



*Italian Canadians as Enemy Aliens:  
Memories of World War II*  
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**NAME OF INTERVIEWEE:** Antonia Maria (Ninetta) Ricci

**NAME OF INTERVIEWER:** Melina De Guglielmo

**NAME OF VIDEOGRAPHER:** Lucy Di Pietro

**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**

This is a follow up interview with Ninetta Ricci. Antonia Maria (Ninetta) Frenza was born in Italy in October of 1926. In 1932, Ninetta and her mother, Assunta Frenza (née Sauro), came to Canada via Ellis Island to join her father, Leonardo Frenza, who came to Canada six years earlier. The Frenza family

settled in Montreal, Quebec. Leonardo was a shoemaker by trade and worked sporadically at factories during the Depression. He was active in the Order of the Sons of Italy. Assunta was a housewife. Ninetta talks about living with her neighbours who were well off before moving across the street to a two-room apartment on Cartier Street. In 1940, Leonardo was arrested and interned at Camp Petawawa for 22 months. He worked in the kitchen while he was there. During Leonardo's internment, Assunta earned money by doing chores for other people and cleaning a church. After Leonardo's release from the camp, he worked for Tarsales, a shoe manufacturer, and eventually opened up his own men's clothing shop. At age 20, Ninetta married Galileo Ricci, who during the Second World War, was designated an enemy alien and ordered to report monthly. The couple moved to Dorval and then to Toronto in the late 1960s, because of Galileo's job. Ninetta finishes her interview talking about some of the people on the street where she grew up: the neighbours that helped them out during her father's internment and the landlady who almost evicted the family. She also speaks a bit about her family changing their religious affiliation from Catholic to Protestant when they came to Canada.

## INTERVIEW

**AR: Antonia Maria (Ninetta) Ricci, interviewee**

**MG: Melina De Guglielmo, interviewer**

**LP: Lucy Di Pietro, videographer**

[Title screen]

[Fades in at 00:00:11]

[Text: Antonia Maria (Ninetta) Ricci. Daughter of internee Leonardo Frenza]

MG: Okay. So this is Melina De Guglielmo on June 20<sup>th</sup>, 20, uh, sorry, 2011. And I'm going to ask you to

start, uh, with stating your full birth name.

AR: It's, uh, actually my birth certificate reads Antonia Maria, uh, Frenza, but everybody knows me as Ninetta and in some cases Nina.

MG: Hmm, and how did that come about?

AR: Well, because, uh, Antonia was, became Ninetta and I was known as Ninetta all through my lifetime until I started to work at Alitalia and they started to call me Nina. So I have these, uh, three names but, uh, seldom anybody knows me as Antonia.

MG: And, uh, when were you born, sorry, where were you born?

AR: I was born in, uh, a small town, Ripabottoni, in the, uh, province of Campobasso, the region of, uh, Molise.

MG: And what do you remember of your, of Italy?

AR: Well, uh, I was, uh, born in, in, uh, October of 1926 and, uh, I left, uh, Italy with my mother, uh, when I was six years old because my dad, one year after my birth, immigrated to Canada. And it took him six years to send for us because he couldn't afford to send for us sooner. And, uh, so we immigrated. We came via Ellis Island. Uh, stayed in New York for three days with an uncle and then took the train and got off in LaCall, Quebec.

MG: Hmm.

AR: So we landed in, in Quebec, in Montreal, and we lived in Montreal for 35 years.

MG: And what were your, what were your parents' names?

AR: My mother's name was Assunta Sarro[?]. And, uh, my father was Leonardo Frenza.

MG: And, um, do you remember any of the, the early years in Italy before coming to Canada?

AR: Oh yes. I remember we spent a lot of time with my grandparents, my maternal grandparents. They had a cantina. And, uh, because it was such a small town the travelling, uh, salesmen used to come into town and, and, uh, my grandmother used to prepare meals for them. It was like a little restaurant.

[fades out at 00:02:54]

[fades in at 00:02:56]

MG: Perfect.

AR: Oh, we start over again?

MG: Oh, no. We'll just go back to Ripabottonian life. Uh, you mentioned, uh, the cantina...

AR: Yes.

MG: Yes. And travelling salesmen.

AR: Yes. And everyday we used to go to my, uh, grandmother because my mother would help—

[sound of footsteps]

MG: Sorry. Yes.

MG: Everyday we went to my grandmother and, uh, because my mother was a big help to her. And in those days she used to have to fetch the water at the fountain...you know? And, uh, with those big congas? You know? Those big, uh, containers? And I used to go there as well with my little container on my head. And, uh, uh, we, this is the way we spent the rest, uh, my, my beginning of my six years. And the, of course we immigrated to Canada and it was a different life. We arrived in September the 3<sup>rd</sup>, I believe, and on the 7<sup>th</sup> I went to school.

MG: Wow, and what year was this that you came to Canada?

AR: Came in 1932. In was Depression, in plain Depression and, uh, it was rough.

MG: So your first impressions of Canada—What were your first impressions of Canada?

AR: Well, I was very lonely because...in Italy I had all my aunts and uncles and, uh, and here in Canada—Well, I had cousins and that but it wasn't the same, you know? And my language, there was a language barrier. But then, soon enough I learnt to speak English quite quickly.

MG: Yeah. And were you enrolled in school right away?

AR: Right away. The 7<sup>th</sup>. The 3<sup>rd</sup> and the 7<sup>th</sup> I went to school.

MG: Hmm. Do you remember those first days of school?

AR: I do. I was lonely, didn't understand, and, uh, didn't speak, of course.

MG: Hmm.

AR: But, uh, I learned quickly. I don't know how—I think it took me about three or four months and then I was in the game.

MG: And do you remember the teacher, um, maybe, uh, being bilingual or—?

AR: Oh no. She was not bilingual. She was English speaking. And, uh, no, I had to learn really on my own. Mind you there were a few other Italian, uh, children there too but they spoke English.

MG: Hmm. Who was your first, uh, childhood friend in, in Canada?

AR: Oh my gosh. I...my cousin.

MG: Yeah.

AR: I had a cousin, but she was a lot older than I was and, I mean, she's the one that cuddled me and, you know, comforted me.

MG: And did she live close by as well?

AR: Yes. She was—We, we were living on Cartier Street in Montreal and she was living on Papineau

Street. And so it was very close, yes.

MG: And, and, um, tell me a bit about the street that you lived on. Was it very multicultural?

AR: It was, uh, predominantly Italian...and, uh, then there were a few French, uh, sp—But, a few French-speaking because they went to Catholic school. And the Catholic School was French-speaking. And then there were a few Jewish in the neighbourhood.

And it was actually a melting pot, really. You know, all different—Syrians, a few Syrians. But predominantly Italian.

MG: Hmm. And what did your, uh—Did your parents work, uh, once they got—?

AR: My father was out of work at that time because of the Depression and he used to go—My father was a shoemaker to begin with and, um, he used to go to the factory to, uh, look for work and sometimes he was sent home without giving him work, you know? And my mother was just a housewife.

MG: Mmmhmm.

AR: So we had a little bit of hard times, yes.

MG: And did you have any siblings?

AR: I had one sister and, uh, she was born two years after we arrived in, uh, in, uh, Montreal. She was born in 1934. So there were almost eight years, eight years difference between us, yes.

MG: And do you remember those first few days with your new little sister?

AR: [laughs] I remember very well. I felt very abandoned. [laughs] But I loved her, you know?

MG: Oh.

AR: We're very close now. We're very close. She lives in Montreal and, uh, I call her everyday.

MG: Hmm.

AR: We are in touch every single day. Sometimes twice...Yeah.

MG: And, and, so we've talked about, uh, your dad's work life. Did he also have a bit of a social life or, um—?

AR: Yes. Well, his social life was, uh, with the Order of the Sons of Italy. And he was the Secretary there. And, uh, so he was very active. He loved that. And, uh, they used to socialize quite a bit. And, uh, they used to have uh, like, uh, concerts, you know, where they—Recitals. And, uh, so he enjoyed that. That's—He socialized there.

MG: And how do you, uh, um, I'm not sure if you remember but do, uh, do you recall how your dad became involved with the Order of the Sons of Italy? Or why, uh—?

AR: Well because, uh, you know, when you're Italian and, uh, you speak—In those days he spoke very little English. And so he looked for his own, shall we say, *pisan*, you know? And, uh, so that's why he liked to be with people of his, of his type and he al, also loved to discuss history and, uh, politics...and

sometimes religion. So that, that's where he found that he could, uh, really express himself.

MG: And was he, um, very politically active as well?

AR: Not politically active, no. He wasn't politically active. Maybe in the beginning when he was just, uh, when he had just arrived. But, uh, after that—Well, no I wouldn't say he was politically. He liked to discuss politics. Yeah.

MG: Um, and you mentioned he had strong ties with, um, other Italians. Were they primarily—Well, were they from all over Italy or were, did he stay—

AR: Well—

MG: —uh—?

AR: No. They were from all over Italy. Yes. They, they had arrived before him. And they were even older than him. 'Cause when my father immigrated he was only, uh, 20 years old.

MG: And, and where, where did they, um, gather? Where were these social gatherings held?

AR: Well, there was the Casa D'Italia and, uh, on Jean Talon, I think it was on Jean Talon. Yeah. And that's where they gathered. And they used to have all kinds of meetings of, uh, you know, socializing and music and, uh, discussing all sorts of subjects.

[00:10:04]

MG: And do you remember as a child going to the Casa D'Italia in—

AR: Yes!

MG: Montreal?

AR: Yes, I do. I went several times, yes. When they used to have different functions. As a matter of fact, at one point they had a function where there was, um, a recital and the Italian Consul General was there. And my father taught me a poem in his honour.

MG: Wow.

AR: Yeah. So I was about eight then.

MG: And you had to read the poem—?

AR: No. Not read. I had to recite.

MG: Oh. Wow.

AR: Eleven verses. [laughs] And I had to put in all my expressions. [laughs]

MG: And what poem was that?

AR: Oh, I don't remember it today. [laughs] I should because he drilled it into me.

MG: And, and were you very nervous to do that?

AR: No, I wasn't nervous. I, you know, I was quite, um, how shall I say, very spontaneous.

MG: And, um, so then leading up to—Uh, was your mom part of any, uh—?

AR: My mother was not interested. She was a typical housewife.

MG: Hmm.

AR: She loved her home and, uh, you know, very modest, very modest home we had at the time.

MG: Yeah. And, um, were you the only family living in, in the, uh—

AR: No, um—

MG: —home?

AR: Oh in our home, yeah.

MG: Okay.

AR: We were, yeah. When we first arrived, though, from Italy, we lived with, um, the neighbour, well, our neighbour, she became our neighbour across the street. She had a, a nice house by those days' standards. She had a phone. They had a phone. They had a radio. You know, a gramophone. So it, by those days' standards it was really something. And she had a very nice home.

MG: Mmmhmm.

AR: And, uh, they had an icebox. That was very important. [laughs] And two bathrooms! [laughs] You know, unheard of in those days.

MG: Mmmhmm.

AR: And so we lived with them for se—for, uh, elev, elev, uh, six months. And then we moved across the street.

MG: And was that home very different from what you were—?

AR: Oh. Very different. It was very different. It was, uh, a double room where there was just the bedroom, actually. It was a small room and, uh, where my mother and father slept. And, uh, there was a kitchen and so-called dining room. It was a double room. And that's, there was a sofa bed. That's where I slept. And then when my sister got older, that's where she slept too. [laughs]

MG: So very close quarters then.

AR: Very close quarters. [laughs]

MG: And would you play often on the street as well?

AR: We played all the time with the neighbours. There were lots of children around. So we played, yeah, we played a lot.

MG: So coming now, um, to June 10<sup>th</sup>, 1940, can you tell me, uh, what you remember?

AR: On June 10<sup>th</sup>, 1940 it was in the, uh, right after dinner and, uh, I was at the neighbours' next-door, my friend. And my mom and dad were visiting the neighbour where we lived for six months. And, um, all of a sudden I see these two tall men going up the spiral stair—We have, you know, the spiral staircase, uh, in Montreal? Going up the stairs, so I immediately ran—And I knew at that time that they were coming to get my dad because there was talk, uh, amongst all the neighbours and, uh, “Oh, they arrested so and so. And they arrested so and so and—“ So we weren't surprised when they came for my dad and, um, I ran across the street to get my dad and he immediately came upstairs. And, uh, so they took all his—They, they told him that, uh, they came to arrest him. And, uh, they took all the paperwork that he had of the Ord, The Order of the Sons of Italy. And, uh, they, he put on his jacket and off he went. And we never saw him or heard from him for three weeks, about three weeks.

MG: And, and—

AR: Had no idea where he was.

MG: And, and where, um, was there a local place or [AR shakes her head] did they—Where did they go?

AR: We didn't know, we didn't know until we got, uh, a letter from him. Uh, it came from Petawawa. So we knew that he was in the Camp Petawawa. And he said that he was okay, you know? That everything was okay and not to worry. But he was very, very worried about us.

MG: Mmmhmm. And did they also pick up anybody else from your street?

AR: Uh, yes. They picked up a few more. There was an, an Italian minister, um, from the United Church and they picked him up too.

MG: What was his name?

AR: And there were—Oh, I think his name was Schalera[?], Reverend, uh, Schalera[?]. They picked him up but he wasn't there very long. They, they, he was released, uh—My dad was in camp for 22 months.

MG: Yeah. And you mentioned some others on, on the street as well?

AR: I don't recall on our street, but there were others, yes. On Papineau Street, which was the street over, yes, there was a *pisan* of ours, another one. Uh, they took him. And, uh, a few others which I don't remember their names but there were quite a few, yeah.

MG: And, so you received the first letter from your dad expressing his, his worry for, for the family—

AR: His concern.

MG: What was he really concerned about?

AR: Well, he was concerned because he knew that we were penniless and, uh, he knew that my mother really had no working skills except being a housewife, so he was very concerned. He didn't know how we were going to get on. And, uh, fortunately there were some neighbours and some friends and some relatives, they needed, uh, help and my mother managed to do some housekeeping

for them. And that's how we got along. And then the government was paying us \$4 a week and this would have covered the rent and the, and— [smiles] That was for the rent and to clothe and to feed and, which was very, very little. You can imagine, \$4 dollars a week even in those days. And, uh, and but my mother managed to make a little living that way.

MG: Mmmhmm.

AR: And, uh, we became very, very close to being evicted by the landlady because we couldn't make the rent. The rent was \$16 a month. And, um, we just couldn't make it. So, she was ready to evict us and fortunately, these friends where we stayed for six months, they came to our rescue and, uh, they guaranteed the rent. And that's how we, we got on.

MG: And what were their names, these, the neighbours across the street?

AR: Their names? Were, uh, Susco[?]. It was Mr. And Mrs., uh, Susco[?].

MG: And through, throughout the entire time that your dad was gone did your family, did your mom depend heavily on, on these—?

AR: Well, no, then little by little she got, uh, some work and, um, uh, uh, you know, some wouldn't pay her in money. They would pay her in goods, like giving her food or whatever. And that, that's how we got by for, for 22 months.

MG: And what happened, um, did you face any sort of discrimination, uh, because your dad—?

AR: Not in the neighbourhood because we were mainly, there were many Italians. And they all, you

know, they all understood. They all were very compassionate So, not in the neighbourhood, but, um, when my father was interned I was just graduating from 7<sup>th</sup> grade because it was the 10<sup>th</sup> of June and I graduated around the 26<sup>th</sup>, 27<sup>th</sup> of June. And fortunately I got a scholarship. And that's the way I was able to go to high school because in those days you had to pay for high school: \$3 a month. And, you know, we, we couldn't afford \$3 a month. And that's the only way I was able to go to high school. And, um, in high school, of course, they were mainly Anglo-Saxons. So I didn't, I didn't face discrimination because nobody knew my business. Nobody knew that my father was interned. I wouldn't dare mention that, that my father was taken and in Petawawa, you know. So, but I personally felt a little inferior. I felt very, very insecure.

MG: And, um, wh—Sorry, what was the name of your high school?

AR: William Dawson High. It doesn't exist now.

MG: Mmmhmm.

AR: And neither does the elementary school, Peace Centennial—

MG: Oh.

AR: —doesn't exist.

MG: They tore it down.

AR: Yeah. This is so many years ago, you know.

MG: And were you able to—Well, was your mom corresponding with your dad while he was—?

[00:19:59]

AR: Yes, they were corresponding. Of course they had to be very careful. My dad had to be very careful how he wrote because all letters were censored. But, uh, he, his, he was always, every letter he wrote he mentioned how concerned he was about us. And, uh, but the, uh, fortunately, uh, about three or four months before they released him, the neighbours, again, our friends, they paid for a trip for us, for the three of us to go to, uh, Petawawa to visit him, which we did. And we went to this camp. And, uh, but we couldn't, when we saw him we couldn't hug him or anything. We weren't allowed to be physically, uh,

MG: Close, to touch him.

AR: —in contact. Yeah. But it was nice to see. He was happy to see that we were well and, uh, he was well. He was working in the kitchen. Yeah, because, uh, others were working in the woods and they were chopping trees and making, uh, little like, uh, uh, wooden spoons and wooden items. And, uh, he chose to work in the kitchen 'cause he was a very fussy eater. And, uh, so he liked to be there because he could, you know, he could pick and choose, up to a point, of course.

MG: Yeah. And, and what do you remember thinking of, of what the camp looked like to you? Do you remember?

AR: It was, um, all, uh, cabins.

MG: Mmmhmm.

AR: I remember. And we were in this big cabin. I don't know if there was, if it was their dining room. I'm not sure. But I see this cabin that we were in. We didn't even sit down. We were there only half an hour. So we went all the way from Montreal to Petawawa and we only spent half an hour with him. But at least it was nice that we were able to spend a little time to see that he was doing okay, physically anyway.

MG: Did you see any of the other, um...?

AR: No. I don't remember seeing any other people from the camp. No. No. I think it was just a private meeting. Yeah.

MG: And how did you get to Petawawa?

AR: Pardon?

MG: How did you travel there?

AR: Oh. By train.

MG: By train.

AR: Yeah. Yeah. These, these people, these, uh, friends of ours, they paid for the trip. Yeah.

MG: Um, and did your father ever, um, find out why exactly he was interned? Or did the family? Did you know why he was...?

AR: Nobody really knew why. They were all considered fascists. Now, I heard that, uh, the Order of the Sons of Italy used to be, years ago, like in, uh, uh, 190—,05 or something like that, it was a fascist movement?

MG: Mmmhmm.

AR: That's what I heard.

MG: Mmmhmm.

AR: And, uh, then in 1927 they split. There were, the fascists remained in their movement and the, uh, non-fascists formed their own group which was the Order of the Sons of Italy.

MG: Mmmhmm.

AR: And that's how I know. But my father wasn't actively a fascist. He only belonged to this organization because it was a social club for him.

MG: Mmmhmm. And did they—Do you remember the RCMP having a list or ever explaining to him, perhaps?

AR: Well, they did have a list, of course. And this list was provided by some traitors in the, in the, uh, neighbourhood.

MG: Yeah.

AR: Uh, we knew, well, we didn't know for sure, but word was going on say—Uh, words were say—um. There was word going on that, uh, Mr. So and so—I don't like to mention names because I don't know for sure—

MG: Uh huh.

AR: But, uh, he was a minister. I know that he was a minister. And, uh, he had something to do with the list. And, uh, a few others had, that we knew, that had something to do with the list. But we, uh, but it was just words going on, you know.

MG: They were informants.

AR: They were the informants, yes. But unfortunately, there were some that didn't even know how to read and write that were interned. You know? So they would've have nothing to do with fascism. And some were actually fascists and they were not interned, you know? So they just picked them. I don't know what the reason was but this was—And I don't know if they got paid for this, if the informants got paid for this or not. I don't know.

MG: Yeah. And what happened to this minister while your dad was taken away? Was, was he in the camp as well?

AR: No. No. No.

MG: He was—

AR: No. He was not in the camp. He was, uh, the informant.

MG: Mmmhmm.

AR: They wouldn't, they wouldn't, uh, intern him.

MG: Okay. I thought it might have been somehow for him to leverage his own way out or not be—

AR: No. No. No. No. He didn't—He wasn't taken at all. Yeah. He was going around.

MG: Okay. And, and, um, you mentioned a lot of hardship, financial hardship on the family. Did the government ever seize any property or—?

AR: No. We didn't have, we didn't have property. Actually, my father had a hard time because, you know, there was Depression—

MG: Mmmhmm.

AR: —and there was no work, so it was very difficult to make a living. Like I said, you used to go for work and then, uh, come back without, uh, you know, without anything and it was very discouraging. During the war, of course, everything picked up and it was the time when he could have made some money and that's when he was away. But when he came back on, uh, March the 4<sup>th</sup>, I remember that morning very well.

MG: Mmmhmm.

AR: Uh...the doorbell rang. Now I'm getting emotional.

MG: Take as much time as you need.

AR: And my mother said, "Who could it be at 7:00 in the morning?" I was getting ready to go to school. And I went to the door and here he is. He was shivering because it was March the 4<sup>th</sup> and was cold. It was a cold morning. And, uh, he came back the way he left. He left in June and came back in March. And, uh, it was very cold, you know, at the door and oh, we were so happy. That, that was the happiest day of our lives...when we saw him.

MG: And did your, your sister who was very young—

AR: Yeah she, she was. And she remembers everything too, you know? Yeah. She was eight years old then.

MG: Okay.

AR: No. Yeah. She was about eight when my fa, father came back. And, uh, yeah, and she, she was so happy. We were all happy, you know? Then the neighbours came later on in the day, they came to visit. And, uh, so it was nice. And that's when our life really started to flourish because, uh, he went to, uh, he started, he got work right away and, uh, he was working about 14 hours a day.

MG: Wow. For what, what company was it?

AR: Well, he went, he went to work, um, uh, for, um, it was, uh, Tarsales, it was called. Tarsales. It was a shoe manufacturer. So he worked for a while there then, uh, a year or so later, a couple of, two or

three years later he went into, uh, his own, he had his own business. It started shoemaking. Then he, he, he, uh, worked as a tailor and, uh, had his, uh, own tailor shop and he was making suits for, uh, men's suits. And then, uh, he, uh, at the same time he had this, uh, we call it, well, we used to call it haberdashery, in other words, all men's clothing, shirts, etc., you know? And he was—So he was doing shoemaking. Part of the store was shoemaking and part of it was, uh, men's clothing and cleaning. And all, it was all together. And he had a couple of people working, uh, with him.

MG: And did he ever spoke of, uh, of what he thought about the time he was taken away?

AR: He spoke very, very little about camp. Very little. He, he always said, though, that he was not, never mistreated, the only thing they didn't have their freedom. But he was never mistreated and, uh, he was quite comfortable under the circumstances, working in the kitchen. And he read a lot. He was an avid reader. And he used to spend a lot of time in the library. So that's how he used to spend his time. But his main concern, he always said, was his family...because he was so worried about us.

MG: Yeah. And did this, did what happened to your dad change your perspective also on life in Canada?

[00:29:49]

AR: My dad was happy in Canada regardless of what happened to him. And we were all happy in Canada. Mind you we still have a weakness for Italy because that's our, that's our, uh, homeland. But, uh, you know, for us, we're, we've always been Canadians.

MG: And did your dad ever have a trial at all or—?

AR: No trial. No compensation. Actually, uh, there, there, we have a document stating there were no charges against him.

MG: Oh. And so how did the government then explain having taken him?

AR: No explanation. No explanation. No rhyme or reason.

MG: And your mom, um, upon having your dad back home, do you remember, do you remember her that day, the day that he returned and her reaction to it?

AR: Well he immediately said, "Well you've gotta stop being housekeeper." You know. [laughs] And, um, well, because he started to work and he was able to provide for us, so. And, uh, life started really well for us and it continued very well.

MG: And did you remain on Cartier Street?

AR: We remained on Cartier Street until the, uh, about three years, close to three years until he got his business. When he started his business then we moved to NDG: Notre Dame De Grace. And he had his place on Sherbrooke Street. And he had his place for a long time.

MG: And did you help your dad around his, uh, shop, or?

AR: Well, I was married at that time—

MG: Oh.

AR: —after that. 'Cause I married—I was 20 years old when I got married. And, uh, but we were always very close. We lived closely and, uh, we were a very close family. And then we moved to Dorval. When my son was, uh, eight years old, we moved to Dorval.

MG: So, uh, I'm just going to back up a little bit, but, when, when did you meet your husband? When and where? [laughs]

AR: Oh. I met my husband, I was, uh, 18 years old. And, uh, he was on a motorcycle. And my cousin and I were walking along. He knew my cousin very well. So we stopped and talked. Later on my husband, uh, well, my husband now, uh, asked my cousin, Nelly, if he would, uh, he'd like to see me again. So they arranged, behind my back, for us to go to his home and, uh, spend, uh, go somewhere together. And, uh, and that's what happened. We went to his home and, uh, we were together and then he asked me out and he sent me flowers at work. [laughs]

MG: And where were you working at the time?

AR: I was working at, um, this was—I was about 19 then and I was working at, uh, it was called The Fixed Shoe. It was a shoe manufacturer and I was in the office. And all of a sudden I see a dozen roses coming for me. [laughs] And I was so scared to take them home because my father was so strict. [laughs]

MG: So what happened when you took them home?

AR: Well, you know, he—It's surprising enough, he said, “You know?” He said to my mom, he said, “I think we've lost our daughter.” [laughs]

MG: So did your dad, um, get along with, with—?

AR: Very much. My dad, uh—They used to have great discussions, mind you, but, uh, very hot discussions. But, uh, my dad loved, uh, that was the son he never had. Yeah. My husband was the son he never had.

MG: And when did you get married?

AR: And we got married, um, in 1946.

MG: So right after the war.

AR: Yeah. Right after the war, yeah. We got married and then, uh, our son was born in 1947.

MG: And how many children?

AR: One boy. Just one son. Two granddaughters, beautiful granddaughters. And now a great-granddaughter.

MG: And, um, did you always stay—Were you in Montreal, or?

AR: Oh, no. We moved, uh, we moved to Toronto because of the politics, the, er, the, um, separatism was, uh, very rampant in those days, even still, I think. [laughs] And, uh, my husband was working for an American firm who had a branch there in Montreal. My, and my husband was managing the firm. And, uh, they decided to move to Toronto. So they moved to Toronto in 1967, I think, or '68. And, uh, so of course we had no choice, we had to move to Toronto and we've been in Toronto ever since.

MG: And now, um...L—Being part of the project's, well, a project like this, how does it make you feel looking back on the experiences your family went through during the World War Two?

AR: Well, it's—Since I've been involved in this project, of course I've been thinking even more about my father and I've been digging up for pictures and that and it brings me back a lot, you know? It's very nostalgic.

MG: And do you think it, it's worthwhile to revisit, uh, issues like this?

AR: Uh, yeah. It brings back kind of a lot of memories. It brings back good things and it brings back the not so good. But all in all we've had a good life. We've, um, we've been blessed, really, you know, despite of, uh, the ups and downs we had when I was younger, but, uh, and I'm still blessed.

MG: And if, um, students and, and researchers, um, access this, this video archive, what do you, what do you hope that they will gain from learning about your story and learning about the stories of other families that went through these hardships?

AR: Well, it's—What can I say? Why? Why do something like that without getting proof of the reason you're putting away this man?

MG: Mmmhmm.

AR: You know? I think the government made a big mistake to just gather everybody in a group like that and just put them away and not, for no rhyme or reason.

MG: And do you have any other stories to share or that, that you think might be an interesting part, um, to add...to your story? Perhaps anything we've missed.

AR: I can't think of anything right now. I can't think of anything right now, so. I mean, there's so many things in my life that happened but mind you when we moved to Toronto I wasn't very happy. But thankfully I have so many cousins in Toronto and we used to gather at least once a week. And, uh, so I had an uncle, uh, my mother's brother, who was a minister here in Toronto. He was interned as well. He was interned as well but not for long. He was interned only for about three months. And, uh, while he was in, in the, uh, pr—uh, internment camp, he had five sons in the army, in, in the service: two in the airforce and three in the army, which didn't make sense at all.

MG: And did your family correspond with them, with, with, uh, the family in Toronto while you were—  
?

AR: Oh, well, yes, we were in touch. Of course we were in touch.

MG: Mmmhmm.

AR: Yes.

MG: And how did you feel about learning that, uh, that also other fam—of your own—?

AR: Well, it didn't make sense. You know, it just didn't make sense. But, uh, uh, when we came to Toronto, well, they were all around. They were all here and, uh, so it was nice that we had cousins that, you know, we could relate to and it was—We're still very good friends...Of those that are remaining because most of them are gone.

MG: And do you remember your dad ever speaking to, uh, your cousin's family about—?

AR: Oh yes! Well, yes. My uncle, um, and, uh, his name was Libero, Libero Sarro. He and my dad, they used to visit, uh, Montreal, when we were in Montreal. They used to visit quite, uh, well, at least once a year. And, uh, of course my father and he got along so well and they always used to discuss such wonderful things. And of course he was also a member of the Order of the Sons of Italy. He was what we call the Grande Venerable[?]

MG: Oh!

AR: And in the Sons of Italy. So of course they had quite a bit in common, you know?

MG: And what does that mean, Grande Venerable[?]?

[00:40:01]

AR: I don't know. Like a president or something. [laughs]

MG: And were they actually in the same—They were both in Petawawa. Did they meet while they were there?

AR: Uh, I don't know. That I don't know whether they met there or not. Im' not sure. But they must have because they were in the same, if they were in the same camp. Now, I don't know whether my uncle, he was in the same camp, but I think he was. I'm not sure. We've never discussed that with my cousins and, uh, it's funny, it never occurred to me to ask. But I think he was there, yeah.



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MG: Interesting. Well, thank you so much for joining us again. [laughs]

AR: [laughs]

MG: It's always a pleasure, uh, to have you here and if there's anything else, um, that you'd like to share just before we finally close?

AR: I can't think of anything. I'll probably think of something—

MG: Later.

AR: —when I go, get home.

MG: No problem. Thanks Ninetta.

AR: You're welcome.

[fades out 00:41:06]

[fades in 00:41:08]

AR: Yeah.

MG: There's some stuff that we—

[fades out 00:41:09]



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[fades in 00:41:10]

AR: Yeah.

MG: If that's alright.

AR: But this is going to be out of sync, now.

MG: Oh, that's okay.

AR: Yeah. 'Cause then you can cut it, you can edit it.

MG: Exactly.

AR: Yeah?

MG: Yeah. So there was a neighbour?

AR: We had a neighbour downstairs from us and she was renting as well but they were pretty well off too because, uh, he was working for the CPR. He, uh, you know when they used to shovel the coal for the trains and that. Though he had a steady job. And he had one daughter, an adopted daughter, with whom I was very good friends.

MG: Mmmhmm.

AR: In fact, I, we were together that night that, uh, my dad was interned. And, um, uh, they were such

lovely people, uh, elderly and, uh, my mother used to always give her a hand because she was a little bit, uh, in, incapable of doing certain things and, uh, so my mother was a big help to her. So they used to buy a chicken and my mother would,,uh, kill the chicken and clean it and then they would give her, my mother, half. So with that chicken my mother made, I don't know how many meals she made with that chicken, but it was so good. [laughs]

MG: To have a bit of meat, I'm sure.

AR: Yeah. And every week they would do that. So they were—Or she would bake a cake and she would give us some. She always shared everything with us. She was a very, very nice lady.

MG: That's good. And what was her name?

AR: Mrs. Vicarol[?].

MG: Vicarol[?].

AR: Yeah. They were nice and a, a couple so, such a nice elderly couple, yeah.

MG: And did you keep in touch, uh, with either the Suscos[?] or the—?

AR: They passed. They passed on. They were much older than my parents and so were the Vicarols[?]. So they passed.

MG: Yeah. And how—

AR: Yeah.

MG: —about their daughter?

AR: She got married. She married a French fellow and I don't know what happened with her after that. You know? You lose touch.

MG: Mmmhmm.

AR: But we were very good friends.

LP: The neighbourhood was Italian—

AR: Yes.

LP: —but was your landlady or landlord Italian?

AR: Yes. And very—She was supposed to be—They were supposed to be very religious people. They were Pentecostals. And they went to church every, every, almost every night.

LP: Hmm.

AR: And the—But she wasn't very kind. She wasn't a nice lady. And they owned a two properties where they were living, the up and down. There were two homes upstairs—

MG: Mmmhmm.

AR: —two apartments, two flats upstairs and she lived downstairs. And then she had this other building where there was one flat upstairs, where we lived, and this other, the Viscarols[?] downstairs. So they were well-off by those days' standards.

LP: Was there any, uh, consideration for her for your family? So did she allow you, uh, to be late with the rent or—?

AR: No, that's why she wanted to evict us! Because she, she knew that, uh, we wouldn't be able to pay. And, uh, she wanted to evict us.

LP: Mmmhmm. Mmmhmm. Because you had been late with the rent? Because your mom had been late with the rent?

AR: Most likely, yeah.

LP: Yeah.

AR: My mother must have been late with the rent, of course. So of course that was a threat for her. She wasn't getting her, she wouldn't be getting her money and she figured she doesn't have her husband here and, you know. And, but we were lucky. We had very good, uh, uh, good friends and *pisan* and they were very helpful.

LP: Mmmhmm. Did your mom ever—Did you ever hear her talking to the neighbours or did she every talk to you about the problems, the financial problems?

AR: Well, she didn't have to talk to us.

LP: You just saw it.

AR: We knew! [laughs] We knew. But like I said, we don't, you don't realize it at the time how bad it is. Because, you know, I knew it was bad but we managed.

LP: Mmmhmm.

AR: And, uh, but now when I think back I say, "She, she made miracles."

LP: Mmmhmm. She kept up a strong front in front of the, you and your sister.

AR: Yes. Oh yes, she, she took care of us. She wouldn't go anywhere without us. In fact, uh, when she, she used to clean a, a church—

MG: Hmm.

AR: And, uh, the floor was cement floor, so you can imagine, the unfinished cement, so there was a lot of dust and so she used to have to pour some water on the cement and then sweep it up and that. And then, of course, the pews used to get all full of dust. She used to work very hard. She got a dollar for that, you know?

MG: Which, which church was this?

AR: This was the, uh, Protestant church where we belonged. And it was the, the Presbyterian, um, the

Italian Presbyterian church. It was called though, it had an English name, Beckwith Memorial, but it was an Italian church. And that's where she used to do also the cleaning there. And she used to take us there because she didn't want to leave us on our own.

MG: Hmm.

AR: She always took good care of us.

MG: Was there a very strong Italian Presbyterian presence in, in, uh—?

AR: Well, in those days, yes, there were, uh, the membership was quite, uh, large. It ended up with nothing now. But, uh, in those days, yeah. And I was very active in, you know, because, um, well they used to have concerts in the, in the, at Christmastime and, so we used to have dress up costumes in crepe paper. [laughs] Those were our costumes. [MG laughs] And we'd, um, be Cinderella or whatever. [laughs]

MG: That sounds a bit uncomfortable. [laughs]

AR: Yeah.

LP: So when your family came to Canada you were already Protestant? Or did you become Protestant?

AR: No, we became, uh, when we came to Canada. My father, like I said, was an avid reader.

LP: Mmmhmm.

AR: And he read every book you can think of. And so then he started to compare religions. And he felt that, uh, it was better to go that—Also another reason he chose the Protestant religion was because the school across the street from us was Protestant.

MG: Yeah.

AR: And it was across the street. And, uh, so. And that was Anders School and it went up to fourth grades.

MG: Mmmhmm.

AR: Then I went to Peace Centennial. It was near the Casa D'Italia.

LP: I'm assuming most of the Protestant schools were English speaking?

AR: Yes.

LP: Mmmhmm.

AR: They were all English speaking.

LP: Hmm.

AR: The Catholic schools, the Roman Catholic schools were Fr—some of them were French.

LP: Mmmhmm.

AR: Yeah.

MG: I see. Wow. Interesting stuff.

AR: So.

LP: And your mother had no problem becoming a Protestant?

AR: No. She, in the beginning, well, she was...She was never religious. Even my dad, he was never really a religious person.

LP: Hmm.

AR: And neither am I. [laughs]

MG: And, and your, uh, grandparents in Italy you mentioned, and what happened to them? Did they come to—?

AR: No. My mother, when my mother left—My mother was the last of 19 children. She had 19 children and, uh, my mother was the only child left. The others had all gone overseas somewhere. They were all somewhere else. And, um, one was in New York, and, uh, most of the others were in, uh, Montreal.

MG: Hmm.

AR: And, uh...He, uh, she, um...Where was I now?

MG: Oh, your grandmother back in Italy with 19 children.

AR: Yes. And when we left that was it and my mother, uh, she died—She was 65 years of age when she died. She had a heart attack.

MG: Hmm.

AR: And, uh, we never saw her again. My mother was heartbroken.

MG: Wow. And did you ever travel back to Italy in your child—?

AR: Me?

MG: In your childhood. Yeah.

AR: I, I can't tell you the number of times. I had the opportunity of course because I was working for Alitalia. And I went back—Well, even before I started to work for the airline I, we did go back. I went back with my dad because my mother didn't want to go. So, because she says, "My mother's gone," she says, "I have no reason to go back."

MG: Mmmhmm.

AR: But I wanted to go back. So my dad and I went in 1964. And then I started to work for the airlines later on. And, uh, I went back and forth. I don't know how many times. Or at least 40 times. Yeah.

LP: Did you go back to visit family?

AR: Yes, we, well, family that was left.

LP: Yeah.

AR: Yes. So in Ripabottoni. We went to visit them. And, uh, my father had, had a, um, a brother in, uh, Vellitaly[?], Rome. It's about a half an hour ride from Rome. And we went to visit, uh, them, uh, that family and, uh, it was lovely. Our first trip back was just wonderful. And it was—We've been back every since.

MG: And were you able to speak Italian?

AR: Well, yes, I've, I've, uh, I'm, I'm, I'm bilingual.

MG: Mmmhmm.

AR: But mind you, my Italian's stale. [laughs] Right now it's stale because I don't speak it anymore, you know. When I was at Alitalia I spoke it quite a bit.

MG: Mmmhmm. And is it important now for you with your, with your son to instil those Italian traditional values?

AR: My, my son, my son spoke only Italian 'til the age of five. And then the moment he went to school he didn't want to speak Italian anymore. He knows, he understands everything and he speaks the odd

word, but he doesn't really—Not much, unfortunately.

MG: I did forget to ask you some questions about the Casa D'Italia. I wanted to know, did your dad upon returning from the camp, did he—?

AR: He was kind of—He would have liked to start, uh, again.

MG: Mmmhmm.

AR: But, uh, the people had—I think they all got cold feet.

MG: Hmm.

AR: The people got disinterested.

MG: Mmmhmm.

AR: So he never went back to any, any social group anymore. He was too busy working.

MG: Oh, I see. And what happened to the Casa D'Italia during the war?

AR: That I don't know. I don't know if they closed it or if they used it for something else. I, I really don't know. I, I have no idea.

MG: Mmmhmm.



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AR: But now it's open, it's flourishing, you know?

MG: Yeah. Alright. I think that's good. Perfect.

[fades out at 00:52:33]