



*Italian Canadians as Enemy Aliens:
Memories of World War II*
901 Lawrence Ave. West
Toronto, ON M6A 1C3
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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: Vikki Cecchetto

NAME OF VIDEOGRAPHER: Nadia Mior

TRANSCRIBED BY: Melinda Richter

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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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ABSTRACT

Nicholas Zaffiro was born in Hamilton, Ontario on March 14, 1930. His father, Francesco Zaffiro, was sponsored by an uncle and came to Canada in 1926 from Racalmuto, Sicily. The uncle, Gaetano Girgenti, lent Francesco money to open a shoemaker shop. Francesco returned to Italy in 1928 to marry his fiancée, Maria Maddalena Licata, and then brought her over to Hamilton. Francesco was heavily involved in the Fascio and the Sons of Italy in Hamilton, two organizations which met at St. Anthony's Church. He was attracted to the Fascio after seeing the good things that Mussolini's reforms had brought for his community in Sicily. Francesco knew that he was going to be arrested if war broke out, considering his involvement in these organizations. He was held at the Exhibition grounds in Toronto, at Camp Petawawa and then finally in Camp Ripples. Nicholas speaks of his father's courage during his interment and the way he acted as a leader to others in the camp. Throughout the war, Nicholas' mother worked at Copley, Noyes and Randall and also maintained the household, for example coming home every lunch hour to make food. Nicholas was also a prominent member of the Sons of Italy and speaks about the creation of the Sons of Italy Charitable Corporation and the creation of Villa Italia retirement home. He speaks about his disappointment that the Casa D'Italia, which was built by his father's generation, was confiscated and sold. He also speaks about his hope that redress money, if it is given to McMaster University, will inspire younger generations to learn about Italian culture.

INTERVIEW

NZ: Nicholas Zaffiro, interviewee

VC: Vikki Cecchetto, interviewer



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ND: Nadia Mior, videographer

[Title screen]

[Fades in at 00:00:11]

VC: Alright so we're back again with Nick Zaffiro and today we're in, uh, the, the, the family home of uh, uh, Nick's, uh, family, the Zaffiro family. And, uh, this was, I guess, the last home that your, your dad had.

NZ: [nods] Yes.

VC: Can you tell us a little bit of the story of how he got to this house, which is on Arkell Street in Hamilton?

NZ: [inhales] Okay, um, uh...I'll start from when my father came to this country in 1926.

VC: Alright and—

NZ: [inhales] He—

VC: And it's — It's Francis

NZ: Francesco.

VC: Francesco.

NZ: Francesco. And he came alone. He was unmarried at the time...but he was already engaged to be married. When he could establish himself in Hamilton then he was to call his fiancée. [inhales] Uh, it went longer than she thought.

VC: [laughs]

NZ: [inhales] And uh, uh, they were both from Racalmuto, Sicily

VC: Okay.

NZ: [inhales]

VC: And what was her name?

NZ: Her name was uh Maria Maddalena Licata... Licata And uh...so...my dad came. He was, uh, sponsored by his uncle.

VC: Who was?

NZ: His name was Gaetano Girgenti.

VC: Mmmhmm. Mmmhmm.

NZ: Girgenti.

VC: Mmmhmm.

NZ: Ah, uh, soon after he arrived...alone...uh, his uncle, uh...um, gave him the money in order to open a small shoemaker shop. My father was a shoemaker, uh, in Italy. He learned the trade there. [inhales] My dad told me that uh—Well first of all, my dad was born in 1901.

VC: Mmmhmm. Mmmhmm.

NZ: [inhales] And when the First World War broke out, uh, he went to enlist in the Italian army.

VC: Wow.

NZ: [inhales] Uh...when his mother found out about it, uh, he believes that she went to the, uh, recruiting office and told them he was too young.

VC: [laughs]

NZ: And, uh, he was only 17.

VC: Right.

NZ: And, uh, so he he was not enlisted at that time. [inhales] The, uh...soon after the war...um...he joined the army

VC: Uh huh.

NZ: And...was...I, I don't know exactly what it would be called but I understand he was like in the military police.

VC: Oh I see!

NZ: And he was stationed for five years...in, uh Trieste.

VC: Oh!

NZ: [inhales] Uh, it was he and...only one other very close friend of his...who was also with him during that period of time. And he subsequently became my father's best man.

VC: Okay. [laughs]

NZ: And uh his name was Pillitteri, uh, who was the father of, uh, the owners of Pillitteri Winery in—

VC: Exactly.

NZ: —in, uh, Niagara on the Lake.

VC: And did he come over at the same time as your dad?

NZ: No.

VC: Oh okay.

NZ: No. The uh...so...My dad, when he was here, received a letter, received correspondence from his fiancée. And one of the letters....uh...revealed to him that her father was anxious for her to be married. There were suitors coming for her hand and he had to say that she was already engaged to be married to my father who was in America. [inhales] And...she was afraid that her father, uh, could keep on, um, uh, denying to them, denying his daughter to these suitors. Uh...some of these suitors felt that uh, um...uh...that they were being denied uh...for I don't know what reasons.

VC: Wongly? [laughs]

NZ: You know...And, uh, she—In her letter she said, “You better come because my father is not going to permit me to stay single.”

VC: Mmmhmm. Mmmhmm.

NZ: Um...There was also the, the, the fear that these people, these suitors, when they were rebuffed—

VC: Yeah.

NZ: —that they might do uh, something, uh—

VC: Yeah.

NZ: —illegal or whatever it was—

VC: Right.

NZ: —to, uh, towards the family that she left behind. [inhales] In any event, when he received this letter, the same day he received this letter there was this friend of his in the store—

VC: Mmmhmm.

NZ: And my dad told him, he said, “Look at the letter I received.” He says, “How can I go back? I don't have the money to go back.”

VC: Hmm.

NZ: [inhales] And his friend told him, “I have \$200...And it's yours. If this can help you—”

VC: Wow.

NZ: “—it's yours.” “I don't know when I can repay you.” “That isn't important. You take this money and whenever you can repay me that's fine. I have...I don't, I have need of it but I'm, uh, not depending on that \$200.”

VC: Hmm.

NZ: So Dad accepted the money and went back and uh, got married...in...uh...I think it was in, uh...March of 1928.

VC: Hmm. Okay.

NZ: And then he came back shortly thereafter again with his wife.

VC: Okay.

NZ: The lived in rented quarters...until 1945...uh, when he bought his house—

VC: Mmmhmm.

NZ: —which house was sold for this residence in 1951.

VC: Okay.

NZ: Now this residence, uh, I don't know if you know it or not, is in Westdale and Westdale is a prestigious part of the City of Hamilton. And it was almost unknown for Italians to to live here.

VC: Yes. Yes...That's very true.

NZ: Now what else do you want to know? [laughs]

VC: So [laughs] so, uh, before your, um, father was interned uh—You were how old when he was

interned?

NZ: Okay, the, uh...I was, uh, 10 years old. I was born on March the 14th—

VC: Mmmhmm.

NZ: —1930.

VC: Okay.

NZ: Uh, so in June that year I, I turned 10.

VC: Mmmhmm.

NZ: And uh...but as a child my father used to take me to the meetings of both the Fascio—

VC: Okay.

NZ: —and the Sons of Italy—

VC: Okay.

NZ: —to get me out of my mother's hair, I guess—

VC: Okay! [laughs]

NZ: —on a Sunday afternoon.

VC: So what would these meetings be like?

NZ: Well, I don't know very much about it except I would sit at the back of the room—

VC: [laughs]

NZ: —and all of these men—

VC: Mmmhmm.

NZ: —took their seats in the audience there or in, in the front part of the the hall. And at that time, uh, my father was the Secretary of the Fascio—

VC: Mmmhmm.

NZ: —and also a member of the Sons of Italy. It was a separate organization. It had separate meetings.

VC: Okay.

NZ: So Dad was very busy in those days attending meetings for both organizations because he was very prominent in both organizations. I can tell you only this: that in those days only Italian was spoken at the meetings!

VC: Oh alright.

NZ: Because there, there weren't any English speaking members, uh, at that particular time.

VC: Mmmhmm. Mmmhmm.

[fan turns on in background]

NZ: [inhales] If I learned how to speak Italian...I, uh, I really didn't speak Italian at that time. I spoke the Sicilian dialect.

VC: Mmmhmm.

NZ: But usually I would speak English to my parents and they would answer me, uh, in their dialect.

VC: Oh right.

NZ: But when I was at these meetings my ear became accustomed—

VC: Okay.

NZ: —to hearing the Italian language.

VC: Mmmhmm.

NZ: And...that is the reason why I am quite fluent today in Italian. My uh—When I speak Italian it's not the Sicilian dialect.

VC: Right right right.

NZ: But I can speak that dialect too.

VC: Good!

NZ: So I have three languages.

VC: Good for you!

NZ: Sicilian, Italian and English!

VC: Very good. [laughs]

NZ: A little bit of French and a little bit of Spanish.

VC: Wow. [inhales] And so, uh, you said that the two organizations were different. Um—

NZ: Okay—

VC: What did—What did sort of—What did the Fascio do? And then what did the Sons of Italy sort of

do?

NZ: Alright. Well, the Fascio, um... The Fascio was, um, uh, founded here by people, uh, who were in, uh, sympathy—

[00:10:02]

VC: Okay.

NZ: —with the, uh, Fascist Party in Italy.

VC: Okay.

NZ: And uh...it encompassed...Italian immigrants from all regions of Italy.

VC: Mmmhmm. Mmmhmm.

NZ: And there they just spoke Italian, not their different dialects.

VC: Right.

NZ: And as I say, I learned when I was young, mainly, if not the language, at least the sound—

VC: Sure.

NZ: —uh of the language.

VC: Yeah. So was it mainly a political party or was it really uh, a party that helped other Italians?

NZ: No. The way I understand it—

VC: Right.

NZ: —the Fascio um...oh was, uh, in support of the Fascist Regime in Italy—

VC: Okay.

NZ: and conducted themselves in such as way as to gain respect—

VC: Mmmhmm.

NZ: —for that regime. Uh...being here in Canada—

VC: Right.

NZ: Uh...it was important to the Fascist Regime in Italy—

VC: Mmmhmm.

NZ: —that they receive favourable, um...favourable opinion from the world at large.



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VC: Right.

NZ: And uh...uh...the, uh—as my father told me when he came back from the, uh, army—

VC: Mmmhmm.

NZ: —and I think it was in nineteen twenty...uh—I think he came back from there in 1923—to his *piazza*.

VC: Mmmhmm.

NZ: Uh, his *piazza* was still very rustic.

VC: Okay.

NZ: No water.

VC: Right.

NZ: No heat in the homes.

VC: Mmmhmm. Mmmhmm.

NZ: Um, dirt roads and what have you.

VC: Mmmhmm.

NZ: Um...So...there was really no livelihood there. It was very difficult.

VC: Right.

NZ: Most people were uh—been in a, uh, in a rural area.

VC: Yeah.

NZ: Most people worked in the fields.

VC: Right.

NZ: They lived in the town but went to the fields, uh, for their for their gardens.

VC: Mmmhmm.

NZ: Um...other than those who took the train. My father took the train—

VC: Right.

NZ:—the shoemaker train, uh, in, in, the *piazze*. Uh, when Dad got married—went back to Italy to get married in 1926.



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VC: Mmmhmm.

NZ: There were proper roads.

VC: Oh alright.

NZ: There were heat in the houses.

VC: Mmmhmm.

NZ: Uh, there was water. And so he saw immediately what the Fascist Regime had done to his little town.

VC: Right.

NZ: And I'm told that this was a situation in many towns throughout—

VC: Yes.

NZ: —throughout Italy.

VC: Right.

NZ: And so...he, uh, um...he was impressed with what had happened in his little town and he

embraced what, uh, um what Mussolini was uh, uh preaching, more or less. So that's why he, when he came here it was very easy for him to join the Fascist movement here.

VC: Okay.

NZ: The Fascist movement I understand, I don't know—The Fascist movement was organized, uh, uh, right from Italy, they sent over representatives—

VC: Oh okay.

NZ: —and these different cities and what have you...through the Italian consulates.

VC: Right.

NZ: And of course to promote the Fascist cause.

VC: Yeah.

NZ: Uh, what my Dad, uh, explained to me, he said, “The—Mussolini—the propaganda or whatever it was there—they, they, uh preached to their members abroad—

VC: Mmmhmm.

NZ: “—Be good citizens of the countries that take you—”

VC: Mmmhmm.

NZ: “—that accept you. Because it's important to have good relations between Italy and country—

VC: Right.

NZ: “—that has adopted you as immigrants.”

VC: Mmmhmm.

NZ: At the same time Italy was a Catholic country. [clears his throat] Um...the, uh, Catholic country, no birth control, no abortions. And Italy had a need of countries to accept their immigrants.

VC: Right

NZ: It was becoming overpopulated.

VC: Right.

NZ: And, and, uh, therefore it was important that Italy had friends abroad who would accept—

VC: Right.

NZ: —the immigrants.

VC: Hmm.

NZ: So that's how my dad—

VC: Yeah.

NZ: —got involved and he really believed in it. He also used to tell me, he said, “You know,” he said, “At one time, uh, the Western nations, the Allied nations spoke nothing but highly of Mussolini and what progress was being made in Italy.”

VC: Hmm. So where would they have their meetings?

NZ: I'm sorry?

VC: Where would—

NZ: At that time the meetings were held, uh, in the basement of St. Anthony's Church.

VC: Oh okay.

NZ: Okay?

VC: The one on Clinton Street?

NZ: ...uh. The original one on Clinton Street.

VC: On Clinton Street.

NZ: And it was, it was usually on a Sunday afternoon because the majority of those people were working people. That's the only day that they had to go to these meetings.

VC: Mmmhmm. Exactly.

NZ: Um...So, uh, that was my father's explanation to me as to why he was, uh, a member of the Fascist, uh, group here in, in, Hamilton.

VC: Did you ever know who the person was that the Italian government had sent over to start the—

NZ: [inhales] I understand [laughs] The one that I knew was a Mr. Tommaso Mari.

VC: Oh.

NZ: Tommaso Mari. [spells the name] M A R I, who was my father-in-law's first cousin.

VC: Oh alright. [laughs]

NZ: He was Marcigurno[?] and, uh, my father-in-law was also a member of the Fascio but never a member of the Sons of Italy.

VC: Oh really.

NZ: And the strange thing—I found it strange—When I went to Italy to meet some of my uh, in-laws' relatives, on my mother-in-law's side, she had a, uh, brother who was a communist. And in fact the—it was in a town called Cerreto d'Esì, Provinco D'Ancona.

VC: Mmmhmm.

NZ: And *irchicolo, circubaba circolo futsio georgi*[?]

VC: Okay.

NZ: Out front there was a shield with the uh, sickle and hammer—

VC: Right.

NZ: —on it.

VC: Right, right, right.

NZ: He was a communist. And it just bears out what I have heard, that in many families in Italy, the same family—

VC: Yeah.

NZ:—you had people on the right.

VC: Yeah.

NZ: —and people on the left.

VC: Yeah.

NZ: And I met this gentleman and he was a fine man—

VC: Yeah.

NZ: —but that's the way, that's the way it was. And my mother-in-law, she was more uh, believed in more towards, leaning more towards her, uh, husband's uh, feelings and, uh, um, views.

VC: Yeah. So you also said that the Sons of Italy was was the second organization that your father was a member of.

NZ: [inhales]

VC: Do you, do you remember or do you know when the Sons of Italy first started here in Hamilton?

NZ:...I should know because I've been the past Grand Venerable of the Sons of Italy and been a member of the Sons of Italy since 1954, which was one year before I graduated from law school.

VC: Hmm. Right.

NZ: Um...but unfortunately I can't be exact as to the dates.

VC: Mmmhmm.

NZ: But I believe that Sons of Italy, uh, was formed here in Canada um, well, gradually because the first charters to different lodges—

VC: Mmmhmm.

NZ: —was issued or, uh, um, was issued by the Sons of Italy in America.

VC: Right. Right.

NZ: From the United States.

VC: Mmmhmm.

NZ: I know the first one was to the Verdi Lodge of Sault St. Marie.

VC: Okay.

NZ: Because that was lodge #1.

VC: Okay.



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NZ: Trieste Lodge is lodge #4.

VC: Oh. And Trieste Lodge is the Hamilton—

NZ: In Hamilton.

VC: Right.

NZ: Uh, I think Niagara Falls lodge was before and I think, uh...I'm not sure. It may have been St. Catherines. I'm not sure. But in any event, those were the, uh, first lodges.

VC: Mmmhmm.

NZ: And then... I think at around 1928 or 29 they formed the, uh, Sons of Italy – order of Sons of Italy Ontario.

VC: Okay.

NZ: And, uh, Order of Sons of Italy of Ontario Mutual Benefit Society...which was part of the same organization, but the mutual benefit society was formed—same members that joined the Sons of Italy Trieste Lodge also were members of the, of the mutual benefit society. And that was in order to, uh, give some subsidies or some assistance to the immigrants.

VC: Okay.



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NZ: Um, if they were sick—

[phone rings]

NZ: —if they were sick they would, uh...get a small amount of money every week during the time of their sickness.

[Voice on the phone in background]

[00:19:58]

NZ: That's before there were any benefits from worker's compensation, what have you.

VC: Mmmhmm. Mmmhmm.

NZ: And if a person died I think at that time they would give \$150 I think the—

VC: Oh okay.

NZ:—I think the amount was. By the way the mortuary benefit continued in the Sons of Italy until about ten years ago. And...when, when it was dissolved...uh the mortuary benefit was \$300 because ten years ago people had other insurance—

VC: Sure.

NZ: —and they were able to look after—and there was worker's compensation. So there was no longer a need to have the mutual benefit society. The Trieste Lodge...um...The Trieste Lodge—The Sons of Italy, itself, uh, promoted that its members take an active part in the political, economic and social life of the nation.

VC: Oh!

NZ: Uh, that is still our, our main purpose: take an active part, be involved in Canadian activities and organizations. Why? To bring prestige on the community. When others, uh, uh, met with Italians—

VC: Mmmhmm.

NZ:—in their particular work, or their particular organizations, they get to meet them and to appreciate that they were—

VC: Right.

NZ:—they were normal people. Uh, in other words you have good and bad everywhere—

VC: Yeah.

NZ: —but people that joined the Sons of Italy...and the Fascio, and I've known many of them, they were honourable people—



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VC: Mmmhmm.

NZ: —uh, stalwart citizens, believed in law and order—

VC: Yeah.

NZ: —and, uh, they were, especially when the war broke out, some of the people, at least the people who were picked up, who had, uh, background with the Sons of Italy or Fascio, were law-abiding citizens.

VC: Yeah.

NZ: And, uh, and they were the cream of our community.

VC: Yeah. So did the Sons of Italy also meet at St. Anthony's or did—

NZ: Yes.

VC: —they have another home?

NZ: No, they also met at St. Anthony's. And, um, uh, as I say, the Sons of Italy was interested in, in promoting good citizenship here.

VC: Mmmhmm.

NZ: Um...many of the Sons of Italy also belonged to the Fascio, not all of them.

VC: No.

NZ: My father-in-law was a member of the Sons of Italy—I'm sorry, was a member of the Fascio and not the Sons of Italy.

VC: Mmmhmm.

NZ: Uh, the, uh, the Sons of Italy, from as long as I've been a member has always been interested in being involved in the community at large. And in fact I was one of the first English speaking. And after me came many, many English speaking and we have many professionals there—

VC: Mmmhmm.

NZ: —and businessman and people who have taken prominent positions in our community.

VC: Right.

NZ: Now right now, uh, we have very recently formed the Italian Canadian Professional Businessmen's Organization in Hamilton. The president is, uh, uh, uh, a very prominent member of the, uh, Sons of Italy.

VC: Sons of Italy.



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NZ: He sat on the board of Villa Italia which was a creation of the Sons of Italian Charitable Corporation. Um, and, uh, he's a wonderful man.

VC: Mmmhmm.

NZ: But he's come from our ranks.

VC: Right.

NZ: And, uh, we've had the first Italian Canadian, uh, chairman of the, uh, Chamber of Commerce in Hamilton. His name is Bruno Bragoli, born in England, of parents from, uh, Emilia Romagna.

VC: Mmmhmm.

NZ: At least the father was from Emilia Romagna. He was the first Italian Canadian chairman of the Chamber of Commerce of Hamilton.

VC: Wow.

NZ: Other members have been prominent. Peter Cicci[?]

VC: Yeah.

NZ:—has been, uh—he sat on the board at McMaster University, very interested in Italian language and culture. Peter was, uh, an immigrant who had been educated in Italy.

VC: Mmmhmm.

NZ: And when he came to this country he got—he was involved in the real estate and insurance business.

VC: Hmm.

NZ: But he was quite cultured and in fact he established the Pico Teatro Defi Italia[?].

VC: Hmm.

NZ: Um, and he was one of the founders of the uh, Fest Italia Corporation in Hamilton. He was very interested in, in the culture.

VC: Hmm.

NZ: And as the lodge started to change, as the membership started to change from mainly Italian to mainly English we were honoured to have Peter Cicci[?] who would still keep alive the Italian language—

VC: Right

NZ:—in the meetings.



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VC: Hmm.

NZ: [inhales and clears his throat]

VC: Now I know that uh, uh, uh, before you talked to us about, uh, going with your father af—I believe it was after the war—to start another lodge up north.

NZ: [inhales] No. [laughs] When the when the war broke out, uh, uh, my father was at that time the uh...*Secretado del Fascio*—

VC: Okay.

NZ: —which is the head man.

VC: Right.

NZ: Uh...and he was a member of the lodge, Trieste Lodge, and at the same time he was Assistant Grand Venerable—

VC: Okay.

NZ: —of the Sons of Italy of Ontario.

VC: Okay.



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NZ: [inhales] Uh, Sunday, I am told Sunday either one Sunday or two Sundays before the war broke out—

VC: Okay.

NZ: —there was already publicity in the newspapers that war was imminent.

VC: Right.

NZ: He and Dr. Vittorio Sabeta—

VC: Mmmhmm.

NZ: Uh um...Dr. Vittorio Sabeta from Ottawa—

VC: Okay.

NZ: —he was the Grand Venerable at the time.

VC: Ah!

NZ: And and my dad and, uh, he...uh, were going up to Timmins—

VC: Okay.



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NZ: —for the inauguration of another lodge.

VC: Oh.

NZ: When they were part way up they heard on the radio, the car radio news broadcast, that, uh, war was imminent.

VC: Mmmhmm. Mmmhmm.

NZ: And they said, “We better turn around and go back. Because otherwise we're going to put in jeopardy the people—”

VC: Oh I see.

NZ: “—up in Timmins.”

VC: Right.

NZ: Because they were smart enough to know that the war was coming and they were realized too that if the war came probably, they would probably be arrested.

VC: Okay.

NZ: So they, uh, they had that feeling plus, as I explained to you at one time—



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VC: Right.

NZ: —there was a friend of my dad's.

VC: Yeah.

NZ: He was a butcher. And he used to entertain from time to time members of the, uh, police—

VC: Right.

NZ:—who would stop in for a drink or a free sandwich. And they told him...that, uh, they had already orders that as soon as the war broke out there were certain individuals who would be...arrested.

VC: Yeah.

NZ: And one of them was my father.

VC: Right.

NZ: So he phoned my father and told him, uh, uh, “Francesco, I've just got this information. So if you can save yourself—“

VC: Mmmhmm. Mmmhmm.

NZ: “—do so.”



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VC: Yeah.

NZ: [laughs] My father says, "Save myself? I got a wife and four children."

VC: Yeah.

NZ: "When they want to come to get me, I'm here. There's no question of saving myself."

VC: Yeah.

NZ: "I have done nothing—"

VC: Yeah.

NZ: "—to be arrested, but if being a member of these organizations it means that they're going to pick me up, fine. I'm here."

VC: Yeah.

NZ: This is what he told me and I believe it too.

VC: Yeah. So this, who was this, this friend of your dad's?

NZ: Why do I have to mention that name?

VC: Oh okay, that's fine.

NZ: I prefer not to mention—

VC: No. That's right.

NZ: He is now deceased in any event.

VC: That's fine. Not a problem.

NZ: [clears throat]

VC: So at this time you said there were four children.

NZ: [smiling and pointing at the camera] I have to be Sicilian now.

VC: That's okay! [laughing]

NZ: *Omerta*.

VC: *Bravo*.

NZ: My father used to say to me, “If you have something to ask about someone else—”

VC: Yeah.

NZ: “—have the courage to ask them directly.”

VC: Right. Right, right. No. I quite, uh, quite understand that.

NZ: Yeah.

VC: No problem at all.

NZ: Okay.

VC: Um, now you said you were now four children?

NZ: Four.

VC: Four. So are—you're the oldest—

NZ: I'm the second.

VC: Oh, you're the second!

NZ: I have a sister who is two years older than I am.

VC: Right.



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NZ: Let me see. She's eighty...three.

VC: Okay. [laughs]

NZ: [laughs]

VC: And, and then there was uh, uh there was another—

NZ: Okay, I have, um—Sister Lil was the first one. And then I came next, born in...March the 14th, 1930. Then I had a, uh, another sister, Antoinette, uh, who was born 1932. She died last year.

VC: Oh. I'm sorry.

NZ: And then my sister Frances who, uh, [points to the floor] occupies this house now—

VC: [laughs] Okay.

NZ: —for the family.

VC: For the family. She's the—she's the custodian for the family home.

NZ: Right. She's never refused to let any of us come in.

VC: That's good. [laughs]

NZ: [laughs] And not only come here but also she feeds us and—

VC: Well that's nice.

NZ: Right.

VC: And I'm sure it's good Italian food.

NZ: [laughs] Yes.

VC: [laughs]

NZ: She's learned from my mother.

VC: That's good. [laughs]

NZ: Not as good as my mother, but not too bad. [laughs]

VC: So when you were all growing up before your father was, was taken away to the internment camps, um, you would have been, uh, down in the sort of the little Italy part of, uh, Hamilton—

NZ: Okay.

VC: Where was where was that?



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NZ: Hamilton, Hamilton has two little Italies.

[00:30:00]

VC: Right.

NZ: Uh one is Sherman and Barton area.

VC: Right.

NZ: Uh, in the proximity of St. Anthony's church.

VC: Right.

NZ: And the people down there are mainly, uh, Abruzzo...up.

VC: Right.

NZ: In other words, Abruzzo and then Northern Italy.

VC: Northern Italy.

NZ: Uh, and...the second, uh, Little Italy was uh Barton and James.



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VC: Right.

NZ: And that is in the area of All Souls Church.

VC: Right.

NZ: And the people there, uh, were mainly, uh, uh, workers in the textile mill, at that time as the cotton mill, or the clothing factories. There was a Copley, Noyes and Randall.

VC: Right.

NZ: And Firth Brothers. And, uh, Cornell Tailors.

VC: Oh okay.

NZ: And down there too there were many shoemakers—

VC: Yeah.

NZ: —barbers—

VC: Uh huh.

NZ: —uh, that's about it.

VC: Right.

NZ: I don't think anyone really owned a restaurant at that time.

VC: No I didn't think so. [laughs]

NZ: Yeah. They would be considered the elite, I guess, if they owned a restaurant.

VC: [laughs]

NZ: My father-in-law owned the Caboto Macaroni Factory.

VC: Oh! And who was your father-in-law?

NZ: Patarella[?].

VC: Ah yes.

NZ: Nello Patarella[?].

VC: Yeah.

NZ: And he owned the Caboto Macaroni Factory before Primo, who I knew very well by the way, before Primo, before Lancia—



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VC: Yeah.

NZ: —before any of the other Canadian Italian manufacturing—pasta manufactures. Uh, he, he had the macaroni factory Caboto. Those are the days that many of our, uh, *paesani* would go to the factory to buy pasta in twenty pound boxes. [laughs]

VC: Boxes [laughs] Long boxes.

NZ: [laughs]

VC: Yeah.

NZ: And um, um, the, uh, the family had the, uh, had the macaroni company until the early '50s, I believe it was, because it was a disastrous fire there.

VC: Oh.

NZ: And it burned. And my father-in-law at that time was 66 years old or thereabouts.

VC: Mmmhmm.

NZ: And he didn't have the courage to start again.

VC: Mmmhmm.

NZ: Um, because it was a struggle to arrive where he was and he didn't—felt he didn't have the stamina...to start all over again. One of his clients was Campbell, the Campbell Soup company.

VC: Oh!

NZ: And they offered to, um, to fund—

VC: Oh wow.

NZ: —the factory if he started up again. Uh, this is not, this is hearsay, by the way.

VC: Yeah.

NZ: And but he didn't have the stamina and refused to do it, collected his insurance money, which wasn't really very much. I don't know how much it was but I'm sure it wasn't very much. But in those days, in 1960, even twenty-five, fifty-thousand dollars was a lot of money.

VC: Yeah.

NZ: You see, but, but anyway.

VC: And was that, uh, was the, uh, pasta factory in that same area?

NZ: Yes he renting, uh, a building on, uh, James Street North—

VC: Mmmhmm.

NZ: —when he first started his business but he had, he had—it was a rented building. He left there when he bought a building on Stewart Street.

VC: Okay.

NZ: And that's the building that, uh, burned down.

VC: Okay...Good. And so what, uh, what was it like growing up in that area of, uh, of Hamilton for, for—

NZ: I—

VC: —young children like yourself? [laughs]

NZ: Yeah. I grew up at the Barton and James area.

VC: Right.

NZ: My father had a shoe, a shoemaker shop. His first shoemaker shop was on Colbourne Street – a little shop just west of James. [inhales] And then his second shop was on James Street North, uh, just, uh...south of Colbourne Street. And his next shop was, uh, north of Colbourne Street but across the road from the from the armouries. But I don't think that was the reason why he was picked up—

VC: No. [laughs]

NZ: —because he was close, close to the armoury.

VC: [laughs]

NZ: In the meantime, at that time we lived in a rented apartment on John Street North.

VC: Oh okay.

NZ: Um...Between Barton and, and Robert.

VC: Mmmhmm.

NZ: [inhales] And at that time I went to school at St. Mary's and St. Augustine's, which was just uh west of James Street.

VC: Right. Yeah.

NZ: [thinks]

VC: Was it, was it hard for, um, for young kids during that time just before the war? Was was there, was there—

NZ: No. Listen the— [laughs] I went to school and I had a lot of friends who went to the Catholic school the lived in the area.

VC: Right.

NZ: So I had friends to walk to school with and come back and play with. Uh, there were other non-Italian children too but there was no problem in those days. Even after the war the friends I had as children—

VC: Right.

NZ:—still, regardless of their background—

VC: Yeah.

NZ: —they still remained friends. There was no problem.

VC: Hmm.

NZ: We, we—my family, we've seen no discrimination from any of our neighbours. And in fact our neighbours were very, very kind and sympathetic—

VC: Mmmhmm.

NZ: —to us. They just couldn't understand why my father would have been picked up. But anyway my father realized he that would be picked up because of the positions that he held.



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VC: Right.

NZ: And, and he was waiting to be picked up—

VC: Yeah.

NZ: —because he was smart enough to realize...that being at the head of both organizations—

VC: Absolutely.

NZ: —that uh if the war came he would be picked up.

VC: Yeah...Yeah.

NZ: And he was and I understand from others who were also interned that he was extremely courageous in the camp.

VC: Mmmhmm.

NZ: Uh, there were others that after a week or two there, they start crying or start bemoaning the fact that they were picked up.

VC: Hmm.

NZ: And we could sympathize with them because it was a traumatic situation, leaving their families

behind.

VC: Yeah.

NZ: But my father, as he explained to me, he says, “I realized that I was the head man here.”

VC: Right.

NZ: “And I'd have to show—”

VC: Courage.

NZ: “—courage.”

VC: Yeah.

NZ: And he said, “Not that I didn't feel also, uh, very badly about the situation,”—

VC: Mmmhmm.

NZ: —he says, “but I had to show courage.”

VC: Yeah.

NZ: And he says people were crying and lamenting it and blaming everybody except themselves. He

says, “People who were doing the complaining were the first ones to get in the first row of any photograph of the membership of these organizations.”

VC: [laughs]

NZ: [inhales] So my dad told me too, he said uh, “I cried too.” He said, “but I cried when the lights were out—”

VC: Right...right.

NZ: “—so that nobody saw that weakness in me.”

VC: Right.

NZ: [inhales] What I thought was humorous when he told me, that he went to confession—

VC: [laughs]

NZ: —to one of the priests...in the internment camp. I don't know who.

VC: Was he—Had the priest also been—

NZ: Yeah.

VC: —interned?

NZ: Yes.

VC: Wow.

NZ: With a priest in the internment camp and after he finished his confession for the penance the priest said, “Your penance is one Our Father and one Hail Mary.” My father said to him, “Is that all?” He says, “Yeah. Is that too much for you?” He says, “No. I say Our Father and Hail Mary every night.” “You say an Our Father and Hail Mary every night?” “Yeah!” He says, “You don't need—you don't need—you don't need anymore penance.”

VC: Yeah! [laughs]

[someone else laughs]

NZ: [laughs]

VC: Um...when your father was picked up—

NZ: Yes.

VC: —we heard stories from others that the police arrived with lists. Did did your father ever mention—

NZ: No.

VC: —or you, were you at home at the time?

NZ: No. I come home after 4:00, right? School was out at 4:00. And he had already been picked up and other children on the street said that—of course the store was locked.

VC: Right.

NZ: He was picked up from his shoe shop.

VC: From the store?

NZ: Yup.

VC: From the store.

NZ: And the children, some children said, “Your father has been, uh, taken away by the police, uh, because he's a spy.”

VC: Hmm.

NZ: [shrugs] Well—

VC: Yeah. I know.

NZ: They're only kids.

VC: Yeah.

NZ: They don't know, uh, the reason why. And that was it. But as I say nobody—they were very good to us. In fact, uh, one lady just down the street, a neighbour about three or four stores down, she took—she looked after me almost like I was her own son.

VC: Right.

NZ: And she was from Birmingham, England.

VC: Mmmhmm.

NZ: And they had a fish and chips store. It was the oldest...uh—The fish and chips store was the oldest fish and chips store in Hamilton.

VC: Right.

NZ: And in fact it was the oldest restaurant, if you want to consider it a restaurant, uh, that had not changed hands at that particular time.

VC: Wow.

NZ: And these people were very good to me. That's why I'm kind of corpulent—

VC: [laughs]

[someone else in the background laughs]

NZ: —because I'd go over there in the morning and my mom who worked, but she came home every lunch time because where she worked at Copley, Noyes and Randall was not distant.

VC: Okay.

NZ: So she'd come home. It was a rush to come home to be with the children. We all were going to school at the time.

VC: Right.

NZ: And she'd prepare the lunch and go back to uh—

VC: To work.

NZ: —to work. But I would go to this fish and chips store in the morning—

VC: [laughs]

NZ: —and...early enough it was probably before breakfast. I'd have breakfast with them.

VC: Why?

NZ: And then I'd have lunch with them. I'm sorry, I'd have lunch at home with my parents...with my mother. My father was still at the store. And then I'd go back to fish and chips store and have a nap with them in their bed.

VC: [laughs] Oh ho!

NZ: Their bed. And at 4:00 when they opened again I would be there all the time.

VC: Right.

NZ: Uh, I subsequently, as I got older, they hired me, at least they gave me a job—

VC: [laughs]

NZ: —that after four—that's as I got older though, I had to be maybe 11 or 12 years old. And I used to wash the dishes or serve and, uh—

VC: Right!

NZ: —uh, I was in an area with a lot of children who knew me and in those days you can get a bag of chips for five cents.

VC: [laughs]

NZ: And they'd come in, kids come in and buy a bag of chips and say, "Nicki, push them down."

VC: [laughs]

NZ: So I'd have this bag and I'd push them down. And the bag was like cones—[picks up a piece of paper]

VC: Right.

NZ: —that we would make ourselves [demonstrates with the pieces of paper].

VC: Right.

NZ: And I still know how to do it.

VC: Oh. Good, very good!

NZ: See? They were done with a piece, sheet of paper like this. [finishes making the cone and holds it out] And that was the cone and you put the chips in there. [motions to the inside of the cone] Five cents worth. It was well worth it. [laughs]

VC: Wow! Wow! [laughs]

NZ: So, uh, the, uh, in fact this lady, I recall being right there by the armouries, there were all kinds of

recruits coming over there from their lunches and what have you—

VC: Right.

NZ: —and I knew a lot of them and unfortunately many who I did meet as a child working there, died during war.

VC: Okay.

NZ: But, um, they were very kind.

VC: Yeah.

NZ: Very kind to me and in fact they were very friendly to me until their death.

VC: Yeah.

NZ: And in fact after she died somebody brought me all her rings.

VC: Oh.

NZ: They weren't worth much money but sentimentally they were.

VC: Absolutely.

NZ: Yeah.

VC: Absolutely. Absolutely. And when your father then was picked up that day, um, was he ever told why he was—Was he ever formally charged, ever given documents saying—

NZ: I don't—

VC: —the reason—?

NZ: I don't believe so. I don't believe so. Uh, there was never a trial. Although I understand there were a couple of hearings, um, at the camp.

VC: Okay.

NZ: Um, he was questioned at the camp and, uh, he told me the first time he was questioned he was asked, “Are you a member of the Fascio?” That was really what worried the—

VC: Right.

NZ: —Canadian government was Fascio and not the Sons of Italy.

VC: Right.

NZ: “Were you a member of the Fascio?” He says, “Yes.” “Are you now a member of the Fascio?” He says, “Yes!” [smiles]

VC: [laughs]

NZ: That's why he was in the camp.

VC: Yeah.

NZ: And, uh, he says, "You know Italy is at war with—Canada's at war with Italy and you're still a member?" My dad said, "The Fascio has never been declared illegal. It was a legal organization. We have a charter. Yeah. I have no reason not to say I'm not a member. I am still a member."

VC: Hmm.

NZ: So I understand a few months later he was called again—

VC: Mmmhmm.

NZ: —um...and asked the same question, "Are you, are you a member of the Fascio?" He said, "No." He says, "Well the last interview you said Yes." He says, "Yes I was a member at that time. But since that time 'til now, orders in council, the Canadian government declared me to be a member of the Fascio, is illegal, and as a Canadian, a loyal Canadian, I'm no longer a member of an organization which is illegal."

VC: Oh.

NZ: “Take him away!” [laughs] The judge was kind of upset at that answer but—

VC: [laughs]

NZ: —that was his answer.

VC: Right.

NZ: Uh, also there was another situation where I am told that, uh, um, a person who was interned asked my father if he would come and speak for him in the camp to vouch that he was a member neither of the Sons of Italy nor of the Fascio.

VC: Mmmhmm. Mmmhmm.

NZ: And my father said, “Certainly I can come. And I will come.” “If you come and speak for me and you feel that you will stay here one more day because you've spoken on my behalf, I don't want you to come.”

VC: Okay.

NZ: My father said to him, “I'm here as long as the government wants me to be here. So I have no fear or no objection—“

VC: Right.

NZ: “—to come and speak on your behalf because you were not a member of the Fascio. You were not a member of the Sons of Italy.”

VC: Right.

NZ: Why was he there? Government knows.

VC: Yeah.

NZ: [raises his eyebrows]

VC: Did did did your father ever sort of, uh, tell you more or less how many other, um, people from Hamilton he had met there, uh, in the camps? Did he—

NZ: Well we have the lists—

VC: Yeah.

NZ: Do you have that list?

VC: I do but there's a discrepancy between the official lists, um, from the government and what we have and there, there's only about 57 on the official list whereas the Sons of Italy list had over 74.

NZ: [inhales] I have no explanation except...there were people in the camp who were there not because they were members of the Sons of Italy or the—

VC: Right.

NZ: —Fascio.

VC: Okay.

NZ: The government knows why they were there.

VC: Right.

NZ: And so that could be the reason why there are different lists. In other words, the list that the government had may have been the list—

VC: Yeah.

NZ: —of the people who were members of the Sons of Italy or the Fascio.

VC: Yeah. But did, do you remember your dad saying, “Oh I saw a lot of, uh, people from Hamilton” or “I saw, you know, 20 people from Hamilton.”

NZ: Well he saw, he saw them all there.

VC: Okay. Got it.

NZ: Because—

VC: They were all together.

NZ: —they were all together.

VC: Right.

NZ: Uh, Dad was picked up and was at the Exhibition grounds first. And you probably heard the story there...It was very embarrassing to these people. You know, our, our people, uh...are not used to uh, how do I put it? Evidently they were paraded nude—

VC: Yes. Yes.

NZ: —while army personnel were up in the balcony at Exhibition stadium there and they were looking down, men and women—

VC: Right.

NZ: —and, uh, uh, making remarks and smirking etc. And this was extremely embarrassing—

VC: Absolutely.

NZ: —to these people who were not used to being nude even in front of their families.

VC: Exactly.

NZ: You know?

VC: Yeah.

NZ: Any event, in any event, um...um my father first went there. And then he was moved to Petawawa. I don't know how many years he was there. It had to be a question of months, not years. And then he was moved out to Fredericton, New Brunswick.

VC: Oh, I didn't realize that.

NZ: Yeah. He was moved to Fredericton, New Brunswick and he was released from Fredericton after a number of months there.

VC: Okay.

NZ: Um...When he got out of the camp—I think he was there 2½ years or thereabouts—he seemed to have more friends when he came out—

VC: Okay! [laughs]

NZ: —than he had before he went in.

VC: Hmm.

NZ: And, um, um, obviously there are some people maybe who had blamed him for being interned in the first place, uh, inwardly were not, uh, um, were not happy, um, but at least they they acted as if they had no, uh, uh, no regrets—

VC: Okay.

NZ: —towards him.

VC: Right. Right. Right.

NZ: Now on the street where we lived when he was picked up there was also Nicola Masi—

VC: Oh yes.

NZ: —who was the travel agent—

VC: Right.

NZ: —and the first Grand Venerable of the Sons of Italy of Ontario.

VC: Hmm.

NZ: And his son is my, my *cumbar*[?].



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VC: Okay.

NZ: Vic Masi lives up in uh the Muskoka area. It's the Lake of Bays.

VC: Okay.

NZ: He's still a good friend of mine. I was his best man at his wedding. And on the same street about three doors down was Aurelio Del Piero—

VC: Mmmhmm.

NZ: —who was the first Secretary of the Grand Lodge. Very respected man. He was from, from the Friuli.

VC: Mmmhmm.

NZ: And in fact he gave the name Trieste Lodge—

VC: Okay.

NZ: —to the lodge.

VC: To the lodge. The Sons of Italy lodge.

NZ: Now he was a, he was, he was therefore eligible for membership in the Venetian Club in



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Hamilton—

VC: Right.

NZ: —where you have to come from, I think, three or four regions—

VC: Right.

NZ: —up north. But Del Piero, believe it or not, was very respected by that, members of that club but never belonged to that club.

VC: Hmm.

NZ: He, he belonged to the Sons of Italy, started the Sons of Italy being one of the, uh, as I say, the secretary. Because he believed the Sons of Italy was good for the immigrants to unite in one family those of Italian birth and descent—

VC: Right.

NZ: —in order to...in order to make progress!

VC: Sure.

[00:50:03]



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NZ: And to defend, uh, the population against discrimination.

VC: Right.

NZ: And the Sons of Italy, as I said previously, to promote an active participation in the economic, political and—

VC: Right.

NZ: —social life of uh the community.

VC: Right.

NZ: And, uh, he was a gentleman respected by the Venetian Club. That's why even though he's from there and didn't belong, he still garnered the appreciation and the respect of all those people.

VC: Yeah. Do you know of any of the other, um, uh, people, uh, or any of the other members of your family? For example was your mother declared an enemy alien? Were you people declared enemy aliens?

NZ: No. Not me. [touches microphone] Not me. I understand the people who immigrated uh, after 19, uh, uh—No. Before 1926 or something like that.

VC: Okay.

NZ: But I'm not sure of the dates. That they were all declared enemy—They all had to register.

VC: Okay.

NZ: They had to go to the mounted police office, I think it was once a month or—

VC: Mmmhmm.

NZ: —to register. And I think my mother was one of them.

VC: Okay.

NZ: And so was my partner, John Agro.

VC: Okay.

NZ: John Agro's, um, uh, parents and John Agro served as lieutenant in the Canadian army, and his brother, Charlie, was a captain. Dr. Charlie Agro was a captain in the Italian army and the other brother, Joe, was also enlisted. So that story or that example is only one of many examples where Canadian born served in the armed forces and their parents had to register.

VC: Right, so Charlie was in the Canadian army.

NZ: Charles Agro, yeah.

VC: Yeah.

NZ: Captain.

VC: Right but you said the Italian army.

NZ: Oh, I'm sorry. No.

VC: No, no. He was the Canadian army. So they, they were serving overseas—

NZ: That's right.

VC: —at the same time their parents were—

NZ: Had to register.

VC: —had to check, check in.

NZ: Yeah. Yeah. Yeah.

VC: Wow. Wow. Good.

NZ: Now the—Anyone who studied law—We are told as Canadian citizens we have rights. We do also have obligations. But we have also rights.

VC: Right.

NZ: And these rights were completely denied to so many of them in the camp who already were Canadian citizens.

VC: Right.

NZ: And this is what bothers, bothered them and bothers a person like me that these people did not have *habeas corpus*, brought before the courts as quickly as possible—

VC: Right.

NZ: —be charged—

VC: Right.

NZ: —and be given the opportunity to defend themselves.

VC: Hmm. Were they ever told the reasons why they were arrested? Were any of them every given, uh, reasons—

NZ: I really don't know that. I really don't know that I believe, only logical in my mind to believe that someone must have said to them, "You're here because Italy is at war and you people are very close to the Italian community." Or whatever it is.

VC: Right.

NZ: And, uh, so I'm quite sure that they realized why they were being picked up. Many of them, maybe only, uh, because they knew that they were members of this particular club, this particular organization—

VC: Right.

NZ: —uh, I, I don't think that many of them knew we're being arrested because we are considered, uh, saboteurs or—

VC: Right.

NZ: —uh, or...because we're disloyal.

VC: Hmmm.

NZ: Whatever the case may be. I remember when the, uh, when the king and queen came to Canada. [clears his throat and coughs] King George the 6th, was it? And Queen Elizabeth. My father's store was right in front of the armouries. He had it decorated with Canadian and British flags and with pictures of the, uh, of the monarchy etc. And he was, he was really proud of—

VC: Right.

NZ: —the monarchy. I'm quite sure he wasn't doing it [laugh]—

VC: [laughs]

NZ: —to change people's opinion. You know, we were never ever, uh, uh, taught not to respect the monarchy.

VC: Right.

NZ: You know, I mean a lot of people today, Canadians too, can't understand why we're part of the, uh, part of the monarchy, why we're part of the Commonwealth and not independent. But I personally don't mind the monarchy. I want the independence. I like it the way it is but I have no objection to the monarchy.

VC: Yeah. So when did, when did the Casa D'Italia, um, uh—

NZ: [laughs] Okay. The Casa D'Italia was built in, I think, 1935 to 37.

VC: Okay.

NZ: Thereabouts...It was the first Casa D'Italia in Canada.

VC: Right.

NZ: Of the three.



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VC: Oh okay!

NZ: [holds up three fingers] Hamilton, Toronto, Montreal. I don't know which one was second but Hamilton was first.

VC: Right.

NZ: And my father was the Secretary of the Fascio—

VC: Right.

NZ: —at the time. And he was the head man in the construction of—

VC: Oh I see, okay.

NZ: —of the Casa D'Italia.

VC: Okay.

NZ: Those were the days when the Italians were urged, Italians from Italy and the Fascists here following, uh, Mussolini's, uh, Fascist Regime, collected all the jewelry—

VC: Oh right.

NZ: —from Italians—

VC: Mmmhmm.

NZ: —and including Italian Canadians.

VC: Right.

NZ: And so many of them voluntarily gave their jewelry for the cause.

VC: Right.

NZ: Because there was an appreciation for what he had done in Italy.

VC: Right. Right.

NZ: This is hard maybe for some people to understand that. But at that time, uh, there also were anti-Fascists.

VC: Right.

NZ: I don't want to say not.

VC: No.

NZ: Obviously the communists were anti-Fascist. There were communists when my dad was up in

Trieste he said every morning you'd find a dead soldier—

VC: Right.

NZ: —because of the, uh, communists.

VC: Right.

NZ: They were in, uh, a military or in uniform or anything.

VC: Right.

NZ: They were like, uh, um, *Partigiani*.

[speaking in the background]

NZ: They weren't *Partigiani* at that time but they were communists. To try to disrupt the social order there'd be an Italian soldier dead.

VC: Right.

NZ: My father says the only people who came to help us were the veterans of the First World War—

VC: Wow.



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NZ: —and, uh, um, uh, veterans of the First World War—

VC: Wow.

NZ: —were the ones that were like the counter revolutionaries.

VC: [laughs]

NZ: And they were Fascists. At that time they were socialists. They followed Mussolini but they were socialists.

VC: Yeah.

NZ: But they were the one that became Fascist.

VC: Right.

NZ: And my father could never stand the *Partigiani*.

VC: Right.

NZ: And the *Partigiani* mainly come from North Italy.

VC: [laughs]

NZ: And if you go to Bologna—

VC: Absolutely.

NZ: Have you been to Bologna?

VC: Yes.

NZ: And you see the wall—

VC: Exactly.

NZ: —full of the photographs of *Partigiani*.

VC: Yeah.

NZ: To my father they were traitors.

VC: Right. Right.

NZ: I have no opinion...but I respect my father's feelings and I always have and—

VC: Right.

NZ: —and his intelligence, and I'm inclined to agree that at that particular time, they were traitors.

VC: Right.

NZ: [shrugs] And I'm still a Canadian. [laughs]

VC: Yeah yeah. Good.

NZ: And I don't—

VC: [laughs]

NZ: —and I don't want to be interned because of that feeling. But this is a free country—

VC: Yeah.

NZ: —and we are able to express our opinions—

VC: Absolutely.

NZ: —without fear—

VC: Yeah.

NZ: —of persecution or internment—



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VC: Yeah.

NZ: —especially internment without, uh, just cause—

VC: Yeah.

NZ: —or without *Habeas Corpus*.

VC: Yeah.

NZ: [laughs]

VC: Now how did they, uh, the internment, um, affect your father? Or did it affect your father—

NZ: No.

VC: Did it create—I know I've, we've talked to others who who said that there seemed to be almost a pall of silence that came over the community after that.

NZ: [inhales] After or at the same time?

VC: At the same time and after.

NZ: I think at the same time there were, people were afraid. When they saw people being interned, it had nothing to do—



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VC: Yes.

NZ: —with the Casa D'Italia...or the Fascio and the Sons of Italy. The Casa D'Italia was the base for both the Sons of Italy and the Fascio.

VC: Right. Did that, uh, did they then move their headquarters over there? Is that where they moved their meetings then—

NZ: Oh yes.

VC: —when the Casa, once the Casa D'Italia was built—

NZ: Yes.

VC: —they then moved their meetings to the Casa D'Italia.

NZ: Right because it was the Fascio and money began with money from Italy—

VC: Oh I see.

NZ: —to start the fund—

VC: Okay.

NZ: —for the Casa D'Italia.

VC: Mmmhmm.

NZ: So it was logical that, uh, when it was built that they would move right in there.

VC: Okay.

NZ: And then Sons of Italy, um, some were Fascist, in fact nearly all the Fascists belonged to the Sons of Italy. But not all Sons of Italy were Fascist.

VC: Right.

NZ: And uh the uh—At that time the Casa D'Italia they also had the *Dopolavoro*.

VC: Right!

NZ: The *Dopolavoro* after work. And in the Casa D'Italia they had bowling leagues. They had baseball teams and concerts and what have you. So people—

VC: Yeah.

NZ: —especially the people from the East End, it was a meeting place for them.

VC: I think your father was also part of the *Dopolavoro*.

[01:00:01]

NZ: Oh yeah. President of the — *Dopolavoro* too.

VC: Okay! I thought so!

NZ: Okay. The, um, um, um, so at the time, uh, there were people who, as I say, they were afraid, uh, that, uh, by giving any support to the people around the inside would maybe be, uh, uh, would be arrested too and interned.

VC: Mmmhmm. Mmmhmm.

NZ: And so they said nothing at all. There were some too who had too much to say and were responsible for people being in who should not have been in.

VC: Right.

NZ: Now this is hearsay too.

VC: I know. This is what we've been hearing also.

NZ: Right. There are people who, uh, were naming other people and unfortunately many were Sicilian right from the same town my father comes from. And he says he was extremely upset when he saw these people being interned. He said he felt so badly because they were not members. He knew who

the members were.

VC: Yeah.

NZ: They were not members. He feels that they were picked up and put in because of some personal animosity between the person who fingered them and themselves.

VC: Yeah.

NZ: But personal reasons. Nothing to do with the war effort or the war itself.

VC: Yeah. I've also heard stories that some of the police here in Hamilton did sort of try to let the Italians know that something was going to, uh, to be happening soon. And they, they did try to warn some of the other Italians. Did your father ever say anything like that?

NZ: No. Well the only, the only thing I know was that friend of his, the butcher—

VC: Right.

NZ: —who, who knew about it, who knew that if the war came the arrests would be imminent.

VC: Right.

NZ: So maybe at that time other people knew too or he told other people—

VC: Hmm.

NZ: I don't really know.

VC: Okay. Okay. So again, how...how do you think the internment affected your father?

NZ: [inhales] Well my father, as I said, outwardly he was very courageous and he didn't give any sign to the people inside that he regretted—maybe that word's not strong enough—that he was, uh, upset. Uh, I think he did regret that he was—

VC: Yes.

NZ: —arrested but I don't think he showed that he was upset at all. And he tried to give courage to other people—

VC: Right.

NZ: —uh, there. The, uh, when Dad came out, of course he had ill feelings towards those people who, uh, he understood were responsible for innocent people being interned.

VC: Yes.

NZ: But he had more friends when he came out because of the way he conducted himself in the camp.

VC: Right.

NZ: In many cases, people who didn't belong to the organizations but people who were put there for other reasons, they were impressed by his courage.

VC: Right.

NZ: And, uh, some of those people obviously have served time for other reasons in the past—

VC: [laughs]

NZ: —and so they were used to those circumstances, eh?

VC: [laughs] Right.

NZ: [laughs] Anyway, what else?

VC: How do you think the internment has affected your life?

NZ: Okay. Um, just to say that while he was in there my dad, uh, wrote cards home. They didn't—

VC: Oh!

NZ: He wrote some letters at one time but I think at one stage they only gave them cards—

VC: Okay.

NZ: —and they write almost like—

VC: Sort of like postcards?

NZ: Postcard. You can write on one side of a card. [inhales] Uh, my sister has them. Not this sister. My sister, little sister has them. He'd write to her personally and he'd write to me.

VC: Okay.

NZ: They're always the same: Hope you're doing well at school. Hope you're keep, you know, keep— Help your mother, uh, Be good kids and, uh, I'll be home soon. Something like that, you know? In other words, words of encouragement to the family. Um, and that, really that was it...Now, when he came out, my sister Frances, uh, she didn't even recognize him, wondered who the hell this stranger—

VC: Right.

NZ: —who this stranger was. [laughs] I think she went away to hide. Anyway, um, but as I say when he came out he seemed to have more friends than the past because they met him, also heard the stories—

VC: Mmmhmm.

NZ: —of the way he conducted himself in the camp.



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VC: Right.

NZ: Now how has it affected me?

VC: Yeah.

NZ: It didn't both—it didn't really bother me too much at that time. I don't think I understood completely, uh, because I kept going to school and I was very lucky because uh...I was out before he was 13.

VC: Okay.

NZ: Before having to go to high school.

VC: Right.

NZ: And so when he came out he started work again. My mother worked as she always did, until we bought—until they bought this house. And uh...and so everybody saw no difference. I had my friends at school who I knew year after year, my friends, uh, down where in I, I lived—

VC: Mmmhmm.

NZ: —um. But I can tell you right from the time as long as I can remember, my father always encouraged education.

VC: Hmm.

NZ: He believed in education. He himself was one of 300 or so children who started school in Italy...where only 30 finished.

VC: Wow.

NZ: In other words of the people there in that town—

VC: Right.

NZ: —most of them, uh, uh, went for a trade or worked in the farms, did not go to school.

VC: Right.

NZ: When Mussolini came he made it compulsory and they did go to school.

VC: Right.

NZ: But he went to school before—

VC: Right.

NZ: —the coming of Mussolini.

VC: Right.

NZ: And, uh, his mother wanted him to go to high school. He was a good student. His mother wanted him to go to high school but he said, "I couldn't put my mother through that, uh, hardship."

VC: Right.

NZ: She made her living—She was a widow—made her living sewing clothes for people.

VC: Right.

NZ: Um, "because to go to high school I would have to go to Agrigento—"

VC: Right.

NZ: "—the county town."

VC: Yeah.

NZ: He says, "You only get there if you have a good horse—"

VC: Or a mule.

NZ: Or a mule, which would take a couple hours.



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VC: Yeah.

NZ: Or if you had money for, uh, a train.

VC: Right.

NZ: The, there were no cars in the town at that time. And also those who went to high school, uh, usually had relatives in Agrigento and they, the family, the kids would stay with their relatives.

VC: Hmm.

NZ: So he didn't go to school but he, he had a lot of education for the time that he—

VC: Right.

NZ: And I, I, it sounds so self, uh, serving but my father, in my opinion, was the smartest immigrant of those times, of those times, that I've ever met.

VC: Right.

NZ: He was current in all, uh, in current affairs.

VC: Right.

NZ: When he came back from the camp, even before the camp he read Italian and English.

VC: Oh okay.

NZ: And, uh, Italian.

VC: Uh huh.

NZ: And after he returned he learned Sp—He learned French in the camp. And he got the French newspaper, Italian newspaper, English newspaper. Plus he read, he wrote—He read books. Remember my father died at 94.

VC: Right.

NZ: And he read books that I haven't read: The Life of Trudeau—

VC: Hmm.

NZ: —uh books substantial—

VC: Right.

NZ: —books.

VC: Hmm.

NZ: He'd watch every newscast, any, every newscast he possibly could watch. That's what he was interested in.

VC: Right.

NZ: He'd watch baseball.

VC: Yeah. [laughs]

NZ: I don't think he knew what the hell was happening, but he watched it and he watched football too. But other than that it was just, uh, those two sports and, uh—

VC: The news.

NZ: —News broadcasts.

VC: Mmmhmm.

NZ: My dad, when he looks in the paper and sees a picture of an Italian Canadian graduate, he wouldn't even know who they are, just knowing that they are an Italian name, he says, “Look at this. Another flower—”

VC: Yeah.

NZ: “—in our garden.”

VC: Yeah.

NZ: And he really meant it.

VC: Hmm.

NZ: Did you interview Vincenza Travale?

VC: Yes. Yes. She had only good things to say about your dad.

NZ: Yeah. Well her father and my father were very good friends.

VC: Yeah.

NZ: Now when Vincy graduated, she graduated with an M.A.

VC: Yeah.

NZ: A B.A. first and then an M.A. And I think she was the first in our community to receive that high—
especially for a girl.

VC: Right.

NZ: That was unheard of. He was so proud of her.



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VC: Yeah.

NZ: You know?

VC: Yeah.

NZ: Anyway.

VC: Did your mom, you said your mom worked at Copley Noyes.

NZ: Yeah.

VC: Did she—Was she able to continue working during the—

NZ: Oh yeah.

VC: —the war?

NZ: Thank goodness.

VC: Oh yes.

NZ: My mother started working out of need.

VC: Yes.

NZ: She told me 1933.

VC: Okay.

[01:10:00]

NZ: And she worked all the way through the war, coming home every lunchtime and every night at 5:00. And, uh, she also was working when we lived on Ray Street until we bought this house.”

VC: Mmmhmm.

NZ: And I, I guess they decided it was enough.

VC: Right.

NZ: Her son was getting his degree from McMaster in that year, and therefore I would need their help.

VC: Yeah. That would be you, right?

NZ: Yeah. And therefore they didn't need the additional, uh, help.

VC: Okay.

NZ: Even though I was going—I had to go to Toronto. They needed all the help there. But anyway, 20 bucks a week in those days went a hell of a long day. Especially when I had to save ten dollars for when I came back to school to take out my fiancé.

VC: Oh yes.

NZ: —was in fact the Petracca[?] girl. [laughs]

VC: [laughs] Oh wow!

NZ: And so that \$10 would pay for, uh, a show and, uh, the Chicken Roost afterwards.

VC: Okay!

NZ: That was it.

VC: [laughs]

[someone else laughs]

NZ: [laughs]

VC: Did your father, um, later on ever, uh, ever decide to, um, start a court case or to try for redress?

NZ: [inhales] Uh, I understand the internees, I don't know about all of them, but a number of them, I

understand they did get together and they put in, I think, \$10 each or a very minimal sum of money to see if they could do something or to get some recovery. But nothing came out of it.

VC: Okay do you—When was this? Do you remember more or less—

NZ: Oh.

VC: —

NZ: No.

VC: 1940s? Was it in the '40s?

NZ: Uh

VC: Was it in the '50s?

NZ: [thinking] 1940...I think it had to be late '40s, early '50s.

VC: Okay.

NZ: But nothing ever came out of it.

VC: Okay.

NZ: We at the Sons of Italy were upset because we lost the Casa D'Italia.

VC: Absolutely.

NZ: See the Casa D'Italia, um, in Hamilton was seize but the Custodian Enemy Alien Properties.

VC: Right.

NZ: Well, custodian means custodian, trustee, to hold it until it was ready to give back to the rightful owners. Toronto was given back to—the Italian community could not agree as to who should get the Casa D'Italia, so, uh, Italians whoever made that decision, probably those that made the decision had nothing to do with being in the camp.

VC: Right.

NZ: But anyway, they decided—The couldn't agree. They decided to give it to the Italian government.

VC: Oh alright!

NZ: And that's why the Casa D'Italia, the building there in Toronto is still occupied by the Italian consulate.

VC: Is that the one on Beverly Street?

NZ: I think so.

VC: Okay.

NZ: The one in Montreal was seized—

VC: Okay.

NZ: —but after the war it was given back to the Italian community.

VC: Mmmhmm.

NZ: Not necessarily, not the Fascio—

VC: No.

NZ: —but the Sons of Italy was one of the groups that was also consulted and was given back, in fact the Sons of Italy meetings are held there.

VC: Okay.

NZ: So, uh, only Hamilton didn't get it. And, uh...you know, we felt quite badly because at that time it was, it was confiscated, I don't know what it would have been worth. It had to be worth maybe \$35,000. Today it would be worth probably 300,000 maybe more.

VC: Right. Hmm.



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NZ: Um, now the Sons of Italy before we founded the Sons of Italy Charitable Corporation and the Sons of Italy Housing Corporation.

VC: Okay.

NZ: We've built, uh, many, under the Housing Corporation, we have built, uh, many, uh apartment buildings.

VC: Mmmhmm.

NZ: We have named them.

VC: Mmmhmm.

NZ: We own them—Technically they're owned by the government still.

VC: Okay.

NZ: But once the mortgage has been paid off to the CMHC they become our property.

VC: Right.

NZ: Uh, when I say, “our property” we can use them the way we wish-keep them rented obviously. And any profits must be given to charity.

VC: Right.

NZ: Okay? That's what led to us, to the Sons of Italy deciding, the time has come, we don't need subsidized housing anymore. We needed it at the beginning because it didn't appear that those Italians who wanted to go to subsidized housing ever could get in.

VC: Right.

NZ: So we figured we better have our own.

VC: Sure.

NZ: Get our own. That way at least our people will be favourably looked upon when it came time, uh, to occupy. In other words you were still restricted because you can, uh, discriminate who's going to get it or not—

VC: No.

NZ: —but at least they had a possibility to get into these buildings. There weren't even many anyway. Not many Italians wanted to go to subsidized housing. They want their own Casa.

VC: Exactly.

NZ: But in any event that's why we built those and we built a number of them.



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VC: Right.

NZ: Now, then we figured no more housing projects. Let's—we need a retirement home now because our population is getting older—

VC: Mmmhmm.

NZ: —and we have to provide for our population. Again, one of the purposes of the Sons of Italy: uh, anti-defamation, uh, service—

VC: Right.

NZ: —service to our—to the community at large, but our community too.

VC: Right.

NZ: So we decided to incorporate the Sons of Italy Charitable Corporation. Charitable Corporation we had to raise our own money.

VC: Right.

[camera is knocked]

[phone ringing]

NZ: [points to the camera] That's off now, right?

VC: No. It's on.

NZ: Oh. So we had to raise our own money and, uh, it was tough, but we raised our own money, uh...
Some people have been very generous.

VC: Mmmhmm.

NZ: Four people have, uh, loaned, uh, 500,000 each. Many 100,000.

VC: Right.

NZ: Some 50, some 25.

VC: Right.

NZ: Believe it not our richest people, proportionally gave the least.

VC: Right.

NZ: But we succeeded in building Villa Italia.

VC: Right.

NZ: People are on a waiting list.

VC: Yeah.

NZ: It's full now.

VC: Right.

NZ: 120. Accommodation for 120 people and, uh, we're now proposing, uh, or we're thinking of building—There's a surplus land there—of building with, uh, keeping in mind the seniors: couples who want an apartment.

VC: Right.

NZ: So it's like life lease.

VC: Right.

NZ: We're contemplating that but we're not really decided yet.

VC: Okay.

NZ: Because there's such a demand for the retirement...maybe it would be better to expand—



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VC: Expand.

NZ: —that one.

VC: Hmm.

NZ: So what did happen to the Casa D'Italia here in Hamilton? Where did that go?

VC: Casa D'Italia, the Casa D'Italia was was confiscated and, uh, subsequently was sold by the government to the Polish community...for, I don't remember the amount of money but it was very little.

NZ: Oh dear. And, uh...such a shame because there was so much sacrifice. Uh people at that time, when they gave donations it wasn't 500,000 or 100. It was like \$20.

VC: Yes.

NZ: Maybe if they really, really wanted to and had the money, maybe 100.

VC: Mmmhmm.

NZ: That's about it.

VC: Yeah.



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NZ: And some of their own labour. In other words—

VC: Yeah.

NZ: —they had to build her too—

VC: Yeah.

NZ: —but they also gave of their own labour—

VC: Right.

NZ: —to build the Casa D'Italia.

VC: Right, right.

NZ: So when we went for this money, in the beginning, in fact I wrote a letter some time ago saying that if money came we would like some of this money to be given to the Sons of Italy for Villa Italia—

VC: Right.

NZ: —which is built by the Sons of Italy...And what is the connection? Well most of the people in the Casa D'Italia were members of the Sons of Italy.

VC: Exactly. So this is the, this is the, uh, the request for redress money—



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NZ: Yeah yeah.

VC: —from the government.

NZ: The last we've heard is the government's agreed to give money but it's going to be to universities for the, for the Italian language, for the culture and that. Um, we're not really happy that some of that money's not being given to the Sons of Italy for their Villa Italia.

VC: Right.

NZ: But at the same time, we are gratified that they're giving this money for that purpose, because we are interested in maintaining the Italian—

VC: Right.

NZ: —language and culture. The only thing now is, that since McMaster University is here in Hamilton and since Hamilton has suffered, um, very dearly from the war by losing the Casa D'Italia—

VC: Mmmhmm.

NZ: —uh, and not only for that but so many of our people were interned—

VC: Exactly.



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NZ: —that it would be good—

VC: Mmmhmm.

NZ: —for some of that money to be given to McMaster because the, the, uh, heirs of these internees in many cases would be going to McMaster University—

VC: Sure. Absolutely.

NZ: —and will benefit from these monies, from the monies that would be given.

VC: Mmmhmm.

NZ: Now, the government knows what cities were most affected by the interment.

VC: Right.

NZ: I don't know but I, I, I believe [counts on his fingers] Hamilton, Toronto—

VC: Montreal

NZ: —Montreal. Out West I don't know whether, uh—

VC: Vancouver a little bit.

NZ: Yeah. I was going to say Vancouver. There are, there are one or two from different other cities.

VC: Yeah.

NZ: But the main cities: Vancouver, Hamilton, Toronto, uh, Montreal.

VC: Yes.

NZ: And so I hope that the people who are in charge of making the, uh, uh, determination as to the recipients of these funds—

VC: Mmmhmm.

NZ: —will keep in mind that fact.

VC: Right. Right. Do you know of any other of the internees that, that tried to get money from the government through court cases or any, any sort of legal ways that they, that they tried?

NZ: No. The, um, the legal—the action that was taken by, uh, Joseph, uh, Colangelo—

VC: Mmmhmm.

NZ: A very prominent lawyer – young fella. Uh, Toronto. Good litigation lawyer. Uh, who, his father was also interned.

VC: His father was Berlino, I think.

NZ: Berlino.

VC: Yeah.

NZ: Uh, he, at his own expense, uh, had be—started an action for some compensation. And in the action he named Jacco Melli[?] and Benny Ferri[?].

VC: Oh right.

NZ: Both who were residents at Villa Italia.

VC: Oh wow! I didn't know that.

NZ: Yep. They were both residents of Villa Italia and, um...Benny, uh, uh, was not married. He, uh, he had no spouse and no children so far as I know. And you know the story of Jacco Melli[?].

VC: Yes.

NZ: Uh but they both agreed to be the front people—

VC: Mmmhmm.

NZ: —for the action taken by Joe. But Joe's action was intended to be an action on behalf of all of the

internees.

VC: The internees.

NZ: And, uh, I really don't know what happened there. Joe would have to explain that to you. Has he been, has he been interviewed?

VC: Uh, I'm not sure.

NZ: Yeah.

VC: I'm not sure. So but, uh, that's about the only one that you would know about, that you had heard about here in Hamilton.

NZ: That's the only one—

VC: Yeah.

NZ: —in Hamilton.

VC: Right.

NZ: Now whether actions were taken or commenced in other cities, I really don't know.

VC: Yeah. Good. That's about it.

[Voice in background]

Is there anything else you want to add?

NZ: [shakes his head] No but it's very important that they move quickly—

VC: [laughs]

NZ: —because if they don't come to some decision then my generation's going to be gone.

VC: Exactly. And who's left to, to remember?

NZ: [inhales] You're right.

VC: Yeah.

NZ: My generation remembers. Our children know nothing about it.

VC: Exactly.

NZ: And, uh, in fact there's been such a break up in our community, intermarriage and what have you, that it's not even important to them at all. What would be important to guys, to people like me is the desire that at least they'd have the opportunity of learning something about, uh, our culture—



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VC: Yep.

NZ: —and our, and our language. I say, “Our language.” My language now is English but the, the language of our ancestors.

VC: Absolutely. Absolutely.

NZ: You can't appreciate the future unless you appreciate the past.

VC: Absolutely.

[fades out at 01:24:03]