

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

**DATE OF INTERVIEW:** September 14, 2011

**LOCATION OF INTERVIEW:** Thunder Bay, ON

**NAME OF INTERVIEWEE:** Joseph Brescia

**NAME OF INTERVIEWER:** John Potestio

**NAME OF VIDEOGRAPHER:** Maverick Entertainment

**TRANSCRIBED BY:** Louanne Aspillaga

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**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**

In this follow up interview, Genero Joseph (Joe) Brescia confirms the names of his family; his parents were Vincent Brescia and Maria Giuseppina Brescia of Grimaldi, Cozenza, Italy, and his sister was Helen Brescia. Joe also clarifies several things such as his father's political views and empathy towards the "little guy" of the working class. Joe also explains a bit more about his duties while serving in the Canadian Army and stationed at Nova Scotia.

**INTERVIEW**

**JB: Joseph Brescia, interviewee**

**JP: John Potestio, interviewer**

**ME: Maverick Entertainment, videographer**

[Title screen]

[Fades in at 0:00:11.8]

JP: This is uh John Potestio doing a follow up interview with Mr. Joseph Brescia at his home at 94 Rupert Street, Thunder Bay on September 14, 2011. Joe uh, this is uh, we talked about this before a little bit is uh--the people in Toronto are doing this project, they're interested in a few--a bit more information in what you gave me before. So I have a series of questions here and uh, please respond to them in your--the best of your ability. I'll start with the first one then, uh what were your father's and mother's names?

JB: Well my father's name was Vincent Brescia. My mother's name was - could have been hyphenated uh - Maria Jos--Josephine. Mary Joseph I guess in English [Unclear]--

JP: --Maria, Maria Giuseppina likely--

JB: --Yeah--

JP: --Okay. And where were they born?

JB: Born--both of them were born in Grimaldi, Cozenza.

JP: Okay.

JB: Italy.

JP: And uh, could you tell us uh the names of, of your own siblings?

JB: Well uh, yes, uh...I was married in 1945 and we had uh a year la--a year later, we had uh, our oldest boy. I have five boys--

JP: --Hmmm mmm--

JB: --and one girl.

JP: --Hmmm mmm--

JB: --The girl, she was the second oldest.

JP: [Says faintly] Okay.

JB: And the rest were down--

JP: --Okay--

JB: --through the fifth and sixth.

JP: Yup. But you also had brothers and sisters yourself?

JB: I had one sister and I'm the only boy in the family.

JP: Oh. And what was your sister's name?

JB: Helen Berrera [?]

JP: Helen, yes of course. Okay...Could you uh, describe or tell us about, a little bit about your father's political views?

JB: ...Well I don't know if I can describe his political views. But all I--what I remembered strongly about him was that he always interested in the little guy when he worked, because he was a little guy himself. And if he can help any little guy, he did in his various ways helping them physically or whatever. Building and so on, so forth. And uh, that was his main goal - the little guy on the street.

JP: Uh, was he, um did he ever talk politics in the house? Like uh, uh his children or uh his wife--

JB: --Not--

JP: --Not particularly--

JB: --Not very much. No. Not very much politics at all in the house.

JP: But you were saying that some of his social activities were with his uh friends, playing cards and so on but--

JB: --On weekends the families would get together--

JP: --Yup--

JB: --We as youngsters would listen to the radio and hockey games and the ladies would be in the kitchen--

JP: --Hmmm mmm--

JB: --cooking up dinner. And the men would be playing cards and probably drinking beer with it. So that was a game they played. That's the way they spent--

JP: --Yeah--

JB: --their weekends and of course you could--it was like a hot stove league--

JP: --[Chuckles] Sure.

JB: --You hear arguments in all directions.

JP: Yes. Y--you told me uh, at another time that uh your father was a little concerned about the fact that uh, uh you have uh--you had to have a Scottish last name in order to get uh, a job here in Port Arthur. Could you tell us a little bit more about that uh?

JB: Well when I grew up, I was fairly young when I came here. I was about two years old when I uh got to Canada from Italy. And uh, but as I, as a youngster going to grade school, uh there was a saying that was quite true that if you weren't a Mc or a Mac, it was pretty tough to get a job.

JP: Hmmm mmm.

JB: And that's what parents would talk about too. It was uh--that's the way things were.

JP: Hmmm mmm.

JB: All th--all the immigrants were from...Italy area, Yugoslavia, and Slovakia and all those places.

JP: Hmmm.

JB: They were foreigners here and they were--they had to work on extra gangs if they can get on.

JP: Hmmm mmm.

JB: And it was always heavy, heavy--

JP: --Yeah--

JB: --labour. And that was the little guy.

JP: Right. And you also mentioned that your father disliked the idea of uh bringing the bosses uh some uh--

JB: --[Laughs]--

JP: --things that are to get in his good graces, uh, you want to comment on that as well?

JB: Well he always said that [Clears throat] the sun would never come up if he had to bring a bottle of wine, or a dozen eggs, or a--

JP: --Hmmm mmm--

JB: --chicken to the foreman on the--so that he can keep his job. He didn't believe in that at all and he, he, he made, he made his point.

JP: Yeah, but there were obviously people at the time who did do that in order to--

JB: --Oh yes! In order to keep job, a lot of these people were bringing chickens and--

JP: --Hmmm--

JB: --eggs and wine for the boss and all this kind of stuff--

JP: --Sure--

JB: --I think some of that still goes on.

JP: Hmmm mmm. Hmmm mmm. Okay, now as far as you know, was your father ever engaged in any anti-fascit--anti-fascist activities?

JB: Not, not really--

JP: --Nothing.

JB: Nothing that uh, outside their, their little hot stove leagues, there was not much else.

JP: Yeah.

JB: He just didn't like Mussolini.

[0:05:21.5]

JP: And did he ever give any reasons why he did not like Mussolini?--

JB: --Well--

JP: --Did he ever talk about that?

JB: He didn't talk about it. It was his uh, uh--he didn't, he didn't seem to like the...the way the politics and the things were re--running in Italy where at--He didn't like him because he joined the Germans to fight...the uh Bri--the British.

JP: Hmmm mmm.

JB: And the Canadians too. But uh, that was his reason, he wasn't very happy with that fellow.

JP: Okay. Uh, do you remember whether your father ever subscribed to any anti-fascist publications, newspapers--

JB: --No--

JP: --magazines? [Unclear]--

JB: He wasn't that big a reader.

JP: Okay, okay. Uh do you have any personal knowledge of any fascists or anti--anti-fascist activities in Port Arthur? You personally do you rem--



JB: --No, I, I have--I was not involved with any of this kind of stuff.

JP: Hmmmm mmm. Okay--

JB: --I stayed out of politics.

JP: Okay. Was there a reason why you stayed out of politics? It wasn't--

JB: --I didn't care for it.

JP: You didn't care for it yeah. Okay.

JB: A lot of it was very difficult to believe that these things would happen. But--

JP: Hmmmm mmm.

JB: I wasn't interested in taking part.

JP: Okay. Um, let's move on then. Uh, Joe do you know why you were declared an enemy alien?

JB: Well that's a stupid question, because uh if you were born an Italian in Italy uh, I think they gave you the, they gave you a certificate of [Chuckles] of being an alien. And uh we had to report to the Mounties once a month and they signed their little initials on it. And...

JP: And how did you feel about that, were declared an enemy alien just because you were born in Italy?

JB: Well the difficult--the difficulty in, in swallowing all that, was if I was good enough to be uh called to the army and given a Canadian uniform, which I enjoyed, aah, and yet I'm called, I was called an alien.

JP: Hmmm mmm. Yes, very good point, yes. Okay, um did you have to carry your Certificate of Parole at all times, on, on your person?

JB: I don't recall when it--I was still living in town, before, before I got into the army. Uh, I don't think I carried it every day. But in the army, I had it with me in my barrack box all the time.

JP: All the time. Okay. And uh, I have uh abou--wha--uh, I think it's the last question Joe. Uh, which wartime experiences stick out in your mind the most?

JB: [Pause] That's uh, that's a hard question. Um.

JP: Alright, you can take your time to see if--What do you remember the most about your wartime experiences?

JB: Well I, I never, never did get overseas.

JP: Hmmm mmm.

JB: So that wasn't much uh--Any experiences I had was to defending the, the harbour, the Sydney harbour from German submarines and stuff like that. Uh, it was an interesting work. We had all the equipment, the radios, and the lights, and the lamps, and everything and the guns uh situa--to protect the harbours in--

JP: --Right--

JB: --Canada. Which I enjoyed.

JP: Hmmm mmm.

JB: And uh, played a little hockey while I was there, the army hockey teams.

JP: Okay.

JB: And uh, it was uh--I think it was an excellent experience.

JP: So eh, uh, I guess you en--uh. Let me ask you this then, did the war experiences uh help you in any way, later on uh, once uh, once things were normal again?

JB: I don't know whether they helped me or not, but it sure, it, it sure chang--it changed my--some of my thinking.

JP: Hmmm mmmm.

JB: Uh, things had to be a little different of course. And uh, uh I thought I managed that quite well. We came out and uh, went back to school.

JP: Hmmm mmm.

JB: Took courses at universities and stuff like that. That was all--all that was available.

JP: Was uh--

JB: --[Unclear]--

JP: --Was uh made it--uh, uh going to school or university, was that because you got uh, uh served in the Canadian army--

JB: --No—

JP: --or would you have done that anyway?

JB: No, I would have done that anyway.

JP: Yes, okay.

JB: No.

JP: Good Joe. Thank you very much.

[Fades out at 0:09:52.4]

**[End of interview]**