

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

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LOCATION OF INTERVIEW: Hamilton, ON

NAME OF INTERVIEWEE: Nicholas Zaffiro

NAME OF INTERVIEWER: Nadia Mior

NAME OF VIDEOGRAPHER: Vikki Cecchetto

TRANSCRIBED BY: Lisa Kadey

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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.

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FrancescoZaffiro, NicholasZaffiro, Zaffiro, RCMP, MountedPolice, Hamilton, Fredericton, NewBrunswick, Petawawa, CampPetawawa, QuintoMartini, Mussolini, CasaDItalia, SonsofItaly, WWII, WW2, Internee, Internees, Interned, Internment, Internments, InternmentCamp, Internment Camps, Camp, Camps, WorldWarTwo, SecondWorldWar, ItalianCanadian, ItalianCanadians

ABSTRACT

Nicholas Zaffiro was 10 years old when his father, Francesco Zaffiro, was picked up at work by the Royal Mounted Police (RCMP). Nicholas describes going to his father's shop after school, and being informed by other children in the area of what had happened. Francesco was initially held at Camp Petawawa, ON and was later moved to Camp Ripples, NB. Although he had been tipped off that he would be arrested, he refused to abandon his family. Nicholas' impression is that his father never blamed the government for their actions, but detested the inability to defend himself. Prior to Francesco's internment, he was very active in the Italian community,

holding the office of provincial Vice President of the Order Sons of Italy, and acting as Secretary of the Hamilton *Fascio*. Nicholas notes that while his father was interned, he did not experience discrimination in his school or community, and that his neighbours were very supportive. Francesco was released after about two and a half years, but because of his prominent involvement in Italian organizations, he was one of the last to be released. Nicholas describes life going back to normal and his father re-establishing the Sons of Italy.

INTERVIEW

NZ: Nicolas Zaffiro, interviewee

NM: Nadia Mior, interviewer

VC: Vikki Cecchetto, videographer

[Title screen]

[Fades in at 00:00:10]

NZ: The top, uh, from the top it's, uh—today's my day off, and that's the only reason why I'm not in bed still. [Laughs]

NM: [unclear; 0:00:21.0] Okay, now, it's [unclear; 0:00:24.7]—

NZ: Only because you're here.

VC: —here, and to say something, um, to see whether it's going to be picked up with the mic.

NM: Okay, so I'll be the one doing the interview with you today.

NZ: Okay.

NM: And, uh, hopefully all things work out.

VC: No, we're only picking up his voice.

NZ: Just, just don't, uh, ask me difficult questions, because, uh, my memory is not that good.

[Laughter] It's how many years, it's—how many years has it been?

NM: Seventy.

NZ: Seventy years? Oh yeah, I was ten years old at the time.

NM: Yeah. Okay, well—so, we're—

[Fades out at 0:00:57.7]

[Fades in at 0:00:59.1]

NM: Okay. We're ready?

VC: The light is on.

NM: Okay, so here we are. Um, my name is Nadia, and, uh, we're here at the house of Nick Zaffiro.

NZ: Mm-hm.

NM: At 11 Forsythe Place, Hamilton, Ontario. So, were you born in Hamilton?

NZ: I was born in Hamilton, 1930.

NM: In 1930. And we understand that a family member was interned. And who was it?

NZ: My father was interned on June the 10th, 1940.

NM: Now, do you remember what happened on that day?

NZ: Well, I was at school. Um, and when I returned home, uh, just after four o'clock in the afternoon, I went to my dad's shop where I had to report each day after school, and the, and the shop was closed. And, uh, other children on the street told me that, uh, my father was, uh, picked up by the mounted police. And that was it, they didn't—uh, and was taken away, so. That's the only thing I, I can, can recall on that particular day.

NM: And so, did your mother say anything more about—

NZ: My mother was at work, my mother, uh, worked at the [unclear; 0:02:18.0] in Randall, where many Italian women worked at the time. And, uh, she didn't, uh, leave work until after five, so she didn't know—

NM: So, she didn't—

NZ: —until she got home from work.

NM: Geez. So, wa—um—

NZ: It was a traumatic experience in any event. Uh, not for me, really, uh, uh—but somewhat traumatic, but for my mother, of course, when she got home, her reaction was such that we all realized that a real tragedy had happened.

NM: Mm, I bet. So, you were at home, and, um—

NZ: I was at—

NM: —you were the first one home?

NZ: Uh, I was at school.

NM: Yeah.

NZ: And, um—

NM: And then you'd been—

NZ: As I say, and then I went home afterwards, but I didn't go home until after five.

NM: Oh.

NZ: In other words, I was on James Street where my dad had his shop, I had—

NM: Oh, okay.

NZ: —uh, other friends there, and I just played with them until I knew my mother would be home. And then I walked home, which was two blocks, uh, two blocks away.

NM: Oh, okay. So, let me just backtrack. Uh, your father's name?

NZ: Francesco Zaffiro, Francesco.

NM: Okay...okay, so you said—how old were you?

NZ: I was ten.

NM: You were ten at the time. So, how did you come to find out what had happened
<0:03:39.1>

NZ: As I say, when I got, when I got home, the other children on James Street there, near my dad's shop, uh, had told me that, um, my father had been, uh, uh, taken by the mounted police and Hamilton police. And that's all they knew, and that's what they, uh—and that's what they communicated to me.

NM: Now, were you, uh—were you able to see him before they took him—

NZ: I, I did not see my father again until, uh, until he was released in, uh, 1943.

NM: So, you had, uh—

NZ: So, he was away for almost, uh, three years.

NM: Did you have any sort of communication with him?

NZ: We used to send cards, uh, little cards very often. I don't know whether it was weekly or monthly, but he'd send little cards, uh, to me and to my sister and to my mother. I don't know whether we got one each, or—but I know very often we received, uh, communication from him, uh, in writing.

NM: Okay.

NZ: But we never ever—none of us saw him, uh, for all that period of time because, uh, the family just couldn't afford, uh, the cost of going to, to Petawawa or Fredericton, New Brunswick where he was, where he was held.

NM: And so, um, does—did he ever mention what activities they were doing at camp, or what it was like?

NZ: Oh yeah, he, he, he worked in the bush quite often, he, he says. And he made, made a lot of friends, people he did not not prev—did not know previously. Uh, he, he knew many of them previously—

NM: Yeah.

NZ: —but those he didn't know, he met them there. And, uh, became friendly with quite a few of them. But, uh, he never complained too much after he—when he was home, he didn't

complain, uh, very much about, uh, his, his treatment there. I think he was satisfied that the treatment under those circumstances was normal treatment.

NM: Oh, okay. Did he say much about the camp life after his release?

NZ: Well, he told us, um—he told me some stories, but, uh, I, I don't think my father ever, um, uh...blamed the government for their action. I think he realized that, uh, the government was taking precautions under the circumstances, and he never, ever berated the government—

NM: Mm-hm.

NZ: —uh, for what had happened at that time. Of course, he was sad being there and away from his family.

NM: Mm-hm.

NZ: Uh, and from his friends, uh, that he left behind in Hamilton. But he never really blamed, uh, the government for, uh, taking the action that they did in returning—in interning, um, Italian-Canadians as the government require—uh, felt that they, uh, re—was—they felt that it was necessary to do. So, my father never, uh, condemned them for doing that, for taking those precautions. What he did, uh, detest was the inability to defend himself under the circumstances, and, uh, not being availed of, uh, justice, uh, as we know it in our society. There was never a trial, and he, he was incarcerated, uh, just on suspicion. And, uh—what might happen, not what had happened.

NM: Mm-hm.

NZ: And, uh, um, my dad was very active in the Italian community beforehand, and he felt that because of his activities, it was natural that he should be perhaps, uh, detained, and which he was.

NM: Mm-hm.

NZ: But he was very disappointed and upset that he saw many people from Hamilton interned who really had no connection whatsoever, uh, with any organization, uh, Italian-based organization in the City of Hamilton.

NM: Mm-hm.

VC: What organization was you father—

NZ: And my fa—[Cellphone rings]

NM: Oops.

VC: Did you want to get that?

[Fades out at 0:08:01.6]

[Fades in at 0:08:03.1]

VC: Okay, we're on.

NM: So, were—was your father ever told why he was sent to camp, why he was incarcerated?

NZ: I, I think he, I think he knew and realized that, uh, when the war was coming that he would be incarcerated. He felt that he would be. In fact, he was tipped off, he was, uh, uh, told that, uh—by a friend of his that he had information that as soon as the war broke out, it was imminent that the war was going to break out with Italy, that, uh, he was on the list to be, uh, to be arrested and interned. So, he did know. And that's because of his activity in the Italian community.

NM: Okay. And so what Italian organizations did he belong to?

NZ: Uh, my father was the provincial vice president of Sons of Italy of Ontario, which was the second-highest office of the Sons of Italy in the province. And he was also secretary of the Hamilton *Fascio*.

NM: Mm-hm.

NZ: Uh, which also was responsible for the *Doppo Lavoro* (?). Uh, by being the secretary of the *Fascio*, though, would be the, uh, head man, I guess, in that organization. So, he was wise enough to know when, uh, the rumours and printing, uh—the papers started to, uh, print, uh, the possible involvement of Italy, that he was smart enough to realize that he might be, uh, arrested. I do remember, as the war was approaching, that my mother was reprimanding him almost every evening immediately before the war, why was he going to the Casa D'Italia? And he says, "I'm the secretary of the *Fascio* and involved, the *Doppo Lavoro*," et cetera. He says, "If I don't go, what are the other members going to do?" In other words, the, the—it was such that, uh, many of them were afraid to go anyway, because, uh, uh, of the war coming on, and, uh, my, my dad, figure—figured that, uh—felt that being the, uh, uh, the, uh, vice president of the Sons of Italy provincially, and also president of the *Fascio*, that he had to show to give

courage to the other, uh, to the other members. And that was it. He was a very courageous man, very, very Italian.

NM: Mm-hm.

NZ: And, uh, um, uh, a disciplinarian, law and order man, and I knew it because, as his son [Laughter], I was reprimanded very, very often.

NM: So, your mother had a sense of what was to come, but you and your sister, did you have any idea?

NZ: No, not—I, I had no idea really that this was going to happen. My, my mother obviously, uh, uh, did, too, although it would be through my father, because my mother, uh, she read somewhat in English, but my father was very fluent in, in English and, and Italian.

NM: Mm-hm.

NZ: Uh, he spoke perhaps with a, with an accent—

NM: Mm-hm.

NZ: —but, uh, he was, uh, quite an orator. And I think that's why he attained the positions he did, with both the Sons of Italy and the *Fascio*.

NM: Mm-hm.

NZ: I've heard my father give speeches, and, uh, I was, uh, I was quite impressed, to be hon—to be honest with you.

NM: Mm-hm...

VC: Um, during the time your father was interned, how—what was it like at home? How did you make do?

NZ: Well, no, it, it was quite normal at home. My mother, uh, really looked after us quite well. She sacrificed, uh, a lot of her time with us. In fact, all of her time was, uh, looking after us and providing for us. Um...the, uh...we really didn't, uh, miss him too, too much, uh, during the day because we were busy or involved with our friends and what have you, but we did miss him in the evenings, and also the holidays.

NM: Mm-hm.

NZ: And as far as communication was concerned, as I say, the cards kept, uh, coming, I think almost weekly. As often—I'm sure he wrote as often as possible.

NM: Mm-hm.

NZ: And there was that, uh, uh—we didn't forget him, put it that way.

NM: Mm-hm.

NZ: There was always that remembrance.

NM: That's, that's good.

VC: Did your mother have to go out and work?

NZ: My mother worked, uh, uh, before he was interned, and continued to work until I graduated from McMaster in 19—in 1951.

NM: Wow.

VC: Yeah.

NZ: Um, she worked because it was necessary to support the family at that time. The family was made up of my father and my mother and four children. I have three sisters—I had three sisters, one just passed away this past year. My oldest sister, uh, she was traumatized by the situation. She doesn't even want to talk about it today.

NM: Mm-hm.

NZ: She's, she's denied that episode ever happened. She was thirteen years old, she was in her grade eight at the time, and she finished her elementary school, and had to go to work to help, uh, the family. And I also worked after school, uh, for five dollars a week. But as my dad explained to me at one time, he says, "I have to leave you something in my will," he says, "because when you worked, five dollars a week would—when bread was, like, five and ten cents a loaf," he says, "five dollars a week went quite a, quite a way."

NM: Mm-hm. Did your mother suffer any backlash, uh, where she was working?

NZ: No, because other people in the plant also were interned. And I, I won't name them, but I know a few other people there, 'cause there were a lot of Italian people in—working in, uh, in the clothing industry, and, um, a, a lot of the people there were interned or had relatives who were also interned. Um...but I—my mother also helped me, uh, get a summer job there once, uh, uh, I worked during the war, uh, on Navy uniforms.

NM: Oh.

NZ: As a, as a presser of the inner seams on, on the uniforms. So, I was, uh, fortunate enough to get the job, and I think I assisted the Canadian war effort. [Laughter]

NM: Yes, you did. Did—what about, uh, you and your sisters? Did you feel discriminated against at school or in the community?

NZ: No, no, I—no, there was no problem with our neighbours or at, at school, uh, we received, um, uh, nothing but support, uh, even our English neighbours, our other Canadian neighbours, they were very, uh, um, supportive and very friendly, and, uh, as I say, I had a job working in a fish and chips store by, uh, uh, ol—old English people who almost raised me, and uh, they were extremely kind and, uh, uh, we, we can't say we received any discrimination whatsoever, uh, from our neighbours, most of whom were Anglo-Saxon—

NM: Mm-hm.

NZ: —background.

VC: Okay. Where was the neighbourhood? Where the was—

NZ: It was on, it was on James Street, uh, North, very near to the, uh, Can—uh, Hamilton armouries.

VC: Okay.

NZ: And close to Barton and, and James.

NM: Mm-hm.

NZ: Uh, that was the area where I was raised. There was two Italian areas here, mainly, uh, James and, uh—Barton and James area, and Sherman and Barton area. And the people that located themselves in those areas depended on the type of work they did. The people who, uh, uh, worked in—uh, who lived down in the west end, uh, James and Barton, they were either, uh, self-employed as barbers and tailors, um, uh, shoemakers, or worked in the clothing industry <0:16:41.6>, Firth Brothers (?), the Hamilton cotton mills. Whereas those in the east end, uh, worked in, uh, in heavy industry. And there were two Italian churches at the time, one at the east end, St. Anthony's, that ministered to the Italian congre—the Italian people on that end of the city, and also—and Barton James, uh, area, ministering to the Italians in the west end.

NM: Now, when, uh...when your father was released—on what day?

NZ: My father was—I don't recall the date, uh, but it was in 1943, I think after—almost three years. I think it was two, two and a half years, plus. I don't re—recall the date.

NM: Okay. Did you have any, um, warning that he was coming home, or did you know ahead of time?

NZ: Uh, we knew only, I think, uh, maybe a week or so before, and maybe not even a week. I received a phone call, uh—he had given, uh—I know he had written, uh, a card to my mother saying that, uh, uh, he believed that he would be released, uh, soon. He didn't know himself when, but I guess he must have been informed that, uh, uh, his time was just about up.

NM: Mm-hm.

NZ: And then at the same time, too, he had seen many people from time to time, uh, released from the camp, uh, uh—some were only kept for, uh, as short as a month. And then gradually they were all, all released. My father was one of the last ones released, and, uh, it's understandable, and he understood it, too.

NM: Yeah.

VC: Mm-hm.

NZ: He wasn't, he wasn't, he was not stupid, and, uh, he was, he was quite, uh, uh, aware of what was happening, and uh, I, I asked him, um, "Dad, why were you a Fascist? Why were you interned?" as I grew up, you know, as I got older. And he, he told me that, uh, he supported, uh, Mussolini and the Fascists in Italy. He was never a member of the Canadian Fascist Party. And politics, uh, he was very interested in Canadian politics. Uh, mainly as a Liberal, but that's beside the point, because his close friend was Quinto Martini, the first Italian-Canadian, uh, uh, Conservative member elected to the House of Commons.

VC: Who was also interned.

NZ: He was also interned. He was a good friend of Quinto's and, uh, um—but, uh, at the same time, uh, he felt that, uh, Mussolini was good fro—for Italy because he, himself, saw the progress that was made in Italy in his town, in Sicily. Uh, roads were, uh, were built and running water in the homes and heat. And these things did not exist when he left for Canada in 1923.

NM: Mm-hm.

NZ: Uh, but when he returned to get married in 1926, these things were all in place, and he saw that the progress that had been made, uh, during Mussolini's time in, in power. And, uh, uh, he, he was, uh, very appreciative of, of what he had, uh, what he had accomplished. Also, law and order in Sicily was never better than it—what it—I'm told, than what it was during the Fascist times.

VC: So, your father started off in Camp Petawawa, and then was moved to Fredericton?

NZ: Yeah, uh, he started off in Petawawa, and, uh, he was transferred to Fredericton when they opened that camp, I guess. And so, his last years were, were there. Um...

NM: Was he told why they moved—he was moved there?

NZ: No, no, I don't know, don't know why. I'm surprised that they moved him, uh, closer to the Atlantic. [Laughter]

NM: What was it like after he was released? He's back home, what, uh—

NZ: When he was back home, things—life went on as normal, uh, his old friends in most cases remained his friends. Uh, and he had many new friends. And, um, uh, unfortunately there were

some, uh, who he did not regard as friendly anymore because of their positions and, uh, what they did, what they spoke about during the war, which would not—supportive of the—some of the people that were interned.

VC: And did he feel discriminated against after his release?

NZ: No.

VC: Like in the areas—

NZ: No, no. That's—as I say, he, um, he had no problem at all when he was released. The neighbours were still friendly. His friends were in most cases—were still quite friendly. If anybody was not friendly, it was because he didn't want to be friendly with them. [Laughter]

VC: And did he go back to the organization?

NZ: You—sure he did.

VC: Yeah.

NZ: He, he was told on his release, uh, that he should stay away from, uh, Italian organizations and not be involved in organizing them and being involved again. But the fact is, within two or three years, he called a meeting himself in his own home of former members of the Sons of Italy, to reorganize in Ontario. And so he was, uh, responsible to the reorganization. But he always pointed out to me that the Sons of Italy was never made illegal during the war, uh, it continued to exist and, uh, that the Grand Venerable, meaning the provincial president, uh, was from Sault Ste. Marie, and his name was Carl Ferra (?), and I understand he—Carl also served in

the Canadian, uh, Forces. So, the Sons of Italy continued to exist. It was not a, not a political type of organization. And although many members were—of the Sons of Italy were interned, it was because they also felt that, uh, Mussolini was good for, for Italy.

VC: Right, mm-hm.

NZ: Uh, I don't think you'd find any of them who would, uh, uh, not be happy with their life in Canada.

VC: Mm-hm.

NM: Mm-hm. So, the police never bothered your father or the organization after—

NZ: No, no.

NM: —being released?

VC: Were there any economic hardships for him? Did he—

NZ: When my mother—when my father was interned, uh, uh, we lived in a rented apartment, and, um, uh, the extent of his resources, financial resources was forty-eight dollars, that was it. When he came out, uh, he went to work, uh, almost immediately. He had friends who had some connections with the International Harvester (?). And, uh, they arranged for him to get a position there. And he retired from the International, uh, Harvester, uh, and thank goodness, because he built up a pension, and, uh, was able to benefit from, uh, the, uh, social services that existed at that time. But during the war, we received no subsidies or any assistance from,

uh, the Canadian government. My—as I say, my mother and my sister had to work, and I helped out a bit. Um, and my mother was too proud to, uh, to go for social assistance.

NM: Mm-hm.

VC: What about help from the churches?

NZ: I, I really can't say anything there. I don't know, I don't want to—

VC: Mm-hm.

NZ: I don't want to say anything in that regard. I do know that I have heard that, uh, uh, the priests were helpful in certain cases, but I, I have no knowledge, uh, direct knowledge of that.

NM: Do you know if, uh—when your da—father was taken away that day, did they take anything from the home? Did they go through—

NZ: Well, I know they went through, uh, through the house. I don't know what they could, could get. But as I say, my father was, uh, quite, quite—

NM: He had a head's up.

NZ: —quite, uh, bright. Uh, I'm sure that in those days that he knew that the war was coming, he would have got rid of anything that might incriminate somebody else. My dad was more interested in somebody else rather than himself, because he knew the position he held, that he would be, uh, that he would be arrested. In fact, he was told, uh, by some—oh, I think I mentioned that previously, that someone tipped him off, uh, that, uh, he would be arrested—

NM: Mm-hm.

NZ: —if, uh, if the war broke out. And, uh, the friend who called him, uh, and who had direct knowledge of that, told him, “I’m calling you to tell you if you can save yourself, save yourself.” My father said, “I have a wife and four children. When the time comes, I’ll be here waiting for, uh, for the police to pick me up.” And that was it, he was very courageous, and I think he must have prepared my mother, too, uh, for what was, uh, was coming. We, as kids, didn’t—uh, didn’t know what was coming.

NM: Mm-hm...any—

VC: Is there anything else that you want to tell us about that whole experience? Um, your father, was there anything towards after—years after, that your father said about the internment, or had he changed his ideas about—

NZ: Uh, uh, no. My father never, uh, changed his ideas of Mussolini having been a good man for Italy. So, he was adamant that, uh, in Italy, he did, he did well. And he reminded me that many of the, uh, uh, leaders of other countries also spoke very highly of, of Mussolini. But when the, uh, when the war broke out and what happened, happened, well, of course, their opinions would be changed. And, um, but other than that, uh, do you recall what I told you about this—about the trip, uh, to Sault Ste. Marie? Can I repeat that, about the trip to Sault Ste. Marie?

NM: Sure, I’d like to hear it.

NZ: We went up to, uh—there was a Sons of Italy convention up in the Sault, this is post-war convention. And, uh, we were going to the, uh, convention, which was held in Sault Ste. Marie.

And in the car, uh, there was myself and my father, and, uh—who—we were both supporting Liberal politics, and, uh, three Conservatives. Uh, and one of the Conservatives was Quinto Martini, who was also interned. And he said, uh, uh, “Mr. Zaffiro, how come, why is it that you’re still a Liberal, when the Liberals interned us during the war?” And my father said, “Quinto, listen, Quinto, lucky it was the Liberals. If it was the Conservatives, they would have shot us all.” [Laughter]

NM: Oh.

NZ: But anyway, the, uh, uh...my dad did tell me, uh, some stories about, uh—in the camp. One in particular that’s remained with me, he went to confession. My father wasn’t a real strict churchman in those days, but anyway, he went to confession, an Italian priest. And, uh, uh, when he finished his confession, the priest said, “Your, your penance will be one Our Father and one Hail Mary.” And my father said to him, “That’s all, father?” [Laughter] And he says, “Isn’t that enough?” And he says, “No, I say an Our Father and a Hail Mary every night.” He said, “Well, if you do that every night,” he says, “You can go home. I mean, you’ve done enough penance, you have no more penance to do for this confession.” So, I thought that was quite humorous, too. [Laughter]

NM: Was the, was the priest also a, an internee?

NZ: Yes, oh yeah, the priest was an internee with the other prominent people in the different communities across Canada. Uh, some of the, the cream of our, uh, of our communities all over Canada were interned. Um, uh, the two extremes, of course. The, the most prominent, and the other end, too.

NM: Yeah.

NZ: But, um, uh, I recall just before the war, war was breaking out, uh, my father was with a Dr. Sabetta (?) from Ottawa. Uh, Dr. Sabetta was the Grand Venerable of the Sons of Italy at the time, and my father was the, uh, the vice president. And they were on their way, I believe, up to Timmins or up north somewhere to inaugurate another lodge. And it was a Sunday, and on the radio, uh, on, on the news, it appeared that the war was imminent. So, they decided, we better turn around and go back and not put in danger—'cause they, they realized what was gonna perhaps happen. "We'd better not—we'd better turn back and not go and form that lodge," because they, they felt that they would be putting in jeopardy, uh, the, uh, freedom of some of those people up north.

NM: Wow.

VC: Did, did your father ever mention any other ethnic groups that were with him in the camp?

NZ: No, he, he did tell me that the—they were in the camp, that the Germans were also in the same camp. And there were also some, um, Italian military, uh, uh, from ships, I guess, that were sunk in the, uh, Atlantic. They were put in, uh—into those camps, too. Um, other than that, uh, um...I don't know. He did mention that, when he got out of the camp, he had—as I say, he had a shoemaker's shop, and there was a Communist that, uh, had befriended him. Uh, used to drop in, in the, the shop and talk, uh, politics, meaning mainly Fascist, Communist, uh, [Laughter], uh, views. And, uh, but after the war, this fella came, this Communist came to visit my dad, and, uh, commended him for his courage—

NM: Mm-hm.

NZ: —in, uh, in, uh, taking the punishment that was, uh, given at that particular time.

NM: Mm-hm.

VC: Mm-hm.

NZ: I must say, he was very courageous. I, I, I know he was.

NM: Mm-hm.

NZ: Not because he's my father, that's the—[Laughter] That's the way he was.

NM: Yeah.

NZ: I think my father would have sacrificed himself for the release of someone else if necessary.

NM: Yeah.

NZ: But anyway.

NM: Do you have—

NZ: *C'est la vie.*

VC: *C'est la vie.*

NM: Anything else that, uh, that you can remember from this period, um, or, uh, afterwards?
Did, did your father meet with, with other internees from Hamilton? Did they used to sort of
get together and perhaps talk about their experiences?

NZ: Well, I know at the beginning, as soon as they were out, the—a group of them did get
together with the view of, uh, uh—they, they felt that they were wrongly in, in, incarcerated.
And, uh, they met with the view of seeing if some action could be taken to, uh, get some sort of
compensation. I think at that time, they were looking for compensation for themselves,
personally. Uh, after the war, of course, uh, uh, that group, they disbanded. Uh, they didn't
have the money, either, to hire a lawyer or to proceed. And the—that group disbanded. But
other Italian organizations, Italian-Canadian organizations felt that there should be redress for
what happened.

NM: Mm-hm.

NZ: And, um, so, uh, um, they started to make, uh, uh, oh, what would you call it? Uh,
submissions to, to the government, et cetera for some sort of compensation. Um...I had
something on my mind and it's—it just escaped me. [Laughter] Uh, you know, I'm not a young
fella anymore.

NM: Oh, go on. [Laughter]

VC: It's okay, I feel the same way.

NZ: The, uh, um—as I say, he reorganized or helped reorganize the Sons of Italy. And, um,
um...we have a very prominent organization here in Hamilton, I think it's the foremost, uh,
organization in, in, in the Italian community in Hamilton.

NM: Mm-hm.

NZ: Uh, when I was young and went to meetings with my father just to, uh, uh—when he was babysitting me, we’ll say, [Laughter] uh, the, the meetings were all conducted in Italian, he says. Uh, today, they’re all in English.

NM: Mm-hm.

NZ: Very little Italian. And in our local lodge, we’re very fortunate to have, uh, young Italian-Canadians of the various professions. It’s remarkable what’s happened in the Italian community in the past 50 years or so. I used to recall my father, uh, reading the, the newspaper and finding—seeing a picture of an Italian graduate, people he didn’t even know, but as soon as he saw the picture, his remark would be, “Look, another flower in our garden.”

NM: Oh, mm-hm.

NZ: He believed in education, and what hurt him very badly was the fact that my sister, Lil (?), had to quit school at 13. Like, as I say, he believed in education. And she was quite, quite bright. And he, he always felt, uh, quite badly that she was not able to, uh, to proceed—

NM: Because of his—uh, the internment.

NZ: Right. My father, as I say, believed—admired—believed very much in education. He encouraged me from the time I was a child to be a lawyer. And I don’t know why, uh, I became a lawyer, but he encouraged me from the time I was a, uh, a child, that I should be a lawyer. In

the meantime, I have, uh—he has five—he has how many grandchildren? Two, four—uh, three, four, five, seven grandchildren [Doorbell rings], all of them with university educations.

NM: That's—

NZ: All of them. He was so proud of that.

[Fades out at 00:36:22.6]

[End of interview]