

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

**DATE OF INTERVIEW:** May 21, 2011

**LOCATION OF INTERVIEW:** Hamilton, ON

**NAME OF INTERVIEWEE:** Fernanda Colangelo

**NAME OF INTERVIEWER:** Nadia Mior

**NAME OF VIDEOGRAPHER:** Vikki Cecchetto

**TRANSCRIBED BY:** Elissa D'Souza

**DATE TRANSCRIBED:** December 2011

**ACCESSION No.:** ICEA2011.0023.0001

**PROJECT NOTE:**

**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 have not edited this transcript for errors.**

**ABSTRACT**

Fernanda Colangelo is the wife of internee, Berlino Colangelo, who was interned in Petawawa by the Canadian government for roughly two years. Fernanda was born and raised in Hamilton, where she met her husband. She recalls the events of Berlino's internment, which occurred before they were married, and while she was still in high school. Their families knew each other at the time, and she describes the East End Hamilton community as being very closely involved with the church. She notes how the community was very upset and sad, and how people were afraid to mix in groups for fear of being rounded up. Fernanda describes how Berlino was heavily involved in the community via various organizations like the church, the Sons of Italy and the *Fascista* Club, which likely accounted for his arrest and internment. Although the family was never allowed to visit him at the camp, Berlino kept in contact with his father via letters.

Fernada further describes the activities that the internees were involved in at the internment camp to keep themselves occupied, such as cooking, woodworking, singing and playing cards. She believes that the internees were not treated badly, as they were given three meals a day and a comfortable place to sleep. However, after their release from camp, many found it difficult to find work, and had to rely on both welfare support from the Canadian government, and assistance from the Hamilton community churches. Fortunately, Berlino was able to get a job right away, and they were married a year after his release. Overall, Fernada notes that the emotional impact of the internment process for internees and their families alike was very difficult, but the will to survive and move forward prevailed.

#### **INTERVIEW**

**FC: Fernada Colangelo, interviewee**

**NM: Nadia Mior, interviewer**

**VC: Vikki Cecchetto, videographer**

[Title screen]

[Camera fades in at 00:00:11]

NM: All right, good afternoon I'm Nadia and, I'm here in Hamilton. And, could you give us your full name please.

FC: Fernada...Colangelo.

NM: And Fernada were you born here in Hamilton?

FC: Yes I was.

NM: And where did you, grow up as a child? Where did you live? In what neighbourhood?

FC: I lived...um...the East End, like Barton and Sherman area, yeah. When I was born, I was born on Beach Road, in the hospital but [laughs]...

NM: [laughs]

FC: ...but you know...yeah. [laughs]

NM: And, when did your parents arrive in Canada?

FC: My father, came, in 1906. He stayed for awhile...and then, he went back to Italy, and got married [giggles]. And then, uh he came back here, here, and called for, his, for my mother and my sister. That was in, 1920.

NM: Hmm...in 1920.

FC: Yeah.

NM: And can you tell us a little about yourself...

FC: [laughs]

NM: ...growing up here in Hamilton?

FC and VC: [laughs]

FC: Well, I gr- I grew—I was born here of course, and I grew up in the East End, of the city [clears throat]. I went to school...[swallows] at St. Anne’s, and I went to Cathedral High School...

NM: Ohhh...

FC: [laughs]...and Cathedral Commercial. Yeah.

NM: Hmm, hmm.

FC: Then after that, I got a job, in the, International, Harvester...

NM: —Ohhhhhh...

FC: ...Office.

NM: Okay. Hmm, hmm.

FC: Yeah. And I worked there for a while. Then I got married, and I quit work. [Smiles]

NM: [laughs] There’s enough work at home.

FC: And I used to play the organ...

NM: Ohh...

FC: ...at St. Anthony's.

NM: Ohhh...

FC: And, my husband, used to be a choir member.

VC: Is that—

NM: —That would be—

VC: —That's how you got to know him.

FC: Yeah, and, I just had the, the one sister...and, she, she went to school here was, because she came over, when she was 10.

NM and VC: Hmm, hmm.

FC: And, she went to school here, and uh, then, she became a nun.

NM: Ohhh...

FC: Yeah.

NM: Yeah...okay...

FC: She was a, sister of St. Joseph.

NM: Okay...

FC: Yeah.

NM: Very good.

FC: Yeah.

NM: Now, your husband, um...was the one interned. Could you give us his full name?

FC: Berlino...Colangelo.

VC: And...did you know him before—when he was interned...how old were you, at the time?

[Long pause]

NM: Um...how, how old were you when uh—

FC: —That was 1940...

NM: —Fourty, yeah.

FC: I was born in 20...1922, so I was 17.

NM: Okay.

FC: Yeah.

NM: So you weren't married yet?

FC: No.

NM: No.

FC: We weren't married. I was going to high school.

NM: Ohh.

FC: But the families, knew each other...

NM: Okay.

FC: ...because we were paesani. Like, I was born here, but everybody else from my family, was born in Italy...

NM: Okay.

FC: ...and they were born, from the same hometown...

NM: Okay.

FC: ...so that's how we knew, you know, knew in the community.

NM: Hmm, hmm.

VC: When did uh, when did Berlino come here? When did Berlino come to Canada?

FC: Nineteen...[struggles to remember]...13...1913.

NM: Thirty.

VC: Wow, 1930?

NM: Nineteen thirty he came.

FC: Nineteen thirty, sorry.

NM: That's okay.

FC: Nineteen thirty.

NM: Not a problem.

FC: I know there was...

NM: And so, do you remember—you were in high school but do you remember...that day that uh they were rounding up people? Do you remember...

FC: Yeah. [nods head]

NM: ...the events of that day...



FC: Yeah...

NM: ...and what happened?

FC: ...because, you know, we were...[clears throat]...we were involved with the church a lot,  
you know...

NM: Hmm, hmm.

FC: ...because, years ago, that's where the community...

NM: Yeah.

FC: ...used to meet.

NM: Yeah.

FC: And, we, we used to go to evening mass, and the priest was very upset. He was uh Father  
Mascaria—

NM: —Okay.

FC: ...at the time. And, he, he was really upset. And so were, the, the people too...

NM: —Hmm, hmm.

FC: ...they were afraid to go out they were afraid, to mix in groups you know.

NM: Hmm, hmm.

FC: But uh...that uh, you know, everybody was sad...

NM: Hmm, hmm.

FC: ...and upset. [Clears throat] And they were wondering who's going to be the next one?

NM: Hmm, hmm. Hmm, hmm.

VC: When did you find out that Berlino had been picked up?

FC: Oh, the same day.

NM: The same day. How did you find out?

FC: Well, through the community.

NM and VC: Okay.

FC: The Italians.

NM: Hmm, hmm.

FC: You know, because, we all lived...in, uh, in one area...

NM: --Hmm, hmm.

FC: ...four or five streets were, all paesani.

NM: Yeah.

FC: And that's how we found out.

NM: Very good.

FC: Yeah.

NM: Now do you remember where they took Berlino?

FC: Well, they—first they took him to, I think the...the jail, here, in Hamilton.

NM: Hmm, hmm.

FC: And then, they were transferred to Toronto.

NM: Hmm, hmm. Hmm, hmm.

FC: And from Toronto, they...bro-brought him to Petawawa. [Voice breaks]

NM: Right.

FC: And that's where he stayed until he was released.

NM: Okay. Now did his—was his family allowed to go and visit?

FC: No.

NM: Anytime...

FC: No.

NM: Like... [Unclear]

FC: No.

NM: And did they keep in touch with him while he was...?

FC: They kept in touch. [Clears throat] His father [swallows], his father was here at the time, but his mother and brother were still in Italy.

NM and VC: Ohh.

VC: Okay.

FC: So, he kept in touch with the father. I mean the father...[clears throat] you know, he couldn't, read or write too well...

NM: Ohh.

FC: ...but he had people...w-work for him...

NM: Right.

FC: ...you know.

NM: [unclear]

VC: Did the father have uh, was the father picked up or did he have to...

FC: No.

VC: ...did he have to go and register with the police or...

FC: No I don't remember whether he had to go, but he wasn't a person that was involved...

VC: Okay.

FC: ...too much in the community. He would go to their...meetings maybe, but he didn't really, really associate, too much.

NM: Hmm, hmm. And what about Berlino, was he involved with...

FC: —Oh my goodness yeah. [Laughs]

NM: ...the organization. [Laughs]

FC: I think he, he was on every committee [laughs] going...

NM: Was he? [Laughs]

FC: ...going. The church...

NM: Hmm, hmm.

FC: ...the Sons of Italy, Doppolofofor [?], and uh—well they call it the Fascista [?] Club here...

NM: Hmm, hmm.

FC: ...you know. They were, they he was involved with everything.

NM: Hmm. Was he ever told why he had been arrested? Before or during or after, was he ever told why he was picked up?

FC: Well, the only thing was, with those letters...that he was born in Italy, that he was a member, of the Fascista [?] Club, and that he was a member, of the Doppolofofor [?].

NM: Hmm.

FC: Yeah.

NM: Hmm. Umm. W-was the fa-, was his father told when he would be arriving back from camp?

FC: No, I don't think so.

NM: No.

FC: No. No.

VC: How long was he in the, the uh...

FC: —In the camp?

VC: Yeah, in camp?

FC: Well, he [clears throat], he was released uh, the third I think the third of March...

VC: Yeah.

FC: ...1942...

VC: Okay, so he was...[unclear]

FC: ...but he was arrested...um...um...in July.

VC: June, July...

NM: Yeah.

FC: ...1940.

VC: Right.

FC: Yup. So he was there all that time.

NM: Did you uh hear about what activities they did at the camp? Did he...?

FC: Oh yeah, we heard about it.

NM: Hmm, hmm.

FC: They, they, uh...they did a lot of their own cooking.

NM: Hmm, hmm.

FC: They, they would go out to the, what they called the bush, into the forest... [Laughs]

NM and VC: [laughing]

FC: ...to call, to...cut down wood the trees.

NM: Hmm, hmm.

FC: And uh...they, they also had like, a choir group.

NM: Ohh...

FC: You know. They sang, and they, he, he used to play the guitar.

NM: Ohh...



FC: And, they used to at night they'd get together, and, play cards, and sing, and do activities to keep them busy.

NM: Hmm, hmm. And do crafts or paintings like you, were showing.

FC: Well—yeah, you, you had to be, a, a painter.

VC: Yeah.

FC: Not—they did woodwork...

VC: Hmm, hmm.

NM: Oh, okay.

FC: ...actu— [unclear] like a, like a sawed [?] wood...

NM: Yeah.

FC: ...that was that showed [unclear] [laughs]

NM: Hmm....

FC: Yeah, they did, they did a lot of woodwork...

NM: Yeah.

FC: ....to keep busy.

NM: Yeah.

[TIME: 10:16]

NM: Did you uh, did Berlino bring back any of those—?

FC: —No.

NM: No he didn't.

FC: Yeah, he did bring back. It's in the picture.

NM: Okay.

FC: Yeah.

VC: Probably... [Unclear]

FC: —That's one thing he brought back.

VC: Yeah.

FC: Yeah.

VC: Good.

NM: So did your husband talk about the experiences what it was like...how he was treated? Did he ever, talk about that?

FC: [clears throat] I don't think they were treated too badly. You know, the-I guess they made sure that they had, three meals a day and, you know, comfortable pl-place to sleep. But, no not, not really.

NM: Hmm, hmm.

FC: No. They were treated pretty well.

NM: Hmm, hmm. And did he talk about uh what had happened in the camps when he came back, uh...with you or, with his father, did he talk about it uh afterwards?

FC: Well, he talked about, mostly about what I just said.

VC: Oh yeah.

FC: All about that stuff.

NM: Hmm, hmm.

FC: You know.

NM: And, did your husband know other, people from Hamilton at the camp?

FC: Oh yeah.

NM: So...[unclear]

FC: There was a lot of them. I don't remember exactly how many, but they all knew each other.

NM: Hmm, hmm.

FC: Yeah, and they also, there was also people there from Montreal.

NM: Okay.

FC: Yeah. And there was a priest there, whose name...[swallows] his name was Father Maltempi.

NM: Ohh.

FC: Yeah, it's too bad I don't have any extra stuff...

NM and VC: Yeah.

FC: ...about him.

NM: Hmm.

FC: But if I ever do come across, I can always...

NM: —Yes!

FC: ...get it to you.

NM and VC: Yes, absolutely. [Laughs]

FC: Hmm.

VC: Did he keep in touch with the other internees after—?

FC: Oh yeah, yeah.

VC: Did he talk about...?

FC: Father—the priest here, the Italian priest here, at St. Anthony's Parish Father Scarab. I don't know how he got in touch with this, Father Maltempi, but he w-, came here.

NM: Ohh.

FC: He ate at our house.

NM and VC: Oh wow.

FC: Yeah...my husband invited him.

VC: So when did you get married?

FC: July the 10, 1943.

VC: Wow...

NM: —A year after.

VC: ...so a year after he was—

FC: —A year after.

VC: —A year after he came back.

FC: Yeah, yeah.

VC: Wow. That's very good.

NM: Very good. Do you remember what it was like for...um, your father-in-law when when Berlino was at camp, um...what it was like for your father-in-law, to be left in—

FC: —Well, [clears throat] he, he wasn't an educated person, but it upset him.

NM: Hmm, hmm.

FC: It upset him to think that his, son [voice breaks] was arrested.

NM: Yes. Yeah. Hmm, hmm.

FC: Um.

VC: Do you want to take a little break?

FC: Huh?

VC: Do you want to take a little break?

FC: Just...

VC: ...A water break?

NM: Yeah...

FC: Jus--

[Camera fades out at 00:13:15]

[Camera fades in at 00:13:16]

NM: Okay...

FC: Well I remember [clears throat], I was going to high school...

VC: Hmm, hmm!

FC: And there was a girl, who'd, who really...kind of...she would call us names.

VC: Hmm, hmm. Not nice names.

NM: [laughs]

FC: Not nice names.

NM and VC: [laughs]

FC: Yeah. Si—

VC: And, and was it difficult for the families who had people interned, uh was it difficult for them to find work, umm...

FC: —Yeah.

VC: ...the Italians.

FC: Yeah, a lot of them, yeah a lot of them had trouble finding work. You know.

VC: So how would they be able to live?

FC: Well a lot of them had to go on welfare.

VC: Okay, and were they able to get uh welfare from the government?

FC: Yeah.

VC: Okay.



FC: Yeah. I remember that. Yeah. And the women, were left, holding, holding the bag as it were.

VC: Hmm, hmm.

FC: They, they tried to find work...

VC: Hmm, hmm.

FC: ...and, you know, that's the way they could survive.

VC: Yeah.

FC: And then, not only that but the families helped each other.

VC and NM: Yeah.

FC: They helped each other.

VC: What about uh—

NM: That's a good thing.

VC: —What about the church? What about uh St. Anthony's...

FC: —Yeah.

VC: ...and...

FC: —Yeah.

VC: All Souls?

FC: —Yeah.

VC: Were they helping too—?

FC: They, they did what they could for the families help them out. Yeah, both, both ca—both Italian churches.

VC: Hmm, hmm. Hmm, hmm. That's good.

NM: Now do you remember—as a teenager again—when...Berlino came back after he was released, do you remember, what it was like, when he did come back to Hamilton?

FC: Yeah, oh yeah [laughs].

VC: When you found out. [laughs]

NM: When you found out. [laughs]

FC: He—his father of course, and Berlino, were boarding, at an It—at a family. And, actually they were related to us.

NM: Okay.

FC: Yeah. A-the, the lady, was my father's cousin, that, you know, those days...

NM: Hmm, hmm.

FC: ...the women weren't here yet but the men boarded...

NM: Right.

FC: ...with Italian families.

NM: Hmm, hmm.

FC: And of course, that was a big part...[laughs]

NM and VC: Yeah. [Laughs]

FC: [laughs]...when we get along. Everybody visited.

NM: Hmm, hmm.

FC: Yeah.

NM: Hmm. Hmm.

[Long pause]

NM: And did he, was he able to go back to...uh...to the same work that he had before?

FC: [wipes eye with tissue] Yeah. Yup, yup, right away.

NM: And where did he work—?

VC: —So what did he—?

FC: Coch[?] [Unclear]

NM: Hmm...

FC: Cabe—it's now, known as Cabage Close. [?]

NM: Hmm.

FC: Yeah.

NM: So he managed to find work after.

FC: But he, they took him back right away.

[Long pause]

NM: Do you remember, your husband talking about the whole experience?

FC: Well...[clears throat]

NM: What his thoughts wore-were about it?

FC: You know, as an Italian, he was very proud...[voice breaks] of being an Italian. [Sadly] And to have something like this happen, was, sort of, degrading.

NM: Hmm, hmm.

FC: You know. They, they weren't happy about it.

NM: Hmm, hmm.

FC: But uh, they he came out, he survived.

NM: Hmm, hmm.

FC: Yeah. They, they tried to survive while they were there keep active and, you know.

NM: Hmm, hmm.

VC: Hmm, hmm. Pick up...where they left off. [Laughs]

FC: Pick up [scoffs]...more or less.

NM: Yeah.

FC: Yeah.

NM: Yeah.

FC: Yeah.

NM: And what about your thoughts on, on the whole experience?

FC: Oh my goodness!

NM and VC: [laughs]

FC: It wa-it was awful in those days.

NM: Hmm, hmm.

FC: The people—you know, you got together, that's all you talked about. And, of course they...some of them had an idea, of why, they were picked up and who was behind it.

NM: Hmm, hmm.

FC: And, this, this really upset them.

NM: Hmm, hmm. Hmm, hmm. Hmm, hmm.

VC: What else would you like, uh, other people to know about this time about this experience?

FC: Well, I would say they survived.

NM and VC: Hmm, hmm.

FC: They, they made—it was very bad...

NM: Hmm, hmm.

FC: ...you know, they were very sad, and upset, because the husbands had been taken away, and, they, they were young families...

NM and VC: Right.

FC: ...you know. They weren't, they weren't like older people, they were mid-middle-aged men...

NM: Hmm, hmm.

FC: ...and families had to survive as best as they could...

NM: Hmm, hmm.

FC: ...and, they, they were very upset about it.

NM: Hmm, hmm. And, and did eh, had do you known any other uh people in your neighbourhood that uh that had also been picked up?

FC: Oh yeah, oh yeah.

NM: Yeah. Were they many in your neighbourhood?

FC: Pardon?

NM: Were there very many in your neighbourhood who were picked up?

FC: Well there were quite a few.

NM: Hmm, hmm.

FC: Yeah, yeah.

NM: Interesting.

FC: And relatives too.

NM: Who else—wha-what other relatives of uh...?

FC: Well, uh, one of them was Antonio Olivieri.

NM: Hmm, hmm.

FC: He was related to us...

NM: Hmm, hmm.



FC: ...because of his wife. And uh...and then there, there were a lot of paisan. The paisani, that all came from Caliono T [unclear].

NM: Ohh...all right.

FC: But then there were other sections of Italy too. There were Sicilians, Marc [?] Calabrese, and, they, they, while they were in the camp, they made friends.

NM: Hmm, hmm.

FC: There were people there that they didn't know, that they became friends. And afterwards they kept up the relationship.

NM: Oh that's good.

FC: Yeah, oh yeah.

VC: So that's good.

FC: They always...yeah.

NM: Now you said you had the priest that was in the uh camp, uh...

FC: Yeah.

NM: ...come to your uh, come to your house.

FC: Yeah.

NM: And what—did, did he talk about the, the experience?

FC: Well, he—they didn't talk too much about it.

NM: Okay.

VC: Hmm, hmm.

FC: Yeah, they sort of put it behind them.

NM: Okay.

VC: Hmm, hmm.

FC: You know.

NM: Okay. Well, anything else—

VC: --I don't know...

NM: --that you want us to, to, to know that you want to talk about?

VC: [laughs]

FC: [Looks sideways, away from the camera and smiles] And... [Continues to smile with no response]

NM: Oh it—it's good, it's very good—

VC: —It's very good—

FC: [nods head and smiles] Hmm, hmm.

NM: ...what you've, what you've done.

FC: Hmm, hmm.

NM: Is there anything else that...?

VC: No?

FC: [raises eyebrows, smiles and shrugs one shoulder]

VC: We'll take pictures of your...[unclear].

NM: Okay—

VC: —Well thank-you very much!

NM: —great—!



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FC: You're welcome.

[Camera fades out at 00:20:27]

**[End of Interview]**