



*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

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

DATE OF INTERVIEW: November 17, 2011

LOCATION OF INTERVIEW: Welland, ON

NAME OF INTERVIEWEE: Mary Raso

NAME OF INTERVIEWER: Sarah Cozzi and Ernesto Virgulti

NAME OF VIDEOGRAPHER: Spencer Johnston

TRANSCRIBED BY: Melinda Richter

DATE TRANSCRIBED: March 2, 2012

ACCESSION No.: ICEA2011.0077.0001

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 has not edited this transcript for errors.

KEYWORDS/TAGS

Raso, MaryRaso, AntonioRaso, Interned, Internee, Internees, internment, Petawawa, CampPetawawa, camp, camps, CampLife, Canada, Canadian, Canadians, Italy, Italian, Italians, ItalianCanadian, ItalianCanadians, Family, Work, SecondWorldWar, WWII, WW2, WorldWarTwo, war, immigrant, immigrants, immigration, immigrated,, Fascist, Fascism, china, business, school, ItalianSchool, consul, ItalianConsul, discrimination, EnemyAlien, EnemyAliens, Fingerprinting, Fingerprints, Mounties, RCMP, MountedPolice, RoyalCanadianMountedPolice, SantosPizza, Exhibition, CNE, ExhibitionGrounds, Canadian ExhibitionGrounds, Bosco, VernaLaBosco, LaBosco, Welland, NiagaraFalls, GiuseppeReturra, AntonioNero,

ABSTRACT

Mary Raso was born in Welland, Ontario on June 21, 1921. Her eldest sister was married to Antonio Raso, who was interned at Petawawa in 1940 (arrested June 10). Antonio was arrested from Cordage,

where he worked as an inspector. He was held at the Exhibition Grounds in Toronto before being taken to Petawawa. He was released around nine or ten months later. Mary's sister (along with her daughter and mother-in-law) came to live with Mary while Antonio was in the camp because their home was confiscated. Mary believes Antonio was arrested because he started the Sons of Italy chapter in Welland. While Mary's husband was not interned, he was fingerprinted and was ordered to report weekly to the Royal Canadian Mounted Police (RCMP). Mary says that she did not have to report because she was Canadian-born. After Mary's husband died (she was 39 years old at the time) she worked to support the family by opening up her own business selling high-priced china. She was very successful and she worked until she was 88 years old. Mary's brothers were also business owners; one brother opened the first pizzeria in Welland — Santos Pizza.

INTERVIEW

MR: Mary Raso, interviewee

SC: Sarah Cozzi, interviewer

EV: Ernesto Virgulti, interviewer

SJ: Spencer Johnston, videographer

[Title screen]

[Fades in at 00:00:10]

MR: I'm Mary Raso. I was born here in Welland, that's near Niagara Falls. And, uh, um, actually my brother-in-law, Frank, uh, uh, Antonio Raso was married to my eldest sister and, uh, they were, they both were born in Italy. But they had, uh, English traditions and, uh—

SC: Okay, so starting with you. So you were born in Welland and what was the date again?

MR: Pardon?

SC: What year were you born in?

MR: I was born on June the 21, 1921.

SC: Okay. And you lived your whole time in Welland?

MR: I lived in Welland all my life.

SC: Okay. And, um, um, work, um. So okay you went to school in Welland?

MR: Yes.

SC: At which school?

MR: Which. Uh, uh, just at a public school education.

SC: Okay. And can you tell me a little bit about that?

MR: The school?

SC: Especially during the war time years?

MR: Uh, well, the school actually went with the other children. We weren't very happy at school and learning was another thing. And, uh, in those days perhaps a lot of us were not allowed to, uh, attend. Once you've had the, uh, the grade eight, they felt that you had enough.

SC: You finished school. And did you take Italian classes? Language classes?

MR: Just evening Italian classes I attended. And, they, they were most informative. And, uh, nice youngsters. And we, we played and we learned.

SC: Were the classes in Welland?

MR: Yes. That, uh, the school was held at the old, uh, hall on Park Street.

SC: Okay.

MR: And, uh—

SC: How many kids were in the class?

MR: Oh, I'd say about 30.

SC: Oh! Wow. Okay.

MR: Yes.

SC: And, uh, do you remember what your teacher's name was by chance?

MR: Uh, pardon?

SC: Do you remember what your teacher's name was by chance?

MR: Um.

SC: It's okay if you don't.

MR: Yeah. I'd like to say but I can't think very well. [laughs]

EV: [laughs]

SC: Um, uh—

MR: We found that, uh, in all the time that we went, we probably went about three, four years, only once did we see a minister from Toronto. Otherwise we were all Canadian.

SC: Right. And how often would you go to Italian school?

MR: Oh, maybe one night a week.

SC: Okay. Uh—

MR: You're going to half to fill in for me.



*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

EV: How was it, what was it like being Italian—

MR: [sighs]

EV: —in those days?

MR: Well, it was the language of my mother and my father. Uh, I, I took pride in my Italian but, uh, again, I'm Canadian. I, I'm born and bred here so I followed our rule. [cell phone rings]

EV: Shoot. My apologies. Turn this off. Sorry. Go ahead.

MR: Uh—

EV: Did you experience, um, because you were Italian growing up with an Italian family, did you experience any discrimination—

MR: Well—

EV: —or—

MR: —we've found some discrimination really after the war started. Once, uh, the, uh, Italians went to war it was a different story altogether. And, uh, I remember the one time a girl, uh, where I worked she, uh, interviewed me and I answered as honestly as I could. And then, uh, one question was asked. I didn't know the answer sincerely and, uh, she says, "Well, you should know." Well, I thought, I thought that was kind of rude. Really, she was of Italian heritage like I am. She says, "Well, you should know."

Well, I didn't know.

EV: Hmm.

MR: And, uh, but other than that the youngsters were wonderful. The Italian songs sometimes that we sang, uh, very cheerful and, uh, it was nice to sort of get together and speak Italian because it was the language of our parents. And, uh, we had, they had to learn English or they wouldn't be able even to buy a loaf of bread.

EV: Yes.

MR: So, this is how we went on until we found the change in the war.

SC: And the war—

MR: The war brought—

SC: Sorry?

[picture fades out at 00:04:45 but sound remains]

MR: The war brought a lot of changes. We were, felt subdued, you know—[picture returns at 00:04:50] and, uh, it was hard coming over that so we just had to, had to obey the law and we did. You know, and, uh, there was fingerprinting done. I remember my husband used to go once a week to get fing, fingerprinted. I didn't because I was Canadian born. And, uh, uh, you go to the market and you ask the farmer, "How much are those?" "Speak English. Speak English." You know, you couldn't even

go to the market anymore. And, uh, my mother would speak a little English. It was half English and half Italian. But she managed to get on more with her hands in different ways than anything. And though everybody was fingerprinted. And—

EV: So there was a definite change—

MR: Oh yes.

EV: —from before when you—

MR: Oh yes.

EV: So prior to the war—

MR: Oh yeah.

EV: —you didn't face—

MR: Oh definitely.

EV: —any sort of discrimination—

MR: Yeah.

EV: —uh, from, from the non-Italians.

MR: Yeah. Yeah. Yeah.

EV: Oh.

MR: You know, because the Italians were so, uh, close, even more you should say, they were, I think, a little more than any of them. And the Germans too, you know. But, uh, we, we went to work. We played like we usually played. And, uh, uh, you know, time went on, as a matter of fact I might have been 14, if I was that. And, uh, you know, it was hard.

SC: Now, were you working at the time when the war broke out or—

MR: Yes, I was working.

SC: And where were you working?

MR: I was working at Messo[?]. It's a cotton mill.

SC: Okay.

RM: Yeah.

SC: Okay.

MR: And it was nice working there. But right away, you know, they weren't discriminating. Sincerely they were good people. But, uh, you know, we, we could feel it with some, you know, either your English friends all of a sudden you have to be careful. And we did but it, it was hard for us.

EV: So it's not just the maybe the people, your, your own friends all of a sudden—

MR: Uh—

EV: —are—

MR: No. No. No. It was everybody, generally.

EV: Generally.

MR: Anybody that had, as they say, a smell of Italy, that was it, you know. And I remember that we had never had the, the consul, the Italian consul here in Welland and, uh, uh, so the one night he came and, uh, there were questions, a lot that I didn't know and so in Italian he spoke to me, “*Come si nome[?]*” I told him my name. And then he asked me a question. He says, uh, “*Qui es commada piase[?]*” “*Comment ton piase[?]*” [laughing] I know it Italian but I don't know Italian. So I says, “I'm going to shoot.” “*It's sintagong[?]*.” He says to me, “*Brava.*”

SC: Hmm.

MR: And I got ahead. And, uh, they were hard times. No kidding. And we felt cheated. A lot of our friends that knew us. No. No. It not, it wasn't everybody. Like our friends that, I had even English friends, no. But, you know, you always felt a little—It was hard.

EV: Yeah. So why did the consul come down [the rest of the sentence is drowned out]—

MR: I think once in a while the, uh, the consul came down for to check all the schools. I think there was one at the Falls, one at Welland, and the other around here, I don't know. But I think there was in the Falls. And it was nice to see. We'd never seen, uh, you know, a director or English, Italian, yes. But not, uh, you know, I mean English, yes and not Italian.

SC: So you'd mentioned the, uh, the fingerprinting and that you did not have to go because you were Canadian?

MR: Yes.

SC: Now, did your parents have to go to be fingerprinted?

MR: Pardon?

SC: Did your parents ever have to go to be fingerprinted?

MR: No.

SC: No? Okay.

MR: No. No. No. No. No. They were kept free, the older people. I know that, uh my sister, actually, she was called by the mounties to, uh, go and, uh, my brother-in-law was already at Petawawa, but, uh, they asked her questions and, you know, she was taken in the cellar for them to, uh, ask questions. She's just a lady. She was there with my brother. What could we do—

EV: Right.

MR: —you know? And, uh, I think it's war time and everybody, perhaps we watch before we leap or, you know, I suppose in other countries it could be the same, you know. We were lucky here. We were strong. And really, the, uh, I don't think that perhaps, uh, it happened everywhere. Maybe at just certain times. Because you hear a lot of, we heard a lot of good people attending the meetings after the war because they had Sons of Italy and, uh, they got together and they did but after a while they closed them. They didn't have them anymore. One or two, you know, months after the war they stopped and you didn't hear. Just, we just had bad memories now. And, uh, it was an awful experience.

[fades out at 00:10:30]

[fades in at 00:10:31]

SC: Yeah and then after the war just what—Did you continue working at—

MR: Uh—

SC: —at the cotton mill or?

MR: Yeah.

SC: Or...

MR: Yeah. I did, uh, actually work. I worked until I was married. I had ch—three children as a matter of fact. Then my husband passed away. And of course that meant I had to go to work. He didn't leave us penniless but if I spent what I had, then what? So I went to work and, uh, uh, worked about four

months, something like that. Then my brothers knew a lot of people that were starting business and so I started my own. And, uh, you know, where there's a will, there's a way. There were years—One, about a year and a half, I took in sales two million dollars.

SC: Wow.

MR: Yeah.

SC: And, and what were you selling?

MR: Pardon?

SC: What kind of things were you selling?

MR: I was selling high priced china, the best. And we gave them an explanation and, uh, we carried china from all over the world. Of course nobody beats the Dalton china. It's made in England.

EV: So where was your store? Where—You had a store?

MR: I had—Yes, I had a very large store. Uh, it's called the Welland Plaza and then, uh, we moved to the, uh, mall. I still liked it at the plaza. I feel that if you make a friend and it's a true one, they don't change. They would still, would still come. I gave, 'cause my son was with me, and, uh, you, you know, he was, would help. He was a teacher by trade. And, uh, actually, uh, things didn't work out for him and, uh, so he helped me. He didn't have to go anywhere. We had our own business. I had hired people. But, uh, with people if, you know, it's just like a little puppy. It think if you treat them right— You know, we, we had big stores here in the area. Nobody beat my china. Of course, though, I did think

English in our way of living today. You know? You don't go back. You go forward. And, uh, I did, did well, very. My—People from around the area all came to my shop. Figurines that, uh—There was one day that Michael Dalton came in. And, uh, uh, actually, I think in, I took in, what, uh, I think \$13,000 one day and, uh, uh, so I called my brother. We're a very close-knit family. I called him. He had a store of shoes. It was because of him that I got interested. I had my brother to watch over if I, you know, did, things didn't go right. And, uh, so, you know, I called him, “Jim, you know what? I, I took in 13, \$13,000 today.” “1300?” No, I says, “Took in 13 today.” “1300?” I says, “No, 13,000.” [laughing] “Wow,” he says, “You do have a good business.”

EV: How long did you have this business?

MR: 44 years.

EV: Wow.

MR: [laughs] I had worked until I was 88.

EV: Oh my God.

MR: Yeah. And, uh, uh, it was wonderful. Knowing things, I learned so much. There's a lot to learn about china. It's not buying a cup and saucer. And this is what I did, if I sold something, I always give a history. I feel that they should know what they—but I wanted them to know what we were buying and it's as a matter of fact, Michael Dalton's still a friend of ours. You know, and, uh, his was the highest. Things now have changed for another, started going another way. But people will be people, I guess?

EV: Yeah.

MR: You know?

EV: Remarkable, remarkable career you had.

MR: You know, yeah. Oh yeah! Oh yeah! And with my husband, uh—

EV: By yourself!

MR: Yeah. Yeah. I had my brothers that were just—we're such a close family. My—I had two more, two brothers, three brothers altogether. They did not marry. Uh, they, they were all business people, my brothers. My brother bought the first pizza, pizzeria here in Welland. He was working in Buffalo and then, now my brother, Jim, says, "Tim, well, you've got all this, come to Welland, come home." And, uh, so, we, he talked, we talked him into it. And he's the first pizza man that, uh—. And still they buy, a lot of them carry his name: Santo's. And, uh, you know—

EV: What year was that? What year?

MR: Oh, yeah, okay, about 1965, 1966. Yeah. And, uh, I've had some tragedies. I lost my husband. I was only, uh, I think 39 years old and, uh, just a heart attack. Uh, and then, uh, one of my greatest difficulties that I've had, I had a daughter. My three children are all educated. And, uh, the young one was, she came a long time after. She was so clever, really. Uh, she got the highest marks in Canada for nuclear medicine.

EV: Wow.

MR: And, uh, the, uh, dean sent me a letter after she passed away, and, uh you know, he says, “Most of them have to work so hard just to get their tests. But, you know you, you know, have, you know, you're the best in the country.” But after, um, they were married in July, after three, three months, she was shot coming home from work. I guess they were, as they say, they were watching, you know, where she would go. And anyway, uh, you know, they had, uh, beaten her up and left her on the floor. So she started to cry for help. What else do you do? So they came back and one shot her.

EV: How did that happen?

MR: And that has, uh, you know, that has been also in my life something I can't get over.

EV: How did that happen?

MR: Well they, uh, the one was 15 years old. He's, he, uh, they're all out. Yugoslavian, uh, I think he's on parole. The young one that did actually the shooting, he was on parole for about seven years and the other one, I guess, uh, suffered, uh, he was just the third party and, you know, we didn't, uh, so that's, that's hard. Money's nothing.

EV: No.

MR: Mmm mmm. I've got her room set, left just the way, uh, she left it on her wedding day. You know, her cards and her things. And, uh—

EV: What's the reason? What happened?

MR: Pardon?

EV: What happened? What, what, what was the reason for that? Do you know?

MR: They were just after credit cards!

EV: Jeez.

MR: They were after credit cards. And she had this little sports car. They thought, well, and, uh—. It was kind of funny, the next day af, the police were brought, um, surveying I guess, and, uh, this car from nowhere starts speeding so they chase them and they found her card and, uh, nothing. About— Nothing in there. And, uh this was it. This has controlled my life.

EV: Yes. I'm sure.

MR: Yeah. I still cry every day.

EV: Okay.

MR: God help.

[fades out at 00:18:29]

[fades in at 00:18:30]

MR: You're married, okay? I don't want to see you with another man. You know, and, uh, time went on and, uh, you know, we, he, he, we found that he had passed away. But this was the point that I was getting at. I was lying down, um, in the bedroom and she came to my room and it was a vision. She

laid down beside me. She look at me. I look at her. Nothing was ever said. But you don't hear them anyway. And then she disappeared. But I didn't want her to go. It's a sad life.

EV: Yeah...Okay. So shall we, uh—

SC: Go backwards—

EV: —go back to the war?

MR: Yeah.

EV: Let's go back to the war, Mary—

MR: Yeah.

EV: —is that okay?

MR: Yeah! That's fine.

EV: Just before—

MR: I, I'm giving you my time so you go ahead. [laughs]

EV: Whatever you like. Whatever you want to say is, is fine.

MR: Uh, uh, gosh, what can I say? My—

SC: Let's, let's start with, uh, when was your sister—When did your sister and your brother-in-law marry?

MR: They married in, I believe in 1948.

SC: Okay.

MR: My sister and brother-in-law. And Mr. Raso was a very intelligent man. Of all the people around he was one of the most intelligent. Maybe this was—He played in a band. In Italy, most of the people, the shoemakers, uh, in between time they, they're taught to play. So he played in the Welland band many a time. And very, very, uh, qualified. He was an inspector at the Cordage. At, uh, very smart, really, and, uh, golly, what could I say? He was always very—

[00:20:15]

EV: —doing before, uh—

MR: Pardon?

EV: Just before the war, what was he doing?

MR: Uh, that was the same job he was doing, yes. Until—

EV: He was working for what, sorry?

MR: An inspector for cord. They making hemp into rope.

EV: Oh.

MR: So, that, uh, for the wheat fields. They, that would go to the wheat fields. And, uh—

SC: The factor was here in Welland.

MR: Yeah, yeah. And, uh, and, uh, [sighs] it's a tough experience. But I lived two all the time[?].

[laughs]

EV: So—

SC: So—

EV: Go ahead.

SC: So the war broke out—

MR: Uh huh.

SC: —and, and what, what happened, and—?

MR: When the war broke out we just followed the, the pack, you know? We went to, like, to school. I went to work. The other people all went to work. And, uh, it's, you know, there really was no change that way. No. We were sort of looked down on but I can't say that they really, no. No. There wasn't

that kind of existence. People around here in Welland are very, very good. They were very, and even better ones 'cause now society has changed. And, uh, you know, it's, uh, it's different today.

SC: So, um, so when the RCMP—

MR: Uh huh.

SC: Was it the RCMP that came—

MR: Yes.

SC: —to see your brother-in-law?

MR: Yes.

SC: Was he at work or did that happen at home or?

MR: No, my brother-in-law was working actually. And, uh, like, my sister was working at the time too. Well, she had stopped at night to visit my mother a little and I was coming home with my sister. So, uh, the, uh, on the next road we could see, we could hear too, a man, a man on a bicycle, on a t—uh, not a bicycle, m, uh, what are they? Motorbike?

EV: Motorbike?

MR: Yeah. And, uh, you know, we knew him, and, uh, so he went that way. In the meantime, my niece, my sister's daughter, she was home, she was home with her grandmother and, uh, you know, she,

“Mom, come home. The police are at our house.” And my sister thought, ‘Oh my gosh. What do the police want?’ Well, it took a little while and she didn’t come home so I went. I was detained and, uh, they were most polite really but there was nothing much that was said. The only that, uh, it was there and, um, some of them though can be just—Well, some people across the street and they were hollering, uh, “Put him in jail, you wop.” Oh yeah. Yeah.

EV: So they were waiting for him to come home?

MR: Yeah. They were waiting for him to come home. Instead he was marched off to, uh, Toronto and then, uh, the, uh...The, the, Exhibition Grounds?

EV: Yes.

MR: That’s where they were held. And, uh, then after, uh, my sister did hire a lawyer but that didn’t do anything. The thing that helped him that he fought his own case with the lawyers there, he says, uh, “Italy had started the war in 1922. I was here in 1921. How could I be involved?” And I think that is what—They let him go and then he started to work at Port Robinson. And things—He was fine after that.

EV: So he, uh, let’s go back a little bit.

MR: Yeah.

EV: Um, was he picked up? Why was he arrested?

MR: I’ll tell you why. This is what we think sincerely. He was picked up for the simple reason that he

started the Sons of Italy.

EV: In Welland.

MR: In Welland. Yes. A lady had come from Toronto and she felt that, uh—There were more Italians at the time because now not too many people really, you know, carry on. And, uh, you know, so she got him and he thought it was pretty interesting. He says, “We have nothing of our own here.’ You know. So they would have the dance sometime or a show. It didn't go much further than that.

[fades out at 00:24:28]

[fades in at 00:24:29]

EV: So your brother-in-law was—

MR: Was taken. My dau—My sister was waiting for him to come home. Well, he didn't come home. As a matter of fact he was marched to Canadian Exhibition Grounds and, uh, I hear that there were quite a few Italian anyway, well known people. He didn't know them, but through the papers. You know, 'cause it was nothing that special. Although they dined. Where would they have dined? At, uh, Roberto's. A lot of times maybe in the church. And there was a hall that nobody really, uh, um, used. Not used, but you know, well, we'll say, used, but nothing, they had a dance or something like that. There was nothing unusual. No.

EV: So—

MR: No.

SC: So was there a specific club house for the Sons of Italy or did they just—?

MR: Uh—

SC: Like you mentioned they used the church hall—

MR: I think they used to—now that—I don't think it was the Italian hall. They just used it, you know, I think. Yeah. And, uh, you know, and like his, uh, mother almost got sick over it. Poor thing. She was on in years. And, uh, you know, it, uh, it was funny. You know, all of a sudden, you, you're minding, you know you, you did what you thought was inevitable and here you are, you've got your fingers in the trap. You know, 'cause knowing that my brother-in-law wouldn't, uh, you know, uh...

EV: So he, he was founder and president of the Sons of Italy.

MR: Yes. Yes. And it carried on very well under his guidance. More people were coming and people did enjoy getting together for a beer or a glass of wine. Dances, they had dances. And—

EV: And where was this?

MR: This used to be at, what they used to call the Italian hall on Park Street? And, uh—

EV: Is it still there?

MR: Yeah. Yeah.

EV: That's not the Dante Club, uh—?

MR: No, no, no. That they built just a few years ago. That's more of a hall to make money. What they do with it I think is—it's not political at all. It's one man owns it and, you know. But there then it was a lot of the people that were in business, Italian, they did come, they did help, you know. And, uh, uh, there was a respectful society. Of course, my brother-in-law was looked up to. You know, and anybody that goes he was looked up to. Maybe that's what was brought him in. We don't know. We don't know anything from—

EV: That's sort of typical because—

MR: Yeah.

EV: —those that were part of the Sons of Italy, at least the presidents—

MR: Mmmhmm, mmmhmm.

EV: —or those in the executive—

MR: Uh huh.

EV: —uh, were arrested.

MR: Yeah.

EV: Uh, but tell me, uh, after the, after he was arrested—

MR: Uh huh.

EV: —did he go—What happened to the Sons of Italy? Did it, uh, fall apart—?

MR: Well, it did. It did fall apart. There was no way. I don't think there was one meeting after.

EV: Yeah.

MR: No. No. There was no meeting. As a matter of fact, I was one of those too. What did I, I joined, What did I go? Three or four times and, uh, my brother-in-law says, “Be [unknown] so you can read,” you know? I don't think I read more than once. But, uh, no. We were afraid.

EV: Right.

MR: We were afraid, you know. And, uh, uh—

EV: So d—, he was taken. Do you know anything about how he was taken? He was taken from work to the CNE and then—?

MR: I would imagine that, that, this deal with the city officers. This is all the, the mounted police. And, uh, those were the rules. Whether, some of them, there was one man that was not very respectful. And, uh, his wife quizzed my sister one day and, uh, they didn't even take, let her take her in the kitchen. They brought her in the cellar. Bomb or something, I don't know. They're be afraid of a bomb themselves.

SC: Now, when the RCMP came for the first time to the house do you remember what they asked?

MR: I really wasn't until later. Or, you know, yeah. So I didn't—

SC: Okay.

MR: No.

SC: And when they took your brother-in-law away, did they—

MR: F—

SC: —tell your sister where they were taking him?

MR: No.

SC: —or...

MR: She didn't know anything.

SC: Okay.

MR: No. He was taken from where he worked and, uh, taken to Toronto and then when the police, police after came to pick her up they told her that she was, you know, that he was in Toronto. Yeah. And, uh, so—

EV: How long after did you find out—

MR: Uh—

EV: —where he was? Because he—

MR: Oh, we caught, caught wind of it right way. He realized. Yeah. They realized. I'm sure they must have told him when they took him that, uh—

EV: But how long did, how long did your sister was it before your sister found out?

MR: Same night.

EV: Oh, same night.

MR: Same night. And, uh, uh, really, I think he was in, in June he was taken. And about Easter time he was out. He was not there at all. Not long at all.

SC: And this is 1940?

[00:29:54]

MR: Yeah. Yes. It was June the 10th. It was kind of funny. We had to cancel our date because, uh, you know, it was alarming[?], really. So we just so disappointed and, uh, so we postponed it 'til later and, uh, uh, you know, there's another thing too. My sister was con—Her money was confiscated. Her property, she had to leave. They didn't own the property but she had to leave. It was Cordage property where he worked. And, uh, you know, so, um, uh, the, the, what, uh, I, I think that, that, that was it.

Like, it was Cordage property and they, they, they weren't mean but they could be saucy sometimes, you know.

EV: So what happened after? Did they get back, the property back or?

MR: No, no, no, no, no, no. No. No.

SC: And then so where did she go to live once she had to leave her home?

MR: Oh all the times she was called for me for interviews. 'Cause the husband—The wives of the— Police people did their bit of work too. You know, we were all, uh, you know, hand printed too. I didn't have to go because I, uh, no—

SC: What did they—Did your sister—Where did she go and live once they, uh—

MR: She came to our house.

SC: Okay.

MR: And we didn't, uh—have that much room. My poor sister. She had a lovely home. And, uh, she was living, sleeping, on mattresses in the house: her, her mother-in-law and two little girls. And they were with my mother. They were okay, you know. But, uh, tremendous, you know. You're put down to nothing. And he was a respectful man. So many times, one of the first there—it didn't have to be Italian, just anybody. You know. And, uh, he was a good citizen. I admire him very, very much, you know, and admire the work that he did because he was an intelligent man but he was never, other than being the president of the society. There was no one else to take that place. There was no one

else to take that place. He was a—There was a doctor, you know Dr. Malidla[?]. Dr. Malidla or Dr. Scozzafave[?].

EV: Yeah.

MR: And, uh, he was a grand man. Very, very, nice. In those days if you did have the money the doctor would come and would come at night too. But today if you don't have, uh, um, you know, you don't have an appointment six months ahead you're out. But him, very, very nice.

EV: So they took him too?

MR: Oh yeah. Yeah.

EV: Why do you think they took him? Doc—

MR: That same reason.

EV: But he was a doctor.

MR: Yeah, yeah, you know, and he was no more—I didn't see him or have heard that he took or went to a meeting. No. He didn't. I know that we had a Catholic society in our church. And, uh, his wife attended. You know, I don't think that would have anything. You know.

SC: And which—

MR: Uh—

SC: Which church was this?

MR: Pardon?

SC: Which church was this?

MR: St. Mary's Church. [laughs]

EV: So you think just because, um, Dr. Scozzafava[?] was a, was a doctor—

MR: Y—

EV: —was a prominent member in—

MR: Yeah.

EV: —that means—

MR: Yeah.

EV: —they took, they arrested him as well.

MR: That's the respect they had for the Italian people.

EV: Yeah.

MR: 'Cause that man didn't do anything, honestly. Like I said, I bet you ten to one he lost a lot of money when he died. People, you know, we felt sorry for him because, you know, we used to go to him and that doctor, as a matter of fact, my dad worked at the Cordage, but, uh, uh, in those days hardly anyone worked. You know, but he had a pretty good little job. We were 6 children in the family. Well, anyway, uh, gee, what am I leading up to? You know, well, this is it. Dr. Scozzafava[?] found out— I was always having a sore throat. Uh, well, he came and noticed I was getting too many sore throats and, uh, he, um, he approached the Rotary Club and he said, “Mr. Calarco[?] can't, uh, pay. The children are always sick.” We got our tonsils out for nothing.

SC: Hmm.

MR: That was that man. Very nice man. See, at times like that I think nobody, you know, everybody's so upset that if they don't do their job, you know, but, uh, it was a mix up.

EV: So you think because they, your, your brother-in-law and the doctor were—

MR: They were—

EV: —were members of probably the two—

MR: Yeah. Yeah. Yeah.

EV: —prominent—

MR: Yeah. Exactly. Yeah.

EV: Yeah.

MR: 'Cause the doctor was well known and respected. My husband—My son-in-law, my son-in-law— My brother-in-law was not, but you know, had he gone to school, he was very, very bright. And he came from, uh [unknown]

EV: Yeah.

MR: And, uh, he was just a boy when he came. And, uh—

EV: Mary, can I ask you, uh, when—You said that when they came, when the RCMP came to the, your sister's house—

MR: Uh huh.

EV: —the neighbours were calling you names.

MR: Well, it was the neighbour across the street called him a wop, “Take him away.” We didn't even know there was that kind of a war yet.

EV: Yeah.

MR: 'Cause it's only about a day or two later, if it wasn't just the next day. Yeah. It's a one neighbour, yeah. But the lady next door she was very British and still she was good friends with, uh, my sister. Not everybody felt like that. You know, you, uh, get, uh, uh—I don't know. I don't know just how to put it

really but it's really. Um, but it's, you know, it was, it was tough.

EV: Now, when your sister came, your sister and her daughters—

MR: Yeah. Yeah.

EV: —and her mother-in-law—

MR: Yeah.

EV: —came to live with you, uh, did you experience any discrimination or any problems?

MR: No. No. No, no. No. No. But they confiscated the money and I think they gave it to him after he came home from the camp. I don't think they even took anything. No. No.

EV: But they didn't—They still didn't have a place when he came home.

MR: When, when he comes home it was easy because he started to look for an apartment and, uh, right away, you know, otherwise she couldn't go anywhere. She was alone.

EV: Yeah.

MR: You know.

EV: Yeah.

MR: And, uh—

EV: Now do you know anything about, uh, uh, what happened to him, his life in the camp and that sort of thing?

MR: Well, he said that they had to cook for their own meal. They cooked their own meals. Um, often times they would go into the forest. About food he never really complained. No. And, uh, there was, uh, a very well to do man from Toronto. He was, uh, put in there too and, uh, he got a carton of cigarettes in those days, they were really large, and gave a package to all of them. And I think that my brother-in-law during his stay there learned how to carve. And he carved spoons and forks and, you know. He, uh, they had to keep busy, you know.

EV: So how long was he there?

MR: About, not quite a year, about nine months, ten months, something like that.

SC: And when he came back did he speak, speak about his experiences or was he—?

MR: No, no. He spoke. He spoke. Yeah. Yeah.

EV: A lot of people don't.

MR: No. No.

EV: Sorry, a lot of people didn't.

MR: Well, to tell you the truth if it wasn't for her [points off screen] I wouldn't have either.

EV: Yeah.

MR: [laughs]

EV: Yeah.

MR: She's a good little girl.

EV: Yes, she is. [laughs]

MR: [laughs]

SC: Um, and while your brother-in-law was, um, either at the Exhibition Grounds in Toronto or Petawawa, were, was your sister-in-law, was your sister, sorry, ever able to go visit him or?

MR: No. No.

SC: No?

MR: That was taboo. No. No. She never saw them the nine months. Although she would sent him parcels—

SC: Okay.

MR: —you know, dried food and they, yeah. A lot of them don't like to—I think for the fear, I didn't like it. You know and I thought, I've had a lot of time to think about it, I wasn't especially fond. But I just thought, 'Well, it's just trying to. [picture fades at 00:38:46 but sound remains] Nothing can happen.' You know? You know. We always had this fear. You know. But maybe not them. [picture returns at 00:38:54] Maybe others. You know? Uh, politics are funny, funny person.

EV: When he was in the camp and, I mean, she wrote letters, do you know if—

MR: He wrote letters to his wife, yes.

EV: Did, uh, and the food, the parcels, were that—Did he receive everything?

MR: Yeah. Yes, he did. Yeah. Yeah. Yeah.

EV: Do you know anything else? Can you tell us anything else about what happened in the camp?

MR: No. He says they had good companionship. But they were all, uh, you know, “What am I here for?” You know? “What am I here for?” That's about all you get. You know.

EV: They were never given any explanation—

MR: No. No. Mmm mmm. Mmm mmm. No. No.

SC: Do you know if he ever stayed in touch with, uh, people that he met in the camp?

MR: Oh yeah.

SC: Yeah.

MR: Yeah. I don't remember them all but, uh, there's, uh, there was a good bunch in the Falls and, uh, they kept friends but they were what you would call a, uh, *pisan* from Italy, so naturally, you know.

But, uh—

[00:40:06]

EV: So, Mary, when he came back—

MR: Mmmhmm.

EV: —can you tell us something about how he got back on his feet, how he got going—

MR: Well—

EV: —was he discriminated?

MR: —the friends, the friends that he had before he [laughing] contacted them and, uh, he got a job at, uh, Port Robinson. And he was, uh, welder. He made good money.

EV: Hmm.

MR: And, uh—

EV: He didn't have any, he didn't experience much? Would you say he experienced—

MR: No. Once it was over, it was over. There was nothing. We all had bad thoughts 'cause we feel that it shouldn't have happened.

EV: But the friends that he had, that helped him get a job and all that, were they all Italian?

MR: Oh yeah.

EV: Yeah.

MR: Yeah. Yeah

EV: So—

MR: The, uh—I'm pretty sure they were all Italian. But I think you didn't need anybody. You would go personally. They needed help, they'd hire you. I, I don't think anyone had to go for it, really. You know, and, uh—

EV: And you think, um, that within the non-Italian community was there, did, did you still feel—

MR: No, the, the there was still a [unknown] with the Italian, you know, the Italian and the—Not too long because Italian people are nice and, uh, the British, we lived with them for years. You know, we, sometimes we admire them and sometimes they admire us. We're just human beings.

EV: Yes.

MR: You know, really.

SC: I had a question going back, um—

MR: Yeah.

SC: —I forgot to ask. You mentioned about the fingerprinting—

MR: Yeah.

SC: —that some people had to go. Now, um, where would they have to go do this, how often?

MR: They had this little place that I told you, the Italian club?

SC: Mmmhmm.

MR: And sometimes they had to go to city hall.

SC: Okay.

MR: The police were there. And everybody who was, uh, not English[?], they had to go or the police would be after them. Yeah.

SC: And then did they have to continually check in after? Or was it just you go once and then you're...?

MR: Well, they, with my brother-in-law was through the war, really because everybody was still fingerprinted right through the war.

SC: Okay.

MR: Yeah.

SC: And when he came back did he ever have to, did he have to regularly check in with city hall or was he free?

MR: No. They didn't bother him anymore. No. No. No. And then he had that going for him because, uh, you know, he, uh, uh, more or less he wasn't there when, uh, you know, Mussolini was, uh, there. Just—

EV: You said your husband had to go get fingerprinted.

MR: Yeah, yeah.

EV: How often?

MR: I kind of think—Gee, you know, I'd have to say once a week.

EV: Really.

MR: It was quite often they had to go.



*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

EV: So all, all those who were born—

MR: Yeah. Yeah. Yeah. Yeah. Just the ones that were born. Like, myself, I was married to one, no. They didn't bother me.

[fades out at 00:43:09]

[fades in at 00:43:10]

SC: Okay. I was just going to ask, um, there were a few more people interned, uh, from Welland?

MR: Uh—

SC: And I believe we spoke about them.

MR: The La Bosco[?] girls.

SC: Yeah. So, um,—

MR: I think—

SC: The first person is, yeah, Verna La Bosco. [?]

MR: Yeah. She wasn't—

SC: What can you tell me about her?

MR: What could I tell you? She taught school. She was working for a, she was working for the government. Uh, she went, uh, for somebody else she read the office of the beer parlour. She was a very wonderful girl. I took, this is where I learned my Italian.

SC: So she was the Italian teacher.

MR: Yeah, well she was Canadian born—

SC: Okay.

MR: —but, uh, yeah. She just taught Italian.

EV: So this is Verna and her sister, the two of them? Was it?

MR: Uh—

EV: Do you remember?

MR: Verna...No, it was just—Verna was not married.

EV: No.

MR: No. No. I don't think so.

EV: So how—Do you, do you know anything about what happened to them? To her?

MR: Well, I think she must have taken her in because she taught Italian school.

EV: Yeah.

MR: That's the only reason we can think. 'Cause she was an honourable girl.

SC: You said she worked for the brewery and—?

MR: Yeah.

SC: Okay.

MR: Mmmhmm.

SC: And did she, was—After the war did she continue to work there or did she—?

MR: No. I don't think so. She was a primary worker. No. She started her own business. And she used to sell china too.

SC: Okay. Also in Welland still?

MR: Yeah.

SC: Okay.

MR: So when I went there I took over. [laughs]

SC: Do you remember what the name of her store was?

MR: Ah sure, Mavern[?]. Mary, Ma from Mary, and Vern, she had another sister, Verna, and, uh, yeah.

SC: Okay.

MR: So it was the two sisters, actually.

EV: Sorry, one is Verna, the other one was?

MR: Mary.

EV: Oh, Mary. But Verna was arrested.

MR: Yeah. Yeah. Yes. Verna was elected. Yeah. Oh, she was wonderful.

EV: You bought them out.

MR: [laughs]

EV: Did you?

MR: I did.

EV: Yeah. [laughs]

MR: As a matter of fact she said, you know when she found out she said, “She'll never make it.” Not only that, I had three stores.

EV: Wow.

MR: It's just, don't push people. And you've got to have a good job and the price has to be good. You can't absorbent prices and—Like, what I did, uh, I sold the same as the big stores because, uh, you know, if they could get it at one price, I could sell it at mine. So I got them to give me a, a discount, like the big stores. [shrugs] All made the same. Yeah. I love business.

EV: Um, do you know anything about Giuseppe Returra? [?]

MR: He was a teacher.

EV: Yeah.

MR: He taught with Verna.

EV: Ah.

MR: And, uh, I don't think he was a teacher by trade. You know, he just, like myself, you know, teaching the Italian. But he stayed and once the war—I don't think he was here during the war. Once the war broke out he went to the States. He wasn't here all the time. Nice man. We enjoyed having him as a teacher.



*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

SC: Do you know what—

MR: Nice—

SC: Sorry.

MR: Nice looking man too. [laughs]

SC: Do you know what he did aside from teaching Italian class?

MR: He worked in a factory.

SC: Okay.

MR: Yeah.

SC: The Cordage factory as well or—?

MR: No. No. It wasn't the Cordage. I think one of those steel plants.

SC: Right.

MR: Yeah.

SC: Okay. Um, there's also a, um, and then Dr. Scozzafava[?] who you mentioned. Yes.



*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

MR: Yeah. Oh, that was such a shame.

SC: Yeah. Um...

EV: [Unknown – very quiet]

SC: Yeah. Go...

MR: His wife was from Northern Italy. And, uh—

SC: Which one was that?

MR: His wife was—

SC: Scozzafava? [?]

MR: Mrs. Scozzafava[?] was from Northern Italy.

SC: Okay.

EV: And—

MR: And she was gorgeous. A beautiful Italian lady. Yeah. Very nice.

SC: And did you ever know an Antonio Nero? Also—

MR: Yeah. [laughing] He was just a grocer in town. He didn't have anything—"Don't take old Mr. Nero."
[laughs] They used to sit on the bushels of potatoes, bushels of apples. You always find some
[unknown] You were afraid to go in. [laughs] Yeah.

SC: Do you remember what the name of the grocery was?

MR: Nero's Grocery.

SC: Pardon?

MR: Nero's grocery.

SC: Okay.

MR: Nice man.

SC: Where was—

MR: He was on East, uh, King Street.

[fades out at 00:47:57]

[fades in at 00:47:58]

SC: Do you feel that the Italians who were interned should seek any, um, compensation from the federal government?

MR: No.

SC: No.

MR: Not at all. They were nearly all workers anyway. I don't think there were any that were on—if they are, there were, I don't know. You know, no. Little jobs, even at the street, cleaning the street. They worked.

SC: Mmmhmm. Mmmhmm.

EV: What are your final views about that, that whole era? The era where you were—What do you think about that, uh—

MR: Well—

EV: —what do you think about the way the Italians were treated?

MR: It's, uh, it wasn't—It was there—We did have peace other than the Depression where people weren't working and, uh, a lot of them had to be supported by the Canadian government. There's no question about it. But, uh, then when, uh, the war broke out, you know, men went to work. All of them went to work. And there was no such thing, people or properties. No. It was just the difference in politics. There was no rotten core. Our girls marry, uh, English boys and vice versa. There's nothing. My brother, yeah, one of my brothers married an Irish girl. And, uh, no. No. It was just sad. And, you know, over in, uh, Europe things weren't at peace. And it had to come to something. And who knows, uh, what else? You know. Uh, this is what I feel anyway.

SC: That's right.

MR: I was just, like I said I was, I was just 18 at the time when all of this happened and, uh, I'm old enough to remember. You know, yeah. Uh—

SC: Can I ask you one more question just about the Italian community in general in Welland at the time?

MR: Pardon?

SC: Uh, just a question about the Italian community in Welland—

MR: Yes.

SC: —at the time. Now, did they, did they all seem to really work together? Were there any divisions? Was there—

MR: No. They took their chance just like anybody. And, like, uh, there's, uh, uh, uh, like, one that hires. If he likes one more than the other it's up to him to take who he wants. There was never any discrimination like that. No. No.

SC: Great! I think that—

MR: Yeah.

SC: —covers everything.

MR: Yeah.

EV: Thank you so much.

SC: Thank you.

MR: [laughing] You're very welcome. I hope I don't have to go to jail for this.

SC: Oh, certainly not.

EV: No.

SC: No, no.

EV: Why? Are you afraid of that? No.

MR: Oh sure.

EV: Why?

MR: We went through horrible things during the war, you know. And actually, uh, you know, I could have been watched too. Although I was good. I'm sure I was watched. And the English people if they don't talk, you know. He did. Our Italian people are the same I'm sure. You know. And, uh, the war lasted a long time. It's a long time. But, you know, a lot of people made coverage.

EV: You need not worry, Mary.

MR: [laughs] Well, it wasn't very easy. If my brothers didn't have the position, I would never have done—I ran the post office, as a matter of fact, for six or seven years.

EV: Oh.

MR: Yeah.

SC: And when was that?

MR: Uh, 1939 to, I think, 194—. 1939 to 1945.

SC: Hmm.

MR: Yeah. Then I started—It was taking so much time. But, uh, it was foolish. I should have kept, you know, I opened more stores. [laughs]

SC: Hmm. [laughs]

MR: [laughs] You know, these things, believe me, they're God-given.

EV: Yeah.

MR: They're God-given. I never thought.

EV: No one ever knows what, what—

MR: No. No. And, you know, this is all it meant. And, who knows? Maybe if they search back they might find the reason why it all became like this. You know, they search back and everybody tells the truth. You know, it's too bad that, we, we lost Canadians, we lost Italians. England lost hers. You know, she was, that was quite a blow. Maybe she wouldn't have been as hard.

EV: Yeah.

MR: You know. You've gotta give credit where it's due or you'll never do anything with yourself.

EV: Yeah.

SC: That's it.

MR: And, uh, yeah.

SC: Thank you very much.

MR: Oh, you're very welcome.

[fades out at 00:52:35]