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NAME OF INTERVIEWEE: George Nincheri

NAME OF INTERVIEWER: Joyce Pillarella

NAME OF VIDEOGRAPHER: Adriana Rinaldi

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

George Nincheri talks about his life growing up in Montreal during the Second World War and his father's, Guido Nincheri's, career as an artist. George describes his father's childhood in Italy, and how he was able to win a scholarship to an arts college, despite his grandfather's misgivings. After immigrating to Canada, Guido worked primarily doing contracts for a number of churches. George describes being a model for his father's work, and appearing as an altar boy or an angel in church paintings. Despite his protests, Guido was forced to paint a fresco of Mussolini on the walls of the Madonna della Difesa Church, which branded him as a fascist, and

eventually led him to be arrested and sent to Camp Petawawa. His wife, Julia, was able to arrange his release after three months by showing the Royal Canadian Mounted Police (RCMP) Guido's original blueprints for the church, which did not include the portrait of Mussolini. As a teenager, George entered a seminary and trained in priesthood. As a priest, he served communities in both Ottawa and Montreal, and found that his three languages held him in his work with immigrant communities.

INTERVIEW

GN: George Nincheri, interviewee

JP: Joyce Pillarella, interviewer

AR: Adriana Rinaldi, videographer

[Others present]:

RBN: Roger Boccini-Nincheri

[Title screen]

[Fades in at 00:00:10]

JP: Okay, it's, uh, July 7th, 2011, and I'm interviewing George Nincheri. And my name is Joyce Pillarella. Hi George.

GN: Good.

JP: So, George, do you want to start—do you want to tell me first, uh, where you were born, when?

GN: Actually, I was born on, um—wait a minute now. You know St. Michael’s Church?

JP: In Montreal?

GN: Yeah, on, uh, Sa—uh, St. Joseph’s Boulevard?

JP: Yes.

GN: And across the street there, isn’t that Clark (?)?

JP: I think so. That was the church?

GN: Yeah.

JP: What year were you born?

GN: St. Michael’s—it—the church is built in the Byzantine style. The, the steeple is round [Gesturing] and then the dome is sort of what they call in Italian, ‘the squashed dome’. Where exactly, I don’t know. And then from there, uh, da—we move—the, the family moved to LeClair (?) Street, which is, um...about ten streets east of Pinot (?) Boulevard. And, um, because, uh, dad...in the meantime, I wasn’t born then, but before I was born, Dad and Mother had to go back to, uh, to Florence. And, um, they stayed there for a [unclear; 0:01:42.2] sort of like the time—I don’t remember anything [unclear; 0:01:48.7]. And this I know, Dad said to Mother, says, “Well, today we’re not too busy. You know what?” He says, “We’re going to go and visit the museum, because there’s something I want to see there.” So, Mother said, “You’ve studied 12 years in Florence, and you have ne—” Well, it’s one of those things. So, they went to see—

visit the museum. And all of a sudden, they heard two gentlemen speak French. Daddy says, “What?” The museum, Florence museum, he says, “People speaking French?” Well, he says—Dad says, “I want to meet them.” And you know, Dad was not a, a go-getter. [Laughs] Mother was quite surprised. So, he introduced himself, and you know who they were?

JP: Who?

GN: The two Dufresne brothers, Marius and Oscar. Chateau Dufresne. So, anyhow, they got talking, you know. And, uh, one of them—which one, I don’t know. I wasn’t born, I wouldn’t know. He said, “Well,” he says, um, “We have the, uh—the castle on the corner of Sherbrook (?) and Pinot (?) Boulevard.” And he says, “If it’s at all possible,” he says, “We’d like to have it, uh—we’ll have to have you decorating,” he said. “Well,” says Dad, he says, “Certainly,” he said. So, anyhow...Dad saw their studio, their office on Pinot Boulevard, 1832. And, uh, there was, uh, a part of it was unoccupied. So, Daddy said to him, uh, this is—said, you know, he says, “I would like to buy—to, uh, rent the place for my studio.” And, uh, so Mr. Dufresne says, “Do whatever you need, you need.” So, Dad put up the, um, the studio for the stained glass windows, and the, uh, the oven and so forth and so—that was ho—that’s how it all started. How he started this business and, uh—

JP: Is it because of that, that he ended up in Montreal? Because of the Dufresne brothers?

GN: Yep, exactly, yeah.

JP: And your dad was, um—he went to school in, uh, Prato. Your father’s from Prato?

GN: Yeah, uh, uh, grammar school.

JP: Right. Do you want to tell us the story about him going to school in Prato?

GN: Well, grammar school—well, first of all, his father was in the textile business, because you know when you say Prato, it's textile. Uh, Detroit, automobile business. You know, [unclear; 0:04:26.4]. So, um, but, um, the, um...

JP: Your grandfather, did he want your father to go into the textile business?

GN: Yeah, his father was in the textile business. He was, um, uh, a broker, textile broker. And [Laughs] Dad, he said, [Gesturing] "Material ye"—uh, uh, how did he say it in Italian? *I cenci*, [non mi interessato; 0:04:58.8]. You know, the rags.

JP: Yeah.

GN: He said, "I was not interested in that." Because he started at the age of nine to draw. And one day, the teacher, um, um, gave them, um, a topic. And Dad was an [Exhales], was a—he never told this. He was not interested. But he was looking at the teacher, and, uh, all of a sudden he says, you know, he says, he's got a nice face, nice features. So, he drew a face—uh, his picture. [Gesturing] "Return your copies." He says, "Young man," he says, "What's the meaning of this? Is—are you trying to laugh at me?" He said, "Oh no." But he says, "The ideas weren't coming, so I looked at him," he says, "At him—at you." And he says, you know, he says, "That must be—that he—he, he—I have the material for a nice picture." He says, "Sir," he says, "If you want it," he says, "I'll give it to you." Well, he was quite surprised, you know, a little boy, nine years old, you know. So, he says, "I'd like to meet your dad and mother." He says, "Sure," he says, "Come on to the house." And, um, his father, well, he says, you know, he says, "I'm in the textile business. I'm a textile broker." And, uh, he says, "I would like my son to take over, but," he says, "I don't think he's, uh, he's up to it." He says, "Sir," he says, "He's got a—an

artistic talent. Don't stop him. Let him do whatever he wants to." So, anyhow, he went to the Academy of Fine Arts (?). And, uh, his father says, "You want to go there? Go ahead." But he said, "I'm not paying your studies." Wow, that was quite a blow. So, anyhow, there was a scholarship, there was an, um, uh, uh, oh, um—a test for a scholarship. So, Dad took it, and he won the scholarship. So, he won the scholarship in, uh, painting. So, that was four years. In the meantime, there was another scholarship, uh, architecture. Yeah, so Dad gave his name, put his name, and he won the scholarship. That was another four years, that's eight years. And then the—finally, the that—the last one was sculpture, and he won the scholarship. So, that's how he spent 12 years at the Academy of Fine Arts in Florence. In a way, his father was proud, because he didn't have to pay a cent and so forth, but, um, you know, he sort of, um, came to better feelings towards his son. But, uh, it was [unclear; 0:07:55.3]—it was too late. Dad had, uh, already started his way to realize his ideal. So, that what—then, in the meantime, all his classmates all went to South America, Buenos Aires. And they wrote to Dad, they used to [0:08:17.4], "Guido, Guido, come to Buenos Aires. This is a beautiful climate, you'll succeed very well." So, that was supposed to be their honeymoon. So, they left from, um, I think it was Genoa, and, um—oh yeah, uh, Genoa for Boston. So, Mother was 16, Dad was 28. So, when they landed in Boston, the big news, the war broke out, 1914. Couldn't go back to Italy, couldn't proceed to South America. So, is a—but Dad was a great believer, he believed in Providence. In pa—uh, Florence, there was, um, a gentleman well-known by his father whose son was in Boston, and he was the owner of the hotel, what used to called at the time, the Artistic District of Boston, because of the opera and so forth, and the, the museum and so forth. So, anyhow, uh, Dad, well, he says, uh, he says, "We're in Boston," he says, "I would like to meet this man." So, through him, uh, that opened many doors for Dad. But, uh, then in [unclear; 0:09:45.5] what about South America? Well, forget about it. In the meantime, you know what happened to South America, politically speaking. So, Dad, he says, "Well," he says, uh—so, anyhow, uh, to make a long story short, Dad, he said, "It's a funny thing," he said, "There's something at the museum that I'd like to see." So, Mother said, "After all those years in Florence," [unclear;

10:08.8]. So, anyhow, they went to visit the museum, and Dad saw what he wanted to see. And all of a sudden—in the meantime, Dad and Mother had picked up on the French, you know, to show they can communicate and...Dad said, “Those two gentlemen,” he says, “They’re well-dressed, perfect gentlemen.” He says, “I’m going to meet them.” Mother said, “All of a sudden,” you know, she goes, “Well,” she says, “Let’s go.” You know who they were? The two Dufresne brothers, Marius and Oscar. So, then the conversation, you know, in French, of course. “Well,” he says, “Mr. Nincheri,” he says, “I have the castle,” he says, “It’s not decorated, but I would like you.” “Well,” he says, “Sure,” he says, [unclear; 0:10:56.9] “When we go to back to Montreal,” he says, “I’ll pay you a visit.” So, then—which he did. And, uh, Dad said, “Well,” he says, uh, “I could do something very well, they’re very nice here.”

JP: Your mother and your father, um, then they came to Montreal, and, um, you were born here.

GN: Yeah.

JP: You have a, an older brother also.

GN: Gabriel.

JP: Gabri—Gabriel.

GN: Yeah.

JP: Um, so the, the two boys—where did your brother go to school, and where did you go to school?

GN: Well, he went to, um—well, at the time, we were living on Pinot Boulevard, so we went to the Christian Brothers School (?), which was, uh, uh, Pinot, Desjardins, LaSalle (?), two streets. And then, um, in the meantime, as he was, uh, finishing his, uh, primary course, they built the D’Arcy McGee High School on Pine Avenue just facing the hospital. And, um, so, um, he did his high school there, and, um, he got pretty friendly with the Christian Brothers, who had a summer home at Lake—uh, Fourteen Isles Lake (?) which is on the other side of Lake Echo. Because at this, this end, it was more ech—uh, at night, it was more Echo. The Fourteen Islands was too—it was built in the, the—it was not as Echo. So, uh—

JP: And where did you go to school?

GN: Uh, Christian Brothers. That was on, uh, Morgan (?)—uh, well, LaSalle Academy—

JP: Right.

GN: —it was on LaSalle Street. Pinot Boulevard, Desjardins, LaSalle, and then they built the, uh, um—

JP: And after you went to the seminary in Ottawa?

GN: Yeah, it was a college.

JP: Right.

GN: Yeah.

JP: When, when did you start that, as a teenager?

GN: Oh, well, I was, uh, 12 years, but for three weeks that I, I turned 14, and—because [unclear; 0:12:56.9] they did not accept me.

JP: Your father was a religious man, eh? Your father was a religious man?

GN: Oh, very, very. Uh, he had a great respect and admiration for religion. And he could not understand how man could live without a belief, a religious belief, and without practicing a religious—whether Catholic or Protestant, a religion, you know. So, uh—

JP: I'm sorry, just earlier—it's my fault, but you had said they didn't accept you at the seminary, but then you went back later? Because you did tell me that you had gone to Ottawa to study.

GN: To study, and then, uh, uh—well, then I decided to go in, uh, a—as a priest.

JP: Okay.

GN: Yeah, and, uh, I did all my—studied philosophy and theology. And then, uh, uh, because of the [unclear; 0:13:53.5] then the one, the, um, the, um, the, uh, the pri—the fath—the, the religious order, the Turvov Fathers (?) had, uh, a parish on, uh, Gaspé Coast. Uh, so, because of my two languages, they thought I would be the, uh—that would be the right spot for me. So, uh, and then, uh, after, uh, a year, I was transferred to Ottawa. And then to Ottawa after a couple of years, I was transferred to Montreal, the Italian church. And because of the immigration, my three languages, I was involved in immigration work right up to my, uh—

JP: Can you tell us a bit about that, George? Because at that time, priests were called on to do much more than their duties, and help out in the community and offer social services. [unclear; 0:14:48.9]

GN: Well, my role was to, to help the Italians who had just got to Montreal. Help them with the language, help them to find jobs and so forth.

[15:00.00]

JP: But a, a priest's job in—I can imagine in the 1930s and the '40s [unclear; 0:15:03.4]

GN: Well, the '40s, well, it was after the war.

JP: Right, it must have been, uh, incredible [unclear; 0:15:08.8]

GN: It was, uh—but you know, I got to meet the, the head of the, uh, Canadian immigration whose name I'll forget now. Wait a minute.

JP: Oh, it's okay.

GN: He had a brother who was a, a Dominican priest. Oh, I forget. But he helped me a great deal.

JP: So, the government was in contact with the priests—

GN: Yup.

JP: —in terms of helping them [unclear; 0:15:33.3]

GN: Well, uh, yeah. So, he opened up an awful lot of doors to, to me, to find jobs for these people, you know? And interpret for them, you know? Yeah.

JP: So, what other—can you describe, like, some of the—just the—some of the daily duties that a priest had in those days?

GN: Well, it was a sort of an innovation, you know? A priest, uh, mixed with, uh, an immigration and so—but it was just a [unclear; 0:16:02.6] to help these poor Italian immigrants who, who are handicapped by the language. They could only speak Fr—uh, Italian. No French, no English. So, I helped them to find jobs, and, uh—

JP: What about finding homes, or if they—there was the Great Depression, so many were left with very little money. So, after [unclear; 0:16:24.4]

GN: During the Depression, well, I was a student in Ottawa.

JP: After the war, if they needed [unclear 0:16:28.4] assistance?

GN: Well, after the war, it was a sort of—a period of prosperity started, because, uh, jobs were available, you know? And, uh—

JP: Did you have any training at the seminar—seminary that prepared you—

GN: [Shaking head]

JP: No, eh?

GN: No. I learned by myself the hard way. But what helped me was my three languages, you know? And then, uh, I became, uh, very friendly with the, uh, the head of the Canadian immigration in Montreal, who had a brother as a Dominican priest. But, uh, that had nothing to do with it. So, he told me many, many times, he says, “Look,” he says, “Whenever you need help, don’t be shy, come to me, and I’ll open all the doors I can for you.” So, he was a great help, yeah.

JP: Um, the priests had a lot of power in those days with the community, I would imagine, even, even in [unclear; 0:17:29.5]

GN: Well, in those days, yeah.

JP: [unclear; 0:17:32.0]

GN: Yeah, in those days, they did, yeah.

JP: Before you became a priest—

GN: Yeah.

JP: —um, what kind of a—that—I guess, can you talk about that at all? Because there was a— they kind of held the community together, didn’t they? Or did they—

GN: Well, you know, in those days, the, uh, the Italian immigrants had no contact, so they would go to clergy. That was their in between, you know? Uh—

JP: Would they go to the clergy, uh, rather than going to a consulate, for example, if they needed something?

GN: Well, they did go to the consulate, but, uh, you know, the consulate, they—there was a line up there, uh, the, the—it was, uh, strictly business. Whereas a priest, well, they felt more at home, the, uh—you know. And it was easier for them to explain their problems. And then we started the, uh, the, uh—this, um, office. Uh, the purpose of the office was to, uh, help the immigra—uh, the immigrants in every possible way, you know?

JP: How important were the religious feasts that were held by the church where—in, in the '30s? For example, they, they would have done, uh, Sa—St. Antonio, they may have done other processions, uh—

GN: No, the, the—

JP: Those processions, did you ever participate as a young boy, just in, uh, processions of the church?

GN: Uh, uh, nothing was, uh—the church and the state. The—they were, uh, very friendly, there was no problem there, no. Because in those days, uh, uh, religion was very strong, despite the fact that it was, uh, um, uh, Depression. But, uh, yeah. But of course, in those days, whenever people needed help, they went to the, to the, the, the, uh, rectory, to see the priest, you know? They thought we were sort of, almighty gods on earth, you know.

JP: Um—

GN: No, the clergy was powerful in those days, yeah.

JP: It almost sounds like the, the church was really the, the centre where the community was built around.

GN: Yeah.

JP: And I guess any celebration on behalf—that the church held in the community was also important in terms of bringing people together through [unclear; remembering 0:19:57.2] of the celebration?

GN: Well, the, the, um, well, that was during my college days, uh, so I was in Ottawa. But, uh, the situation was about more or less the same, you know? Whenever people needed help, they go to the priest, you know?

JP: Right.

GN: Uh, the French people, it was also the same thing.

JP: At that time, in the 30's, uh, after the Lateran Treaty was signed—

GN: Yeah.

JP: —um, do you remember—or, what's your earliest memory of the, the, the, um, the clergy here in Quebec, uh, in regards to the Lateran Treaty? 'Cause from—what—news reports that I've read, they were very supportive, and they were very pleased with this.

GN: Uh, well, I didn't have many—ma—much contacts with the French-speaking clergy, because I was a student, you know? Uh, um, in boarding school in Ottawa. Uh, I presume there were friendly relations, uh, you know, contacts, relations.

JP: Did, um—what other memories do you remember from the 1930s with your parents? Uh, do you remember Italo Balbo?

GN: Yes, I remember Italo Balbo.

JP: [unclear; 0:21:12.4]

GN: I saw him going by, you know, and—

JP: Tell us about that day, what he was like.

GN: Well, uh, I was just a little wee boy, then, but when Italo Balbo came, um, uh, of course Mother and, um—was on the front line. I was with her. My brother was, um—oh, wait a minute now. Um, I forget the name of the one that was sent by the government to Montreal to prepare the, uh, the arrival of Balbo, uh, yeah, because he made a stop in, uh, Montreal. And then he went to—I think he went to Toronto, and from Toronto, he went to, uh, Chicago to attend the, um, um... the Fair?

JP: The Fair, that's right.

GN: That's right?

JP: That's right.

GN: Was it the 1933 Fair?

JP: Uh, I believe so, but I know there was a Fair in Chicago, right, right.

GN: That's right.

JP: But—so, there was this preparation that was held—had—um, sorry. There was this preparation done before he came? They prepared it—somebody from Italy came?

GN: Oh, yeah, yeah, because, uh—

JP: What, what were they preparing?

GN: —it was, uh—he was a, uh—he was a colonel? Oh, I forget the name now.

JP: It's okay.

GN: And, um, he was, he was—first he went to the Italian Consulate. And at that moment, I don't know how it happened, but my brother had to go there. So, uh, he told the consul...what was his name? Was it Brigidi (?).

JP: Brigidi, yeah.

GN: Brigidi.

JP: You're right.

GN: He says, you know, he says, “You wouldn’t know someone who speaks the three languages?” And right at the ba—at that moment, my brother walked in. It was really providential. He says, “I’ve got your man.” [Gesturing] “Right here.” So, that’s how he met...I forget the name of the one who was sent here to, uh, prepare, uh, you know, make all the arrangements for the landing of the, uh—so, then another thing, um, he says, you know, he says, um, uh, “I need a car.” So, my brother, well, he says, “Well, I could use my father’s car.” “Oh,” he says, “Wonderful.” So, anyhow, he wa—he’s the one, my brother took...oh...

JP: It’s okay. Anyways, he took this man.

GN: Oh, yeah.

JP: He was a colonel.

GN: Yeah, and he took him around, and—in order to prepare the arrival of Italo Balbo in Montreal. And from here, they went to Chicago to attend the, um, the Fair.

JP: And in Montreal, this was a very important occasion.

GN: Oh, you bet.

JP: Why—what, what made it so exciting for the Italians [unclear; 0:24:17.3]?

GN: Because, because Balbo came to Montreal.

JP: But why—what did he represent to the Italians, Italo Balbo? What did it mean to them?

GN: Well, he, he—um, it was an, a top government man. And who was visiting the Italian community outside of Italy, you know, in Amer—in America, North America. So, that was a big thing to them.

JP: To them, it was an honour, I guess.

GN: Oh, you bet, yeah, yeah.

JP: Yeah. Also, because they were—

GN: And another, another thing, too, um, uh, uh, Brig—no, what was his name? Brigidi, I think was the, the name of the Italian Consul at the time.

JP: Yes, you're right. You're right.

GN: Brigidi. But, uh...the one who came here to prepare the land—uh, to prepare the arrival of Italo—

JP: We'll find out.

GN: Eh?

JP: We'll find out.

GN: Will you? Yeah, I'd like to have his name.

JP: Yeah. And so, that day, that day—

GN: Well, yeah—

JP: Can you describe where—what was around, what was involved?

GN: Well, that day, well, Mother and I and, uh, a few of the ladies whose husband was, uh, you know, among the, uh, the nucleus of the, the Italian community, uh, we all, uh, la—uh, met, uh, the, uh, um—on the south shore there, um—

JP: Longeri (?)

GN: Longeri, yeah. And, um...that's where, that's where they landed. And from there, they were taken to Montreal, and I think, uh, they—there was a, a reception at the Mount Royale Hotel by the Italian community. Uh, to Italo Balbo and all his crew, you know?

JP: And, uh, that—I—

GN: I wasn't there.

JP: But at the arrival in Longeri, did they have a marching band, music?

GN: Oh, yeah. Oh, the, the works. Well, you can imagine.

JP: [unclear; 0:26:25.0]

GN: Yeah, yeah.

JP: Songs.

GN: Yeah.

JP: There were—did—

GN: I wasn't there—

JP: [unclear; 0:26:30.1]

GN: —but you can imagine, you know?

JP: Did they have [unclear; 0:26:32.2]

GN: It was in, in a very Italian atmosphere, let's put it that way.

JP: Were there flags or—

GN: Oh, flags, uh, to, to make him feel at home, you know? Because it was just a stop here, eh? Oh, they spent a night here, yeah. They spent the night, the—all the, uh, the officers spent the night at the Mount Royale Hotel, and then the next day, they left for Chicago to attend the World's Fair in Chicago. But after that, I don't know nothing, yeah.

JP: And when you came home, like, when you saw [unclear; 0:26:58.7] you said your mother noticed him—the planes?

GN: Oh, you know what, you know something? It was my Mother who notices the plane. She said, [Italian, 0:27:06.8]. So, everybody looked, and sure enough, [unclear; 0:27:10.9] went around and we saw them land on the St. Lawrence River. And imagine, there was a, a mishap, there was an accident. A plane lided—landed right on the wave, so it tipped over. Yeah, what can you do? That was the only black spot on the event, yeah, what can you do?

JP: Yeah.

GN: How, how, how was he to know that we—the—because you know, the, the, uh, the plane, eh? There was two bodies, the, the wings, and the motor was between the two wings, eh?

JP: How did Italo Balbo look? How would you describe the man?

GN: Very, um, down to earth, uh, beautiful smile with that, uh, beard, you know? And broad smile, he was a, a sharp looking man. And I cou—I remember hearing the, the Italian [Italian; 0:28:05.7]. [Laughs] How, how handsome is he? Yeah. And then they had the, uh, the banquet at the Mount Royale, but that, I didn't go. But then, uh, soon after they, uh, the [unclear; 0:28:20.8], one girl got up and she wanted the, the, um, the signature of all the, uh, the whole crew. So, you can imagine, that spoiled the whole thing, you know?

JP: That must have made the Italians feel very proud.

GN: Well, first of all, the event. Imagine 24 planes.

JP: It was not something that you saw. We have to put it in terms of the time.

GN: Who would imagine a thing like that? No one could have visualized such an event. But in the meantime, you know what was, uh, behind the whole thing? It was to show the, uh, military might of, uh, Italy.

JP: Yeah.

GN: Well, it was Fascist, you know? Yeah.

JP: Do you remember how, how people felt after that? Like, even within the [unclear; 0:29:13.4]

GN: Well, they, they felt proud, you know? They felt proud, and, uh—well, which is natural, you know? Because, uh, that was really a big thing. That was, uh, uh, mm...say, an, an event to, to, uh, uh, worthy of, uh, history.

JP: And around that time, I don't even—I don't know if—something you would remember, but growing up, what were the relationships like, be—in—within the Italian community with the English and the French? Or did it depend where you were in the city, or the people?

GN: Well, that had a lot to do, yeah, the district, you, you were living in, yeah. But you see, the thing is, we were always—lived in the east end, because Dad had his studio on Pinot Boulevard, and like Mother used to say, “As long as Dad has his studio on Pinot Boulevard, we're doomed to live on Pin—” we still are.

[30:00.0]

JP: [Laughs]

GN: Yup.

JP: Yeah, your father wor—Guido worked—

GN: Oh, like Mother used to say, “If, if we—“ uh, no, “If Dad could get us to live, to live in the studio and sleep in the studio, he would.” But what, what can you do? I mean, the studio, that was his, uh, that was his world, you know?

JP: Do you remember seeing your dad and having dinner with him and having breakfast with him? Or—like, [unclear; 0:30:24.7].

GN: Well, I posed an awful lot for my Dad. I posed an awful lot for my Dad, because Dad, he said, “You are a good model.” You know, to, to rain—to remain, uh, uh, motionless, you know, it’s quite a thing. You, you got to [Gesturing] ech—um, uh, establish that st—close contact between the artist and the model. And, um, the moment you start moving, the artist knows you’re tired. You see, you’re not concentrating. He says, “You’re tired.” I says, “Yes, Dad, I’m tired.” Well, he says, “Do you want a glass of water or something?” Well, I said, “Let me rest for a little while.” I’ll drink a glass of water, then, uh, you know. And said—“Okay, Dad, let’s carry on.” He says, “Okay, go back to your [unclear; 0:31:24.1].” No, no, Daddy—

JP: So, what was your father—

GN: —liked me as a model because I was, uh—[Recorded voice gives the time in French] Oh boy, it’s time for lunch.

[Fades out at 0:31:37.6]

[Fades in at 0:31:38.7]

JP: Um, do you want to tell me a little bit, George, about your father, what he was like, because—just as a father and, uh, what kind of activities you did with him day to day?

GN: Dad was a very, um, humble man, very modest. He was not the bragger, you know. But, um, strictly to the fulfillment of his artistic duties. And nothing would stop him, nothing would stop him. And, uh, if Dad could have worked 24 hours a day, seven days a week, I think he would have done it, really, yeah.

JP: So, what—how often would you see your Dad? Would you have to go—would you go to the studio, like when you were modeling and posing, that was one of the ways of spending time with him?

GN: Well, as soon as I get home after school, Mother says, “What are your intentions? You want to stay home, because Dad’s going to call you. After the phone rang, she says, “George, answer, that’s Dad.” [Laughs] “George, [Italian 0:32:47.5].” Come to the studio, I need you. So, it was, uh, well, Pinot Boulevard, across St. Catherine’s Street and walk up, uh, Adam LaFontaine (?) and then, uh, well, you’ve seen Dad’s studio—

JP: Yes, yes.

GN: —between, uh, LaFontaine and, uh, Ontario Street. So, I’d—

JP: Did you ever do activities as a family together, you’re—you and your brother and your parents that were not in the studio? Did you ever go out on a picnic with your parents, did you—

GN: Well, back in the 1920s, late '20s, uh, Mother and my brother would take us to the, uh, the end of the island. The Boul de L'Ile (?), they used to call it, for a picnic, you know? And—the meantime, I didn't mind, because it was quite a ride on the streetcar. And then we'd come home, have our, uh, supper, you know? And—but I'll tell you, I missed my dad, though. I missed my dad and, uh, no—I always complained, "When is Dad coming home?" Well, so—Mother was trying, you know, to, uh, make me understand that if he was not living with us, it's not for fun, because he—his work—he had, he had to go where his work was, had to be done, you know?

JP: Did you, uh—did your father wi—bring you to the churches and show you his work?

GN: Well, uh, wait a minute. At della Difesa, I posed there for my dad, on a table—uh, on the scaffolds, yeah.

JP: Yeah, we'll talk about that after—

GN: Yeah.

JP: —as a group, the whole thing.

GN: But, uh, other churches, no. Because he would do his work at home, you know?

JP: And, um, in, uh, in the, uh—did you, did you ever do things with the Italian community that was there in the Mile End (?) District?

GN: [Shaking head]

JP: Or it was really [unclear; 0:34:44.2]

GN: We were completely out of the Italian community. But we were living on Pinot Boulevard, so we were completely out of the, the—let's say, the Italian District, which was, uh, St. Lawrence Street and, uh—

JP: Right.

GN: —and all the streets be—St. Lawrence right down to, um, St. Dennis (?), you know? That was the Italian community there.

JP: Were you aware that there was a Protestant community and a Protestant church around, uh, Papinot (?)?

GN: No.

JP: You weren't aware of that?

GN: I had nothing to do—besides, uh, I was a student then, you know?

JP: And when you went to the seminary, uh, the, the priests that were there, were they familiar with your father's work?

GN: Oh, yeah. Well, first of all, there were—uh, uh, most of them were all Italians, you know, Father Cheli(?)—not Kelly, Cheli, C-H-E-L-I. Uh, first class mathematicians, oh. And then there was Father John Bertsche, B-E-R-T-S-C-H-E, was German. He was Bavarian, spoke four languages fluently. And then there was, uh, Father Borelli (?), he—uh, he was sent afterwards to Winnipeg

to, um, take over the Italian parish there. And then there was Father Forges (?). Well, Father Forges wa—spoke beautifully French, English, Italian, and Latin. He spoke Latin like you speak English. And then he did a lot of work at the [unclear; 0:36:21.4] delegation in Ottawa, because of his languages.

JP: Did you, uh, um, as a child, uh, your father was well-known in the, in the, um—

GN: The Italian community, yeah.

JP: —in the colony, the Italian colony here in Montreal. Um, did you ever go to events with your father?

GN: No, no.

JP: Your mother went?

GN: Yeah, because, um, um—to represent Dad, you know? And, uh, uh, to make them feel that after all, Nincheri was still alive in the Italian community. But outside of that, no. Dad didn't, uh—wasn't too much in favour of, uh, uh, a dictatorial regime. Because the first thing, he says, they steal from you your freedom, your liberty.

JP: Mm.

GN: And that's—you were born free, it is your right and privilege to live free and to die free, no matter where you decide to go, you know? He was really democratic, you know?

JP: He, he—it sounds like your father was, uh, more concerned with his art.

GN: Oh gosh, yeah.

JP: And he was more true to his, his own beliefs—

GN: Oh yeah.

JP: —that he was in terms of [unclear; 0:37:36.9]

GN: First of all, Dad was a great believer, and, uh, for the, uh, respect of religion, he was number one. And, uh, uh, to, to help the people to understand the role of religion in the life of, uh, of the people, um...

JP: Do you think that's why he chose to express his art through, um—

GN: Well, he was a very—first of all, he was a very religious man, yeah.

JP: Is that why you think he gravitated towards, uh, using his skills and his artistic abilities in churches?

GN: Because he—yeah, because of his be—and then he felt that he was, uh—Dad was a [unclear; 0:38:19.8] field. He was born for that particular field, and it was up to him to operate in that field, which he did, you know?

JP: It almost sounds like a calling.

GN: Eh?

JP: It almost sounds like a calling for your father.

GN: Yeah.

JP: It was a, it was a calling—

GN: Yeah.

JP: —even though it was, uh, [unclear; 0:38:29.5]

GN: Uh-huh.

JP: —[unclear; 0:38:40.7] calling—

GN: Yeah.

JP: —in a religious world for your father.

GN: He says, “For religion,” he says, “for the Catholic Church, he says, I’d be the first one,” he says,” to kneel down.” Yeah.

JP: Did he, uh—who made the decision for, for you to go to the seminary? Was it your dad, or you made that decision? Who—

GN: No, I decided on my own, yeah, I decided on my own.

JP: Okay. Um, we'll take a break now, we'll eat something, and then we'll pick up on the other stuff, is that okay?

GN: It's up to you.

JP: Yeah? Okay.

[Fades out at 0:39:11.4]

[Fades in at 0:39:13.2]

JP: Um, when we were talking, um, during the break, you brought up, uh, about Italo Balbo when he was here, and about Eaton's, d—uh, doing a display.

GN: Yeah.

JP: Do you want to tell us about that? Do you remember what it looked like?

GN: Well, if I remember, well, I think the—it was the, the window on the corner of St. Catherine's (?) and, uh, what's the side street, [unclear; 0:39:37.8] Is it University?

JP: Yeah, I think that was one of them, yes.

GN: I think so, yeah. And people like that [Gesturing, bringing his fingers close together], you know? And all the girls, "Oh, I like Captain So-and-so, he's nice looking." "No, I like better the other one." [Laughing] They were making all kinds of comments, you know, on the, uh—yeah, but, uh, it was quite a display. Even Dad, he said it was very well done.

JP: What kind—do you remember what was in the display, by any chance?

GN: Well, it was the picture of all the, uh, the crew of the 24 planes, eh? And, uh, you know the accident that happened here in Montreal, one of the planes—

JP: Right.

GN: —uh, landed on the wave. And that's exactly what made the, uh, the plane, the seaplane tip over.

JP: So, it sounds like Italo Balbo was, um, quite a hero, not just for the Italian community, but it was of—something that was of interest that—

GN: Well—

JP: —to the Montreal—

GN: —mind you, it was, it was quite a feat, eh? Take off from Italy, twenty-four p—seaplanes land in Montreal, and then from here they went to Chicago—

JP: Right.

GN: —to attend the, um, uh, the, the World's Fair. That's right. But after that, well, uh, I don't know anything. I was too small, you know?

JP: Stop.

[Fades out at 0:40:57.8]

[Fades in at 0:40:59.6]

JP: George, do you want to tell me about some of the books that you used to have in the house that your father, uh, had?

GN: Well, they were mostly, uh, about art, you know. Um, painting, sculpture, uh, architecture and, uh—I mean, the, the—all the material that Dad needed for his work, yeah.

JP: Did he read a lot?

GN: Dad was a, a good reader. He was a fast reader. So—I don't know how he did it. And I'm a slow reader. I'm just as slow as molasses. Now, that's slow. Gabriel was a fast reader. He's a fast reader [Pointing off-camera]. Roger's a fast reader. Roger could read two books in one a—one evening.

?: No. [unclear; maybe one 0:41:46.3] [Laughter]

GN: Two books?

?: No, I—I'll go one book per every two days.

JP: That's still—

GN: Well, whenever you flew to Italy at night—

?: Oh yeah, then I'll go through one.

GN: Yeah.

?: Yeah.

JP: That's a fast reader. And your father, um—so, I mean, at that point, in terms of getting, uh—would he order books from Italy? Would he, um—how would he expand, uh, his resources at the time?

GN: Well, you know, there's one thing you must remember. From 19...32 and on, right down to '45, I was in boarding school. So, what went on at home in the Sault, I know very little. Uh, I would spend two weeks at Christmas, and then the summer, well, the end of, uh, June, uh, right up to the very beginning of September, I was up at the lake. So, what I—what went on, oh, I don't know. What went on in the Sault, I don't know. And, uh, uh, then I was very much interested in sport. I was quite the tennis player, you know? So, uh—no, uh, I just wanted to leave Dad and Mother alone, you know, and, uh, uh—

JP: So, um, leading up to 19—uh, up to the—we're going to talk a little bit about, uh, Madonna della Difesa.

GN: Yeah.

JP: And, uh, I don't know if you want to start the story with, uh, uh, how your father—'cause—tell me about your father's involvement with the church first, and, uh, then, uh, we can take it from there.

GN: Well, you know, Dad, besides being an artist, painter of religious art, he was also an architect, an architect and a, a sculptor. I never saw Dad, uh, doing anything in [0:43:37.0]. Design, yes. Uh, so, uh, like, his masterpiece is St. Leo's (?) Church in Westmount. Because the church burnt down, eh? But the, uh—completely. Except the exterior walls. And, uh, according to architects, whom Dad knew very well, uh, they said, well, you could design the interior, because the foundations and the walls are strong enough to hold the whole thing. So, Dad designed it, the interior. The—always in the Romanist (?) style. And then he did the painting, which is all frescos, and then the, um, stained glass windows and all the sculpture. Now, in order to do the work, Dad called a friend of his. They grew up to—a classmate of his. And, uh, um, buddy, uh, Alveiro Marci (?) who was also from Prato. And, uh, he did a tremendous job. As a matter of fact, the, um, the, um, the choir, the, um, the altar boy's choir, they're three rows. But there's one row against the wall.

[0:45:00.0]

GN: The panel is right by the door leading into the sacristy, or the door that the priest uses when he comes out of the sacristy on his way to the altar. There's a panel. It represents the, uh, the, the, uh, the, the lamb coming to the fountain. His little leg is completely detached from the background. As a matter of fact, Father Gocci (?) always kept, uh, a wooden match on, on the seat. And he told the altar boys, he says, "Whoever takes that match is kicked out of the choir just like that." [Laughing] The, the match was—always stayed there. Because he was, uh, very authoritarian, yeah.

JP: And, um, for Madonna della Difesa, in, uh—on Dante Street (?)—

GN: Yeah.

JP: —at the time, your, your father was approached, uh, to design, to, uh—

GN: Mussolini.

JP: No, no, not the Mussolini thing. The, the church—first of all, what was your fa—your father did, did the church, did—he was the architect of the church.

GN: That's right.

JP: [unclear; 0:46:08.1]

GN: And I'll tell you, the—um, most of the pe—the Catholic community at the time were all from Casa Calenda (?). So, they all got together and they wanted to have a replica of the church of their own village. So, Dad, well, says, "Give me an idea." So, anyhow, draw this, and draw this. So, Dad put together the, uh—but it's exactly the replica. And, um, the main entrance is on Dante (?) Street. And there's an entrance, side entrance on Alma (?) Street. And the other is on Henry Julliene (?). And then there was the rectory. But actually, the rectory was right in the, in the church. It was the sacristy, yeah.

JP: Originally.

GN: Yeah. But then it got to be too, too small. So, uh, I think they bought the land, and then they built the, uh, the rectory there. And across the street, the—you, you saw the church—they—the school. And the school was run at the time by the Franciscan nuns. And, um, there were a couple from, um, the States, because the, the, the, um, primary course was in—uh, bilingual. Uh, French and, um, Italian. And, uh, the two Italian nuns, one was from Brooklyn,

and the other one was from Boston. And they were always [Gesturing], you know, teasing the, um, Boston Red Sox, the, the baseball teams, and the Brooklyn—uh, forget that, anyhow.

JP: Oh, that's funny.

GN: I forget anyhow.

JP: Yeah.

GN: But it was, uh, it was funny, anyhow, yeah.

JP: So, what happened—when, when your father originally, uh, painted the fresco on the walls, he—there was no Mussolini—

GN: Well, during the war, it was covered.

JP: Okay. But I'd like to know about what happened. Because in the original design, he wasn't there, um, on the wall. But you told me that, uh, the, uh, elders from the church—

GN: Yeah.

JP: —came to visit your dad. Do you want to tell me about what happened at that meeting, when they came to your house?

GN: Uh, yes, I was going to school at the time. Uh, Dad was against the idea. He says, "Alright, it's to—" It was to honour the Lateran Treaty, you know, between the state and the Vatican. But he says, "That's not the place. Not a church. That would be alright for a public bead—uh, a

building like an embassy, a consulate. No, no, no, no.” And, uh—so, uh, one of them, he says, “Well,” that I remember well, “Signor Nincheri, [Italian; 0:48:52.1].” So, Dad jumped. He says, “[Italian; 0:48:59.0].” So, I think it was, uh, Father Manfriani (?). And I think Father Madori (?) was a—so, they said to Dad, they want it like that, [unclear; 0:49:13.0]. Let them have it, you know? But Dad was always against the idea because—he said, “Alright, the idea’s beautiful, it’s a, it’s a commemoration, but it’s not the right place.” Not in a church, not in a religious building. That’d be alright for an embassy, a consulate, and so forth. But not there.

JP: You, you said you were at the house when they came over to discuss this with your father? You were there?

GN: I was there, oh yeah. I was leaning on the, the, the, the, the, the, the door of the dining room—[unclear; 0:49:47.8] the living room. So, I heard the whole thing. [Laughs] And then, Mother, you know, she says, “George, you’d better go to bed.” [Laughs] “Don’t forget to say your prayers on your knees.” Mother was strict, you know. Prayers on our knees, uh, uh—

JP: So, your father went ahead and did it, not, not because he chose to, but because, uh, he was forced?

GN: He was against—he said, “The idea’s beautiful.” I mean, uh—but not in a church. That, I remember very well. That would be alright for a public building, like an embassy, a consulate, but not a church. He says, “A church is a, um, um—is the place where you go to practice your religion.” And you know, and so forth. But not a public building, yeah. But he says, “Well” —uh, well, one of them—if I remember correctly, I think it was Mr. Forti (?). I’m not too sure about that, but don’t put that in writing. [Italian; 0:50:45.2]. Oh, my dad jumped. He says, “Come? *Strappato contratto?* [Italian; 0:50:54.6] *legali.*”

JP: So, the whole thing calmed down?

GN: The whole thing [unclear; 50:59.0] so Dad, you know, to have—to make peace was okay, let's have it. So, he did it, and, uh, actually in 1933, I believe, um...what was 19—I think it was the anniversary of the Defisa Church. Oh, that was a big thing. Senator Wilson was there, uh, the [unclear; 0:51:24.7] delegate was there. Uh, Carsulo (?) whom Dad represented in the church. Uh, well, the—as the representative of the Pope. And, and so—no, it was a, a big thing, you know. And then the war broke out. Well, then the—Mussolini declared war. Well, that changed the whole picture, you know, yeah.

JP: And in the—uh, next to Mussolini, he also put Italo Balbo.

GN: Yup. It was the, the—that was the, uh, uh, Triumvirate, *Triumvirato*. Um, M—uh, Mussolini, Balbo—oh golly.

JP: I can't remember.

??: De Vecchio [sic].

GN: Eh?

JP: Here.

GN: Yeah, yeah.

??: [unclear; 0:52:07.6]

JP: Oh, because he—okay.

?: Yeah.

JP: Yeah, there's, uh, Mussolini, um, Bianchi—

GN: Bianchi, that's right.

JP: De Bono, uh, De Vecchi, Italo Balbo—

GN: Yeah.

JP: —uh, Senator Marconi.

GN: Yeah, Marconi.

JP: And then, uh, [unclear; Duca degli Abruzzi?; 0:52:24.6], the cousin of the king of [unclear; 0:52:20.3].

GN: Yeah.

JP: Yeah. And then there's an altar boy.

GN: Oh, that's me. [Laughs] All the altar boys is me.

JP: That was you, you were the [unclear; 52:39.4]

GN: And the Blessed Virgin was always my mother. Yeah. Dad always used my mother to represent the Blessed Virgin.

JP: And you—and how did it work, 'cause you obviously posed for him. You would pose for him in the studio, and he would bring, uh—how did he, uh—

GN: Well, depending, uh, on the pose and so forth—there, the altar boys, well, I had to wear a soutane and a surplice. So, that was done in the studio, yeah.

JP: And then a picture was taken, or a sketch was made?

GN: Uh...

JP: Do you remember?

GN: Well, depending how I felt. Because ju—just look at the eyes [Pointing]. And he would say, [Italian; 0:53:19.9], eh? So, then he would take pictures, yeah.

JP: Oh.

GN: Oh, Dad had an acute sense of psychology, oh yeah. He would a look at a person, you'd be surprised to s—to hear the things that he could say about the per—that per—nothing wrong, mind you, no.

JP: Yeah.

GN: You know. But, uh, he, he—Dad was very psychological, yeah. And then the Blessed Virgin, he always used my mother. No matter the pose, if you'll—

JP: Julia.

GN: Oh yeah, Julia. You recognize my mother right away, yeah.

JP: And, um, after he pa—after he—you went to see it before, uh—did you see the, the wor—the artwork before 1940 on the, uh—in the Madonna della Difesa?

GN: La Difesa? Oh yeah.

JP: You saw it?

GN: Yeah.

JP: What was—what are some of the first things you recall when you saw it? What did you think? Do you remember?

GN: Well, uh, first of all, that's when the Italians of the It—Italian community got a bad name. Fascists and all kinds of names, you know. Well, you know, when you're dealing with, uh, um—have nothing against the French-Canadians, you know, but, um, they're ignorant, you know? They're—they have no background, you know? It's not like the Italians, they, they got a background that goes way back to the time of—the ti—times of Caesar, you know? But, uh, the French-Canadians, I mean—

JP: They were working with a more limited knowledge—

GN: Yeah.

JP: —of what was going on at the time.

GN: That's right, yeah.

JP: Yeah, so the decisions are going to be different.

GN: Yeah.

JP: Right. Um, did—were you impressed when you saw it, because having been there in the home when the men came over and asked your father to paint it, um, your father's reaction, I, I don't expect you to remember the words, but your father obviously had a reaction, and did—he did not want to do it.

GN: Yeah.

JP: He did not want to paint it. Uh, when you saw the work, the final product, do you remember what your reaction was or what your Dad said?

GN: No, I wasn't there.

JP: You weren't there.

GN: No, I wasn't there.

JP: You were already in Ottawa at the time.

GN: Yeah, yeah.

JP: Okay. So then, um—si—uh, June 10th, 1940, the RCMP starts going around and picking up men. Your father was not picked up that day, but, um, did you know what was going on even though you were in Ottawa?

GN: No, I was in Ottawa then.

JP: Right, so did—

GN: When I got the letter, uh, from my mother informing me that Dad had been arrested, it was sent [unclear; 0:55:50.0] cry, oooh. But, um—you know what? Th—the—they were sleeping in a dorm, eh? You know who was sleeping next to him?

JP: Who?

GN: You'll never believe, Camillien Houde.

JP: The mayor.

GN: The mayor of Montreal. And that's when they became very friendly [Coughs], and th—that brought Mrs. Houde and mother like this. [Links fingers]

JP: Oh, really?

GN: Yeah. And then they spent two summers up at the lake, Lake Echo, yeah. But I never met Camillien Houde in person. I've seen him in the pictures, you know, but to meet him personally, no, no.

JP: Your father did a poster for, uh, Camillien Houde.

GN: He came what?

JP: Your father did a poster for Camillien Houde.

GN: Yup.

JP: Right? How did—

GN: And that's Camillien Houde used, uh, as, um, a proprie—um, uh, uh...

JP: Publicity? For publicity for his company?

GN: That's the picture he used when he, um, uh, presented himself as the mayor of Montreal. So, here's the major of Montreal, p—um, uh, in a constant—wearing the, uh, shirt of the interned when he was interned in Petawawa. So, that [unclear; 0:57:13.4]. He, he won the election, and he, he was elected with a very strong majority, yeah.

JP: Oh, 'cause your father had made that poster at the camp?

GN: At the camp, that's right. Yeah. And, um, Mother went to see him with Gabriel, but, uh, I was not allowed to go. They wouldn't allow me.

JP: What did, um—when, when you got the letter from your mother, Julia—

GN: Oh.

JP: —um—

GN: I cried. And, um, uh, in those days, a Father Master (?) would read the letters from the parents, but he, he never bothered reading my letter. So, he said to me, he says, “Why are you crying?” So, I showed him, so he read the whole letter, you know? And then he went like this [Pats his shoulder], he says, “Things will get better.” So, that sort of, you know, encouraged me a little bit before, but, uh, then it got known, you know? So, uh, Father Master, who was Father Walche (?), he was from Sainte-Anne-de-Bellevue. He, uh, he told the, uh—my classmates, and all the, the boys at the college. He says, “If anyone makes this much of a remark against George’s father and so forth,” he says, “out he goes. He’s going to be kicked out of the college.” So, he came—and back in the 1930s, boy, it didn’t take much to make you walk straight, on the straight line, eh? Yeah.

JP: That, that was really nice.

GN: I beg your pardon?

JP: That was very nice.

GN: Yeah. No, Father—besides, Father Walche had studied philosophy and, uh, uh, theology in Italy, so he spoke very good Italian. And he was a very broadminded man, yeah. Yeah. I learned a lot from that man.

JP: Did you have questions? When your father was picked up, did you have questions, and were you able to ask those questions to anybody?

GN: No, because I was a student. I was a la—in boarding school.

JP: No, but I'm talking general questions, like, in your mind. Why is my father picked up, why is he being sent there?

GN: No.

JP: Did you have any of those questions and—

GN: No.

JP: And what happened after? 'Cause the reason your father was picked up from, um, what we understand is because he had painted Mussolini on, uh—on the della—

GN: Difesa, yeah.

JP: On—at the church. So, what did your mother do?

GN: Well, the first thing she did, she went to the Italian Consulate, and she said, "Well," she says, "You know, uh, my husband was never a Fascist." Mind you, he admired the par—the party, uh, because Italy is a poor country. They have no natural resources, and so forth. So, um, the only form of government that would make—that would help the country as a state and then the people, would be a dictatorial regime. Because, um, uh—

[1:00:00.0]

JP: He was more sympathetic—

GN: Uh, as far as natural resources, Italy has none. The only one they have is marble. They have marble that's all ready for artistic work, but I mean, it doesn't feed a whole nation.

JP: Right.

GN: They have no steel, no iron, no, uh, aluminum and, and so forth, you know? I mean, uh, like in those days, it was like, you want an artist? Go among the Italians and find—or go to Italy. You won't find it here.

JP: So, your mother was upset. Did she go to the Canadian authorities to try to find out what had happened to her husband?

GN: Yup, she did.

JP: When—do you remember anything—

GN: Well, uh, she, she wouldn't tell me.

JP: —she said?

GN: She wouldn't tell me.

JP: Okay.

GN: No.

JP: But what did she say when she went to the authorities? How did she try to get your father, uh, released?

GN: Well, first of all, she says, "I know what, um, um, brought the RCMPs to arrest my husband, it was the decoration at della Difesa. But I'll tell you from this, it was never his intention." He says, "I know the i—the idea is beautiful, it's to signify the, the signature of the Lateran Treaty, but it's not the place. That would be alright for a, a secular building like an embassy, a consulate, but not a church."

JP: So, what did she do to get your father out?

GN: [Sighs] What did she do now to get—

JP: Did she, did she, uh—'cause it wasn't in the original plans.

GN: No. Oh, yeah. So, um, the art—the, the—

JP: Did she go to the studio?

GN: The RCMP says, "Well, can you prove it?" Mother says, "I think so." He says, "How?" "If I show you the original, uh, sketch." So, he says, "Could we see it?" Says, "I think so." So, needless to say, when I left the RCMPs, I went straight to the studios. Boy, did I pray. So, I asked Mr. Roy (?), I says, "Do you still have the original sketches?" He says, "Yeah." "Could I see it?"

He says, "Yeah." It's good. [Claps] She says, "I think this will help my husband." She says, "Can I borrow it?" "Certainly." So, she got home, she called the RCMPs, she says, "I want a meeting, a private meeting with you tomorrow. What time, I don't care." He says, "Suit yourself." She said, "Two o'clock in the afternoon?" "Suits me fine." So, she went. [Claps] "Here's the original sketch. Do you see him? Can you point your finger on him?" So, the evidence was right there. So, that's exactly what helped my dad to, uh, to be freed. Yeah. But it was tough yea—tough months. Oh, the people on the street, "[Italians; 1:03:04.4]." Oh, the things they said to me. So then, in September, my dad and mother put me in boarding school in Ottawa. I was only in grade—mind you, I started my—what they call, what they called then, [French; 1:03:19.5], Grade Five. In those days, it was Grade Six and then Grade Seven. But the year I started was Grade Seven. So, uh, Dad and Mother drove me to, uh, Ottawa. Dri—ba—Gabriel was driving. And they spent the night there, and the next morning—of course, uh, I went to bed in the dorm with all the, the rest of the boys. After breakfast, we all went to the study hall and get our books ready, you know? So, one guy's like [Taps on his shoulder], he says, "The dean of studies wants to see you." *Le doyen*. Who the hell is *le—le doyen*, you know? He says, [unclear; 1:04:02.1] he said, "The dean of studies wants to see you." I says, "Who's he?" So, I si—sit down. "Thank you, Father." He says, "You want to start your [1:04:17.6]?" And he says, oh, "With, uh, uh, a, a small background like that, you went as far as Grade Five?" He says, "Now," he says, "We want the Grade Se—before, it was Grade Six. Now it's Grade Seven." Oh, I says, "Boy," I says, "I've had it." No Grade Six, no Grade Seven. So, he says, "I'm going to give you a dictation." I said, "Okay." No mistakes. "Well," he says, "I think we'll accept you." But in Latin, oh boy, did I have a hard time, did I have a hard time. But I no—I pulled through. Yeah.

JP: When you—after, um, after your father, uh, was released thanks to your mother's efforts in proving his innocence, did you—

GN: I wasn't there. But—

JP: No. When did you come back to Montreal? Uh, did your father ever talk about it with you?

GN: No.

JP: The experience—no, eh?

GN: No. Mother told us, my brother and I, says, “Please don’t ever bring it up. If he talks about it, okay. But don’t ask him any questions. But no—don’t—I don’t want to hear.” “Okay, Mother, we don’t want it.”

JP: Why do you think your mother said that? What, what’s your guess?

GN: Well, not to renew all the past, because it was a very sad past, yeah.

JP: How was your father, um, affected by that internment? How do you—

GN: Well, you know, he made a lot of friends. And, um, um, he—what can you do when the—you’re, uh, you’re vanquished? You know, when you’re not—you have to follow. But Mother always wrote to him encouraging letters, says, “Remember, anything that it—has a beginning, sooner or later will have an end.” But Dad was not there very long, though. But just—but enough, long enough, you know, to, to get a good taste of it, yeah. And of course, you know, the Italians, uh, uh—most of them have a good sense of humour, eh? So, uh, some of them were, uh—because they knew they had a—sure, let’s put it this way, sort of a job to do, you know? Help their, uh, um...

JP: They approached it philosophically.

GN: Their, their people, you know?

JP: And uh, when did, when did you come back to Montreal? 1943, was after the war more or less, it was in the early 40s that you left Ottawa?

GN: Before that.

JP: Oh, before that, okay.

GN: I think Dad came back to Montreal—would you know anything about that, Roge (?)?

[Looking off-camera.]

??: Eh?

GN: Was it before the declaration of the war?

??: Oh no. Well, Nonno Guido (?) was interned, okay—

GN: Yeah.

??: In, uh, in, uh—

GN: 1939.

??: In, uh—well, no, 1940.

GN: Oh, 19—

?: He was picked up in, in August of '40, and then he was released three months later, in the— let's say, so, August, September, October, so he came out of there—he came out of it in October. And he went back and, uh—went back then to [unclear; 1:07:28.0], when he was doing the—

GN: Oh yeah, yeah.

?: Then, during the summertime, he came back then to Sainte-Amelie to finish the job. And he did this between Sainte-Amelie and, uh, [unclear; 1:07:38.7].

GN: Oh yeah.

?: Took another job in [unclear; 1:07:40.2] in—

GN: Sainte-Amelie is a [unclear; 1:07:41.7].

JP: Oh, okay.

GN: Yeah, it's all the frescos, beautiful church there.

JP: How did your father, um—did he ever express his feelings toward, uh, what had happened to him, uh, the rest of the Italian community?

GN: Mother told us—Mother told my brother and I, never bring it up.

JP: And he never said anything to you—

GN: Nope.

JP: —either—

GN: So, that was taboo.

JP: Interesting.

GN: No, because, uh, it would renew a very sad past, you know? And being an artist, very sensitive, you know, he felt it deep down inside, oh yeah.

JP: Did you ever see the, uh—a fresco when it was covered up with—

GN: Yes, oh yeah.

JP: —the paper, where they come back and [unclear; 1:08:27.2] a visit?

GN: Oh yeah, it was of—

JP: How did that affect you?

GN: Oh, you could imagine.

JP: You were covered up, too, weren't you?

GN: Eh?

JP: You were covered up, too, [unclear; 1:08:35.4]

GN: Oh yeah, oh, of course, yeah. I was in the group.

JP: You were in that group.

GN: That's right.

JP: So, you were covered up during the war with paper?

GN: Yeah, that's right. [Laughter] So, I said to myself, just look at it, that'll tell you what to do, keep your trap shut. [Laughter] Oh, what can you do.

JP: It's quite symbolic, wouldn't you say?

GN: Yeah. And I never talked about it. And Father Master, Father Walche, forbade the students to bring it up in whichever form, "I forbid you, and if someone does it, out he goes with a kick in his pants," so.

JP: When they unveiled it afterwards, after the war was over—

GN: Yeah.

JP: —did—it went back to the church, and you saw it and you could see the, uh—

GN: Yeah. Well, then it was cleaned, you know, the whole decoration was cleaned, yeah.

JP: Who were the—uh, Father Multempi and Father Evangeliste (?), can you tell me something about those men?

GN: Uh, Father Evangeliste was a very learned man. He was a writer. And, uh, he was a Doctor in Theology. And, uh, a big guy, you know, a little bit, uh, um—wait a minute, um, *contadino* (?), but a smart brain. Father Multempi, also, but Father Multempi, he was a big mouth. Yeah. And, uh, he was very vain and proud, yeah. Terrific cook, oh yeah, a learned man, an avid reader. He could read a book, uh, just like that, you know? But Father Multempi and Father Evangeliste were two different types, yeah.

JP: And Father, Father Multempi, um, from what you remember, how much did he associate with the Italian groups and the Fascist groups that had been there before the war?

GN: Ooh, that I wouldn't know.

JP: Wouldn't know that?

GN: That, I wouldn't know, no, no. That I wouldn't know. Do you know anything about that, Roge, you? [Looking off-camera]

??: No, I don't, but one thing you should talk about is Armadori (?) who was actually his, uh, uh, let's say he inspired [unclear; 1:10:44.9] in doing art, in doing the decoration. Father—

GN: Yeah, well, made—he—well, Dad had an idea, you know? But Father Armadori, a holy man—in fact, he is—you see him at della Difesa, he's front like that [Clasping hands in imitation

of prayer] and you see him looking up, he was a holy man. And, uh, a very learned man, oh yeah. And, um, um—

JP: How was he inspired by your [unclear; 1:11:14.7]

GN: He was a—he would have been a wonderful diplomat, Father Armadori. Listen, talk very little, but make sure each word is heavy, yeah. And, uh, uh, Father Multempi was more of a, um, *fanfarone*, you know, he liked to brag. Although he was a very learned man also, terrific reader. And, uh—but, um, he likes to brag and—

JP: Did you ever go to, um, uh, La Chiesa di Monte-Carmelo?

GN: Mont—no, no. My brother attended school there, one year. And then after that, he went to D’Arcy McGee High Sch—which was St. Patrick’s School at the time, while they were building, um, D’Arcy McGee High School, which is on Pine (?) Avenue, facing the hospital, yeah. And—

JP: It was [unclear; 1:12:10.7], uh, the orphanage there on, uh—there was an orphanage also near, um, La Chiesa.

GN: Um, Madonna della—del Monte Carmelo.

JP: Yeah, it was an orphanage?

GN: That was the Italian orphanage.

JP: Saint Giuseppe—

GN: Yeah.

JP: —was the orphanage?

GN: [unclear; 1:12:24.8] And it was run by the Italian—by the, uh, Servite Sisters, yeah.

JP: So, you remember that old community a little bit, the one that was—

GN: Well, we never lived there, you know, I know it like that. I know the church was on Dorchester (?), which was very narrow. Uh, and then—well, they decide to widen, so that cut the school, which was right on the corner of Saint Andrew and Dorchester. So, that was Mont Carmel School, completely destroyed, and so was the church. And then they decided—where was the church built after that? I wouldn't know.

JP: They didn't rebuild it. They—the—'cause of the—

GN: No.

JP: —the people just sort of migrated to the—

GN: Yeah, they, they—yeah, they moved away from there, yeah.

JP: And the Madonna della Difesa—

GN: Yeah.

JP: —started growing in numbers, and that was able to serve the community, I guess.

GN: Mm-hm.

JP: Yeah. And when you came back to Montreal as a priest, you were working, um—when you were working with the Italians in that area, do you have any anecdotes or any stories about that time?

GN: No, because it's, um, something that they're—nobody would bring it up, you know? It was a very sad past.

JP: No, I mean, when you came back, after the war. After the war—because you came back to Montreal after the war?

GN: Uh, wait a minute. After the war, I was taken in Ottawa.

JP: Okay.

GN: I was taken in Ottawa.

JP: They didn't—in Mon—did, didn't you come to Montreal at some point after the war?

GN: That's when the immigration started.

JP: Okay, okay, so—

GN: Yeah, because of my three languages, yeah.

JP: Yeah.

GN: Yeah.

JP: Yeah. And how did you find the community then?

GN: Well, I'll tell you very frankly, no one would, uh, dare talk about it, because it was to renew a very sad past, you know? So—

JP: It's hard, eh, because there was this whole period—

GN: Yeah.

JP: —and so many people didn't want to talk about it—

GN: Yeah.

JP: —because it brought back pain.

GN: Yeah.

JP: Maybe there was fear, I don't know. And so—

GN: Then there was another thing, too, eh?

JP: What?

GN: Spying.

JP: Yeah. Before.

GN: And then, not only that, but there was an awful lot of revenges between—uh, among the Italians, you know? Oh, you did this to him, but some of these days, boy, you're gonna get it. You're gonna pay for it. But that's one thing that we never did, uh, experience. Nobody touched us, yeah. And besides, the fact of living in the east end of Montreal, Pinot Boulevard, that, that helped us a lot.

[1:15:00.0]

JP: Yeah, you were in a very—

GN: Completely out of the Italian community, yeah.

JP: Yeah.

GN: And you know why? Because Dad had his studio on Pinot Boulevard, and like Mother says, "As long as Dad will have his studio on Pinot Boulevard, we're doomed to live on—" we still are. Pretty soon it will be a, a century.

JP: It's true, 'cause your, your family was quite unique at the time, where they came from in Italy, your, your father's, uh, profession, where you lived, uh, you were very much—

GN: Because Dad was never a Fascist. Mind you, he admired Mussolini for what he did, and you know, strictly between the two of us, or all—the, the four of us—

JP: And the camera.

GN: And the camera. [Laughs] What may—what form of government would help Italy? It has to be a, a dictatorial regime. First of all, they've got no natural resources, no iron, no, uh, uh, aluminum, no nothing.

JP: Yeah.

GN: The only, the only natural resource they have is marble. Yeah, but marble's alright, but marble doesn't feed a whole nation.

JP: After your father—in the 1940s, did he, he start working in the United States?

GN: Yes.

JP: More so than Canada?

GN: More, yeah. Then all his work was that. He started in, in, uh, in the States in, uh, Central Falls, Rhode Island. I think it was 1935. So, after St. Matthew's Church, it was, uh, St. Anne's Church, that was a great big chur—beautiful church. Uh, you could have used it as a cathedral. And that's all frescos, eh?

JP: And did he, um, ever become an American citizen?

GN: Yup. Mind you, it was offered to them. Oh, then, there's another—there was a, um, um...*un concorso* (?). Uh...

JP: In the United States?

GN: Yeah. The, uh, Polish community of Rhode Island is very strong. And the, uh, Polish community wanted to erect a monument to Casimir Pulaski, who was considered as the father of the American cavalry. And, uh, so they wanted to build a monument. So, there were two— [Laughs] American sculptors who represented him on a horse. [unclear; 1:17:34.1] So, they didn't like it. So, then they came to my dad. So, Dad represented him, Pulaski, in the pose of, uh, uh, the, uh—no—uh, yeah, with the sword, yeah. Uh, uh, the attack, you know? And, um, and the, the horse is resting only on his two back legs. It's, uh—so, um, oh, the, the, there were all kinds—well, there were a few, uh, contractors, sculptors, but they always repres—all of them represented Pulaski sitting on the horse, his horse. So, they didn't like it, you know?

JP: Your father's version was much more dynamic?

GN: Oh, yeah, that's right, you know? So, right away, hey, who's—this is it. So, I mean, Dad, uh, helped them to acquire a better reputation and so forth. And made them better known throughout the—

JP: His contracts, um, were always—well, mostly were with churches.

GN: Yeah.

JP: Not exclusively, but mostly—

GN: Well, he was an artist, painter in religious art.

JP: Right. Um—

GN: By the way, have you seen the Chateau Dufresne?

JP: Yes.

GN: Oh.

JP: Yeah, that would have been a private—

GN: Yeah.

JP: —uh, home, right.

GN: Yeah.

JP: But did he, um—after the war, did you find that, uh—did he do works that were for Italians or, um—

GN: Well, then he was getting known in the States. He did a few jobs in New York, I think, eh?
[Looking off-camera]

?: Yeah, he did quite a few of them in New York, he did in Buffalo and New York, in the subway in New York.

GN: Oh, you know more than I do.

?: Yeah, they said there's a lot of them that he did, yeah.

JP: Yeah.

GN: Yeah?

?: Yeah.

GN: Well, you should se—set up a list.

?: I've got it all.

GN: Eh?

?: I've got all the list.

GN: Well, maybe that could be helpful to—

JP: No, we're going to, we're going to be talking to Roger on Friday next week.

GN: Okay, okay, yeah.

JP: So, Roger's going to fill us in.

?: I've got everything [unclear; 1:19:25.5]

GN: Okay. Oh, well then, he's your best source of information.

JP: So, just—so, I guess you should—what else? What did your father like to eat?

GN: Dad was not a, a heavy eater. He ate very little, but good food, yeah. So thank god, Mother was a good cook. His mother was a good cook, oh boy. His mother and my mother, when the two would put their heads together, you could imagine what was coming out of that kitchen, besides the smell, oh boy.

?: Uh, George, [unclear; 1:19:55.5]

GN: Oh yeah.

?: That's the thing that Nonna would cook.

GN: Oh yeah, that's right.

JP: [unclear; 1:20:01.1] dish.

GN: If sh—yep. [unclear; 1:20:03.2], you know, uh, uh, Florentine beans, yeah, oh yeah. He, he enjoyed that, yeah, yeah.

?: And remember, I still remember the expression on his face—

GN: Oh boy.

?: —when he was eating this.

GN: Oh yeah.

?: Yeah.

GN: Not only was he eating with his mouth, but also his eyes, you know? Oh yeah. [Laughter]
And, uh—

JP: Did he ever want to go back to Italy to visit? 'Cause you told me you went back—

GN: Oh, he did. Yeah, he went, yeah. But, um—oh, I don't know if I should tell you this. Um, his father, who was in the textile business, wanted Dad to follow him. Dad, no. And he used to say, *i cenci*, you know, the rags, "didn't interest me." Because he started at the age of nine, to draw. And one day at school—well, the—in those days, classroom, and then there were three steps, and then the—let's say, like, uh, uh, the, the blackboard, and the, the teacher was sitting at his desk, just all he had to do was just raise his eyes, he had a general view of all the classroom, you know? And, um—what was I going to say now?

JP: The—

GN: Oh yeah. He was looking at my dad, and the kids were writing and writing and writing.

JP: Oh yeah, you told us—

GN: But Dad, he said—so, Mother said, what did you do? Well, he says, "I don't know," he said, "the ideas weren't coming." You know? But he said, [unclear; 1:21:31.8], "I was looking at the

teacher, meanwhile, say,” he says, “that would be a nice, uh, a nice picture.” So, he drew his picture. “Return your pa—your, uh, copies.” When he saw my dad, my dad’s copy, he said, “Hey, do you have a—you see—you understand Italian, eh? [Italian; 1:21:52.0] “So, I drew your face.” So then, the—but he said, “Would you like to have it?” He says, “I’ll give it to you.” So, that made him feel a little bit better, you know? So then he says, he said, “Okay, sit down,” he says, “We’ll have a little talk.” He said—he says, “What was I—” Well, he says, “I’d like to be, to be a painter, you know, draw, paint, and so on.” But he says, uh, “Do you think you could make a living?” He says, “I think so.” “Well,” he says, “What are you going to do?” “Well,” he says, “I’m going to go to the, the Academy of Fine Arts.” So, he went.

JP: Did your father, um—

GN: And you know what? His father threatened him. He says, [Italian; 1:22:24.0] —you understand Italian, eh? [Italian; 1:22:44.0] Wow. That was a bad slap in the face and a kick in the pants. So, he, uh—

JP: Right.

GN: He, he offered to himself to, um, to, um, to help the students with their notes and so forth, you know. So, finally—

JP: Did he—

GN: —there was a, a scholarship in painting. So, he won the scholarship. Then the scholarship in, uh, in drawing. He won the scholarship. Then in sculpture, he won the scholarship.

JP: Yeah.

GN: So, he spent 12 years at the Academy of Fine Arts, and it didn't cost his father one cent.

JP: Did your—did your father train people while he was here in Montreal at all?

GN: Oh yeah, quite a few, quite a few. He had a—well, he had a—it was some of his workers, um, Mr. Roy, uh, he was a good painter. Then there was another one, Dietrich, and funny thing, his wife's name was Marlene Dietrich, just like the actress. [Laughter] Then he—Mr. Dietrich was called back by Hitler, and Dad wrote to him, and, uh, he never got a reply.

JP: Oh.

GN: Well, he did get a reply, but a lot of the lines were all, uh—

JP: Blacked out.

GN: Yeah.

JP: How did it feel growing up as, uh, Guido Nincheri's son?

GN: Well, I was proud. But I never talked about it, you know? No, I was proud, but I kept it inside, you know? I was glad to see Dad's work, and then it gave me the chance to admire his, um, uh, his, um, facility to create. Yeah. And then when he did all the, the sketches of St. Leo's Church, oh boy. But wait 'til I tell you about Father Gottier (?), a real miser.

JP: But when you were—just going back to how you felt about growing up, having such a great artist as a fa—as a father, uh—

GN: But you know, I'm not a bragger.

JP: Did you talk about—no, I can tell, you're, you're very humble, actually.

GN: Yup.

JP: But did you and your brother talk about this? Uh, did you have conversations with your brother about your father, uh, did, did you talk about—

GN: Well, first of all—

JP: Did you have anybody you—

GN: When Gabriel was, uh, living in—at home, he was, uh, attending D'Arcy McGee High School.

JP: Right.

GN: Um, how—

JP: Did you talk about things about—

GN: No.

JP: —your father with—

GN: No. Uh, I was too small then, you know. I was, uh...

JP: Did the priest—

GN: Seven, eight years old, eight, nine years old, you know. And, uh, then another thing, too, um, I was sort of, um, laughed at, scoffed at, you know, being Italian, [Italian; 1:25:29.7] and “Don’t walk in front of him, because he’s going to stab you, wh—he’s got a knife.” And I used to empty my pocket, “Well, where’s the knife?” You know? And that let me with a sour taste in my mouth, yeah.

JP: So, stayed more of a loner?

GN: Eh?

JP: You became more of a loner because—

GN: Yeah, yeah.

JP: —of things like that.

GN: Then, in, in September I went to Ottawa, started my classical—then there, over there, was all put together different, yeah.

JP: Did, um—do you an—when I—um—[Laughs]

GN: Take your time.

JP: Thank you. Do you remember—

GN: Listen—

JP: —the attitude that the, the Catholic Church had toward Mussolini?

GN: No.

JP: After the Lateran, uh—

GN: No, I was too small then, no.

JP: Did they ever talk about it?

GN: No, no.

JP: Like, it would have been, let's say, uh, in the '30s, like when you were a teenager.

GN: Yeah.

JP: Did they ever talk about it?

GN: No.

JP: Because he seemed like he was very well liked in Quebec because of that.

GN: I know they uh—there was a, a Fascist, uh, group in Montreal, but, uh, everything was kept, uh, to themselves, you know? Uh—I don't even think they took part in the processions. Safety first, you know?

JP: Yeah. Is there anything we should know about your father? I didn't ask you, but is there any, uh, um, story that you remember, any memory of your father, a recollection, an incident, something funny, maybe something, uh, that you want to share?

GN: Um, Dad had a lot of respect for people. And, uh, Roge will back me up on this. Um, he was very, um—first of all, dignified in his manners, his speech and so forth. You never heard my Dad, uh, swear or curse, nothing like that, you know? Oh, he would lose his patience, oh yes. Of course he was human like anybody else, but, uh, um—even the, uh, the—his employees at the studio, they all said he's a [Italian; 1:27:54.9]. He felt he—mind you, he trained them. But he felt that he knew—he needed them to do his work, you know?

JP: When you go back into that studio on Pinaff (?)—

GN: Yeah.

JP: —how's it make you feel?

GN: Well, it brings back an awful lot of memories, you can imagine, you know. And in a way, the, the house on the Pinaff between St. Catherine's and Notre Dame has been torn down. So, that's where I grew up, you know?

JP: You spent a lot of time in that studio when you were a kid?

GN: Well, whenever Dad needed me. And then, um—[Clears throat] sometimes he would call Mother, “As soon as George comes home from school, tell him to come to the studio.” And, uh—well, at times, it, uh—I was planning to play ball with my friends and [Laughs] Mother said, “Dad needs you at the studio, so you better go right away.” [Cringes] You know. But, uh—

JP: And how many pieces are you represented that you—do you know?

GN: How many?

JP: How many, uh, pieces of work [unclear; 1:28:57.0]

GN: Well, I would have to see them. I would have to see them.

JP: You may even be in some that you don’t even know.

GN: Uh...well, at della Difesa is the altar boys.

JP: Right.

GN: Yeah. And then, uh—

?: [unclear; 1:29:11.0]

GN: Eh?

?: The Baptist [unclear; 1:29:12.5]

GN: Yeah, that's right, the Baptist Street, St. Madeleine's—

?: St. Madeleine du Trebon (?).

GN: St. Madeleine du Trebon (?)

JP: And how are you represented in—

?: Again, too, he's one of the angels. He—

GN: Yeah.

?: He's one of the angels.

JP: Oh.

?: Yeah.

GN: [Laughs]

JP: That's so nice. Any other stories about your father that we should, uh—eh, uh—something else that you want to share about your dad?

GN: Well, you would have to ask me questions, uh—[Clears throat]

JP: Roger, is there anything that, um—

??: No, right now, I can't think of anything, really. I mean, eh—he was a loving father, attentive father.

JP: Yeah.

??: I mean, that's—I mean—but he would know that, I don't.

[1:30:00.0]

GN: He was what?

JP: You would know how your father, uh—how he was—

??: He loved you, he was a good father—

GN: Yeah.

??: —and everything, yeah.

GN: Good provider.

??: Good provider, yeah.

GN: Uh, very sensitive. Of course, being an artist, he was very sensitive, so. And, uh—but, um, his studio, oftentimes Mother says, "Sometimes I don't know if the studio doesn't come first before the home, or the home first after the—" [Laughs] So, Gabriel said, "Mother, don't talk about it." [Laughs] So, that was the end of it, you know?

JP: [unclear; Maria; 1:30:36.0], how do you feel today, when you look back and you—

GN: Oh, I feel very proud of my dad. I never talk about it, you know. No, but, uh—

JP: No, it's true.

GN: Oh, really, Dad was in a class by himself. Really. Eh, Roge?

?: Yeah, he—

GN: Daddy was—Dad was in a class by himself. First of all, his background, you know? And he was an accomplished artist. And, uh, um, he never worked, you know, to make of himself a big name, you know? [Clears throat] Excuse me. As long as he had enough to take care of the studio, uh, the staff of the studio, and put our three meals on the so—uh, the table and good clothes to wear and so forth, he was happy. And paid the rent monthly, yeah.

?: Um, just to give you an idea, during the Depression when things were tough—

JP: Mm-hm.

GN: Oh yeah.

?: Uh, anything—it really actually was quite interesting, because you look at the books, he always had work.

GN: Eh?

?: He always had work during the Depression.

GN: Oh yeah, oh yeah, that's right.

JP: During the Depression—

GN: Oh yeah, he was never, never—he never did—Dad never told his employees, “Well, you can stay home tomorrow, I don't need you.” He kept, uh, the, the, uh, the studio going day after day, week after week, [unclear; 1:31:57.0], yup.

JP: There was nobody else that did the type of work he did. He was really—

GN: That's right.

JP: He had—

GN: There was no one else to [unclear; 1:32:04.2] able to match him, you know? He was really the one and only. Mind you, he was abused in more ways than one, especially by Father Gottier. [Gasps] Very, um, learned man, uh, Doctor in Philosophy, Theology, but, uh, a real miser. He nev—not only after all the work that Dad—he never paid—charged him a cent. The interior of the church, the architecture, all the, uh, the, the artwork, paintings, the, uh, stained glass windows, the—have you ever been to St. Leo's Church?

JP: No.

GN: [Claps] Go in the sanctuary.

JP: [unclear; 1:32:46.8]

GN: The stalls, the altar boy stalls, it's all handmade.

JP: Was your father eventually paid at, um, the Madonna della Difesa, after they, they told him that, uh—[unclear; 1:32:58.3]

GN: Oh yeah, that's another thing. Mussolini—Dad never wanted him there. He s—

JP: No, I know, but was he—he was paid eventually for the work, because that held—the contract was held—

GN: Yeah.

JP: —as, uh—

?: Yeah, we got, we got, uh, the, uh, the contracts, how much it was, and it's all in the, uh, in the studio, uh—

GN: Yeah.

?: —archives.

JP: It came in [unclear; 1:33:15.4]—

GN: As a matter of fact—

??: We've got all the, all the correspondence between each of the—

GN: Yeah.

??: —uh, the, uh, the church and him, with all the amounts, et cetera, it's all recorded.

JP: Wow.

??: It's all in the studio.

GN: Mm-hm.

[Fades out at 1:33:28.3]

[Fades in at 1:33:29.4]

GN: Well—

JP: Oh, it's off. Do you want it off or on?

AR: You want to see this—

GN: Well, maybe with this will be good, yeah.

JP: Okay, we'll leave it on. And if, if you don't want it, we can take it out.

GN: Uh, she went to the CRP—RCMPs.

JP: Your mother.

GN: That's right, to get him out of the camp. And, uh, so naturally, the, uh—oh, how would you call—the head man there. Uh, he said, "Well," he says, uh, "Why didn't he put"— Because he had to. As a matter of fact, he—there was a meeting at my house with the chur—the pastor and the church trustees, and one of them said, "Well, if you don't go ahead," he says, "We're going to tear the contract." Dad says, "Who authorizes you?" So, anyhow, the pastor—I think it was Father Monthriani (?)—so he looked at my dad, and says, "Let it go." Anyhow, Dad did it, but he says, "While I was doing it," he says, "There was something inside of me telling me," he says, "Don't be surprised if someday—you don't—you won't have to pay for this." And sure enough, it happened. So, when, uh, Mother went to the—see the head of the RCMP to see eh—if he couldn't be, uh, uh, free, you know. So, he said, "But why did he do it?" "Because he had to." As a matter of fact, he was threatened. "If you don't go ahead," he says, "We're going to tear it." And I was there. So, uh...

JP: After the men went away—

GN: Just a minute. So, he said, "Could you prove it?" He says, "I think so." So, right away, she went to the studio. And she had Mr. Roy—says, "Have you got the original, uh, sketches?" He says, "Yes, I do." She says, "Could I borrow it?" "Certainly." So, the next day, as soon as she got home, she called the RCMP, says, "I've got the proof." She says, "I want an appointment with you tomorrow after lunch." "Any time, Mrs. Nincheri." So I was, uh, uh, a student at the college, I was in boarding school at—so, here—

JP: Do you still have the original ju—sketch?

??: No, we lost it.

GN: No, no. I don't know what happened to it. Uh, is it at the studio?

??: No.

GN: I don't know what happened to it.

??: No, because—I mean, I photographed everything there was in the studio, and it's gone.

GN: Unless Dad destroyed it because it brought back so many bad memories, you know? Could be, I don't know. We never questioned Dad about that.

JP: What's one of your favourite, uh, things that you have from your father today?

GN: Oh, there's so—

JP: What is—like, what is there—

GN: —many.

JP: —that you have, that, that, that's your personal things, like—

??: Where you really actually see it, it appears in the video when he describes how his father told him to clean the, the, the—

GN: Oh yeah.

JP: The brushes, yeah.

GN: Oh, that would be a good thing to, to show them.

??: Yeah, but—

JP: Oh, we saw it.

??: —they, they, they have seen the video.

JP: I've seen the video—

GN: Eh?

JP: —where you're washing your father's brushes.

GN: Yeah, that's right.

JP: [unclear; 1:36:36.4]

GN: At the studio, yeah, yeah, uh—

JP: You used to wash his brushes?

GN: Oh yeah. And Dad would bring the ru—[Motions as if sniffing the tip of a cane] [Italian;
1:36:45.8] [Laughs] Oh yeah, I wouldn't mind.

JP: You would do it once in a while.

GN: I wouldn't mind. With—in the, the, lukewarm water and soap, you know, and then
[Motions as if washing dishes]— [Italian; 1:36:57.3] Let me see in? Oh, this is much better.
[Laughs] Or but—by the touch.

JP: By the touch and by the smell?

GN: Oh yeah, by the smell and the touch. He had a very sensitive touch, you know, yeah. Mm-
hm.

JP: So, you would go there and you would, you would help do these, uh, tasks.

GN: Paintbrushes, I would take care of his paintbrushes, yeah. Because it was pretty di—
difficult to ask his employees, you know to, uh—well, what are we here for? To do a job, or to,
to—

JP: Wash.

GN: —clean paintbrushes, you know? So, I wouldn't mind. I would, uh—

JP: Where did he get his tools from? Were they, uh, from Montreal or from United States or
from Italy?

GN: The paintbrushes?

JP: The paintbrushes, the [unclear; 1:37:28.9]

GN: He would buy them here in Montreal. Where, I don't know.

JP: Okay, but they, they were local, his tools were local?

GN: Yeah, they ju—just, just were all, uh, local products.

??: I think Omer De Serres (?).

JP: Oh yes.

GN: Eh?

??: Omer De Serres.

GN: Omer De Serres, yeah.

??: Yeah.

GN: Omer De Serres, and there was another place. I forget now.

JP: There's another place they used to sell—

GN: Omer De Serres.

JP: —[unclear; finished blueprints; 1:38:00.2]?

GN: I think Omer De Serres at the time was on the corner of St. Denis (?)—

?: That's right.

GN: And St. Catherine's.

?: Yeah.

GN: And on St. Denis there's the, uh, polytechnical, uh, school.

?: Yeah.

GN: With the long [unclear; 1:38:13.1]. And the technical school was on Sherbourne Street (?).

JP: Did your father enjoy working with other Italian artists that were here at the time?

GN: Was he—

JP: Did your father enjoy working with other Italian artists that—

GN: Well, uh—

JP: —were there at the time?

GN: He didn't mind, as long as, uh, he—they had what Dad—oh, how could—as long as they would, they would be in a position to help Dad, that's all—he didn't mind the nationality, oh no. Well, he had a German, uh, uh, Dietrich. And the funny thing is his wife, first name was Marlene Dietrich, just like the actress, yeah. And then poor—oh, Dad, he says, "If all my men were like Mr. Dietrich." He was very disciplined, you know? And, uh, minding your own business, very clean, nice-looking man. Then he was called back to Germany, him and his wife. And Dad wrote to him. And, uh, they answered, they replied, but a lot of the lines were, uh—

JP: Blacked out.

GN: Black—yeah.

JP: Did your father have anything to do after with the Italian elite in Montreal afterwards, whether it was the consulates or, um—

GN: No.

JP: He, uh, he still—he stayed away from, uh—

GN: That's right.

JP: —that circle, he just continued concentrating—

GN: No, he had his work, that was enough for him, you know? And, uh—

JP: He wasn't out at special events, uh—

GN: No, no, no. He was—Dad was a rather shy man, yeah, yeah.

JP: Well, I don't—is there anything else that you want to add, 'cause I—

GN: Well, it's up to you. Ask me all the questions you want, maybe—

JP: Well, we'll take a break, thank you.

GN: Uh—

JP: You, um—

[Fades out at 1:39:52.0]

[Fades in at 1:39:53.0]

JP: —put it to you on camera.

AR: We're recording?

JP: [Laughs] George, I want to thank you so much for [unclear; 1:39:57.8]

GN: Oh well, listen, it's—

JP: It's a real honour.

GN: The pleasure is ours.

JP: Well, thank you.

GN: As long as it—if we were of—able to help you in your project, uh, the—

JP: Yeah.

GN: —the realization of your project, it's fine and dandy.

JP: Well, thank you very much.

GN: Why not? Instead of you, it could have been me, you know? So, uh, uh—

JP: Thank you.

GN: Here comes the occasion to be useful, well, don't let it go by.

JP: Yeah.

GN: You know, that's the way I am.

[Fades out at 01:40:25.7]

[End of interview]