldn't say the words, you know, he just looked at me, he must have been about five-five two or something, and he looked-just looked at me and said, "Your father, oh, I wish he was here. We miss him. All my family miss him." Just to show, you know? Cause of the uh Royal Order of Buffaloes, you know? Because Ukrainians, and the Polish were in with the uh-

JP: So why-

VDB: There was French also, but not many. It was moistly English. Possiby that's why he couldn't get the license from the Mayor of Lachine, cause he was more on the English side. And-and-and its all under the table you know but uh. But uh I don't want to talk against the mayor, the uh mayor-he was also minister of roads. This uh-the mayor then.

GDB: Carignan.

VDB: Carignan, yeah. So he did a lot, but in the meantime he didn't do any good for my-my dad.
Cause my dad-

GDB: How come the chief of police wanted to shoot him?

VDB: Oh uh, shoot uh-

GDB: The-the

VDB: -Carignan.

GDB: [unclear] he wanted to shoot him.

VDB: Oh. Yeah, because he was uh-a real uh-somebody that-my friends and my way, is the way
you're going to do it.

GDB: Oh, I know he had a one track mind.

VDB: Yeah.

GDB: That's what it takes to succeed in politics.

JP: What do you think the Canadian government was afraid of with your dad?

VDB: Yeah.

GDB: That's what I'm saying. You know, physically no. He-maybe if he talked to people or something, I don't know. I never heard him talk anything about the *Fascistes* you know. I more remember my Uncle Nick, than he did.

JP: And was your uncle Nick arrested?

GDB: No, no. [laughs]. Well I don't-I was-I-I-I wasn't hoping for him to get arrested, but I-I don't know why he takes a guy with nine children, and the other guy was not married. My uncle wasn't married, you know.

VDB: Eh-

GDB: He never got married, you know.

JP: Does it make sense to you the way they picked the men?

GDB: No, no. Uh-you know.

JP: Do you think that the government-did uh-or did your mother or did anyone-

VDB: Oh, they-they just picked him up.

GDB: Uh-uh-

JP: -give you any indication on how the arrests were made?

VDB: No.

GDB: Like today, you have-if you're laid off today, you have unemployment insurance for a year eh? That's what I hear. So, at that time, the-we didn't have that. So he left with mother with nine kids, and one working, and that's it. You know, and the store of course. Well, you know the store, uh-at that time-

VDB: Selling candies you know.

GDB: Well, you know. Uh-so this is the part I could never understand you know. And-and the- they should have made a better check up of it before they pick up them you know?

JP: And how about how the whole issue has been treated now. Because, do you think uh-now it's all said and done and all these years have gone by, and every now and then it pops up its head in the news. There was the redress committee in Montreal that happened in the mid-80s, the *Congression Nationale* [?]-

GDB: I don't know if you were aware of that.

VDB: Yeah, I follow-I follow it.

JP: -recently it's been in the paper, Pucetti's [?] been trying to pass a bill-uh- I don't know if you were following any of it or-what are your impressions now when we hear about this situation?

VDB: I think you have to be pretty powerful to be able to get redress. Because uh-unless-and then if you start something, and you get stronger, if you don't have money in the back of you to you know, uh to keep you going, and also to s-strong people behind you then-then there wouldn't be any problems. So, if there wouldn't have been uh-uh up North where we were

living. I wanted to find out if there was a Liberal person, or federal Liberal, if there would have been one I would have to try to be-uh to uh to liven up the thing a bit uh-

GDB: At that time too was the depression time was very bad eh? So-uh lots of Italians in Lachine they were all journeymen workers, they worked two days a week, three days a week. If-if-like my uncle worked five days a week, but he used to make 15 cents an hour. Ten hours is a dollar fifty.

VDB: Huh. Yeah.

GDB: You know?

VDB: He worked at the-the wire rope at the end.

GDB: Yeah, hey?

VDB: Yeah, his fingers like this [traces large finger circumference] because he had to manhandle-

GDB: See? There was no time. Even my uncle, who believed in fa-fascism you know, he-he wouldn't have done anything, you know, because he liked-he liked it here. He used to go to the States to see his-his sister all the time. You think they wouldda made him go in the States?

VDB: [laughs] No.

GDB: No way. They-they wouldn't even let my grandmother to go into the States at first, you know? Uh-uh on my mother's side, they wouldn't let her in here at [unclear].

VDB: [laughs]

GDB: We went there once, then after that she uh got like uh papers you know all that, she was able to go out to Detroit that day you know?

JP: What did your father say to you, that-the fact that you had enlisted in the Canadian army?

GDB: Is-

JP: That you were-you went to fight for the same government that-

GDB: Yeah.

JP: -that arrested him. Did he give you any comment on that afterwards? Did he-did he says, "Good, son." Did he say anything?

GDB: Oh, you mean my father?

JP: Yeah, to you.

GDB: No.

VDB: I doub-I doubt he would have said anything.

GDB: No.

JP: But did your father feel Canadian or Italian in your mind?

GDB: Well-

VDB: Oh, Canadian. Canadian.

JP: Why do you answer-why do you think he felt Canadian?

GDB: You know, I'll tell you something. My father, he was a great man, out of the house. In the house, he was another man. Okay? That's the way it is.

VDB: No, in the house he was Italian. So there, I can answer that. Definitely he was Italian in the house.

JP: What-what-how do you define that?

VDB: Because he spoke Italian mostly, uh when he spoke. And uh-he wouldn't say, "Pass this, or pass that." He would say it in Italian, [Italian phrase]. See?

JP: What else made him Italian in the house? Was there anything in his behaviour?

VDB: Well-

JP: -in the way he raised the children?

VDB: That's the way he was. He-I'm sure he married, and it's the wife that took care of the kids. Cause I read a story, like he-the book he's got [points to GDB] about life over there, and it seems to be the woman who was doing all the work. And doing everything in the house and the man would come in, the-the morning or at night, that's it.

GDB: Yeah, but the man brought-brought in the money.

VDB: Yeah.

GDB: [to VDB] The book I lent you, remember that book?

VDB: Yeah.

[VDB and GDB both laugh]

JP: And what made him Canadian, you father?

GDB: Sorry?

JP: what made your father Canadian?

VDB: Oh, it's Americanized, the song hits, hit parade, the music. The children, Adeline and Mary and Yolanda, they-they were singing A-American songs. It started, you know, like a brain washing.

GDB: Well, I don't remember when he became a citizen though.

VDB: Uh-uh-uh-

JP: Was he a Canadian citizen?

GDB: Way before time.

VDB: I don't remember though.

JP: [unclear].

GDB: I remember something about my mother. She was born here. Okay? She was born in Canada.

VDB: Yeah.

GDB: But, there's something that happened, and she kept telling the guy, "Look, I was born here." You know? So I-I don't know what the story was about the-nobody wanted to tell me.

JP: Was that when your father was interned?

GDB: Uh-

JP: Was that during the war?

GDB: No, no, no not that time. No. I mean, I shouldn't even be talking about it because I don't remember the time you know.

JP: So-

GDB: Uh-but I remember you know. One time, uh-my-my mother said, "Hey, I was born here, [unclear]." You know?

JP: Did your mother ever have any-suspect any reason as to why your father might have may have been interned? Did she have her own [unclear]?

GDB: She-she never said, no.

JP: Did she ever have any idea or-

GDB: No.

VDB: I don't know if it was the way of-you know like children look-you do whatever you want to do, and us, we-we talk-the husband and the wife and that's it. Cause I never heard any-anything about things going bad because of-my father was sitting down, he talked to us, whatever, I had to say-whatever he had to say in the morning you know. And he would look at me and the newspaper you know. [makes lecturing gesture]. Okay. And if he had a couple of seconds and there was nobody around he would say, "[Italian phrase]." And I'd say, "Yeah". And I'd say, "My report card is pretty good now." And he would say, "[Italian phrase]." [whistles and makes leaving gesture]. Out the door. He spoke too much.

JP: What should the Canadian government have done for your generation?

[BREAK]

TIME: 1:34:28.4

GDB: He was 80-

JP: Okay...

GDB: This man I don't know his name but he was 83 years old, and uh-and he said to the conservative man you know-at that time the conservatives were in power with the Mulroney, and he says, "The Italians don't want any money."

VDB: Oh, Layton.

GDB: Yeah, he said that to Layton. The father, not the one that's there now, that's his son. He said to him, he says uh, "The Italians they don't want any money here, all they want, is just an excuse eh, like you know a-a pardon or-or something like that you know, to say that they were not uh belligerent." You know? And, that's-that's it. Because I went to see him in Dorval, he had an office in Dorval. I told him, I said you know, "My mother was left with nine kids, you know." Ten with her, and no money coming in you know? It was a little store.

VDB: [sneezes]. Oh, sorry.

GDB: You know, my sister worked. "Well" he says, "That's the way things are." He says. That's why I didn't vote for conservative for quite a few votes after that you know?

JP: What do you think they should have done. How would it have-what should they have done?

GDB: Well, me, I think they should have-should have found them-found her a house...to live in. That's it. If they don't want to give more it's ok. But at least she had a house to live in, not-not to buy-not to give it to her no, she would have had to pay rent you know? But a house in Lachine you know? Cause she didn't want to move out of Lachine, and my-all my relatives were here. My grandmother, my aunts and all that, you know? And, she used to go out shopping with my mother-my grandmother she used to go to the market with her and everything you know? Well, that-that was gone you know?

JP: And what about afterwards, when this whole issue came up in the 80s-now it's kind of late but, what do you think should have been done to address you generation?

VDB: Well-

GDB: Well, I'm not-they way-I-I'm not going to beat around the bush. If they give 25,000 dollars to the Japanese, who tried to get into Kiska [?], you know up North there, to prolong the war you know, maybe something. Well, they could've give 25 thou-uh thousand dollars to uh-to each family.

JP: Hmm.

GDB: That way, the people could've bought themselves a house, or a deposit or something you know. But it-it would have made them feel good too you know? A pardon with it you know, a-a pardon-pardon with it.

VDB: Well, I have a-a-

GDB: And Polish too eh? Or no uh-Ukrainian.

VDB: Ukrainians.

VDB: No, it's unfortunate, there's uh-I have something written at home on uh-my brother in law uh-Mary-Mary-Al, he got 24-uh-25 thousand from the Italian government for being in the war.

GDB: Oh yeah.

VDB: Gerry-Gerry-Gerry never got 25 thousand dollars for being in the war.

GDB: And they-and they lost the war. [laughs]

JP: [unclear]

GDB: Yeah.

VDB: And I lost a-lost the-he would have worked-the fellow who worked at the store, uh-Gino, he was like 68 uh 69. He was working and I-he couldn't see himself not working because you know, he wanted to buy the wine uh-make wine and so on, so he needed money, extra money. So he was working, then all of a sudden, he gets a check for some 20 odd thousand dollars-

GDBL Who is he?

VDB: -cause he was in the army, in Italy. He didn't fight. He tol-I asked him, "Did you fight there?" "No." he said, "We didn't fight." My uh-my oth-other brother in law-not my other-Al, he-he was a pilot. Uh, I think he go shot down or something.

GDB: Well, he was a prisoner of war in-at the Greeks for four years.

VDB: Yeah.

GDB: He spoke fluent uh Greek.

VDB: So.

JP: What's the message that the kids should know? What's the message that you wanna pass on? What should be learned from this?

VDB: Uh-

JP: What's [unclear].

VDB: That's more overall, that's politic-politics.

JP: No, it-but from a-on a human level. What do we have to learn about this?

VDB: I think people should be-when it's uh-it's only one or two people-they'll protect them. Maybe, depending on how much people know about it. You know like uh, right now there's a girl that's uh-a little bit off. It's in the papers. I don't know if it's in the English paper but it's in the French paper. And one is being taken care of, but the other one isn't. This is what, this one's sick in the mind, and the other one's sick in the mind, but only that one's allowed to get something. Like the Italians should have been a certain amount money giving because of what I just said before about, they got a check, from Italy. This-this we're talking about the 80s you know? The war finished in '45. In Italy it finished in '43, so so many years alter they get a check for 25 thousand dollars. What about the guys who uh went to war here? You know? The didn't get anything. They started to get somebody to cut the grass in the front, and a little bit of cement here and there, here and uh cut the grass in the back too.

GDB: Oh, here?

VDB: Yeah.

JP: Do you think your voices have been heard?

VDB: No.

JP: Your voices. About this whole story of what's happened. Because, people have written about it, and there's been different things in newspapers and people have talked about this issue. Do you think your personal voices have been heard? Like what –the things that have been on your mind-

VDB: No, it hasn't-it hasn't.

JP: -have they been heard have you been silenced?

VDB: It hasn't been heard. That's why I'm writing this about this 25 thousand being given and I think the government. I'm gonna-I'm gonna send this to the newspapers, but also to the uh radio, especially uh Radio Canada.

GDB: You see-you think like now, today uh every time you hear-like the newspaper we get there and all that? You never hear about Italians at Ville au Nord, or Lachine, even NDG which is, there's lots of them. And they always talk about Sainte-Leonard you know? It's-

JP: How does that make you feel?

GDB: I don't feel-make me-don't feel good, I tell you the truth, you know. Because, uh-I have to go to-like the other day, uh-what's his name that-from the Liberal party? He had a meeting in Sainte-Leonard-

TIME: 1:41:30.3

VDB: Ignatieff.

GDB: Uh-[to VDB] Hey?

VDB: Ignatieff.

GDB: Yeah. And I said Saint-Leonard, why doesn't he come to the West Island or something you know? We have to go all the way there, just for-just for you know so. It's a long way Sainte-Leonard you know, and the traffic. Oh you know.

JP: And as-and as far as all this, it's like-like if they decided for example. Uh, we're gonna put up a memorial to the men that were interned during the Second World War. Where should they put something like that?

GDB: Uh-

VDB: Uh-

JP: Would that-or would that even satisfy you-

VDB: It's gonna go-

JP: -to see something with your name, your dad's name on it, would that satisfy you?

VDB: It'll go to Sainte-Leonard anyway so uh-there-there gonna-

JP: But how would you feel about that?

GDB: W-w-w-

VDB: That, I think there should be more than one. Because Lachine, there was seven, supposed to be seven, but-in your paper I think there's only four or five. Oh no, there should be around seven anyway. Uh-who were uh in prison. And uh-

GDB: They-

VDB: -we should-we should get something. Each uh city should have a memorial, next to city hall or something you know?

JP: Would that make you feel better?

GDB: Well uh-

VDB: In a way yeah.

GDB: I don't think it would have to be a government to do that, it would be the people themselves you know. Like here, we have one eh? For the soldiers of 1914. You know, at the end of the street over there.

JP: Is that-

GDB: And-and made out of copper, so somebody came at night, and he stole all the copper. [laughs]. You know?

JP: Do you think-do you have faith in the-with the Italian community here be able to-do you think it's their responsibility too to do something.

GDB: Well, if they can build a church, the-the-the need 600 thousand dollars this church. If they could built the church for 600 dollars they could do a little plaque you know. I don't belong to that church, I being to the Irish church you know. But I-I would be willing to pay my share you know.

JP: And what else-

VDB: No, it's a good idea, put in in the ch-in the Italian church.

GDB: Yeah.

VDB: Yeah.

JP: What about um-

GDB: Oh yeah, oh yeah. That's -you mean to build the thing at the church.

VDB: Sure, yeah.

GDB: That would be good.

VDB: And some money from the government to pay for -

GDB: No-no no, do it ourselves, we don't need to be-we don't need them. [laughs]

VDB: Yeah, it's better one way.

JP: How do you feel that in the history books, these stories-

VDB: Hey?

JP: -in the history books, that the kind read, like your grandkids read, or that you-you even pick up. Cause I know you do a lot of-you like doing research.

VDB: Uh huh.

JP: Do you-you don't see the story about the interns about the Italians begin interned and all that. How does that make you feel?

VDB: Uh-not too much. Not too much writing on them.

JP: So uh how does that-how does that react, you know what I'm saying like-your kids they go to school-the kid-the grandkids go to school. They don't come home and they say, "Oh, you know, I read about this, this was your story wasn't it?" Are they asking about it-

VDB: No, no.

JP: They're not learning about this in schools.

VDB: No, no.

GDB: Well, I don't know.

JP: Do you think it's important for this story to get taught in schools?

VDB: From what I've heard, no.

GDB: My kids, I told them, "You guys are lucky." You know? Because I says, "I-I went to the war ok?" "You didn't go, and now your children didn't go." They're-they're-my grandchildren are 31 years old, 30 years old. They-they've never been called to go to the army. I says, "You're lucky." You know?

JP: Do you tell these stories to your grandkids?

GDB: Oh, sure. Oh yeah. Hey. One of them is a policeman in the [unclear]. You know? He was here this week. Uh, we talk about those things. Sure, we don't hide nothing.

VDB: Oh, we're supposed to go the summer though to Petawawa.

GDB: Yeah?

VDB: We're organize uh-we're gonna have even French Canadians come with us.

GDB: There was a lot of French Canadians there too you know.

GDB: Well, uh I-I see in the list.

JP: Did I miss anything, is there anything else that you want to add?

VDB: Oh there's-

JP: Did I miss anything in our discussion?

VDB: Well, because my father was in a-a concentration camp. Uh, somehow I worked harder in school uh, if we were in sports, I had to be the best. Ah no we know we played all kinds of sports, imaginable. Soccer, football, with uh stockings filled up with other stockings. And then, we'd-you'd throw-but baseball and softball, we won the championship of the island of Montreal. It's in my writing, in one of my pap-we won the championship at Parque Jarry. And they uh-every time I pass by there on Sainte-Lawrence I see the park there, and I say, "Hey, remember?"

JP: How do you think your life would have been if your father hadn't been interned?

GDB: Ah.

JP: If your father had not been interned-

GDB: Yeah.

JP: How do you think your fa-your-your life would have been.

VDB: Www-[gives thumbs up]. It would have gone up.

GDB: Personally, I would have finished my schooling. You know? Who knows what would have happened after, but uh-

VDB: Well, mum said that he was gonna buy the building.

GDB: [to VDB] There?

VDB: That I remember. She said that he was gonna buy the building.

GDB: Well-he wanted me to go partner with him, but I didn't have any money. Uh, you know, I just came out of the army [laughs]. I came in uh July, and then I worked six months, uh at the tavern, uh and then all of a sudden he gets the news that he didn't get the money so I quit right away uh, there's no future being behind a bar, that's for sure.

VDB: Yeah.

GDB: I see one guy die in front of me.

VDB: Hmmph.

GDB: Yeah.

VDB: Yeah, the bars yeah.

GDB: Yeah, at the bar. The guy was ordering a beer, and uh-he went like this [sways from side to side] all of a sudden, boom.

JP: How about you Victor, how would you have liked-would you have uh become a tailor?

VDB: Oh no no no. I was in research, definitely research. I even have my books at home on horticulture, I wanted to make a uh a scientific approach also see the words are all gone, because I don't uh-I don't look at the books anymore, but it's um, it's a book about the smallest

part of what's in the ground you know? So when you're-whatever's there you have to know what it is, and then from then on, you cultivate according to whatever's in the ground. You don't put in uh-cucumbers when there's very dry soil and down 10 feet is still dry. So you have to oh-I read all those things. I got the books on-every part of and I-if I wouldn't have had that accident when I was 24, my spleen was taken out. Uh, uh possibly-I was afraid that I wasn't going to be strong enough, but I found out later, I was lifting rocks 50 pounds, I think I-and mixing cement and doing all kinds of work when I was in my thirties. Didn't bother me, so it had nothing-if not I would have a farm. I almost bought one, past Granby. A hundred and eighty acres for 4 thousand dollars.

HD: Oh yeah, I saw that tone.

VDB: I didn't-I didn't know that you could get to farm for very cheap amount. Not-not-not for the farm itself, but I mean for the deposit. If not, I would be-I would be a farmer today. But experimental farmer.

JP: Oh.

VDB: It's different from uh the farm. Because the farms right now, they're having a lot of trouble. Because they kids don't want to learn and all this you know?

JP: What did your father do when he came back from the war?

GDB: What did he do?

JP: [unclear]

GDB: He-he went back to his trade. Uh-barbering.

JP: What kind of work did he do after? He did the same work.

GDB: Oh barber.

VDB: Barber.

GDB: Barber. Yeah, oh yeah. At the corner.

JP: No longer a shopkeeper, that was no longer.

GDB: No, no.

JP: Just barber.

VDB: He worked for somebody uh not far away from the house. Not far away from that church on uh-if you were standing in front of the church you could see where he was working uh-cause Saint James and Sainte Antoine came together, there was the first house was there right there.

GDB: But he was better off the second one. Inspector [?] and Notre Dame. There he had pret-pretty good clientele.

VDB: Yeah.

[BREAK]

TIME: 1:50:49.6

JP: -listen.

GDB: Although probably that, he had, in those years you know. It-a-a-a chance to-you know. That's about it you know.

VDB: Uh to me, the uh-when they took my father away, one of the most important things was uh, I was out of the house. And when I went downstairs with my friends, it was uh to build ourselves you know. We weren't bums, but there was a lot of bums around Sainte-Henri then. But, we never talked to them. We never you know. They-they-well as a matter of fact one time we were uh, we went up the hill, and we got into one of the box cars-not the box cars, the trains themselves, and we took the toilet paper and we made a fire and we cooked some uh-sausages you know. And uh, but the guys from the other gang came at the same time, but they went into the-to the, and they stole the uh the mail. So the next-about two-three days later, the police come into-into the-come into the school and uh our class. They-well it must have been all the classes but uh they heard that there was an uh Italian guy. And uh so he says, "[Italian phrase]." "Okay, you're going in." And somehow, my shyness disappeared and I said, "Well we went up there for exactly what I told you before, you know we went there-we picked up newspaper and we cook sausages." But he says, "Somebody did something." Well-I s-I said, "I don't know." And I was only what, 11-12, maybe not. Around 12 anyway, and uh-the other guys got arrested, the other kids. So in other words we were honest people, but-I-but to get up on the hill-to do the work there, we had to be strong. We did housing, we got some planks together with-we did-we built shacks, uh we played baseball, softball, and we won championships, we ran around, and when there was nothing to do,no-no game on, we made a game. We used to make a circle in the ground, and then you'd get uh-my mother would have found out, she would have killed me. Uh, we took the broom, you-you cut a piece of the broom

around this long [measures around 2 feet with his hands] and you file it till it gets pointy, then you take a stick about this long [measures around half a foot] and you file both sides. So you put it in the ground, maybe 20 feet from uh-from that circle. But the circle, there's a good line deep line right around, cause it could get stuck in there and you're supposed to do that. Not supposed to-you don't want to get in there, And used to put it on the ground, and then the point used to, and then hit it. And it used to fly. You'd make it fly into-into the round part. You know? It was amazing what we had to do. How much we, what came out of it you know. Like, keep thinking of things to do. Another one was uh you stuck a-in a-in a board you took uh- again, a broomstick. You stick it inside-uh we had rocks anyway, we stuck it in there, and then there was a gang on one side and a gang on the other side. And the gang on this side [gestures to his right] tries to grab the stick. But on the stick there was a flag. So you had to grab the flag with the stick and bring it back at their own. But the guys n that side [gestures to his left], they were defense, they were on defense. So they had to stop the people from taking the flag. So I mean, you say, my fathers in the concentration camp, but you know, we're enjoying ourselves. So, you know, one way, it's the freedom, it was my sisters and my brothers working, and eventually there was some money coming in. Of course all these things were done in the summer eh? So, we also had a- [to GDB] did we have a garden? Yeah, we had a garden, one year. My father made me make holes, we put the tomato plants in [hits hands together] and that's it.

JP: Tell us something you could ask your dad about this. What would you ask him?

VDB: Oh, about the internment.

JP: Like, if you could ask your father anything, you would ask him about the internment.

VDB: Oh yeah. I would like to know what happened.

JP: What would you like to know that you never found out?

VDB: Well-

GDB: Maybe uh-either ourselves or our mother could have encouraged us to write him a letter, you know. We never wrote him a letter-

VDB: Yeah.

GDB: -when he was in camp.

VDB: Yeah, that a-that's a good thing also we didn't do.

GDB: Uh-we never thought about it, you know. Because uh, the reason I was telling you before. Outside was ok, but inside was another story. You know? But I imagine, if I would have wrote a letter, it would have been good you know. For the morale of us and-and him you know.

JP: And what would you want to know from the government about this whole thing today? What's missing, wha-what questions do you have unanswered?

VDB: Well, I think we should get a check from the government.

GDB: [laughs]

VDB: We should get a check like my brother in law got from Italy.

JP: And what answers-

VDB: Forty years later. He got a check, what for eh? He killed Canadians, possibly, in Italy. But of course he was in the-he got caught right way, but still, he was in the army. And he fought Canadians.

GDB: But the only reason he got the check was because he was a prisoner of war.

VDB: No, there were-they were soldiers.

GDB: No, no, no because they-there's a guy from Sault Ste. Marie, uh his name is Ruggiero. And he said to me, he says-he was a prisoner too in uh in Greece you know? Four-him too it was four years, and he got that check 25 thousand.

VDB: Yeah, cause he was in the army. But the Gino, he went two years in the army, and he-he never went to war.

GDB: Gi-Gino?

VDB: Gino the one who worked at the store. He never-he got tw-20 some odd thousand dollars too.

GDB: Oh.

JP: If the archive of Canada could just open up, and people could ask you-

[BREAK]

JP: -if you ask questions to the government, they will answer it straightforward about your father, what would that question be? [to videographer] Are we recording? Okay.

VDB: Well, the story of what went on in the internment camp you know?

JP: What would it be for you?

GDB: Well, money [laughs]

JP: I'm good, unless there's anything else that you.

GDB: Not money would be separated three-three times you know? It's too bad that this didn't come out 10-15 years ago. We had Adeline, and you know, and others. Mary [laughs].

VDB: Yeah, if Mary had been here, we wouldn't have been able to talk.

GDB: That's right. [laughs]

VDB: Mary uh Mary uh was uh, she-she never lost her funny part.

GDB: She had a lot of dirty stories though. Oh when she-

JP: This is your older sister right?

VDB: [nods].

GDB: When she started talking dirty stories I used to walk out. After one or two, that's it, then bye bye. She worked at uh at the-at the Rolly [?] products there.

VDB: The Rolly[?].

GDB: That's where all the stories came from.

VDB: I still have Rolly [?] products at home.

GDB: Me too, I got one left.

VDB: From the-

JP: We're good. Is that ok?

VDB: The salon-yep.

GDB: Perfect.

JP: Did you say everything you wanted to say?

VDB: Yeah.

GDB: Oh, it's uh-

JP: Oh, thank you so much. Ok.



*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

[End of interview]