

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

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NAME OF INTERVIEWEE: Mildred Irene Steer

NAME OF INTERVIEWER: Travis Tomchuk

NAME OF VIDEOGRAPHER: Lucy Di Pietro

TRANSCRIBED BY: Lisa Kadey

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

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ABSTRACT

Mildred Steer talks about her childhood growing up in a working-class neighbourhood in Windsor, Ontario during World War II. Her father immigrated to Canada at the age of sixteen, and ultimately opened up a barbershop in Windsor. Mildred talks about how her father had a firm English-only policy within the barbershop, not allowing family members to speak Italian when they were there. At school, Mildred found that Germans and Italians were looked down on, and she was teased throughout Grade 9 and 10, by both students and teachers. She left high school to go to business college, and worked at Hiram Walker, where she met her husband. She describes meeting with her future father-in-law for the first time, and hearing him

use a derogatory slur at the dinner table, and knowing from that point on that he was prejudiced against Italians. After marriage, she left her job, and dedicated her attention to raising her five children. She remained active within the Catholic Church throughout her life, and participated in the Christian Family Movement.

INTERVIEW

MS: Mildred Steer, interviewee

NH: Nancy Hawkeswood, interviewee's daughter

TT: Travis Tomchuk, interviewer

LDP: Lucy Di Pietro, videographer

[Title screen]

[Fades in at 00:00:10]

TT: Today is July 20th, 2011. Uh, we're in Windsor, Ontario at the home of Mildred Steer. My first question to you is could you give us your full name?

MS: Mildred Irene Steer.

LDP: Your birth name?

MS: Mildred Irene Steer. Oh, Mildred Irene Celotto, pardon me.

LDP: [Laughs] That's okay.

MS: C-E-L-O-T-T-O. [Laughs]

TT: Um, when and where were you born?

MS: In Sandwich, Ontario, 1926, August 27th.

TT: Um, what can you tell me about your family, your parents, siblings?

MS: Well, my dad—I didn't have any siblings, I'm an only child. And my dad had his barbershop, and he didn't speak Italian. He came over here when he was 16, boarded with English people, learnt the language right away. And he wouldn't even allow his own brother to come in the barbershop and speak English, 'cause he had a lot of American clientele, and Canadians. And my dad was fair, um, kind of blondish, blue eyed. They never took him as an Italian. He had no problems with people. They all accepted him.

TT: And his, his English, then, it was not an accented English, or—

MS: No, I don't—was it a little bit? [Looking off-camera] Do you think Grandpa had a little bit? Mm, mm-kay, see, I didn't think so, but anyway, my daughter did.

TT: And your father's full name?

MS: Albino, A-L-B-I — I-N-O, uh, Celotto.

TT: And your mother, what, uh, what was her name?

MS: Louise. Um, do you want her maiden name?

TT: Yes.

MS: Louise Ferrari (?).

TT: Okay. And when did she come to Canada?

MS: She was born here in Windsor, Ontario. This is why we never spoke Italian at home. I never heard my dad speak it. Maybe a few little words when he was with friends, but no, he just dropped it, so.

TT: And when was your mother born?

MS: She was born in—ooh, when was Nana born? 8—9—8—

NH: 1905.

MS: 1905, I think it was. November 26, yeah, so that's it, mm-hm.

NH: Maybe it was 1903.

MS: Um, 1903. Yeah, I meant to look all that upstairs, I can't remember all these things.

TT: And what, uh—going back to your, your father, what was his impetus for—or, like, why was—why did he leave Italy?

MS: He wanted to come over here and make a better life for himself. He knew there was nothing over there, he left his mother and father and sisters and came over here. He had a chance to come on the boat with a good friend, whom he paid back once he started to work here. I remember him going, paying this fella back money, mm-hm.

TT: And the money that was loaned to your father was for, like, transport—

MS: Transportation, the transportation to get here, mm-hm.

TT: Do you know the name of the friend?

MS: Um, I think it was Barbaresco (?). I don't know his first name, but these people have all passed away, of course, mm-hm.

TT: And what part of uh, uh, Italy was your father from?

MS: Udine, Udine, the northern part. You see, why he was fair, blue-eyed, mm-hm, so.

TT: And you said he came to Canada at age 16?

MS: Yes, mm-hm.

TT: And what did he do once he got to Canada?

MS: Once he—well, he told me he went and boarded with an English person, a Mrs. Brown, and he, uh, taught himself, uh, how to read the paper, you know, persevered and picked up the

English language very quickly. And, uh, then I think he went to Wallaceburg and started in there as a barber. And—'cause that's where his sisters were. And then he came to Windsor.

TT: And, um, whereabouts is Wallaceburg?

MS: Uh, it's about, uh—well, from here to Chatham it's 52 miles, and then Wallaceburg is about 18 miles from, uh, Chatham. Wallaceburg, just a little suburb.

TT: And, uh, his sisters that had already come to Canada—

MS: And they all just got together and they all spoke Italian, and they had this one brother who was single, lived with them, and he would come to our house every two weeks, go to the barbershop. And that's when my dad would say, "Now, when you're in here, you know, you speak English." But he couldn't speak very well, but he tried. But he wouldn't allow him to speak Italian. So, he knew that, and knew the rules, and that was it.

TT: So, and how many sisters did your father have living in Canada at that time?

MS: Um, I think only two at that time. The other two were still back home, mm-hm.

TT: And the brother, he came to Canada—

MS: He came, he was here. He was here, mm-hm.

TT: And do you know when he came to Canada?

MS: No, I don't. Mmm, no, I can't answer that.

TT: How about the brother's name?

MS: Uh, John.

TT: And the sisters?

MS: Uh, Carmina and Maria.

TT: And those would be the two sisters that were living in Wallaceburg?

MS: Were here, mm-hm, mm-hm.

TT: Okay. And, uh, the sisters that were still in Italy, their names?

MS: Uh, Elenora (?) and Citimia (?).

TT: Um, okay. So, you were saying that your father started to cut hair in—while he was living in Wallaceburg?

MS: He did. He worked for some—excuse me, barber there for a, a short while. But then, I don't know how he came to Windsor, I don't know that.

TT: Do you know if he had any training previous to—

MS: No.

TT: —immigrating?

MS: No.

TT: Okay.

MS: No, I don't think so.

TT: Did—any reasons why he might have chosen, like, ba—a barber profession?

MS: I have no idea of that, no. Never discussed that with me. [Laughs]

TT: And did he—tell me more about his barbershop here in Windsor.

MS: Well, it was right on Partington, right, uh, on the west end there, Partington Avenue. And, like I say, he had a great American clientele and a lot of lawyers from Windsor here. [Pointing] And here's the picture, Nancy will show you, of Mino's (?) barbershop. I don't know how that little dog got in there. [Laughs] It was just one of the neighbourhood dogs, I think, mm-hm.

TT: And do you know when the business would've, uh, started, his, uh—

MS: Mm.

TT: —Mino's barbershop?

MS: When did he start on Partington? Uh...[unclear; 0:07:18.8] when was the Ambassador Bridge, Nancy? Ni—it's—I was three years old then, I think it was—

NH: I think about '29.

MS: —1929 or '30, and dad was already there then. So it must have been about—

NH: Late '20s?

MS: Mm-hm, mm-hm, let's say.

NH: You were born in '26?

MS: Mm-hm.

NH: Did he have it then?

MS: Mm-hm, mm-hm.

NH: So.

MS: Yup, mm-hm. Yeah, I'd say '30 something, yeah.

NH: Well, if you were born in '26 —

MS: I think. Maybe I'm not too clear on this, but anyway. That would be about it.

TT: Um, did your father own the property or was it a rental?

MS: No, he was renting.

TT: And were there—did he have coworkers, or—

MS: Yes, he did, mm-hm.

TT: And how many people would he have employed at the barbershop?

MS: Well, at one time, he used to have, uh, a beautician in the back, like, you know, the shop was big enough. And he always had a barber, a steady barber. One, mm-hm, mm-hm.

TT: And you mentioned that his clientele was, uh, largely from the US?

MS: Well, he did—had a lot, mm-hm, people that came in, mm-hm. And a lot of people that worked here at Ford's, big executives, things, yes, mm-hm.

TT: And, um...is it—do you have a sense of how, you know, folks who didn't live in Windsor would've learnt about the barbershop? Um—

MS: I would imagine that would be just word of mouth or something, you know. I don't really know.

LDP: He didn't advertise, though, to your knowledge?

MS: No, no, he never had—he didn't have to advertise, no.

TT: And how long did he have the barbershop for?

MS: Oh, when did he die? He had it 'til he passed away in 1972, or—

NH: '72.

MS: Mm-hm.

TT: And it was always at the same location?

MS: At the same, mm-hm, mm-hm.

NH: And was he not one of the first Italian barbers in the city? Did you not get a phone call about that once?

MS: Um, that, I don't remember, Nancy. But you said you remembered that, that he might have been one of the first—

NH: Mm-hm, saying that he was one of the first Italian barbers.

MS: —Italian barbers in Windsor, mm-hm.

TT: Did your, um, father ever talk about his impressions, uh, or his arrival or how he felt about Canada when he got here at, at 16?

MS: Oh, he loved it here, I know that. He loved it. Mm, much better than where he came from, 'cause there was just nothing at that time for them, so.

TT: Was there anything specific that, that he liked about being in Canada?

MS: I don't think so. He just liked everything about it, I would say.

LDP: Do you know anything about his route here? Did he come in through—

MS: He went—I think it was New York, mm-hm.

LDP: Oh. And then took a train, then, to your knowledge, from New York to Detroit, I, I imagine?

MS: That, I, I don't know, but I would imagine that would—

LDP: Okay.

MS: —be it.

TT: And was your mother involved in the barbershop in any way, or—

MS: No. All she did was wash and iron those white clothes you saw he had on. [Laughs] The white pants, the white shirt, the shoes, yeah.

TT: Um, s—so, was she mostly at, at home, then?

MS: She was a homemaker, stayed home.

TT: And did she ever work outside of the house at any point?

MS: Not 'til later years, when I was married and had, what, about three children? She worked for Guilio's (?) grocery store at Partington and Wyandotte, where—right where my dad's building was, mm-hm.

TT: And how long did she work at the grocery store?

MS: Mm, I don't know. When did Nana pass away? She started there, and she passed away in, uh—

NH: 1985? '84.

MS: '84, mm-hm.

NH: She worked 'til she was 81 years old.

MS: Yup, my husband—

NH: And then she passed away a month later—

MS: Yup, right.

NH: —after she quit work.

MS: Yup. Ron would pick her up, my husband would, uh—he worked at Hiram Walker's, and he would take her into work and then pick her up every night. Yup.

LDP: Why do you think she wanted to go back or, or decided to go to work, having [unclear
0:11:49.9]?

MS: Oh, she didn't. This, uh, Joe Guillio (?), he bugged her. "C'mon Mrs. B" —he used to call her Mrs. B. "You've gotta help me, you've gotta come, I need you." And I hadn't—you know, I was away out here in South Windsor, and she was living down in the west end. So, she thought, why not? So, she went in. And she enjoyed it. All the university kids used to come in, you know, this and that. And she enjoyed working there.

LDP: How did your parents meet?

MS: Uh, well, when my dad was in Sandwich at this barbershop, her brothers, they lived—my mother lived on Felix Avenue in, uh, Sandwich. And the brothers came down and saw my dad and they introduced my mother to him, and that's how it all started. [Laughs] So.

TT: And what year would they have married?

MS: Uh, 1925.

TT: Now, your, your family lived in the west end of—

MS: Mm-hm.

TT: —of Windsor.

MS: Mm-hm.

TT: So, wh—what street was that?

MS: Well, I was on Partington, I lived on Partington where dad's barbershop was for a while, then I went to—it was called Craig (?) Street, and then they changed it to Union. And then we ended up on, uh, Wyandotte Street West.

TT: And, um, were you living in homes or apartments?

MS: It was in homes, and then when we came to Wyandotte Street, it was a terrace, like—mm-hm.

TT: And were they homes that your parents owned, or were they rentals?

MS: No, we didn't own anything. My mother and dad paid two rents, the rent at the shop and the rent at home, but we never went on welfare. I don't know, we always managed three meals a day and didn't do without anything. I didn't realize it was Depression time. I mean, all the kids I went to school with, I noticed the changes in them, but thank goodness, we didn't. I guess my mother was—and dad were good managers.

TT: Do you recall how much the rent for the barbershop might have been, or, or even the homes that you—

MS: Mmm, no, I don't know how much they would be. That, I couldn't really tell you. I guess I wasn't up to caring too much about that, [Laughs] that time.

TT: And during the Depression, did your father, um, lose any business, or, or less customers?

MS: Well, I think haircuts were about 25 cents at that time. But do you know what, every Saturday night he would take me to this store called the A&P, which was in his block, and he'd go in and he'd buy this and buy that, and I'd say, "What are you doing this for?" "Never mind." He would send it to the people that were in need, and, uh, any time people would come to the barbershop and say they were hard up, needed a meal, he would send them home to my mother. I remember her locking the backdoor, screen door, and she would make them sandwiches and give it to them. So, he was—helped everyone that he could.

TT: And would that—the people that were being helped, were they from the neighbourhood, or were there folks that might have been travelling through from other towns?

MS: I think they were from the neighbourhood mostly, mm-hm.

[0:15:00.0]

TT: And can you tell me, uh, about the neighbourhood that you grew up in?

MS: Well, I grew up in a very English neighbourhood, down where I was. There were no Italians living there, they were all mostly down in, uh—on Parent (?) Avenue way, down east, no, no.

TT: Um, so were there any, any other people other than English speakers that lived in the neighbourhood, like French or Germans or anything like that?

MS: Well, I think most of them—let's see, the Gardiners (?) were English. I think they were mostly English, and a few French, that was it.

TT: Oh.

MS: And the Lightfoots (?). You remember them? They were English, they were English, mm-hm.

TT: And s—the people that lived there, the English people that lived in that neighbourhood, what kind of professions—you mentioned some of them was a gardener, but what other kinds of jobs were people working?

MS: Um, Greyhound bus drivers, uh, hardware workers, the men that worked in a hardware, and, uh, that's about it.

TT: Oh.

LDP: So, would you say it was a working class neighbourhood?

MS: Yes, mm-hm, mm-hm.

TT: And where did you go to school?

MS: I went to Patterson Collegiate, which is no more, of course. And that was down on Elliot (?), and, um... anymore you want to know about? My Grade 9? [Laughs]

TT: So, did you—was that the only school you attended?

MS: That was—no, I went to grade school, like, in my own neighbourhood.

TT: Okay.

MS: And that fine. No problem there. But once I got to high school, I didn't like it, because that was the time the Germans and Italians were kind of looked down on, you know? I had this great big—do you want me to go on with this?

TT: Please.

MS: Great big football coach, Eddie Dawson (?), and he would get me up to the board every morning, and I was so nervous, you know how the boys would laugh. And up to the board for the biggest equation, and at that time, I wouldn't have been able to write my own name, I was so nervous. And they'd call you a wop, eugh. I hated that. I would come home from school crying to my mother, "Can't we change our name? I hate it." And the boys, of course, all laugh at you, you know? And with a name like Celotto—and they'd call me Celotto teabag, and I'd say, "The only letter in Celotto that's like my name is the L," and then I'd start crying. And then they'd laugh harder. [Laughs]. So.

TT: And, and the—how long did that go on for at school?

MS: Well, that was—once I got out of, uh, Grade 9 and this teacher, when I went and had another math teacher, there was nothing like that then, you know. But still the kids that knew your name, when they'd hear, oh, Celotto, oh, you're a wop. You know? This would go on, walking home, this and that.

TT: And did that continue, then, for the rest of your grade school, um, years?

MS: Well, I think it kind of stopped around Grade 11, you know, when the boys are looking at you. It's a little different then, so.

TT: Um, so it was teasing, um, or name calling in the class or on school grounds?

MS: All over.

TT: All over.

MS: All over, mm-hm, in class, yep.

TT: And, um, did—you mentioned that you had talked to your mother about, you know, “Can’t we change our—“

MS: Change our name, yeah. I really wanted to.

TT: So, when you would tell your mother about what was happening at school or, or your father, what kind of response did you get from them?

MS: They didn’t say anything, really. I mean, I think they thought, well, we’ve got to put up with this, you know?

TT: Mm-hm.

MS: So, that was it.

TT: And it—you said it wasn’t until Italy was at war with Canada that, uh—

MS: That, that was—mm-hm.

TT: Okay.

LDP: ...So, in grade school, most of your friends would have been the English kids—

MS: Oh, yeah.

LDP: —from your working class neighbourhood?

MS: Yup, mm-hm, yup. No problem there. No, there might have been one or two Italians, but there were no problems.

LDP: Mm-hm.

TT: And did any of your, your English friends ever intervene in situations where—

MS: No.

TT: —you were being harassed?

MS: No, no, no. Nobody got involved.

LDP: Did you have much involvement with your cousins in, um...up there near Chatham area?

MS: Um, yes, with the one cousin I did, yup, mm-hm. Yup, two cousins. Yeah, my cousin Lucy and, uh, Ferruccio (?), mm-hm.

LDP: And did they come visit you at Win—in Windsor or you—

MS: Oh, yes, yeah, they'd come and they enjoyed staying at our house for a week during the holidays, 'cause my mother was an excellent cook. And we'd take them to the zoo in Detroit and go swimming. And then on Saturday night, we'd go down and help my dad in the barbershop, he'd give us money. And then there was a drugstore right at the end of his building, and we'd go in and have sodas, ice cream, anything we wanted. [Laughs] So, yeah, we enjoyed it.

LDP: Did they ever talk about what it was like for them in, in Chatham? Or around the same time you were having problems here, did you ever—

MS: No, we never talked about that.

LDP: You never talked about—

MS: No, we never talked about that, no. 'Cause in Wallaceburg, it was a different Italian community, like, you know.

LDP: Mm-hm.

MS: And, uh, that was it.

TT: And did, did you or your parents have any contact with the Italian community here in Windsor?

MS: No. Once in awhile, my dad, uh, would take me, we would go on Parent Avenue, we had some good friends there that were Italian, and one of—[Looking off to the side] oh hey, birds. One of them owned a grocery store, and we'd go down there. And they were excellent cooks, and we would have a Sunday meal there, and come home. But that was about it, you know?

LDP: Mm-hm.

MS: 'Cause they came from the same, uh, um—Udine, the same place. And they would talk, that's it.

TT: And what would be the family name of those, those people?

MS: Natalin (?).

TT: Natalin.

MS: The mom was Natalin, and Palatto (?), mm-hm.

LDP: And did you ever overhear a—as a young teenager, conversations at those events or other events where your dad might have gathered with friends, Italian friends, about what was happening in the community at the time?

MS: No.

LDP: No?

MS: No, no.

TT: How about, um, in the lead up to the Second World War, specifically Italy's involvement, um, did your parents or, or family friends living in the Italian neighbourhood, or your cousins, anyone ever, uh, talk about, like, is Italy, you know—what's—is Italy going to join the war, or what side are they going to be on, or—

MS: No, I never heard any of that, no.

TT: And then—how about—did any of these—your, your family, uh, friends, did anyone—what was the reaction to, um, Italy joining the Germans?

MS: Uh, I never heard anything about that, no, I don't think. No.

LDP: How did you hear about it? How, how did you learn that Italy had declared war against Canada, and Canada was now at war against—

MS: Well, in those days, uh, they come out with a pink paper, the Windsor Star, with, "Extra, extra, read all about it." That's how you heard.

TT: Um, did your, you know, your parents from their friends in Windsor of Italian extraction, did they—was there ever any kind of, um, mention of Italians being arrested by the police in this—during the Second World War, or taken away for questioning or—

MS: Well, I knew that in, um—when I went to the Sacred Heart School, grade school. One of the Italian boys, very nice family, his father, uh, was arrested. But, uh, that's it. But t—there was nothing, he hadn't done anything, I think it was just because he was a registered alien or something, I don't know. But, uh, that was it, that's about all.

LDP: Did you hear from the little boy himself that that had happened, or—

MS: No, no. No, these people lived next-door to my mother's brother.

LDP: Mm-hm.

MS: And, uh, this is where I heard it, and they said, "Oh, it's a shame, because they're such a good family." You know, they hated to see him being taken away. Now, how long he was gone, I don't know. When you're a kid, you don't go through all this, so.

TT: And, uh—

MS: [Looking off camera] Thanks, Nancy. We'll talk to you later.

TT: Um, what was the family's, uh, surname?

MS: Luciano (?).

TT: Luciano.

MS: Luciano, yup.

TT: So, they might—it might have been the case that the father had to report, or was he interned, or—

MS: I think he was interned, I don't know. I just really don't know.

TT: Alright... and how about your father? You know, he's Italian, it's the Second World War, did he have any...problems with discrimination?

MS: I don't think he did. Uh, he was so friendly and everybody liked him, and he was so generous that that's all I can remember about him and that.

LDP: Did your father become naturalized at some point, or, or gain his citizenship?

MS: Oh yes, yes, yes.

LDP: That—was that early on?

MS: [Shrugs] That, I can't tell you. I think it would've been, yeah, because he was so into the English language and this and that, you know.

LDP: Mm-hm.

MS: That... and like I say, he never talked Italian, 'cause everybody now says, "Oh, you didn't learn Italian?" And I said, "No, we never talked it at home." I can't remember my dad ever really speaking it, so he just—

LDP: Would you have Italian newspapers? Would you have ever seen him reading—

MS: No, no.

LDP: No?

MS: Never.

LDP: Never in the home?

MS: Never, no, no.

LDP: How about at the barbershop?

MS: And I remember when his, uh, sisters would send letters, he couldn't even read them. My mother would have to take them to his sister or to somebody else that knew, you know, what was going on, so, that was it.

TT: So, your mother didn't—

MS: No.

TT: —know Italian, either?

MS: No, her parents came—Ferraris, they came from Piemonte, a different part. And, uh, I always thought I was French, because we called them Mimi and Pipi (?) [Laughs]. I thought I was French for a long time, but no, mother didn't speak Italian. Until she went to work for Joe Guillio, and then she picked it up there a bit, you know. And, uh, I don't know what his dialect was, but she could understand the people that come in to his store, because it was an Italian store, and a lot of Italians, of course, came there. So.

LDP: Can you, uh, tell us a little bit about what life was like during the Depression in, in Windsor as a child, what you remember?

MS: Well—

LDP: You had mentioned you saw some changes.

MS: Well, I saw the kids. You know, I used to see them with running shoes and they used to have a blue T-shirt with red on, and I'd say to my mother "Oh, I want that, why can't I have that?" She'd say, "No, you can't, because those are the people that are on welfare, and they were handed these clothes." We never did without anything, my mother as I say, and my dad were good managers, because I didn't even realize we could—I had all the candy and stuff I wanted, and clothes. I never wanted for anything.

LDP: Mm-hm.

MS: So, I really didn't experience what the other kids were going through. And when you'd be in the schoolyard eating an apple, they'd all come up, "Cores, cores." Do you know, they wanted your cores. So, I'd give them the whole apple. They wanted it, so.

LDP: Did you, did you ever remember—you said nothing changed, so you don't remember any changes in what you, what you would eat for dinner, or lunch, or—

MS: Oh, we always had big breakfasts, my dad would make a frittata on Sunday morning, flip it over, you know. And, uh, we always had pork chops, steak, chicken, stews, typically English meals, yup.

LDP: Mm.

MS: Pasta, once in a while.

LDP: Once in a while?

MS: Once in a while. I like pasta, spaghetti. To this day, I do. I love it.

LDP: And did you notice if—you had mentioned you had lived for awhile near your—or in your dad's or near your dad's, uh, barbershop. Did businesses close on the street, other businesses, or—

MS: No, because there was, uh—it was a big apartment building, there was a dentist up above, a drugstore and a hardware down below, and then the two entrances to go up to the apartment, and then dad's shop was at the end.

LDP: Mm-hm.

MS: Very nice district, Partington, mm-hm.

LDP: So, you wouldn't have had any soup kitchen line-ups—

MS: No.

LDP: —anywhere near you, never saw that, never—

MS: No, no never saw that, never saw that.

LDP: When you went to high school, you, you mentioned that was around the time that war broke out.

MS: Mm-hm.

LDP: Um, wh—were there more Italians then in that high school, or, or children—

MS: Mmm, no.

LD —of Italian—

MS: I don't—there were a lot of Chinese and all different, because they came from the east end. I was from the west end, and there was only myself and another girl from, um, the west end that went to Grade 9.

LDP: Mm-hm.

MS: [Looking off-camera] Hey, come on. At that time. And, um—

LDP: Did you remember if there were taunting of the other groups? Like, if—you mentioned the Chinese.

MS: No, I don't know.

LDP: Or you don't—yeah.

MS: No, no.

LDP: And your friends in high school, then, would have been the same, mostly your English friends that you carried over—

MS: Yes, mm-hm.

LDP: —from—

MS: Mm-hm, yes.

LDP: —your neighbourhood in elementary school?

MS: Right, uh-huh.

TT: Um...they—staying on that topic to some degree, what did you do—did you finish Grade Twel—or Grade 13, I guess they must have had then.

MS: Well, yes, I went—I started Grade 12, and at that time, most of the boys had gone overseas in war, and, uh, I came home and begged my mother, I said, “I want to quit and go to business college.” No, she wanted me to be a nurse. I said, “No, I don’t want to go into nursing, please let me quit. There’s nobody at school.” And most of my boyfriends and that had gone to war, they were in the army, Air Force, blah, blah, blah. And I had a girlfriend whose mother let her quit, and she went to business college and got a good job, so this is what I wanted to do.

[0:30:00.0]

MS: So, finally my mother gave in and I went to business college, and it worked out well for me, 'cause I ended up in Hiram Walker's, so, it was good.

TT: And where was the business college, in—

MS: Right on Ouellette Avenue.

TT: And what, and what was it called?

MS: Uh, O'Neills (?). Bo—Bohmer O'Neill (?) Business College at that time. It's long gone, too, mm-hm.

TT: And how long was the program?

MS: It was for a year, but then one day, my girlfriend that I met there, she could drive and she said, "Oh come on, let's play hooky. We'll go down to Hiram Walker's, put our name in. I know everybody there." I thought, oh, here I had a red suit on, huaraches, and my hair all done up high. And I thought, my mother's going to kill me, because I only had my shorthand to go. I had passed everything else and was just waiting for shorthand. They were sending me out training, I was working for some lady in a bank, blah, blah. So, when we got to Hiram Walker's, she went in and they asked her a million questions. And I'm sitting there so nervous, this great big—if you don't know Hiram Walker's, a great big gigantic gorgeous office down Riverside Drive. And, uh, I go in, very nervous. And they ask me all these questions, and he said, "Now, if you get the job, would you go back to night school and get your shorthand?" And I said, "Of course." So, I come home. I didn't say anything to my mother. A couple of days later, a letter came. And I was accepted, and this girl that knew everyone down there, she didn't get the job. I got it. 'Cause

when they asked, do you know anybody that works here, I said, “No.” And I was so nervous. But anyway, that’s the way it goes.

TT: Mm-hm. And, so what—besides shorthand, what were some of the other, um classes—

MS: Business, business practice, uh, [Laughs] math. What, what else was there? Uh, there were three or four subjects, can’t even think of them all now. Shorthand, math, bookkeeping, stenography, that’s about it.

TT: And—

MS: Cumulative (?) spelling, I guess, well, mm-hm.

TT: So, when did you start working for Hiram Walker, then?

MS: Uh, when was it? 19—I think it was ’42, ’43, ’43, I think. Right after—like, I’d just got out of school, didn’t go in to take the full Grade 12, like I say. So, I think that was about it, mm-hm.

TT: And what did you do?

MS: Well, when I started, I started out as a typist, and then went to stenographer. And, and all of a sudden, this Charlie Gordon (?) from the salary department, he’d come up. They say he used to pick his girls. [Laughs] So, he’d come up in the accounting, and he asked me if I would like to go down there. Of course, I said yes. It was much better, more pay. And that was it. And it was so nice to be making Cliff Hatch’s (?) cheques out, and everybody’s cheques. But my mother had to go down and, uh—what would she have to do? Bond me or something, she had to go down, talk for me. Because you couldn’t reveal anything, you know, so. But it was the

greatest place on earth to work. And of course, that's where I met my husband, made out his paycheque, but I didn't marry him for that reason in those days. [Laughs] But, uh, anyway, it was great.

TT: And, so how long did you work?

MS: Well, I only worked two years, because in those days, when you got pregnant [Folds arms over stomach], oh, you didn't want to work, you know? Now, they go with these baby bumps, show them off. Times have changed, so. But, but then I got called back to go many a time, and I said, no, I can't do two things and do them right. Gotta make up your mind. So, I did. Stayed home, had five kids. [Laughs] Never regretted it.

LDP: How—you mentioned you met your husband at work, so can you tell us a little bit more about how you met?

MS: Well, these guys came up—and I had just broken off a romance, I won't go into that, and, uh, anyway, of a different religion, and I said—they wanted me to go on a golf date with this guy. They used to have golf parties, this and that. I said, "Nope, I'm going, I'm finished with him," and blah blah blah. Anyway, they talked me into it, and then Ron was not Catholic. And that didn't matter to me, I respect everyone's religion. But I said—and he said, "Oh no, I don't like mine, I'm United, I'm not going." He went on his own, and took instructions from the Catholic Church, and, uh, I knew he was sincere. So, we used to take the priest with us and go to the ballgames, Tiger games in Detroit. And then when we first moved out here in south Windsor, we had Gary and Nancy, Ron went to 6:30 mass every morning before he went to work, and I thought, you're a better Catholic than I am. I didn't do that. So, anyway.

LDP: What's a golf party? Or golf date?

MS: Uh, well, it was—they'd have, um, parties. Like, they had golf tournaments, and then you'd go to the—to Beachgrove (?) or one of the places. And we'd have dinners and banquets, like, you know.

LDP: Mm-hm.

MS: This and that, mm-hm.

LDP: And when you mentioned that you'd take the priest to ballgames, so you always had a chaperone with you if it wasn't a large party, or—

MS: No, no, it was just Ron and I. We'd ask Father Larry (?) to come with us.

LDP: Okay.

MS: And he'd go with us, mm-hm, mm-hm.

LDP: What did your parents think of, of Ron, given that, I'm assuming he wasn't Italian or—

MS: Didn't think anything of it. No.

LDP: How about that he wasn't Catholic?

MS: No, uh, this was my choice, you know?

LDP: Mm-hm.

MS: Th—this was my choice. I mean, I was strong in my religion, and I respected everyone else's. This is why this other friend that I had been going with for a while in high school, like, puppy love, I guess you'd call it, he was an only child, but his mother was dead set against Catholics. And I told him right from the start, that's no way to start out. You know, with your mother-in-law against you, forget it.

LDP: Mm-hm.

MS: So.

LDP: What faith was he?

MS: Uh, I don't know what exactly.

LDP: Uh, Protestant? Christian?

MS: He was Protestant, but I don't know what, mm-hm. Now, you know my life history, don't you, almost? [Laughs]

TT: S—um, when you were working at Hiram Walker, um, the money that you made, did that—was that money that you kept for yourself, or did that help contribute to, to your family?

MS: [Laughs] My mother never took anything from me. In fact, I'd borrow from her all the time. But, uh, yeah, 'cause my girlfriend and I, we'd go down, first thing we did was go by for a Coke. [Laughs] You know, this is it. And we'd shop in Detroit. Every Monday night, her and I would go,

because you couldn't get the sizes, small sizes over here, then. And we'd go every Monday night. You couldn't do that now, the way things are over there. But there was no problems, you could just go through on the tunnel bus. There was Verner's (?) ginger ale stand, you could go in and have a cream ale, this and that, shop at Hudson's and different places.

LDP: Mm-hm.

MS: Very nice.

LDP: So, you didn't need any paperwork to cross the border?

MS: Oh yeah, you had your, uh, passport, you had a passport.

LDP: You had a passport?

MS: Yup, mm-hm.

LDP: And someone would check it, a custom—a US custom's official—

MS: Oh yeah, when you go through.

LDP: —[unclear; 0:37:27.4]

MS: But there was no problem. Like, not today, they don't frisk you or do anything like this.

LDP: Mm-hm.

MS: Nope, every Monday night on the bus.

TT: And, back then, how much did it cost to get a passport?

MS: Oh, I don't know what that was. My mother would have taken care of that, I'm sure. Just go down. And that was stolen when I had my first child in a private room at Grace (?) Hospital. They stole my purse and everything in it, took all the money and everything. That wasn't nice, but there you go.

TT: And did you ever have any problems crossing over into Detroit with US—

MS: No, never, no.

TT: —or Canadian officials?

MS: No.

TT: No?

MS: No.

TT: And you were going there—you were going to Detroit, at one point, at least one a week?

MS: Yup, mm-hm, mm-hm.

TT: Okay. And that at a, at a certain point, did the trips—the trips began to slow down, or, or have you—

MS: Oh yeah, I didn't go over that much, you know, once I met Ron and I got away from my girlfriend. Well, I didn't get away from her, she went her way and I went my way. We still got together once in awhile, but no, we didn't go shopping. But we would go to Greenville Village, Ron and I, and, uh, to the zoo, different places like that, you know, on a Sunday. And my dad was a great one to go to the racetrack over there. In fact, he'd take Nancy with him sometimes, too. And my mother and I, we'd go once in awhile, but my mother wasn't much for the horseracing, but he enjoyed it. That was his sport.

TT: And was it typical, then, for folks, uh, uh, of your age when you were growing up and s— like, a young adult, adulthood to travel to Detroit regularly to shop or to, to—

MS: Mm-hm, mm-hm, yup. Most of the kids did, mm-hm.

TT: Did people cross over to, you know, fill up their vehicles with gas?

MS: Well, we never had a car at home. We walked everywhere we went, 'cause dad's barbershop was close to where we lived, you know. And every night, we'd go for a walk. And I said, this is why I never had to go to—like, Nancy goes to all these things. And then after you have five kids and race around with buggies and strollers, forget it. [Laughs]

TT: And your husband Ron, did he keep working at Hiram-Walker?

MS: Mm-hm, yup, mm-hm. Yes, he started and ended up in the American sales in Detroit in Farmington Hills (?). Yup.

LDP: So, he would commute to Detroit daily?

MS: Mm-hm, mm-hm.

LDP: For work?

MS: Mm-hm, for work, mm-hm.

LDP: Would he be paid in Canadian or American dollars?

MS: American, American. See, this is why today I still get, thank heavens, American Social Security. I didn't think—after he passed away, I didn't think I would get it, but I do, every month, so.

LDP: Well, maybe not so much today, but a few years ago it would've been good.

MS: Yeah, well, this is it, right? Now, it's not bad, but anyway. It comes in handy when my grandson comes and says, "Grandma, I'm going to a Tiger game tonight." "Here, how much money do you want? You can have my American money." You know?

LDP: Mm-hm.

MS: And to Megan (?), I'm always giving it to them.

TT: And how long did your husband work for Hiram Walker?

MS: Oh, well, if he started in—about the same time as I did, and then he just...passed away, what? About nineteen months ago. And he quit, oh...he worked there 'til—when was it that he quit. He'd worked over 40 years, 50 years, retirement. Yeah, he started to get, um, sore feet

and that, so he took early retirement. 65, I think he was. I don't know how many years that was, can't—you've got me there. I just can't think.

LDP: Was your husband from Windsor?

MS: Yup, it was Sandwich, he was born in the town of Sandwich.

LDP: He was born in Sandwich.

MS: See, town of Sandwich is just right now—now it's all amalgamated. It's Windsor, you know. It's just right near where the Ambassador Bridge is, that would have been Sandwich, across there.

LDP: And what would have his family's background been?

MS: English, English. They both came from England.

LDP: Mm-hm.

MS: And even his dad. I'll never forget the first time I went there for dinner. He even mentioned the word wop, and I almost got up, pushed the plate away and walked out. And then I thought, I can't do it. And I told Ron this after, he said, "Oh, don't pay attention to him." But I knew from that day on, that right there, he was against Italians.

LDP: Mm-hm.

MS: So.

LDP: But the mother—your mother-in-law was always supportive? Or you didn't find that [unclear; 42:20.4] her?

MS: Oh, yeah. No, no, [unclear; 0:42:21.6, it didn't have it]. But, uh, no.

LDP: Mm-hm.

TT: And with regards to your father-in-law, did you—did he...continue to say derogatory things about Italians in your presence, or—

MS: Oh, he would. He would on occasion. Then after that, after Ron told me not to bother with—but we didn't go down there much, anyway. He kind of got away from them, you know.

LDP: Did your husband or—ever tell you—or did you ever come to know why, maybe, your father-in-law felt that way? If there was any reason for him to feel that way?

MS: No, I don't think there was any reason. Just only because, you know, the war, this and that, so.

LDP: Did either your husband or your father-in-law fight in the war?

MS: No, no. Ron joined, but he was too young, and, uh, he just went from here to Petawawa, I guess it was. But he was too young, he didn't.

LDP: Mm-hm.

MS: But I don't know about his dad, if he was in the British army. He might have been, he might have been.

LDP: Mm-hm. From the, from the First World War, then?

MS: Mm-hm, mm-hm.

TT: And earlier you had mentioned when you were in, uh, high school, that you knew a, a number of young men who had enlisted.

MS: Mm-hm.

TT: Um, and, and did most of them then end up actually going overseas?

MS: Yup, they did, and lot of them didn't come back. I still have a lot of pictures, like, of the football team and different ones I knew. And they never came back, mm-hm.

TT: Um, okay. So, you've already mentioned some of the various social activities that you would have been involved in, whether it was going over to Detroit, or, or here. I was just wondering, um, you know, were there—were you active in a local church?

MS: Oh, yeah. We were active CFM, we were Christian Family Movement. We were leaders in that. My husband was a leader at the church, and then we were in Windsor Junior Chamber of Commerce through Hiram-Walkers. Yes, we were in the art group, the art gallery through my boss, Charlie Gordon. Yes, we were very active, mm-hm.

TT: And what would you have done in these various organizations?

MS: Well, when, uh, they'd have dances and different things, I might convene them. And Ron would be that, we'd have different things out at the airport, too. The JCs (?) would have something every year in June.

[0:45:00.0]

MS: And, uh, the CFM group kept us busy. And then Ron was always vice, uh, chairman of the, um, parent-teachers' associations. We were involved in all these things with the kids. Boy Scouts, Girl Scouts, that's it.

LDP: What wou—can you tell us a little bit about what the Christian Family Movement was, or—

MS: Yeah.

LDP: —what its purpose was?

MS: Well, you'd meet as a group with your priest, and we would discuss different things. We had books, you know?

LDP: Mm-hm.

MS: And then we would help families, too. And we would go out to Metropolitan Hospital, to the children, and, uh, bring them different things and read to them different things.

LDP: So, it wasn't just the Catholic Church?

MS: Yup.

LDP: The other churches would have been involve—other Christian churches?

MS: No, no, this was just our church.

LDP: It was just your church.

MS: The CFM, mm-hm.

LDP: Okay.

MS: The Christian Family Movement.

LDP: And—

MS: That's why they said everybody had so many kids in those days. [Laughs] I know.

LDP: What was the name of the actual church you attended?

MS: Uh, we first started over here at Christ the King, which is now knocked down. [Laughs] So, and then when we come over, the church was right here, so handy for our kids to go to school. It was, um, St. Martin de Porres, which they closed now, too, so with all this stuff about the priests, you know. I said, yeah, they closed my church to pray for the sins of the—to pay for the sins of the priests.

LDP: Yeah.

MS: But there you go.

LDP: Did your parents actively go to church?

MS: Oh, yes. Mm-hm.

LDP: And would it have been Christ the King, or another church?

MS: No, that was, um, Holy Name of Mary, where they lived, near Wyandotte Street. And Assumption Church, that's where we—I was baptized there and my parents were married there. And, uh—

LDP: Mm-hm.

MS: —as I say, my Mimi and Pipi were there. You had to pay 10 cents for a pew in those days, they said. And, uh, yeah, I liked Assumption. But when I got married, I couldn't go there. You had to stay within your own boundaries. So, I had to get married at Holy Name of Mary.

LDP: Oh.

MS: So, anyway.

LDP: And were most of the other parishioners, then, Irish, or, or—

MS: Oh, we were all nationalities. I don't remember—they were all French here in our Christian family group. French, English. I can't remember. No, Louis Palatto (?) was in it, so he was Italian. But other than that, there weren't too many, no.

LDP: Mm-hm. And your parents' church? Were they also mostly—

MS: Oh yeah, all English, French. Mostly French, I would say.

LDP: Mostly French.

MS: French, yup.

TT: Uh, were you involved in any kind of sporting activities throughout your life?

MS: Me?

TT: Yes.

MS: In high school, a few, a few. But, uh, I'm not like my husband. He was, uh, in baseball and coaching. I had three of them. Gary, Nancy, and Brian were on three different tea—teams, and he would go out to coach, and I'd be pushing the stroller with Brent in, and either pregnant for Mary Lou, and I thought—but we—the dishes were all done, and no dishwasher. I said, I raised five kids without a dishwasher or air conditioning, but I'm still here. [Laughs] But the kids don't do that today, of course.

TT: So, what kind of sports would you have, uh, played [unclear; 0:48:16.8]—

MS: Well, I like badminton, tennis, and I always was a roller skater and an ice skater. All the time. Froze my big toe ice skating, stayed out too late, things like that, outdoors. I was outdoors all the time. Bicycle riding, mm-hm.

TT: Are there any other kinds of activities that you, you did growing up that were, you know, just for fun? You know, besides the shopping in Detroit or [unclear; 0:48:48.6]?

MS: No. Well, swimming and things like that, going to the park every Sunday. Walking down, you know, meet the boys down Jackson's Park (?), blah blah. That's about it.

LDP: And your parents would have no qualms, uh, about you going down to—

MS: Oh, yeah. Oh, I was an only child. I was restricted. I couldn't do this, I couldn't do that. But after a certain age, you know, and I'd say, "Well, I have to be home at a certain time." I knew the rules.

LDP: Mm-hm.

MS: And I knew I had to abide by them.

LDP: Mm-hm.

MS: So, very strict.

TT: Um, how about—were your or your husband or your parents involved in any political organizations?

MS: No, no, no, no.

LDP: Did your father ever travel back to Italy?

MS: No. He always wanted to take Nancy and Gary, but he never made it. He wanted to go back with the two oldest ones, just to see, you know—

LDP: Mm-hm.

MS: —what it was like. He never did.

LDP: Mm-hm. And, um, did he talk about wanting to go back at a certain point in his life, or it was just always throughout your life, you always knew he wanted to go back at some point to visit?

MS: No, it was just, just after I had, uh, my k—children.

LDP: After you had your kids.

MS: This was when he thought he'd go back. No, I never heard him say that before.

LDP: And was your mother interested or ever mentioned—

MS: No.

LDP: No.

MS: No, no.

LDP: And so, he never s—did he never see his parents again, then?

MS: No, no, I used to bawl him out. I said, “Oh, you left your mother,” when they’d tell me I couldn’t do this and do that. I’d say, “Well, what about you? You left when you were a certain age.” “Well, that was different.” You know?

LDP: Mm-hm, mm-hm.

MS: So.

LDP: D—but he continued to receive letters or some correspondence from his parents?

MS: Up until his mother died. His father had went to South America, and, um—but after his mother died, there was no contact. But then the two sisters that were there, they came over here. But—

LDP: Do you know how they came over here, if he sponsored them or, or—

MS: No, I don’t know how they came, no. It wasn’t my dad, that.

LDP: And do you know where they ended up?

MS: In, uh—well, they stayed in Wallaceburg for awhile ‘til, um, one of the, the hu—husband got a job in Beachville in the lime quarry or something, I think it was. Yeah, Beachville. That’s near Woodstock.

LDP: Mm-hm.

MS: So, mm-hm.

LDP: And were—did you—they had children, the two—

MS: No, no.

LDP: No, sisters in Italy?

MS: No, no.

LDP: So, you only had cousins from the two sisters and the brother here?

MS: In Wallaceburg.

LDP: In Wallaceburg, yeah.

MS: Mm-hm.

TT: And you had mentioned that your, your grandfather was in South America.

MS: Yup.

TT: Now, what was—

MS: I don't know why he went. To get a better—make a better living or something. I think he was a carpenter or something. And in fact, one of the oldest sons, I think, had went there, too. But I don't know any more than that.

LDP: So, your, your father had quite a few siblings, then?

MS: Well, he had the two brothers and the four sisters, I guess.

LDP: So, it was him making seven, then?

MS: Mm-hm.

LDP: So, there were three boys and four girls in the family?

MS: Mm-hm, mm-hm.

TT: And, uh, I just wanted to clarify, was the—was your grandfather in South America at—while your grandmother was still alive, or—

MS: Yes, yes, yup.

TT: He was, okay.

MS: Yeah. I don't think she probably ever heard from—I don't know too much about that, I don't know.

LDP: Do you know if your grandfather ever had made, um, other trips, uh, when your father was young and living in Italy, whether he'd gone to—

MS: No, no, no.

LDP: —New York or anywhere else?

MS: No, no.

TT: So, you had four or five children, I'm sorry?

MS: I had five.

TT: Five children. And, um, did you got back to work at some point after the—

MS: Oh, I could've, but I wouldn't. No, too much to do at home, and I wouldn't. As I said, I thought I couldn't do two jobs and do them right.

LDP: So, when did your father pass away?

MS: 1972, just before Nancy got married.

LDP: Right.

MS: Because he wasn't at Nancy's wedding.

LDP: Okay.

MS: And of course, he thought so much of Nancy and Gary, the first two, like, you know, all of them, but I mean, they were special, the first two.

LDP: So, uh, at his passing, you mentioned that your, your mother went back to work thereabouts, and then was a—passed away in '81 or '82 or something like that.

MS: Mm-hm, mm-hm.

LDP: Um, so, did she live, um—

MS: Well, she—

LDP: —on her own, or—

MS: No, she just stayed there for a while, and then we [unclear; 0:53:51.1] her. She came and lived here, mm-hm, she lived with us.

LDP: And how was that? Was that an adjustment for you, or—

MS: No, the kids loved it.

LDP: —or for the kids?

MS: We all loved it, you know. She loved it. And on Sundays, she'd do all the cooking and that, and anyway, that was it. Give me a break.

LDP: And your husband was happy with the [unclear; 0:54:11.3]?

MS: Oh, yes, yeah. As I said, he would take her to work in the morning and then pick her up. No, no, he loved my mother.

LDP: Okay.

MS: Had a good arrangement.

TT: And, you know, what kind of activities—you know, when you had children, you're raising children, did you, um—you know, were you still active in various, uh, various groups that you had mentioned, like the Christian—

MS: Oh yeah, you'd take 'em.

TT: Yeah.

MS: They'd have picnics and different things and outings and different things. And we'd—we were all involved, we would all go.

TT: Oh.

MS: Mm-hm.

TT: And then—well, your life after your children had grown up and, and, move—moved on or what have you, um, what were you doing then?

MS: [Laughs] I'm never still after having eight grandchildren and two great-grandchildren and, uh, some of them are over here most of the time, and, uh—very active place, and go over to school or pick this one up or do that or babysit this one. But I don't mind. I love it, especially now. I feel like, you know, I don't really like being alone. Nothing's gonna be the same ever, but it's one day at a time.

LDP: Are you very active in your church still?

MS: Oh, yes. I go with—Nancy picks me up.

LDP: Mm-hm.

MS: Every Saturday, oh, yes, mm-hm, yup.

LDP: Were you ever interested in, or inclined to, or have you, uh, visited your dad's hometown or your mom's hometown in Italy?

MS: No, no, no. I would like to go to Tuscany. Ah, I'd like to go there after reading the books and see—and my husband, Ron, he said, too, "We're gonna go, we're gonna go to Tuscany sometime." Uh, didn't make it.

LDP: Mm-hm. Did you travel, um—

MS: Oh, we went to Florida. Oh, he was all—we were always on the go with Hiram-Walker's. Florida, and St. Lucia, and here and there.

LDP: Mm.

MS: We travelled all over, Mexico. Had a great life.

TT: Do you have any other questions?

LDP: Nope. Is there anything else that you would like to add, um, that you haven't addressed, or something you'd like us to know about your dad or your mom or growing up in Windsor?

MS: No, I don't—I, I think you've just covered it all.

LDP: Great.

TT: One thing is—I did want to ask you, just before we, we stop, like, do you know if the police ever came and visited your father at his—

MS: No.

TT: —barbershop during the war?

MS: No, no, no, not that I know of, no.

TT: Okay.

MS: No, no. He used to have a lot of detectives come in for their work.

TT: Mmm.

MS: This and that, so, mm-hm.

LDP: And he never had to go visit the police for any reason that you're aware of?

MS: Not that I know of, no, no.

LDP: Okay.

TT: Okay. Well, thank you very much for your time.

LDP: Thank you.

MS: Oh, no problem.

[Fades out at 00:57:07.0]

[End of interview]