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NAME OF INTERVIEWEE: Joseph Mastromonaco

NAME OF INTERVIEWER: Joyce Pillarella

NAME OF VIDEOGRAPHER: Adriana Rinaldi

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

KEYWORDS/TAGS

Mastromonaco; Joseph Mastromonaco; Giovanni Mastromonaco; Saint-Henri; Montreal; Italian; Italian-Canadian; immigrant; Italian immigrant; Mussolini; Hitler; Fascist Party; Fascio; War; RCMP; Internment; Internee; Petawawa; Stuttering; Stutter; Festa; Feast; Procession; ESL; education

ABSTRACT

Joseph Mastromonaco was a child during the Second World War living in Montreal's working-class area of Saint-Henri. His father, Giovanni Mastromonaco, born in Italy, was one of the Italians interned from that city. He describes the neighbourhood; the Italian community and its relationship with other ethnic groups; his childhood, including some struggles with stuttering; and the emotional consequences of his father's absence during his early formative years. Some reference is made to the role of the Catholic Church and the early work of immigrants as "fornachaires" – those who kept the furnace and grounds of the wealthy residents of Westmount. He also describes his understanding of the function of the Fascist Party and the Sons of Italy, and the perception of Mussolini by the Italians of Montreal and Saint-Henri. He describes the day the Royal Canadian Mounted Police (RCMP) arrested his father in their home,

and the efforts of his mother to learn of her husband's whereabouts, including a frustrating experience with a Liberal aide, and later trips to Petawawa.

INTERVIEW

JM: Joseph Mastromonaco, interviewee

JP: Joyce Pillarella, interviewer

[Title screen]

[Fades in at 00:00:10]

JP: Ok. Um, my name is Joyce Pillarella and I'm here with Joe Mastromonaco. Today is Thursday, June ...

JM: 16th.

JP: 16th [laughs]. Thank you Joe, 2011, and we're at your house, and we're going to start uh our conversation.

JM: Very good.

JP: So, I mean, let's talk first...do you want to tell me about uh where you were born and where you grew up?

JM: I was born in Saint-Henri and ...

JP: What year?

JM: 1935.

JP: OK.

JM: December the 30th.

JP: And your father and your mother they came from Italy or ...

JM: My father came from Italy but my mother was born in Montreal.

JP: OK. Your mother was Italian-Canadian or ...?

JM: [Nods] Italian-Canadian.

JP: And your father where did he come from?

JM: Provvidenti, Campobasso.

JP: Ok. And how did he end up in Saint-Henri, do you know? Like what type of work was he doing?

JM: Well, when he first came over he spent four years in Cleveland, Ohio, and then he came to Montreal, and he started working as a landscape gardener. In those days it was called in Italian a *fornachaire*. They used to take care of furnaces and jackheaters[?], meaning they had to go to work 365 days of the year.

JP: And is there a reason he settled in Saint-Henri?

JM: Because uh there was other people from la Provvidenti that he knew and it seemed like everybody from that area settled in Saint-Henri. That was the only reason.

JP: Alright, and um so your father was doing this work 365 days a year [laughs].

JM: Yes.

JP: And what else do you remember growing up from your childhood? Like tell me about what street did you live on--what was your home like--street what was it like?

JM: We lived on Walnut Street in Saint-Henri where mostly--on one side of the street was all Italians and on the other side of the street was French Canadians.

JP: And so--and who were your friends? Was it the Italians and the French?

JM: Both. That we got along with both but up to the age of five...uh five, six years old we only spoke Italian, French. We did not speak any English up to the age of six.

JP: No, eh.

JM: No.

JP: Why?

JM: Well because all our French friends, that we associated with the French. We did not associate with the English-speaking, at that time, because there was nobody English in our area.

JP: Yah, Saint-Henri that's right.

JM: And at the age of uh five, six, my mother went to register me at the French parish, Sainte Elisabeth du Portugal, since it was only about 50 yards away from the house. But we were told no Italians here. The Italians have to register at St. Thomas Aquinas, one mile away.

JP: In Pointe-Saint-Charles?

JM: No in Saint-Henri.

JP: Oh in Saint-Henri.

JM: Yah. Yah, in Saint-Henri.

JP: And so you were--you had to go to English school because [unclear]--

JM: We had to--we had no choice. They did not want us.

JP: So that meant changing--a whole, getting a whole new group of friends...

JM: No not that we had [unclear]--they were just added but it meant that we had to learn the English language. We never spoke English before and maybe it's a coincidence or maybe we should ask a psychiatrist but it happened that most of the Italian-Canadian kids who were brought up like this and then went to English school were stutterers. And as the years went by we grew out of it, because out of my friends, a good seven of us, including me, were very bad stutterers [smiling].

JP: Really?

JM: Yes. Maybe it affected some and some it did not affect.

JP: Hmm... Uh, at home what did you speak?

JM: We spoke Italian and then English.

JP: Cause your father worked in what language?

JM: My father worked in English. All his clients were, were uh Jewish or the elite Anglo-Saxons.

JP: So at home you spoke Italian--

JM: Yah.

JP: ...on the street you spoke French --

JM: French.

JP: Or...Cause with your Italian friends, what did you speak with them?

JM: With them? We spoke French.

JP: Amongst yourselves?

JM: Among the uh, among the children.

JP: And uh your first memories that you had--I'm not putting it to an uh age, but what did you grow up feeling like? Did you grow up feeling Italian? Did you grow up feeling Canadian?

[TIME: 5:02]

JM: No. We grew up feeling Italian because everything was Italian around the house.

JP: Even though you lived in a French neighbourhood --

JM: That's right. Everything was Italian and the, the Italians that lived on our street, which was a dead-end street, they had to adjust to us...and so that we spoke French but they more or less followed us around.

JP: And what else made it Italian? That, that little...cause I know that area that you're talking about--

JM: Yes.

JP: It was almost like a little enclave ...

JM: That's right.

JP: Right...cause you were separated by ...

JM: Because the Italians ...

JP: [Unclear] and the train pass ...

JM: That's right...that's right. The Italians always stuck together like when we had to go to school in the morning, we'd uh, we'd all gather at the corner of Cazalais and Walnut - 30, 40 of us – and walked all the way down Saint Antoine[?] Street up to Du Couvent, that where St Thomas Aquinas school was, and like this. We, we were not friends, we were family.

JP: That really brought a lot of strong uh...

JM: It still...

JP: [Unclear]

JM: It does. It did and it does, and just to show you, today, today at my age, 75, I still have the same friends that I see, three times a week playing golf, and we also go to Florida, for two months all together.

JP: So you grew up with these very strong ties in the neighbourhood to the other Italian families. As kids you all went to the same school, you were kinda ostracized for your French and then that actually added to this whole idea of this, you walking from where you live to De Couvent ...

JM: We eventually started to associate with the French because at Parc Vaillant they had hockey games, baseball teams, softball teams, football teams, so we played on the same team as the French-Canadians.

JP: Right. So, it was just a way of socializing in the neighbourhood on these teams...

JM: That's right.

JP: What else in your childhood do you remember that made you feel Italian?

JM: Ah well uh the way that uh each family was so close, and the way most of all, Thursday and Sunday pasta, you better be there [laughs]. So this added to the, uh, to the culture. And how each family, ey, most of us, our neighbours lived in either to the right or to the left, were always

the mid-wife to our birth. The older ones were born at home, not at a hospital. So this brought the families, look at the uh, very close. Like one was mid-wife, and because she was a mid-wife, she became the *comare*.

JP: Right. And what about the church? What role did the church have in Saint-Henri in bringing the Italians together?

JM: None whatsoever.

JP: No, eh?

JM: No. In fact, they caused animosity.

JP: Because, because ... [unclear]?

JM: Because they did not want the Italians in the French-Canadian churches.

JP: Ok. We're talking like Sainte Elisabeth?

JM: [Nods head] Sainte Elisabeth du Portugal.

JP: Ok they didn't want the Italians.

JM: [Shaking head] No.

JP: Did they do like a *masse du Italiens* at least?

JM: Never. Never.

JP: Not even?

JM: There was no Italian mass [shaking head], only a French mass. So we had to go to mass at St. Thomas Aquinas.

JP: And they had an Italian mass?

JM: No. They didn't. Just English.

JP: Just English.

JM: Nobody had an Italian mass in Saint-Henri at the time. Much later, maybe they did something at uh Sainte Elisabeth du Portugal.

JP: As a child, do you remember any processions: the Sant' Antonio, the--

JM: Sant', Sant'Emedio.

JP: Oh. Sant'Emedio.

JM: Madonna Della Libera. I could tell you a very funny incident with these because if you know Sant'Emidio was the patron saint of the Marchigians[?]. La Madonna Della Libera was the patron saint of the Campobassi, and the Campobassi were all gardeners, landscapers. So when they made the Italian feast, both together, the float with Sant'Emedio never had any flowers but the float with La Madonna della Libera had flowers for everybody [laughing makes wide, open gestures with arms].

JP: [Laughing] So the Campobassans[?] looked good?

JM: [Laughing] Oh yah. And they didn't help the Marchigian[?] with their float. It was quite fun yah.

JP: But it is interesting though that the sense of regional identity was still strong.

[TIME: 9:59]

JM. Oh yes. Yes. Yes. On, on Walnut Street the night before the uh the Italian feast, which was on a Sunday, they would all--everybody would gather on the whole street, and everybody would try on their costumes of Sante Gabriel and the other ones and everybody would have a nice time. There would be music. Gentile and his band would come down and they would play all night and they would salute the organizer of the feast, Mr. Mancini, and others. And, uh that, that --we'd have a good time and uh ...

JP: But the feasts were organized in conjunction with which church?

JM: Sainte Elisabeth du Portugal.

JP: Even..., but oh, this was years later right?

JM: No, no, it's still ... way back then.

JP: But they allowed it even though it was Italian?

JM: Oh they allowed it, as long as they got their contribution, their cut [laughing].

JP: Where--I guess...um...I'm trying to understand or to get a picture of what it was like in Saint-Henri around the time because the uh the pivotal year would have been 1940 right and you're too young to--so, to, to explain to me perhaps what it was like before 1940 in terms of what it meant to be Italian in Saint-Henri before 1940. How was it expressed...before and how was it expressed after--?

JM: My grandfather from Abruzz' [?], my mother's dad, came over from Abruzz' [?], and he was self-educated, and he became a policeman for the CNR and he was in charge of Turcotte Yards during Prohibition and I was told that since he was so...a policeman and in those days the French would not permit the Italian to walk on the sidewalk. My grandfather was one that would not accept something like that [shaking head]. In fact, he told them to walk on the street and he made the Italians walk on the sidewalk [pointing with his hand]. This is the stories I heard from other people.

JP: Really. He stopped. Because... I know a lot of men, they used to say "*circuler, circuler*". The policeman would, came by and tell them that --

JM: But, but my grandfather would not bend to the French. And he uh--that he was self-educated, and he had quite a job during the Prohibition days. He was in charge, as I say, of the Turcotte Yards, where all of the liquor was coming in.

JP: That was... yah that was right--that was in your backyard?

JM: That's exactly it. That's exactly it.

JP: That was an important uh--

JM: That was a very important--

JP: ...distribution point.

JM: Oh yes, oh yes. And the Italians in those days, more or less, I heard, and even in my time, the early years, we had to fight for everything.

JP: In what sense? Like give me an example.

JM: If we, we had baseball teams and hockey teams, and other areas were fully equipped by someone sponsoring them. Us from Saint-Henri, nobody sponsored us. So I think we grew up with a chip on our shoulder. Looking at the other one, having all this beautiful...that equipment...and we had nothing. Oh, it would lead to a fight, many fights [laughs].

JP: How did you uh establish your turf? How did the Italians establish their turf in a French neighbourhood like Saint-Henri, and a tough neighbourhood, tough working-class neighbourhood?

JM: Well, we beat them up [laughs]. It's that simple. Because, not because that we were stronger than them or uh heavier than them but just because we stuck together. If you touched one Italian, well you had 40 after you. So that made us tough. Where the other ones, French or English, did not stick together.

JP: Yah. It was the power of the group.

JM: It was a group, you know. And just the close ties, each family [hand gestures showing a circle].

JP: Where do you think the Italian kids learned that from?

JM: Oh I think they more or less lived it, more than uh learned it. Because in those days, uh, just I'll give you an example, like my mother, I could never go into, into the house and tell her that someone beat me up, because I knew she'd beat me up [laughs]. So you more or less go defend yourself [points]. And it--you grew up taking care of yourself.

[TIME: 14:48]

JP: Did you ever hear stories of what it was like before, in, in terms of Italians, because leading up to World War 2, the Italians uh in many parts of Montreal were very um, uh, how to say very open about their uh their *italianità*, not many, but their you know the *fascios* and the uh the, uh the bands that used to go through the marches with the black shirts--

JM: Well yes.

JP: Have you--did you hear any stories about that?

JM: I heard the stories. That the French did not like this, but uh, but then they more or less accepted it because it was--if there was a band everybody joined in, everybody liked to hear music, so the French joined in with us after awhile. At the beginning, no, they wouldn't, they

more or less wanted to, but they never had these things. They never had any bands...they never had--like their Saint Jean Baptiste, it wasn't--nobody ever celebrated it then. Only later on this came in.

JP: Um. What about at school...

JM: Yes.

JP: Tell me what it was like in school with the kids. Did there, were there kids that had to um...

JM: Well at our school that we associated more with the Irish because from the Burgundy area came to St. Thomas, from the Atwater area they came to St. Thomas and we got along very good with the Irish. You know people say that we are both the same. We're both nuts [laughs]. And uh, that we had no problem with the Irish. And you know that when we played sports and if we had to go play in Pointe-Saint-Charles, we found out that they were just like the Italians because they had a tough time and they had to fight for their turf like we did. And uh that we were more or less the same.

JP: And um, what about other--like what were--what were your boundaries--would have been as a kid. Where did you go up to in terms of the neighbourhood?

JM: Well. I'm glad you asked me that. If you're familiar De Courcelles and the Glen, there's a little tunnel over there [hand gesture]. The Italians told the English, you can't pass this [draws line on table].

JP: Really?

JM: Oh yes. We would...on, on Halloween night try to go up into Westmount...[shaking head] not the kids would stop us, but the police would tell us...the Westmount police would tell us, go back where you came from, Saint-Henri.

JP: The Palm[?] Tunnel, we used to call it the--

JM: --That's right. That tunnel right there...you cannot pass this [fingers pointing]. The police would tell us to go back. I'll tell you another little story. When Palm[?] Bakery was there, I was maybe seven or eight years old. And we didn't have anything. But I'd ask my mother for 10 cents and we'd take the cushion cover and we could go up to Palm Bakery with 10 cents and they would fill our cushion cover with yesterday's bread and yesterday's cupcakes, but you had to be there for 6:00 in the morning. But we could not pass that tunnel leading to Westmount. They would send us back.

JP: What do you think they were afraid of?

JM: In those days, and even up 'til much later, much, much later, we were all called the Saint-Henri bums. So you know our reputation...

JP: And tell me about the neighbourhood as you got older, and you were a teenager. Um there was uh, like--tell me about the White Owl.

JM: Yes.

JP: ...and there were, there were pools, there were bars, there were [unclear]—

JM: Oh there were—

JP: Tell me about the social places for Italians to gather in the neighbourhood.

JM: Well we had Orsini Hall where we used to go every Friday and Saturday night to dance...the Italians...it, it was all Italians. That we would gather in there. And later on, was maybe 100 yards away from there, uh Tony Mancini opened the White Owl Social Club. And this consisted of four bocce alleys, one boxing rink, and one little building that housed all of the card games. In those days, what we liked to play in those days was *tresette*, for the simple reason that you could put four or five tables together and after a game you would play for *padron*[?]. [Gesturing with his hands] *Padron* meaning you would buy four- or five-quarts of beer; the losing team had to pay. And then when you played for *padron*, the winner, he was the boss of all the beers. And if you were 12, he could make 10 dry, not drink, and only two would drink, and this would cause more or less animosity. Let's play again [laughs]. But this was strictly Italian. But uh we used to have a bit of a problem with the Italians from Ville-Émard. They would come over there [pointing] and they thought they were Italian and we were not, and they did not like us, because they always thought that they were better than us. But we always reminded them that we lived in lower Westmount and they lived in lower Saint-Henri.

[TIME: 20:42]

JP: [Laughs] What a great...oh what a great comeback.

JM: Oh yah. Oh yah.

JP: Cause those guys thought they were better off.

JM: They always thought they were better, those from N.D.G. and those from Ville-Émard, always thought they were better than the Italians from Saint-Henri.

JP: And what would, what would they consider a real Italian?

JM: Well that they had a little bit of money, more than we did in Saint-Henri, let's put it that way. Their homes were nicer and there weren't too many bums up in N.D.G. and Ville-Émard. We were considered all bums [laughs]. And we had to fight for our turf and anywhere that we went it was always the same. I played baseball. I played hockey and if I went up to say [unclear] Mount Royal[?] to play, I always carried a chip on my shoulder, because they had beautiful uniforms. They had girlfriends in the stand. We had nothing. We had--if our stocking one was yellow and one was blue, and just to get it a bit off-colour at the age of 16 for a jockstrap, we would take a pocketbook, put it there and tie it with a long stocking over there. We could not afford a jockstrap.

JP: How do you think this experience shaped you to who you became today?

JM: It made us very strong. Very strong and I see it in business when I started in business there would be nothing that would discourage me, nothing. And I grew up to be very positive, very positive.

JP: Let's go and talk about your, um, your, your family, your family now, your dad, your uncle, the um ...

JM: Yes.

JP: Can you just--can you give me an overall first in terms of the people who had been interned and just how you relate...who they are to you... can you give us uh...

JM: I could only tell you about when they were interned. I could only tell you what I saw myself at the age of five, six.

JP: Maybe we can establish the names of the people—

JM: Yes.

JP:... and their relationship to you first—

JM: Sure.

JP:... before we uh...

JM: [Nodding head] We lived on Walnut Street on the first floor. And uh the night that the RCMP came into the house I remember because it was, it was very noisy and I did not know what was going on. And way back then there was no chip rock. There was plaster and they would break the walls to see if they could find arms. And this is when they took away my father. My father was Giovanni Mastromonaco. He was in the Sons of Italy, and the Fascist Party. But my, my direct recollection of the Fascist Party and the Sons of Italy in those days was...the only thing they ever did was help the church, the French Church and the English Church in our district. My uncles Mike Mastromonaco and Dominic Mastromonaco lived on Cazalais Street. And they were in the Fascist Party, but somehow, they did not uh go to the internment camp. They were not picked up. Why, I don't know.

JP: Cause your father was picked up? And in your mind who had, who was more involved in the Fascist Party?

JM: Of the brothers?

JP: Yah.

JM: Mike, because he was a director.

JP: In Saint-Henri?

JM: In Saint-Henri. He was a director.

JP: Of the *fascio*?

JM: Yah.

JP: And, ok so that was Mike. And your father's involvement was simply through the uh...he was a member of the club and [unclear]--

JM: That's right. He was a member of the club, and, and the Sons of Italy and he helped with all of the--but, but my father was more outgoing, more-- He used to mix with French, with English. He was more friendly. The other two uncles they were more, more that reserved. They didn't mix, uh.

JP: The uncles are the brothers of your dad?

JM: Of my father, yes.

JP: Ok. So it's three brothers essentially were talking about.

JM: They--Can I tell a little story about my uncles?

[TIME: 25:06]

JP: You can tell as many stories as you want. I love listening.

JM: They came over from Italy and they were 21, 22 years old. At the beginning they boarded at our house. Both of them had two kids in Italy in the Provvidenti. From the age of 21, 22, they never went back to Italy. They went back at the age of 65, when they took their pension, and their wives were waiting for them in the village at 65. They both had two kids, and I have to take my hat off to them, both of them educated their kids: one is a pharmacist and one was a professor of mathematics at the University of Rome.

JP: And they came here in 21, 22?

JM: 21, 22... they never went back until the age of 65 when they were eligible for their pension.

JP: And the wife and the children...

JM: ...were still waiting but meanwhile they would always send money to upgrade their home that they had in the village. And uh eventually they moved to Rome because one of my uncles in Rome became *Capi di Stazioni di Roma*. And so they moved to Rome and they had a condo in Rome subsidized by the Italian government.

JP: And these are the two brothers that had been interned[?]....

JM: That's right. They, they always maintained their, their homes in, in le Provvidenti because as you know you cannot stay in Rome in the summer, so they would go back to the village for the summer months.

JP: When they were 21, 22, around what time was that, what year did they immigrate? I'm just trying to figure out what decade was it?

JM: The year, the year...

JP: Circa?

JM: 20s

JP: In the 20s.

JM: Yah. In, in the 20s.

JP: Oh my god?

JM: Most Italians that's, that's what they did. They never went back 'til they had their pension.

JP: Then your dad came over after the two...

JM: After, after the two brothers. That when my dad came over, the uh, the father was in Cleveland. So that my father went with the father. But then after, after the boys were working and gave the father their pay, the father finally went back to Italy, but the boys came to Montreal.

JP: So...so these three men, your father and your two uncles, it's late 1930s, they're involved in the fascist organizations. You also brought up an interesting point; you said that the organization was helping uh the French Church?

JM: That's right.

JP: In what way? Because that would have been the Great Depression in Montreal and Canada at the time.

JM: But, but if you know everybody went through a depression except those who were la--who were gardeners. The gardener who never went through a depression. Because most Italians from Provvidenti were landscape gardeners. In those days, as I, as I explained, the landscape gardener was called a *fornachaire* that means someone who takes care of the furnace. Now they had, they had the key to go into their--the private homes of all the very elite Anglo-Saxons. So they would go in the morning at 6:00 to put coal, and they would go back at night at 6:00 to put coal [hand gestures]. Now they worked for all the elite Anglo-Saxons, which means they had--they were paid every month. And they need--the Anglo needed his house to be taken care of: his furnace, his jackheater [hand gestures]. It's, a jackheater is a hot-water thing; it's a little thing that you have to keep it going to that supply hot water. And this is why most of the, uh, those coming from Provvidenti never went through a depression.

JP: They never lost their jobs.

JM: [Shaking head] They never did. It was so much so that the--in those days, the English would permit his *fornachaire*, the one who took care of his furnace and shoveled the snow, to put a mattress in his furnace room and if it snowed, he did not have to walk home to Saint-Henri, he could sleep on the mattress in the furnace room so he's there in the morning to take care of the snow removal. Beautiful story huh?

[TIME: 30:15]

JP: It's interesting isn't it, how depending on the job that you had--

JM: That's right. And the, uh, and the--it's the landscaper, way back, never went through tough times.

JP: And you know what, it also puts a different spin, because like you said, when you think of Saint-Henri you think of an area that's like you know--

JM: Depressed.

JP: ...Really tough, depressed--

JM: Ghetto.

JP: ...[Unclear] Neighbourhood ghetto yah--

JM: Ghetto.

JP: ..And--when in fact, men such as these--

JM: Were well off.

JP: Were actually probably better off--

JM: Than anybody else.

JP: ...[Unclear] *volevano pretendere*.

JM: That's right. That's right. But because they had to shovel snow in the middle of the winter and uh, you know do the landscaping, cut the grass, take care of the flowers, but uh...

JP: So it really was Lower Westmount because they would just go through the tunnel and go and work up there?

JM: But what I could never understand in those days was...England was at war with Italy, but they would employ, employ...the Anglos over here, the very elite would employ the Italian to take care of his furnace.

JP: How do you explain that?

JM: [Shaking head] I have no explanation for that...But let me add something else. They were the best to work for. The best. They uh, they were very good to the Italian.

JP: So they paid?

JM: They paid and they paid well and they also heard if you had trouble at the house, you know, maybe medical problem, they would help you.

JP: That's really kind.

JM: Yah. Yah.

JP: And then...were they, were they *facista*, you think, in the sense, like and I guess you could only gather this from the type of stories they would have told you after...

JM: Yes.

JP: Um. How would you uh portray them? Do you think they were *facista* for *convenienza*, because they had to be, did they believe it?

JM: I don't think that they really believed it. I think they just joined an organization. Where they could be--It's a group to—to that protect themselves, because I just don't see them uh being, being, being political because those who--the fascists from Saint-Henri, ninety percent of them were not educated. So all you needed was a good order, and they would follow. So I don't think they--because after the war they all more or less [hand gesture of parting ways] went their way.

JP: What do you think was the attraction for them, in the *fascio*, for the Italians in Saint-Henri, for people like your dad and your uncles? What attracted them to that organization?

JM: It, it was Italian; it was for Italy. Because even though they came over here, they loved their country and that's all they talked about was their country. But their country, they worked,

worked, worked and after 365 days there was no profit. Food they had, but there was nothing...no dollar bill showing.

JP: That's it.

JM: Yah. That's it.

JP: And the way you've painted Saint-Henri, in terms of, how it was even for you as a child, in terms of these, these turf wars, these identity--

JM: Yes.

JP: ...divisions, um, if it had been like that leading up to it, if it was like that, for you in the late 30s, early 40s, as a child...

JM: Yes.

JP:...could it have been similar for the adults, like for the older people, in terms of that same ...

JM: Sure it was. Definitely it was. As I explained to you, they were not allowed to walk--they tried to not let them walk on sidewalks. They had to walk in the street.

JP: The Italians.

JM: The Italians had to walk in the street. The French walked on the sidewalk. So again, they had to battle. I never went through that, but what I heard from my grandfather, it was, uh--they had to fight for everything.

JP: It's almost like dogs.

JM: Uh [shrugging his shoulders and shaking his head – hand gesture].

JP: So the *fascio*, the--what it offered these men...

JM: I, I think it offered them somewhere to go for a meeting, get together, play cards, have a drink and talk about their home...and then--2

[TIME: 35:00]

JP: Do you think it did anything, anything for them in terms of sense of pride or that really wasn't an issue at all?

JM: Actually, yes it was... It was an issue because I, I understand that very well being an Italian Canadian.

JP: Can you, like explain?

JM: I, I, I feel as an Italian Canadian I'm more proud and I'm more Italian than an Italian who is a hundred percent. And I've experienced this because-- It's, it's a lot of Italians from Italy, they lose their identity over here. I mean they lose their pride for their country. Whereas an Italian Canadian once he visits Italy...take my case. I'm a very hard man. I was a hard man. But I never showed emotion, maybe being the oldest of eight kids. But when I went to Italy for the first time, and I'm riding along the highway and I see the first sign Provvidenti, I says tears came to my eyes and I said to myself - Oh my God. This is where it started. This is where it started. This is where my father was born. And then when I went into the village and I saw...I says, I take my hat off to any Italian coming over here, not knowing the language, not having a dollar in his pocket and making it over here. I take my hat off to these people. These people must have been very strong - very, very strong and it's uh--but I, I feel that the, the early ones lost their pride. Like they were more or less--the new one here, Italian-Italian will go visit Italy but doesn't want to stay there. But the old Italian - Let me work 'til 65. I want to go back home. The new Italian that came over, doesn't want to go back. You see, so they've lost their uh ...

JP: What differences do you see--that's like, that's a very strong difference--what other differences do you see in the Italians that were here before the war versus the ones that came post-World War 2?

JM: Well, this is what I see. I see that those that came here after the war, much after the war became Canadian...what exactly happened in the US. In the US today, an Italian is an American first and an Italian second. Where in Canada, the older Italian was always Italian. The new one is becoming Canadian.

JP: Why do you think the ones that came after World War 1—like, let's, ok let's just call it—

JM: [Unclear – some verbal response as Joyce continues to ask the question]

JP: ...World War 2, so cause some of them may have come even earlier. What made them [unclear] to be them?

JM: Because they were not educated. They had no education.

JP: And how does that play out?

JM: It was...It was their home. It was their home. And it was their...where they were born. They knew nothing else. The new one who came over here and the older one made his dollars but he didn't do anything. All he did was work, work, work, whereas the new one who came over here worked, made his dollar, but had a good time and they're still having a good time. This is your difference. And he's educated. Every, every new Italian that comes over here does not want his son or daughter to follow in his footsteps. The old one, they want this [hand against the table] - an education. Don't do what I did. Even though, he made a million bucks. I don't want you doing that, I want you doing this [hand against table].

JP: So true.

JM: It's true.

JP: But the older ones, like your dad, what did he want for you?

JM: This is what he wanted. He wanted me to go to school. He didn't want me to go to work with him.

JP: But you're part of that pre-World War 2 group?

JM: Yes, I, I still have...even though I'm a Canadian Italian, I, I find myself Italian. Look I can criticize an Italian, but don't let anyone else do it [laughs]. And I, I feel, what hurts me the most is that if I hear an Italian born on the other side, comes over here, and criticizes Canada. And you know, often I would tell them, I says "Look", I says, "Where did you make your dollars? Where did you make your dollars? Where did you make those dollars to send back home and put a shower, and put a washer and dryer inside your house, where did you make this money?" So please...but the newer one won't say that. It's nice to visit, but I want to go back.

[TIME: 45:26]

JP: It's really powerful what you're saying Joe because...

JM: Yes.

JP:...because of whether it was, you know, lack of education--

JM: It was.

JP: ...Or the time that it was at the time, you know, uh the situation...You're saying that those people had a stronger uh *voglia*--

JM: The older ones.

JP: The old, yah, the old group. OK. *I vecchi, li chiamamo. I vecchi avevano una voglia più forte di sentirsi Italiani.* Maybe less so than the ones post war. And when you're thinking about that *voglia*, that need, and then you're talking about Saint-Henri, and you're talking about how, you know, the friction that was created--

JM: with the French.

JP: ...along ethnic lines. The *fascio* becomes a very interesting place all of a sudden.

JM: Sure.

JP: ..Where you can--

JM: Exactly.

JP: ...You feel...

JM: You feel wanted. You feel--you're a part of...This was it. When I joined the, the, the, that Casa D'Italia, I knew nothing about it really. But I knew it was to help the Italians. If, if an artist, if a poet, if an author wanted to exhibit his works, it's there. It's there. But the first ones against it were Italians.

JP: What sense of...what satisfaction does that give you, in helping...like here you, when you said you got involved with the Casa D'Italia...

JM: Yes. Helping--

JP: What was it...what, what drove that?

JM: Helping an Italian.

JP: And that's important to you.

JM: Very, very important because I'm Italian. It's very important to me. You know, I'm very proud when I hear an Italian did something. I'm very proud. I feel - it's me. Like...just, just that, I will pick for a hockey team, or a baseball team, not because they are good, because there's an Italian there. Just to show you a couple of jokes. Every time that Mike Cammalleri has a bad night, that's because his mother's Jewish [laughs]. But when he scores a goal, he's Italian--

JP: ...he's Italian. Of course, it's, it's so easy to sway it right...

JM: I'm joking. No. Just joking.

JP: [Unclear] *una minestra*.

JM: Ah yah yah. You know--I went to--let me just tell you a story...

JP: Yah. Go.

JM: My wife is Scottish-Irish. And she has family in Clarksburg, West Virginia. OK. Now she was--the family was having a wedding over there. And she says to me, "Joe, look, I got a cousin that's getting married in Clarksburg, West Virginia, so we're gonna to for a week." I says, "Carole, for a week?" I says, "Look, let's go three days. Clarksburg, West Virginia." She goes on the internet and she sees the week of the wedding - it's Italian week. I says, "Carole, book the week" [laughs]. So I go over there. To my surprise, there are maybe 22,000 people; 13,000 are Italian from Calabria, from Calabria, OK. And it amazed me, the difference, they when--and the entertainment. Have you ever heard of the Gaylords?

JP: Yah, that was an old, old band from the 50s. Is that possible?

JM: [Nodding head] They sang all the good Italian songs: *From the grapes came the wine*, and uh, uh *Was on the Ile of Capri that I met you*. All those songs. They were entertaining. Lou Ritchie is, is your time [points]. He was entertaining. Gary Louis & the Playmates. Free. You can sit in the middle of the street and watch these guys. I always remember Gary Louis coming on the stage and saying "I bet I know exactly what all you Italians are thinking. What's this little Jew boy doing over here? But for your information, my mother's Sicilian" [Laughs]. And these, and these Calabres' over there, I walked down the street, and after, a day I had, I had become friendly. What hurts me the most? Not one of them could say two words in Italian, but, all traditions from Calabria. The one that amazed me the most was this fellow was telling me a story that he had a headache. He was in his car and he called his grandmother to give me *mal'occh'* [laughs]. I said, "Listen" I says, "and you don't speak Italian?" And you know it was amazing. And uh, you know, talking, how things, they, they don't speak a word of Italian but they keep all the old traditions.

[TIME: 45:35]

JP: Did you keep traditions in your house growing up?

JM: Yes, we did. Thursday and Sunday is pasta. And if you miss, you better have a doctor's note [laughs]. My mother, uhhh ... you know ...

[Unclear voice in background]

JM: Oh yah, yah. If, if you miss, you better have a note from the doctor [laughing]. Oh yah, yah. And you know, the old Italian, you know, this is, I find, a big difference today, in that, the--is the respect. It's not there anymore.

JP: So what...you know...cause we're having this really good discussion about what the identity...about identity, and about the time...

JM: Sure.

JP: And about being Italian, what it means...so what do you think Mussolini meant to these people.

JM: He meant everything. He meant everything to them. My mother, my mother, don't you dare say a bad word about Mussolini, and she was Canadian. Yah.

JP: What did she like about him?

JM: She liked about him, because maybe he, he was Italian. He fought for Italy. And uh, you know, he, he just personified Italian [hand gesture].

JP: And, and what else would have been--

JM: Nothing political because I don't think she, she knew anything uh about political--

JP: But no that's valid too--

JM: Yah, yes. Sure, sure--

JP: ...This is their perception--

JM: ...sure.

JP: ...That's what I'm asking is--What do you think...what was the attraction of uh Mussolini's persona to these people. What did it, what did it fulfill them with?

JM: Well those who were educated, it was his social programs. I don't have to tell you that, that you're educated. In the world today, it's all his programs [gestures with his hand].

JP: [Unclear]

JM: And uh, my argument with everybody is when they tell me "Yah, but he joined Hitler." They blocked the sea on him [pointing]. He had no choice. He had no choice. And if you ever want to read an—interesting book, read Churchill, and you'll see how much Churchill admired him. And the, but the Italians, just they looked at him and he looked Italian. They were proud that—you know. But it's amazing how the South was so pro and the North where the partisans were—I'm, I'm Italian over here, but I still, when I read about him, you know, I see about the Germans and all this but, you know, when you have no choice...

JP: What did your father ever say about him, or your uncles or your grandfather? What, what stories would you hear?

JM: No. Just that you know he was a great man [hand gestures]. But nothing really, that they could come up with an instant, no, no, no.

JP: And uh, so let's go back to that day. You were in the house when the police came.

JM: Yes. I was in the house.

JP: There were two officers?

JM: No, no, no. It was a good uh...oh listen, I, I can't tell ya...

JP: Ok, but there was a group?

JM: A group, yes. There was a lot of yelling going on--

JP: Did you have any idea something was coming down that day?

JM: No, no, no. I was only five, six years old.

JP: But the kids on the street they weren't buzzing or [unclear]...

JM: No, no, no.

JP: It was like a normal [unclear] day...

JM: They just—normal day—and they just came in there and they...

JP: Day or night? Do you remember?

JM: Early morning. Yah, early morning. Because I always, always remember my mother telling me, says, “Go into the room. Stay in the room. Don’t come out.”

JP: Oh, so these men came in?

JM: Yah.

JP: In uniform, or not uniformed?

JM: Some were in uniform. Some, uh, some weren’t in uniform.

JP: And, what do you—so what?

JM: There was a lot of yelling around. You know...

JP: In the house?

JM: It was noisy. Yah. A lot of yelling. My mother was yelling and but, my father was, was the calmest one. I always remember him saying “But what’s the problem? What’s the problem?” And I just heard a lot of yelling. They put him on the floor, uh, that I saw. I saw them breaking the walls. Then they took him out--

JP: They were looking for?

JM: They said arms. I— I didn’t hear this, but I learnt, I heard after that it was arms.

[TIME: 50:02]

JP: So they actually broke the walls in the house--

JM: They broke the plaster.

JP: And I mean they left it? Did they come back?

JM: Oh. They left everything the way it was. They did no clean-up or anything.

JP: And your mother's in the house. She's watching--

JM: She's yelling.

JP: ...the men break the walls, with her child—

JM: She's yelling, yah.

JP: ...The other kids in the house too?

JM: There's two more and she's pregnant with the third one.

JP: *O Dio*. And your father's calm through all this?

JM: Oh yah. He's calm. He--He was a calm man.

JP: And so this went on for a little bit?

JM: Yah, for a little bit.

JP: I guess your mother wanted you in your room?

JM: Yes, Yes, She said bring your—you know bring your brother with you and get in the room and don't come out. And I heard yelling and then I peeked, you know. I opened the door and I looked because there was so much noise. I was scared too. I guess, I was scared.

JP: And your father was put on the floor?

JM: My father was put on the floor. They put the handcuffs on him and then they took him out.

JP: And when he went outside, I guess did you run out?

JM: No. I didn't remember that. No.

JP: That part you don't remember.

JM: No, no, no.

JP: So then—

JM: Then we—

JP:... you're in the house now, and your father's taken away. Does your mother have any idea where, where he is?

JM: No, she, she didn't for months. She tried to find out where he was—

JP: So—

JM:...Nobody came up with an answer. As I said before, you know, I think ahead of we went on camera, my mother happened to go to the Liberal aide—representative, but he asked for money and we did not have a cent because my grandmother who had a bit of money was living in Boston with her husband and when she found out, because we were living in her house in Saint-Henri and we did not pay rent...so this helped...and when she found out about it, she came in to town and she took care of us. We never had to go on uh, on welfare or whatever.

JP: And you were able to stay in your home.

JM: Oh yes.

JP: Thanks to your grandmother.

JM: Thanks to my grandmother. Yes.

JP: So, at that point your father is taken away. Did you have friends whose fathers were taken away as well?

JM: No. I didn't have any friends that, whose father—only my dad that I--

JP: ...[unclear] in your circle?

JM: ...[hand gesture of a circle] of the people that—Yah. Like the uh, like the Capozzis[?] and my uncle, that Mr. Rosati. They, they were not taken away.

JP: And did the other kids hear about it?

JM: Of course.

JP: So how did you deal with that—with the kids, like with [unclear], what did you say to them?

JM: Well it, it was hard, because at the, at the beginning, you know, when they, when they say that you're going to jail and right away they associate that with him doing something--robbing whatever— and it took a while but then they were not uh—really I didn't go through anything with friends.

JP: Cause your friends were—your friends didn't provoke you?

JM: Not at all—

JP: Which is good.

JM:... not at all.

JP: And in school, when you went to school, were there other...

JM: No, no, no.

JP: Did anybody ask questions, the nuns, the...

JM: It's the, it's the teachers ask questions later on, you know, things like "Why did your father go to jail?"

JP: They asked you?

JM: Yah, later on. And you know, the thing that amazed me the most was all of a sudden I started stuttering. It's uh—I, I don't know if, if it was associated with that but there was about seven or eight of us Italians, we all stuttered and badly. But as we grew, we lost it because uh the people told me that I'm a, I'm a pretty good public speaker [laughs].

JP: You are.

JM: So uh, you, you know I--

JM: ...Do you think it was just a, was a reaction?

JP: You know there was a teacher—this is maybe going off, off line...

JM: No, no...2

JP: But there was a teacher in school when this happened. I was very good at school. I always had, you know, top marks. And this teacher one day would ask oral. And he'd come to me, says "Joe". And I said, "I'm sorry Sir. I don't know". Mr. Wellborn. He said to me, says "You don't know". Then he get me alone, he gets me alone and says to me, "How is it Joe, every time there is a written test or something, you're way up there. Any, any time I ask something oral, you always tell me you don't know. Is there a problem?" I said "Well, you know Sir, I stutter and this". "Oh yes, I tell you what, from now on"—this was fourth grade—"from now on when, when we do this, all you have to say to me is you know it or you don't know it". And at the time, I thought I was going to get away with something. But come recess, he said "Joe, I'll be downstairs in the yard". I didn't know what he meant by this. When we got to the yard, he says "Now, would you like me to walk behind you or in front of you, while I ask you those questions?" Do you know something, it started in fourth grade and I ended off with the same teacher in high school. As I went, he went up; he went up. And if, usually, they going ask you - Who in life ever had such an influence on you and helped you? - then you know, maybe-- without even knowing it—this teacher here. [Coughs] To take the time, to always tell me, "Joe, we'll go downstairs. I won't look at you. I'll just walk in front of you, back"—and, and as the years went by, all this stuttering just—but it was uh the English teachers in school liked the Italians.

[TIME: 56:15]

JP: They did, eh?

JM: They loved us uh. The principal loved us. The teachers all loved—the Italian teacher did not like us: Mr. Costanzo [coughs].

JP: How would you explain that, that the Italian...?

JM: Because maybe every time he'd line us up, he told us our hands were dirty and to go downstairs and wash them. But he'd pick only us. Maybe our hands were dirty [laughs]. You know, but uh he didn't like us. I think he, I think he was ashamed of us.

JP: He was a more sophisticated and educated Italian?

JM: Yes, yes, he was, he was an educated one. And he also, he also played music. He played at the uh at the Ritz Carlton under the name of Jose Di Costa. And--he had money, but he had his nose up in the air with us.

JP: Hmm. What other um—did you mother experience any problems when your—while your father was interned in terms of going—just day-to-day activities: shopping, or just like day-to-day things—did she have ...

JM: My mother became a very aggressive woman, very aggressive. My mother uh – very strong woman. I guess [shrugs shoulders] being away for that long, you know, and then coming back and —those years when he was away, she more or less lost her pride with asking her mother to help her out because she couldn't do anything [gestures with both hands to indicate “oh well”] and she became a very aggressive woman.

JP: How would you see that—like an example [unclear]--

JM: Dealing with us—uh you know, if she ever heard that we got pushed by someone, she would give us a good whack - “You go back and you beat them up” [laughs]. “If the parents come, then come and get me.” “But you handle it yourself” [pointing], and uh, she raised us—no but I have to admit you know—in, in Saint-Henri when you have six boys, and they all turned out well, it's an accomplishment because it was very easy to go the other way, very easy. But my mother [hand gesture against table – axe coming down]...

JP: Did she have problems—uh I heard some, some women had problems even going shopping...

JM: Of course.

JP: ...Some people wouldn't be sold certain things.

JM: That's right. Well first of all that you had to have the rations and uh, but we had a uh Italian grocery store by the name of Febbi[?], Dominic and Yolanda Febbi, and they were very friendly with my mother and more she extended a credit line to her, so she could more or less, she had no problems. But with the French we had a problem, you know. At the beginning, after no, but at the beginning, we did.

JP: So did your, your mother have, have to maneuver within the Italian circle in order to do the day-to-day uh *facendi*[?]-

JM: No.

JP: ...and *spese* or would she, would she venture out onto let's say Notre Dame or [unclear]—

JM: Yes. She would always take her walk on Notre Dame Street up to Atwater. And she would like to—she used to like to go to the movie. You know, see a show.

JP: So your father's away, she goes to the Liberal, like you said—

JM: Yes.

JP: He asked her for money for info—to provide—

JM: To find out where he was, that's all she asked for—

JP: So that information would have come with a price tag?

JM: Oh yes.

JP: Your mother obviously didn't have the money to pay for [unclear]—

JM: No she didn't.

JP: What did she do next?

JM: Next she went and see this Tony Mancini, because Tony Mancini was involved in politics and being involved in politics he had the connections for the other party, the blue, the Union Nationale, Mr. uh Maurice Duplessis. And in our area at the time was a gentleman who represented Mr. Duplessis by the name of Ormidost[?] Delille[?]. And my mother went and see him. And he says "I don't promise you anything, but I will go to Ottawa and see what I could find out." He did. He came back, he told my mother—in fact, he set up the—for that my mother to go see my father in Petawawa. And he did not ask for a cent.

[TIME: 1:00:47]

JP: So, how much time has gone by before you found out that your father was in Petawawa?

JM: Six to seven months.

JP: It's quite a bit of time.

JM: Yes.

JP: For—so, during that time you had no idea—

JM: My mother—

JP: ...if he had been at Bordeaux, if he had been sent to Petawawa—

JM: No, only after did we find out that he had spent six months I think in Bordeaux.

JP: [Unclear]did like --a part—he was there.

JM: Yes.

JP: But this was so--six months at this point.

JM: Yes.

JP: You have no idea where you dad is.

JM: No. No idea.

JP: And your, your mother has no idea where her husband is?

JM: No idea.

JP: And your uncles are also picked up.

JM: No they're not.

JP: Oh they weren't picked up?

JM: They weren't picked up as I said only—

JP: ...[unclear] That's right. Sorry.

JM:...only my father was picked up from the area in Saint-Henri. Only my father.

JP: And how did your uncles explain this—when they [unclear]—

JM: They never did explain it. I don't know why. I have no idea why.

JP: Where they around the family to help?

JM: Yes they were. Yes, yes they were.

JP: And...

JM: As I said, that they boarded at the house.

JP: OK, so six months—

JM: They came in after, after my father went away, they came in to pick up the—help us, you know. Help my mother, at least.

JP: Who fixed up the wall holes?

JM: Oh, I have no idea.

JP: So six months has *più meno* has gone by. Your mother finds out through the guy from the, through the Union Nationale, uh Mancini's help obviously, that your dad is in Petawawa—

JM: Petawawa. That my mother--my grandmother came over from Boston to stay with us, and she went to Petawawa.

JP: At this point, you still have not received a letter.

JM: No, no letter, no.

JP: There was no—was there any justification as to why your father was picked up that you know of?

JM: No.

JP: At that time, there was nothing said—

JM: Nothing, nothing. The only thing they said to my mother was he was a fascist. That's the only thing they said.

JP: That's all they said.

JM: Yes. And, and--my mother said "Well, what did he do? Did he do anything?" Says, "No, but he's a fascist."

JP: Did your father have like a black shirt in the house?

JM: Yes, he did have a black shirt. Yes.

JP: And did he have uh a membership card maybe [unclear]?

JM: Well that I don't know. But I guess he did though--

JP: But you remember he had a black shirt?

JM: Yes he did.

JP: What happened to the black shirt?

JM: I have no idea.

JP: Hm. And um, then what happens with your mother going to Petawawa? Cause at this point, now she's found out--

JM: She's found out.

JP: ...You said that the gentleman helped her arrange to go to Petawawa to go visit your father.

JM: That's right. She visited my father and she visited him quite a few times after.

JP: How would she go?

JM: She'd go by train, always with the help of my grandmother. She could not afford it. She had no [shrugs], no means.

JP: And so she would get there, and it was a one day trip or...

JM: Uh, Yes.

JP:...come back at night?

JM: No I think she would, would come back the next day.

JP: And, what would she tell you?

JM:... I think.

JP: ...What would she tell you about [unclear]--

JM: No, she wouldn't tell me too much. She said that--I just, I just remember her telling me, "He's coming home soon. He's coming home soon." She wouldn't go into any uh ...

JP: Did you get any letters after that, or pictures from him?

JM: Letters, yes, but no pictures. And you, you can see, after, you can see that the letters were screened. But there was always—[hand gesture towards of holding stamp] what amazed me was the stamp, Prisoner of War. As I said, I always remember one of them, February 1941; there was a stamp on it.

JP: What was special about that letter—that made you remember that letter?

JM: Well that my dad, after I read it, he, he, he uh—that he was quite the guy and he expressed his love for my mother, you know, and he says "I know that you're, you're being taken care of by your mother, and uh how's the pregnancy going?" You know, because she was, that she was pregnant with the third child—[unclear] "I know I love you very much, and I'll be seeing you soon."

JP: And that child was born while your father was at the camp?

[TIME: 1:05:02]

JM: You know, I don't know.

JP: OK.

JM: I can't uh—but I think yes, yes.

JP: He came out in uh ...

JM: 42.

JP: 42.

JM: Somewhere in 42.

JP: Yah, whatever, we can check [unclear]. Oh my god—

JM: But it was, it was quite an experience—and, and again I say thank god for my grandmother.

JP: It sounds like your mother also wanted to protect you. She didn't want you to be hurt by all this.

JM: Of course, of course, of course. She always—all our life, she always tried to protect us. If there was any problem—uh you know, I'm, I'm gonna to tell you a story that uh—and if she needed help from her mother—I guess for how many times she asked her mother, she'd always tell me "Joe, would you call her? Cause I know if you call her, she's going to send the money right away. But if I do, she says no" [laughs]. But I remember my grandmother coming from Boston you know three, four, five times a year and she'd always come with two, three suitcases full of clothes. And I remember as soon as she'd arrive, she would fill up the coal-bin, fill up the ice-box with food. She'd stay a week or two, and then she'd leave. Ahead of she left, she would fill up the ice-box. She was, she was quite the lady too. In, in my life, both my mother and my grandmother uh were something - they influenced me quite a bit, quite a bit.

JP: When your dad came home, do you remember that?

JM: Very, very little.

JP: Were you home uh?

JM: Yes I was. And I, I, I always remember uh finding it hard to approach him, you know, when he came home. That I found, maybe that caused my stuttering. I, I don't know, but I would find it hard. Because at the beginning, I would say, but how come at school when the parents go, I says, Where's my father? I kept asking my mother all the time "But where's my father? How come everybody else has a father?" And I did my First Communion, and he wasn't there and I remember that. That I remember; my father wasn't there.

JP: That, that must have hurt you.

JM: It did. It did. Like not, you know, not to—

JP: No. But as, as a seven-year old hurt, I mean, not as—

JM: But no, no, but—I know that in life after—I, I have a hard time being emotional. Like when I lost my first wife to, you know to that leukemia, I couldn't cry.

JP: How does that relate to...

JM: I don't know.

JP: ...that time.

JM: I don't know.

JP: Why do you think--but you think there's a link?

JM: I think there's a link. I think that, you know, being the oldest, and going through that, I think--because my father had a hard time showing, showing me love. I know he loved me very much, but he—it was hard for him, because he wasn't there at the beginning. And even I, even though, he was a, a kind man, a soft man—I don't think he ever hit me. I don't think he ever touched me; my mother did, but not my father [laughs]. Like all Italians.

JP: Yah. [Laughs]

JM: Oh yah.

JP: But, so when you dad came back, I guess—you're right cause he wasn't there for, I guess, uh—

JM: No.

JP:... an event that in the community—

JM: My starting of—

JP:... normally was celebrated with parents—

JM: ...starting of school, my First Communion, he was not there. I used to look at the other kids and see a father at school, you know, they go for a certain thing—my father was not there.

JP: Were you angry?

JM: No, not angry, hurt.

JP: Hurt.

JM: Hurt, not, not angry.

JP: Did you ever—like when he came back—I guess, even as a kid, like cause you don't know how to deal with emotions right—

JM: No, I, I—Exactly and I [hand gesture]—

JP:...Cause I'm, I'm not talking to Joe the adult—it's Joe the kid.

JM:...You know--There was distance [hand gesture].

JP: Cause that's how a kid would ...

JM: If he came home, you know, from work. I, I wouldn't "Hey Dad" [hug gesture with arms]. I wouldn't do that.

JP: But would you have done that to your mom?

JM: Yes.

JP: If you hadn't seen your mom? Would you go and give her a hug—

JM: Oh yes, yes, yes, yes, yes. But my father, no.

JP: So when your dad came back you weren't able to give him a hug?

JM: I don't think. Maybe he hugged me but I [clenches fists and tenses body]. That I remember you know, backing away. And this was all--you know--the years nine, ten, eleven [hand gesture indicating continues into future]...

JP: Yah, well I'm sure it's gonna--that's, that's one of the price of the, the internment on the kids--

JM: Yah, yah, oh yah—Guaranteed, guaranteed, guaranteed it was, because I looked at other kids. They had a father, I didn't.

[TIME: 1:10:08]

JP: And through no fault of anyone.

JM: Listen. I'd go play hockey at the outside rinks. My mother was standing [points up] in the snow cheering me. Everybody else had a mother and father.

JP: So you went that, through that for a couple of years?

JM: Sure, I did. A good three years I think. And those were the years, where, where, where a foundation is [hand makes sweeping gesture against table indicating expanse].

JP: Canada took your father.

JM: Yah.

JP: And did you like—I mean I understand the, the first reaction—because it would be—it's almost natural that you would, not know what to say, that you're going through withdrawal as opposed to...

JM: Right. Really--

JP: And then, how long did that take?

JM: [Unclear]--I think it lasted [shaking head]--it's a lifetime.

JP: I'm so sorry.

JM: I could never, I could never get close to my father. Maybe I didn't let him get close to me [clears throat]. Now I realize it. And the difference with the day is—today the kids would, would have gone and see a psychiatrist. Because you, you grow up with these things, it could cause—it caused, it uh, it made me be a very hard man, you know, not showing emotion, ey, not crying—and you notice that the people look at you and say “He doesn't feel anything”.

JP: But you're feeling it.

JM: [Pointing in the air] You feel it worse than the other one who is crying - worse.

JP: Cause you're holding it in, yah.

JM: That's right. Not, not that you want to hold it in.

JP: You can't.

JM: You can't. You just can't. It, it--

JP: What about—so then if you compare yourself to your, to your younger brothers and sisters—

JM: Yes.

JP:... who didn't go through that experience at that critical age in life, they don't have the same relationship with your father that you did.

JM: [Shaking head] That's right. Today you can see the difference—well, not—as I grow older, my wife always tell me--“You're, you're starting to get soft now. I see a tear. I see it”. “Oh yah”, I says, “I'm catching it from you”. But my, my brothers and sisters after me, except maybe the second one [clears throat], my second brother Sabatine[?], he's hard. But after that, they're soft. They'll hug [hugging gesture]. Like—it took me awhile to uh, to hug my children. But I did; uh but it took me awhile --Like I brought up my kids too strict. Mind you, they lost their mother at six and eight, huh, so uh—but uh they are completely different from me—except my daughter; my son is a softy. But my daughter, she is too much like me [laughs].

JP: She has your character.

JM: Oh does she ever, yah, yah.

JP: How much of that do you think was also the time?

JM: Pardon?

JP: Because at that time, men were—

JM: ...were men.

JP: ...behaving according a role.

JM: They thought they were men.

JP: Well they were behaving according to a role they learned from their dads or [unclear]—

JM: That's right. That's right. That's right.

JP: ...and that was their role.

JM: Yes, yes, yes.

JP: Today, today in Italy, it's the same thing. It's the same thing. You go to, you go to the northern part of Italy, Florence, my step-daughter lives there—these are educated people, but their traditions are all [hand gesture towards his head]—Man is king. I go to my, my step-daughter's in-laws, educated people, well-off people, aristocrats. They serve me [points at himself]. My wife serves herself. I tried to explain it to them. First time I got there, you know, as I told you, I uh—I lost my wife very early, so I had to learn. I'm a good cook. I will wash the dishes all the time, like—my wife still works. She's a negotiator with—Bombardier. Her supper is ready every night. I learned how to cook. I learned how to fend for my—you know, for myself. I'd go to Italy. I'm at a house with maybe 12 people. That the, that the supper's over, I push my chair across and I start picking up dishes, bringing it to the sink. I'm called non-macchio by the men. I invite them to step outside and see whose macchio [laughs].

[TIME: 1:15:33]

JP: [Laughs] Your Walnut St. comes back, eh?

JM: I says, "Would you like to step outside all of you?"

JP: I'll show you [unclear]—

JM: I'll show you whose macchio and whose not-macchio. But that's—

JP: [Unclear]

JM:...that's the mentality over there, today.

JP: Do you think, I mean, as much as you were hurt—

JM: Yah.

JP: I mean and this is—

JM: Go ahead. Any question.

JP: ...no fault.

JM:...any question.

JP:...No, I am. I'm—cause I'm not—and I'm saying you were hurt as a kid and it was of no fault of anybody.

JM: That's right.

JP: And your father comes back. He must have—do you think he also felt a certain hurt like—

JM: Yes. No.

JP: ...he may have let you down.

JM: That's right. He felt guilt. He felt guilt that he wasn't there for my years of school, starting of school. I'm sure he must have felt that, I'm sure.

JP: That's what I'm thinking.

JM: Very much.

JP: And do you think he also felt—well yah, just everything—he, he—did he feel—cause like you said there was never anything—he, he never actually did anything wrong towards this country—

JM: No he didn't. Never.

JP: He just went on his, his day-to-day life—

JM: It was more a show, you know, when they were in this group, I think. I might be wrong but I never found anything that they were subversive. I never found anything like that. And uh...

JP: No, it, it fulfilled maybe a need like you said. I mean, cause--cause I mean you painted a really good picture of what it was like at the time—uh, in that neighbourhood for them, for the Italians, so there's just a lot of guilt and, and hurt—

JM: Yes. Yes.

JP: ...all around that came out of that. And none of that is, is anything that's--it's not something that you can qualify. Do you know what I mean? It's all feelings in here.

JM: That's right. Very hard to explain these feelings. Very hard to explain. And this is why, I think, if there was a professional then, maybe we could have got help, not feeling this way. Cause I grew up with a chip on my shoulders so bad.

JP: That chip was towards who?

JM: Everybody.

JP: Your dad?

JM: No, no. Outside people, not my family, the world, outside [gesturing with his arms]. I grew up; they're against me [pointing with both hands].

JP: Well I guess, cause you had that came out—like you said, I guess as a kid, you would see that when you competed with other—

JM: In sports, in anything, it was always the same, you know I, I--

JP: In sports—in marks, on the street, when you met—did you have friends like from other neighbourhoods?

JM: Oh no—just from—no [shaking head].

JP: You stayed within the group.

JM: Yah, yah, yah.

JP: And then when your father—when the police came that day and took your dad away, who is that anger vented towards, as, as a child—well then, as you get older—

JM: Not the police, not, not my father, just everybody else, everybody else.

JP: There's no them.

JM: Yah. And it took me years to get that chip, that chip off my shoulder. You know, I blamed everybody. If, if I went and play, you know like, a game of hockey up in [unclear] Mount Royale

or whatever, it's always them that started the fight. It wasn't. It was us – me [gesturing to himself].

JP: What made you—how, what—how'd you get over that?

JM: Ah gees [shaking head]—you know, I don't know—time, just time, just, just—and you know it's—I like to read. I'm a reader so I, you know—when you read you find out how other people live and, and when I travel, I do a lot of traveling, I like to ask people what they think of America, what they think of Canada, and so on and so forth...I like this...when you find out things--that you find out it's not the rest of the world, it's you.

JP: Hmm. When your father—as time went on—you know talking as a child or a young boy, but as you got into your teenage years, and, and as a young adult, did your father talk about the internment?

JM: My, my father passed away very early at 51. Now eight kids, I'm the oldest.

JP: You became papa.

JM: You better believe it. So this is why—but you know again, hard worker, irresponsible, not a business man. The kindest man you could ever find, the kindest, oh my god, too kind. He uh wasted—very, very intelligent man, self-educated, very intelligent. Oh my god, was he intelligent. He, He--

[TIME: 1:20:22]

JP: Self-taught.

JM: Self-taught. And what amazed me always the most about him, he was not scared to try things. He was not scared of failure. Where I am. Him, he always told me, you only learn by making a mistake. And he was right, and he, you know, he had no education. Bright, oufh, he would do—and everybody loved him: the Jews, the French, the English, anybody.

JP: And he started the business then. It was your dad that started the landscaping business, and that business is still on today.

JM: Yes.

JP: And—explain something—um—sorry I might be jumping here but I just thought of it—why do you have Mastro and not Mastromonaco—

JM: Well in those days if you—

JP: --on the trucks.

JM: Yes. Sure.

JP: --I've seen the trucks, yah.

JM: Yah. Yah, but those trucks in those days, those doors were not that big [hands in the air showing expanse/distance]. If you put Mastromonaco, then you need two doors. That was the simple reason.

JP: The doors...

JM: Yes.

JP: ...edited your name.

JM: Yes, and way back. You could not put Mastromonaco right across. It wouldn't fit.

JP: [Unclear] too small--

JM: It wouldn't fit.

JP:...on one door.

JM: You would have to put Mastro and Monaco underneath.

JP: So it just became Mastro.

JM: Mastro.

JP: So it was the door that—that edited your name, the truck.

JM: I guess so.

JP: That's so funny.

JM: And frankly—you know what...the funny thing about it, after, after I went out of business...Don't ever call me Mastro...now Mastromonaco.

JP: When did the Mastro thing start?

JM: Oh way back, way back.

JP: Like *più meno*, like...in the 50s...

JM: In the 50s, 40s, 50s.

JP: Actually that sheet that I brought you today that's 1939.

JM: There you are [gestures to the side].

JP: That's Mastro.

JM: That's it. That's my father started it then.

JP: It was on those, on those trucks—your dad had a truck?

JM: Yah. I guess, yah.

JP: Before the war?

JM: No, no, no, no, after the war.

JP: But maybe, is it possible he went under an abbreviated version?

JM: Yes. He did.

JP: For the clients.

JM: Yes. Yes.

JP: So he started the business in the 30s.

JM: Around there.

JP: *Più meno*. Doesn't matter, but it was pre-war.

JM: Right.

JP: Pre-internment.

JM: Right.

JP: And during the internment, who took over the business?

JM: Nobody.

JP: Nobody.

JM: It's—He lost everything.

JP: He lost everything. Did the bank freeze anything, but you wouldn't know that I'm guessing...

JM: No, no the bank did not freeze us [shaking his head]...as I said we had no trouble with money.

JP: Ok. You had access to the, the bank.

JM: My grandmother.

JP: Because of the, your grandmother. Oh but she was your bank at that point.

JM: That's right.

JP: It wasn't your dad's bank.

JM: No.

JP: It was the grandmother bank.

JM: My grandmother—

JM: Your dad's bank, there was nothing.

JM: He had no money.

JP: There was no money, yah. So then he comes back. He restarts the business.

JM: He starts again.

JP: As a landscaper again—

JM: Yes, *fornachaire*.

JP: *Fornachaire*, cause that continued -- the *fornachaire*.

JM: That's right. Sure. Up until way, way—you know then when they switched to hydro and uh oil.

JP: So, cause at that point, it was like when it was like the coal [unclear] was used.

JM: Yah.

JP: [Unclear talking] yes, it's true—cause all—they would be doing that kind of work.

JM: That's right. They all started off as *fornachaires* – the original ones.

JP: They learnt it here.

JM: Pardon?

JP: They learnt that trade here.

JM: That's right. Sure.

JP: Cause that's not something [unclear]—

JM: Nobody else would do it. Nobody else would do that.

JP: *ch'è molto*—it was very dirty.

JM: Of course it was dirty and it was 365 days a year; 6:00 in the morning, 6:00 at night you had to do it [hand to table for emphasis].

JP: Every day...

JM: Every day, Christmas, New Year—

JP: Even if there was a *cresima* or whatever you still had to be there.

JM: You—even if there was a big storm, you better get up there. We used to walk from Saint-Henri and go all the way up Westmount, every day, walk up and down, walk.

JP: And depending on how high up, that was quite a walk.

JM: It was quite a walk, exactly. Look, when, when I—

JP: And the streets weren't paved like today.

JM: [Makes hand gesture – wait] When my brother and I started with my father, we had homes Cote Sainte-Catherine and Victoria. Are you familiar?

JP: Of course.

JM: Ok. My father would bring us there with an old Ford car, in the middle of the winter—my brother and I start here. We would start over there, shovel the driveways, the front door there. Do all the furnaces and jackheaters over there. Walk up Victoria. Walk up Victoria. Do a home here, a home there. Walk all the way up Victoria to the back of St. Joseph Oratory, Summit Crescent, on top. We would do some homes over there. We'd come, come back down, walk down Clairemount. Do some homes along Clairemount...

[Camera fades out 1:25:43]

JM: Walk up Victoria...

[Camera fades out 1:25:45]

JM: That, that we're going to go into something that we've already—is how Italy being at war with England and the elite of the English who ran Canada, you know, like, like the Grahams, the Websters, T[?], all these people, would employ Italians to come into their house, every day, twice a day.

JP: There's got to be an element of trust.

JM: Exactly. How do you explain this?

JP: I don't know, how?

JM: I don't. Maybe it was only the Italian doing it. You know, this always —you know, I used to, and I was—look, believe me, when we were in business, before Bill 101 when Sun, when SunLife took off. At Christmas, my dad and I would make \$3,000 cash, gifts, from the English. The English people were the only ones, if we went to the house to do work, “Would you like a glass of water Joe?”, “Would you like a coke, Joe?”, “Please come in Joe, into the kitchen, and have a cup of tea with some biscuits with me.” I would never get that from a uh, from a Jewish person, a French-Canadian. And I don't know if you ever remember when the Brigandi Rouche were shooting off the knees in Italy. There was an influx of very rich Italians up in Westmount. Am I on camera?

JP: Oh yah. We can erase all this—

JM: No. Yah, yah. Please that.

JP: OK, wait, you know what, we'll erase this whole story.

JM: No.

JP: You can't erase--

[Camera fades out 1:27:45]

JM: --the very elite Italian came into Westmount. They were the worst ones to work for, the worst. They had no compassion. They had no—we were dirt. I said to my father, “No Italians” [shaking finger].

JP: Do you think, in that, in those cases, it was a question—and something like you said, your teacher Constanzo, um, was very difficult on the Italian kids and he was somebody who was in the elite also cause he you know—

JM: But there was a question of him. There was a question of maybe he was doing something right because we did have dirty hands. But picking on us only. You know this—

JP: Maybe it wasn't the, the, the image—

JM: But when the Brigandi Rouche were shooting off those knees in [?] Milan and Turin...Westmount, the Italians were coming over there [hand gestures] by [unclear] and to deal with them, to work for them – the worst, the worst, the worst.

JP: Yah, because you had clients—that you had elite clients—

JM: The very rich.

JP: So you were able to compare.

JM: The very rich. The English, beautiful, caring—

JP: You called them fair.

JM: Oh, more than fair, more than fair.

JP: Caring.

JM: They treated me like I was part of the family. “Good morning Joe”, “How are you Joe”, “How is the family Joe; how is the kids Joe”, “How’s everything Joe”, “Joe”. I’d, I’d say to one of them, I’d say, “Look, look what do I do here”. “Fix it up with my wife. Whatever she wants, give it to her.” “Send me the bill” [gesturing with his hands]. And they, if you did work for them, they’d bargain with you, but once the handshake was done, at the end, “Thank-you very much Joe. Everything is beautiful.” Two days later, you’d have your cheque. The other nationalities, six months later, you’re running after. It comes a point that you’re, you’re shy to go and ask for your money. And when that Bill 101, pooh, all my good English clients they schoop [hand gesturing showing swept away].

JP: That affected your business—

JM: Oh yah, yah, yah. Listen—all my like repeat business at the time, because these people wanted things good. They wanted things to look good: their homes, their gardens. The English ladies knew the garden as well as I did [points to himself].

JP: It’s something that they were proud of.

JM: Oh they were proud. You know they had a back garden—in, in those days, you’d have a huge back garden and they wanted something blooming in May, June, July, August, September, October, and then leave space and you put your annuals in the space, but they wanted those colours. You know, I used to have a bet with my father. Show me a house, tell me the owners planted the flowers, and I’ll tell you the nationality of the person. Never was I wrong.

JP: Yah, cause they’re cultural uh—

JM: They are Italian and Jew same thing – red, red, and red and red. They’re French-Canadian, one red, one blue, one yellow, one this, one that. The English, clusters, white, soft pinks. If you got red, isolate the red. Because you come into a room, and if there’s red, your eyes go right to the red. The English [waves hand no], white, soft colours.

JP: Interesting.

JM: When you go into a house, again the Italian and the Jew, gold, everything’s tile.

[Background noise]

JM: Hey Carole...

[Camera fades out 1:31:56]

JP: Um, Joe is there anything that we missed, or anything—

JM:[Holding papers] No I think I’ve got everything in there.

JP: Oh, I just wanted to say thank you so much.

JM: You’re very welcome.

JP: You’re wonderful uh—

JM: If you’ve got any other—

JP: [Unclear]

JM: But please the next time advise me so I can have my hair done and everything.

JP: Ok, and I’ll get the [unclear]. *Sei fantastico. Grazie, grazie* [laughing].

JM: *Grazie* [laughing].

[1:32:19 – End of Interview]