BEHIND BARBED WIRE

Creative Works on the Internment of Italian Canadians
Acknowledgements

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In April 2011, the Association of Italian Canadian Writers (AICW), in partnership with Guernica Editions and Accenti Magazine, undertook a national literary project to increase public awareness about the internment of Italian Canadians during the Second World War. During this period, about 7,000 Italian Canadians were identified as enemy aliens and obliged to report regularly to the RCMP. Approximately 600, almost all men, were sent to internment camps in Alberta, Ontario, Quebec and New Brunswick. None of the internees was ever charged, yet some were held for more than three years. The internment years not only impacted the families of the interned, it slowed the progress of the entire Italian Canadian community for decades.

Behind Barbed Wire is a collection of short fiction, memoir, poetry, drama and visual art inspired by the internment. Beyond Barbed Wire, a co-publication with Columbus Centre of Toronto, is a collection of essays examining the internment from historical, social, literary, and cultural perspectives. The volumes are simultaneously published as print and e-books. A series of articles in Accenti Magazine previewed the two companion volumes, launched across Canada in March 2012. The project is funded by the Minister of Citizenship and Immigration Canada (Community Historical Recognition Program — CHRP).

We are extremely proud of our literary project, which was completed in record time. By breaking the silence of past decades, our project bridges the generations and encourages a better understanding of the past so as to avoid repeating the same mistakes.
This project has also given us a unique opportunity to build bridges between individuals and communities across Canada, while emphasizing the endeavours of creative writers, artists and scholars who often work on the periphery of the Italian Canadian community. Let us continue to build bridges. Let us work together on new ventures, not only among writers and artists, but also with other Italian Canadians and organizations at large.

Note: Style choices are those of the individual contributors.

—The Editors
Although their body of works is relatively new, Canadians of Italian origin have influenced the evolution of writing and literary criticism in Canada. In 1978, the publication of Pier Giorgio Di Cicco’s anthology *Roman Candles* brought together previously unheard solitary voices and, by so doing, gave a sense of direction to Italian Canadian writers. Before the 1980s, Italians in Canada wrote in isolation. Since the 1980s, the appearance of specific collections and anthologies has had an important impact on the visibility of the Italian Canadian community’s literary voices. Some of these titles include *La Poesia italiana nel Quebec* (Caticchio 1983), *Quêtes: Textes d’auteurs italo-québécois* (D’Alfonso, Caccia 1983), *Italian Canadian Voices* (Morgan Di Giovanni 1984 and 2010), *Ricordi: Things Remembered* (Minni 1989), *Contrasts: Comparative Essays on Italian-Canadian Writing* (Pivato 1991), *Echo: Essays on Other Literatures* (Pivato 1994), *Social Pluralism and Literary History* (Loriggio 1996), *The Anthology of Italian-Canadian Writing* (Pivato 1998), *Pillars of Lace: The Anthology of Italian-Canadian Women Writers* (De Franceschi 1998), *Sweet Lemons* (2004) and *Sweet Lemons 2* (Fazio, De Santis 2010).

A number of national magazines have focussed on issues of a literary and intellectual nature, thus providing a forum for Italian Canadian writers: *Vice Versa* (1983 to 1997), *Eyetalian* (1993 to 1998) and *Accenti Magazine* (since 2002). Publishing houses have also contributed to the evolution of Italian Canadian letters. Since 1978, Guernica Editions has published over 400 titles and 500
the “shame surrounding the subject” that lasted decades, thereby discouraging discussion and writing on the internment. “In the Italian community where I grew up,” says Mazza, “people knew about the camps. They would whisper about it, but not talk openly. They tried to keep it a secret ...” (“City of a Perilous Legacy”).

This volume, Behind Barbed Wire, presents fiction and nonfiction, poetry and drama, and visual art — works which bring to life the internment of Italian Canadians. Through words and images, writers and visual artists attempt to reconstruct a hidden past and give a voice to those who were silenced by shame or the inability to speak up. These works interpret the painful reality that Italians in Canada lived during, and after, the period of the internment.

The titles of poems included in this volume clearly indicate the emotion and climate of the period: Giulia De Gasperi’s “Pensieri / Worries,” Loretta Gatto-White’s “Strangers,” Domenico Capilongo’s “hour of the round up” and “nessun dorma.” In his poem “Horses for Mussolini,” Frank Giorno pays homage to internee James Franceschini.

Pietro Corsi introduces us to Roberto Pio Cassanelli, a body builder and dance teacher, who was interned on St. Helen's Island. Mélanie Grondin contributes letters written by Guido Nincheri, the “Michelangelo of Montreal,” while he was interned. “Of all the humiliating moments Italian-Canadian artist Guido Nincheri may have gone through in his life, this was surely the most humiliating one of all, because he never, ever told his family,” writes Grondin. In “Dancing with the Devil,” Anna Foschi Ciampolini writes about Vancouver’s Italian Canadians affected by the internment. As one interviewee says:

“Those were difficult times for our community ... The RCMP came to arrest some of those poor fellows. Most people in

our community were just busy working at two or three jobs trying to save money, rather than meddle with politics, but that’s how it was.” He paused for a moment, and then added: “Yes, that’s how it was. It was a long time ago. Anyway, they were not mistreated in those camps. Maybe it’s better not to talk about it anymore.”

Joseph Ranallo’s “Remembrance Day,” is about remembering those who experienced war in different parts of the world and looking towards a future of peace. The story also illustrates the resignation and resentment which the internment elicits. Mr. Canesi’s comment, “They were good to me” at Camp Petawawa, provokes an angry response:

“How can you say that?” John Battista retorted. “They took away your most prized possession, your freedom. You had no criminal record. You were almost born here. You spent most of your life in Canada. You were the Consulate's representative. There isn’t another person in Trail who is more loyal to Canada than you are. They used the War Measures Act to arrest you without cause and without reason. You should be furious.”

“Hello to Our Friends, If There Are Any Left,” by Paula Masiocli and Giulia De Gasperi, tells the life story of Paula’s grandfather, internee Leo Masiocli. A creative nonfiction account, it is a good example of an internee’s desire to bury his experience. The story is inspired by an old box of documents and letters that Paula Masiocli found in her mother’s basement. From this box of papers, Paula pieced together what happened years ago and recreated an episode in the life of the grandfather she never met.

Delia De Santis’ story — “An Ordinary and Innocent Outing” — illustrates the uncertainty and fear of the early days when
men left their home on a regular outing and did not return. Venera Fazio’s “Song of My Heart” remembers those “more fortunate” individuals who were not interned but who had to report regularly to authorities. In his story “Where One Hears a Noise Like This,” Ernesto Livorni describes an internee’s despair as he is unable to comprehend his confinement and unable to reach his family. Terri Favro’s “Angel of Petawawa” recounts an Italian Canadian soldier’s journey home from Petawawa and the events surrounding a friend’s internment.

A number of excerpts from novels that set characters within the internment years are included in Behind Barbed Wire. In 1979, Elena Randaccio published Diario di una emigrante under the name E. MacRan. Diario di una emigrante is narrated by Climene, who describes in detail how her husband Beppe is taken away by two policemen and interned for three years. In his 2002 historical novel Down the Coaltown Road, Nova Scotia writer Sheldon Currie describes the struggle of Italians in industrial Cape Breton during the years of the internment. Rene Pappone contributes an excerpt of his forthcoming book The Italian which brings characters to life during the internment.

This volume also includes an excerpt from a film script that is set inside Camp Petawawa. In W.O.P.=P.O.W.: The Internment of Italian-Canadians During WWII, Gary Clairman and Michael Mirolla present a fictionalized account of the day-to-day life experienced by Italian-Canadian internees. Originally written in 1994, the script evokes humour as well as tragedy as the internees from all walks of life struggle to cope.

Julie Campagna presents sculptures which interpret the emotion associated with a difficult truth. “The challenge for me as a sculptor and observer is to try to find a way to relate to a world that feels worlds away,” says Campagna. And Darlene Madott introduces “Horses,” a pen and ink drawing by her late father John Madott, that celebrates the perseverance of Italians in helping create the Canada we know today.

No doubt, the internment years have influenced the identity of the Italian Canadian community and affected its progress. We cannot erase the painful experience of individuals and families, but we can grow as a community by revisiting and speaking about the period. In bringing together the works of established and emerging writers and artists to break the silence of past decades, Behind Barbed Wire bridges the generations. The many different contributions reflect the various ways of approaching the subject of the internment and commemorate those who suffered. The appearance of Behind Barbed Wire — and its companion volume of essays Beyond Barbed Wire — marks the passage of Italian Canadians from victims to agents of social change. The two volumes are important contributions to Canadian letters and to the history of Italian Canadians. They revisit a painful period so that we can all move forward.

Works Cited

Sculpting Truth: Introduction to the Sculptures

With thoughts of war in my mind, I looked for themes in my work that dealt with resilience and courage, fragility and sorrow, conflict and rage. Whether it is through countries, families, neighbours or oneself, the potential for war seems to lurk just beneath the surface of words.

The sculpture “Weapon” is about the repercussions of judgment. An exaggerated hand with a finger pointed in blame is propped and aimed like a rifle at the viewer. The figure is on the verge of falling backward, barely able to sustain the weight of this ridiculous body part.

In “Faces of Destruction,” I examine the idea of one who is unchangeable through a form that changes. A human body is constructed from a grenade and comes with pin, cap and removable heads. Regardless of which expressive head is threaded onto the grenade-body the outcome remains the same — the form is set to explode.

The two characters which make up “Company” are extreme opposites. One figure holds tightly to his being with suspicion in his eyes and nothing in his bowl, the other looks out wildly, in want, spiralling out of control. They are at odds with one another but are nonetheless couched together.

...
“Earth and Sky” is about perseverance: the figure looks out towards tomorrow yet feels the weight of yesterday in today’s heavy, useless, hands.

Reading can inspire thought. I seek out books to gain some sort of understanding about the world in which I live and the creature that I am. There are times when an author articulates what is in my mind even though I had never thought of it before, provides an insight so great that a truth is revealed — comforting or terrible. “Search and Rescue” is about that kind of discovery, that kind of power.
no one can sleep
without wives
without the touch
of lovers

the moon
an empty plate
is claimed by every man
in this forgotten moment

secrets of the heart whispered
to this lone luna

messages sent across kilometres
across cities of war
sealed in silent
starlight kisses
it’s time to dig up all your pomodori. turn the radios down low. take all your laundry off the line. hide the prosciutto under the bed. mop your floors and pull the curtains closed. it’s time to get nonna out of her black dress and tell her to stop humming tarantellas. burn all your letters and bury all the books in the backyard. talk with your hands stuck deep into your pockets. smile at all your neighbours without letting them see your teeth. lock your vino in cantinas and raise the union jack. it’s time for you to register. please don’t let the children know they are italian. the time has come for all of this.

they sent hundreds of italian men to petawawa. to sit out the war just in case they tried to start a revolution. just in case they turned the whole place upside down.

they sang on the train going up
sang in corners of the camp like shy birds
blew out a village tune at midday
threw together a mandolin band
plucked the corners of their hearts
like lost balding barbers of seville

at night without women no one slept
they hummed a baritone of blues
arias of ancient operas never written down

these spies
these forgotten fascists
of backyard gardens
and homemade wine
sang until il duce hanged
sang until the gates swung open
until they felt their wives
sleeping quietly beside them again
It was in the spring of 1959 that I first heard of the internment of Italian Canadians at the onset of the Second World War. I had recently arrived in Montreal, via Halifax, to work at the weekly newspaper *Il Cittadino Canadese*, then on St. Lawrence Blvd., across from Dante Street, in what was, and still is, the heart of the Italian community.

Founded in 1941 by Antonino Spada, the Italian language newspaper had recently been sold to Nick Ciamarra and, together with the travel agency and the print shop, to Emilio Putalivo, printer extraordinaire. Already well into his sixties, Spada was not one to sit idle and do nothing. His visits to the newspaper were a daily routine. So much so that, while dreading his presence, we would worry when he didn’t show up before noon.

Spada was well known for his anti-fascist sentiments and for his hatred of Mussolini’s dictatorship. This helped explain why, when other prominent Italian Canadians were forced to the internment camps, he was left alone and allowed to found the newspaper in time to cover the war in progress. He loved to chat and exchange views on the most important daily events, particularly those involving the Italian community. Above all, he delighted in saying this and that about what was being written in the pages of *Il Cittadino*. To be blunt, he liked to provide unrequested (but welcome) constructive criticism. He loved to do so in riddles, like
a good teacher or a good trainer would. And a teacher and a trainer he was. At least, that’s how I like to remember him. He was also a good community historian, as his book *The Italians in Canada* (Montreal, 1969) illustrates.

He loved to chat, as I said, but refused to freely talk about the internment of Italian Canadians during the Second World War. A horrible human injustice, he would say, if and when solicited. His attitude reflected the spirit of the community at the time: lay low, do not say more than you need to say about those sad days.

That was way back then — until November 1990, when Prime Minister Brian Mulroney saw fit to publically declare the internment an injustice, although not officially in parliament. Antonino Spada’s unspoken sentiments, and those of hundreds of thousands of Italian Canadians, were finally vindicated.

I left Montreal and did not hear again about the Canadian internment camps for enemy aliens until I came to California and ran into Roberto (Pio) Cassanelli. Upon learning that my first stepping stone into this continent had been Montreal, he commented: “I was there too — Camp 43 St. Helen’s Island, Enemy Alien prisoner No. 242.” Remembering Spada’s few words about the internment camps, I asked Cassanelli to tell me more about his experience in Camp 43. And he gladly did so, with the gentle words and manners that distinguished him throughout his life.

Born in Gussola (Cremona) in 1913, he was the last of ten siblings. His elder brother, Nino, had started working in hotels as *piccolo di camera* at the tender age of 12 and, when Roberto became of age, had already made a career in the hospitality industry. (He later became owner and operator of a fine hotel in Bordighera, a few steps away from the beach). He insisted that his younger brother follow in his footsteps and at age 16 sent him to work at the Hotel Savoia in Rome. After a few months, he dispatched Roberto to Tripoli, to work at the Grand Hotel there. Having gained more experience, he was first sent to Belgium at the Hotel de la Plage, and then to the Grand Hotel Britannique of Ostende.

Back in Italy, he happily wandered from Cortina d’Ampezzo’s Miramonti Majestic Hotel to the Majestic Hotel Diana of Milan; from the Excelsior in Florence to the Miramare Continental Palace in Sanremo; from Viareggio’s Grand Hotel to Salsomaggiore.

At the beginning of 1939 his destiny was to take him to London, where the hospitality industry thrived and life was good. Just what he had been looking for all along. His Alien Certificate of Registration No. 736439, issued on June 12, 1939, dates his arrival in Dover on March 14 of that year and residing at 14 Eatham Street W.C. 2, London.

London was to be quite good for him, away from the vigilant but loving supervision of his elder brother Nino. While working as a waiter at the Ivy Restaurant on West Street, he started training his body to become as strong as his mind. A London trade publication shows how he had been able to build his physique, with dumb-bells, to a fit “10 stone 7 lbs at 5’6” tall, expanded chest measurements 43.”

His happiness was not to last long, however. A diary written years later shows how he ended up at Camp 43 on St. Helen’s Island. This was an abandoned piece of real estate in Montreal that was later to become, together with the newly created Île Notre-Dame, the site for Expo ‘67.

At this point, let Roberto Pio Cassanelli tell the story of his confinement in Camp 43:

*One morning, Saturday June 15, 1940, at 7 am, two policemen picked me up at my house and took me to the police station. I will always remember their words: “Don’t worry fella, we don’t take too much time...*
with you, it’s only for questioning, which will take about a couple of hours.” That couple of hours was to be five long years. Not trusting them, I took with me a suitcase with all that I may have needed for a long time. On June 23 I was transferred to Burry Int. Camp and Wednesday July 3, at 10 am, I was dispatched to Liverpool for an unknown destination.

Locked behind bars in the bowels of a ship, together with 400 other unfortunate human beings, thirsty and famished having been fed raw potatoes on a daily basis, after 10 days we were told that we had reached our destination in Quebec, Canada. It was the 13th of July, 3 pm. We could consider ourselves lucky since another ship, the Arandora Star, carrying German and Italian prisoners, was torpedoed and sank.

(The British liner Arandora Star, 15,501 GW tons, was torpedoed by a German submarine and sank off the West Coast of Ireland, while carrying 1,500 German and Italian aliens to be interned in Canada. On board the vessel were also British soldiers acting as guards, a crew of about 300. No estimate of the total casualties has ever been released).

We left port by train for an unknown destination, escorted by fully armed soldiers. That same day, Saturday July 13th, 1940, 11 pm, we arrived at St. Helen’s Island Int. Camp 43, or Camp “S”, Montreal P.Q. We were badly treated. They looked at us as if we were animals, seated on the bare ground all night long with nothing to eat or drink. We couldn’t even talk to each other. Those who dared, including some priests who were with us, were brutally beaten.

We were made to undress, inspected one by one, and ordered to take a cold shower. They gave us prisoners’ garments, each with a number (mine was 242). Then they sent us to a big dormitory, gloomy and filthy: 400 people in such a small place, in which the most common decencies were minimal, with a courtyard no bigger than 100 meters. And to think that Canada is such a big country! It was shameful, to be treated without a glint of humanity, behind barbed-wire fence. In winter time, with all the ice and snow on the ground, we were forced to live indoors for weeks on end. It was not easy to get along: the more a man knows other human beings, the more he loves animals instead. We were kept in those conditions from that day in 1940 through 1943.

The camp was right across the city of Montreal, divided only by the St. Lawrence River. At night we could see the lights of the big city. Life must have been so nice there! On Sundays, while locked up in this cage like beasts, we could see people peacefully promenading on the bridge (Note: the Jacques Cartier Bridge). How bitter life was; and how odious the human being!

It was under these conditions that, three months later, I was informed of my mother’s death and, six months later, my father’s.

Summer 1943. Given the turn of events of the war in Europe, many prisoners were allowed to return to England, mostly Italians who were born there. We were transferred to Camp 70, Fredericton, where we arrived on November 4, at 6 pm. The camp was located in the middle of a forest, cool and humid. We lived in barracks together with Germans. There was a bit more space to move around in this camp. And, I have to say, though always a prisoner, I was in a privileged position since I was made in charge of the overall administration of the Italian internees.

July 1944. Casa Savoia made a turn-around during the night of the 24th. The Duce was arrested on the 25th, then freed by the Germans. He tried to escape to Switzerland, but was arrested again and killed by Italian partisans. The Italian armistice was signed September 3, 1944, to become effective Sept. 7th. We remained in Fredericton during 1943, ‘44 and ‘45, then German armistice, May 8th 1945, 3 pm: surrender without conditions. The commander of our camp gathered
all the prisoners to announce this big event. He told us that both Mussolini and Hitler had been defeated, and that Fascism was dead.

May 17 we were told that all civilians would be returned to the U.K. Friday May 18th, 1 am, we left Camp by bus and we arrived at St. Johns at 6 am. We left St. Johns at 7 am, arrived Halifax at 7 pm. At 8 pm we boarded the vessel “Ashton Castle” for the Trans-Atlantic crossing. The overall conditions were much better this time around. We arrived in Liverpool on Friday, June 1st, and disembarked at 5:45 am.

After touching English ground again after five long years, the moral and physical suffering of the last five years seemed a dream. I have often thought, since then, how can a human being survive through such ordeals. Dreams and nightmares. This horrible furrow forever embedded in my mind.

So, we disembarked at 5:45 and were conveyed to the Isle of Man, where we arrived the same day at 8 pm, Ramsey Camp “N”, House No. 10. On the 27th of July I was informed of my imminent release. I left camp on the 30th, and on Tuesday, August 1st 1945, 6 am, I left Ramsey. At 10 pm, August 1st, I was back in London and was able to resume work.

Years later, Roberto (Pio) Cassanelli moved to New York, where he worked at the Stork Club, at the Savoy Hotel and at the Ritz Tower. Then on to California, where he became a dance teacher and owner/operator of a dance studio in the San Fernando Valley under an Arthur Murray franchise. He passed away on Sept. 12, 2008.

Had Gelo visited the wash house on that day he would have seen the front page of the Sydney Post-Record that one of the miners nailed to the wall:

Rome, June 10 - (AP) - Italy joined Germany tonight in war against Great Britain and France.

Premier Mussolini made the announcement to Fascists gathered throughout Italy that the fateful declaration had been handed to the Allied ambassadors.

The formal welding of the Rome-Berlin axis in the steel of war was set officially for tomorrow, but Berlin reports claimed Italian troops already had entered France through the Riviera.

Gelo was never in the house when the news was on the radio. Like his father, he visited the house for bed and board. He saw the Newsreel Movietone News at the Savoy Theatre but he paid little attention to it. Sadie berated him for his inattention but he didn't care. He was called wop, dago, and bohunk more often now, and not so often in jest, but he brushed it off. He learned from his Indian friends how to deal with it. It was only scum. It washed off. It thickened your skin. He was content. He was not prepared for the shock of the afternoon. The shock of his life.
“Get in here and sit down,” he ordered Gelo. “At the table.”
“You, off your knees and sit at the table. And you Ceit, you get on the couch there by the stove.”
“Gelo, go get the priest,” Anna said in a stage whisper.
“Nobody goes anywhere. Sit and stay put.” The officer’s menacing mouth forced Gelo to a chair at the table.
“Where’s your husband?”
Anna stared. She’d heard rumours the Mounties would “round up the Italians” after Mussolini got in the war with Hitler. Was this it?
“Who wants to know?” Ceit shot at him from the couch where she’d sat herself down in an uncharacteristic moment of intimidation.
“I want to know,” the officer replied with an extra surge of menace.
“And who are you?”
“You know perfectly well who I am.”
“Yes, I know who you are you fat tub of lard. You’re the brave man that beat up that boy at the rink last Saturday. I suppose I should be scared too. I wouldn’t put it past you to beat up on a woman, if she wouldn’t be too big and tough for you.”
He turned to Anna. “Where’s your husband?”
“I don’t know.”
The Mountie put his hands on the table and leaned over Anna. She put her hands over her face, her elbows on the table. “Was he home today? He’s not at work.”
“He went to work.”
“You just said you didn’t know where he is.”
“I don’t know where he is. Did you try the Italian Hall?”
“What do you think?” The Mountie asked.
Ceit twisted her face in derision at his sarcasm. “Nice talk,” she said.

“What did he do?” Anna said.
“Nothing yet, I hope.”
“Nothing — what do you want with him?” Ceit demanded.
“Did you come bursting in here for nothing?”
The officer ignored Ceit. The second officer at the front door stood with his hands behind his back, barely able to conceal his embarrassment. He straightened up, pursed his lips and looked at the floor.
“If you know where he is you better tell us,” the officer, bending over Anna, talked to her ear. “If not, it’ll be so much the worse for him if we have trouble apprehending him. We’ve come to put him under arrest.”
“What did he do?” Anna spoke through her fingers.
“Nothing that we know about yet.”
“What are you doing here then?” Ceit demanded. The officer ignored her.
“He’s under arrest for nothing?” Anna asked.
“Suspicion,” the officer said.
“Suspicion of what?”
“Espionage.”
“What’s that?”
“Spying.”
“Spying? Tomassio? A spy?”
“Of course he’s a spy,” Ceit said. “I heard him just last week on the phone down at the Co-op. He was calling Mussolini. He was giving him the names of all the ball players on his team. And their middle initials. Come Christmas Benito’s going to send them all a card.”
“That’s enough out of you Ceit. Shut up.”
The noise from Anna’s breathing was beginning to get their attention, rasping over her throat on the way to her lungs and moaning through her nose on the way out. She put her hand over her heart. “Gelo,” she gasped, “go get my pills in the pantry.”
business up to a certain extent and even draw. (A sketch he drew of Camillien Houde at the camp became the latter’s campaign poster when Houde ran for mayor again in 1944.) Gabriel reported back to Nincheri on the different projects the studio was carrying out and Nincheri gave him instructions in the weekly letters he was allowed to send.

Other letters between Gabriel and a client, Reverend Laliberté of Église Saint-Mathieu in Central Falls, R.I., whom Nincheri was supposed to work for in August, show the amount of support the artist received from those who knew him best. Although Nincheri’s other son, George, remembers how the family was called names by neighbours and Father Vangelisti, parish priest at Madonna della Difesa at the time, recounts how the Mussolini fresco was completely covered “con grandi e lunghe strisce di carta.”

Nincheri himself had a lot of support. Gabriel’s letter to Reverend Laliberté, dated August 9, 1940, a few days after Nincheri’s arrest, mentions how Father Gauthier of Saint-Viateur d’Outremont and Secretary of State Pierre-François Casgrain were taking care of getting Nincheri out of Petawawa.

On September 17, 1940, Nincheri’s wife Giulia, his son Gabriel, their lawyer Jean L. Tarte and several witnesses — such as his former patron Marius Dufresne, the latter’s brother Candide Dufresne, and fellow artist Nicholas Petrucci — presented themselves at the Court of Enquiry presided by Honourable Judge H.A. Fortier to plead in Nincheri’s favour. Among the documents shown in court were the original sketches of the offending fresco that did not contain Mussolini. Over a month later, Nincheri was released.

Even then, it would seem that Nincheri didn’t give in to the horror of what had happened to him. Indeed, three days after his liberation, Nincheri wrote to Lt. Col. H.E. Pense, Camp Commandant of Petawawa, to thank him for his care and kindness and to promise him a painting. In a similar letter to Reverend Harrington (the priest in charge of the prisoners’ souls), Nincheri mentions, almost in passing, a few days of feeling depressed before his work was able to make him forget the camp “and the moral sufferances of the interned” (October 28, 1940). These events, however, had a greater impact on Nincheri’s life than the letters may indicate. The family was strictly forbidden from ever talking about it. Petawawa was to be forgotten.

*Please note: We wish to acknowledge the Nincheri family for kindly allowing us to reprint the following letters.*

**Guido Nincheri’s Letters To and From Petawawa**

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Mr. G. Nincheri,
4058 Ontario St. N.,
Montreal Que.

Dear Sir:

Enclosed please find cheque for $35.00. This being the amount to your credit on October 31st, 1940, on our books.

I hope by this time that you have arrived at your destination, and that the last three months will soon vanish from your memory.

Yours truly,

D. Ireland
Assistant Adjutant
Petawawa Internment Camp.
time of need, so many turned their back on him, denying their friendship. Few spoke up for him or said a good word. People crossed the streets to avoid meeting Leo and his family members.

I can’t stay here any longer. It hurts too much. I am going to Toronto. My heart is heavy now that I am making this decision, but staying here, seeing those faces of betrayal and having to face them every day, would hurt even more. Toronto is a big city.

Leo’s heart was heavy the day he left. And it stayed heavy for many more days after that.

• Hello to Our Friends if There Are Any Left was first published in Accenti Magazine’s Winter 2012 issue.

Gary Clairman & Michael Mirolla

W.O.P. = P.O.W.
THE INTERNMENT OF ITALIAN-CANADIANS DURING WWII
(Excerpt From A Film Script Written in 1991 – 92)

1. INT. — BEDROOM — NIGHT (DREAM SEQUENCE — IN BLACK & WHITE).

The screen is completely dark. Suddenly, two doors fly open — one at either side of the screen — and extremely bright light streams in. The light is broken only by the looming, exaggerated shadows of FOUR LARGE MEN: two at each door. NUNZIO TREMONTE bolts upright in bed shielding his eyes from the glare.

MAN (with voice that echoes)
Nunzio Tremonte! Are you Nunzio Tremonte? Nunzio Tremonte! (repeats)

The MAN continues to ask this question as he slowly walks towards the bed. At first, he is wearing a Gestapo uniform. But, by the time he gets to the side of the bed, it has become an RCMP uniform. NUNZIO opens his mouth to say something but nothing comes out. He looks with panic at the MAN standing at the side of the bed — then at the other THREE MEN, also in RCMP uniforms. They step forward as well and begin to repeat: “Nunzio Tremonte! Are you Nunzio Tremonte? Nunzio Tremonte!” Each shouts out the words so that, while one is finishing, another starts (like an absurd musical round). The wall lights up behind NUNZIO’S bed. On it are several faded portraits
showing a couple’s wedding day in what looks like a medieval village church. The portraits start to slip and tilt sideways.

NUNZIO (screaming)
Mamma!

There is the sound of shattering glass as the portraits hit the ground.

CUT TO:

2. INT. — ARENA — DAY (DREAM SEQUENCE CONT’D)

A confused NUNZIO stands, clothes in hand, wearing only his underwear. He is in a long line of men all in their underwear and all holding their clothes in front of themselves as if for protection. On either side of the men is a line of armed soldiers, keeping an angry crowd at bay. The space is gloomy and grey, filled with dust and wisps of fog. As the men move slowly forward, jeers and insults can be heard coming from the crowd: Go Home, Jackals; Wop Traitors; Fascist Pigs; Go Back to Italy, You Scumbag Peasants. As NUNZIO approaches the front of the line, he sees a LITTLE BOY dressed in a sailor’s suit sitting at a huge desk. The MAN ahead of NUNZIO in the line stops at the desk.

LITTLE BOY (mixture of arrogance and petulance)
And what’s your name?

MAN (timidly)
Capobianco, Vittorio.

The LITTLE BOY stares up for a moment.

LITTLE BOY (gleefully)
Capo-Bianco, your mother stank-o; you’re a fascist-commie-pinko: Petawawa’s the only place-o for such a dirty, ignorant woppo!

The MAN puts his hands together as if to plead for mercy. But he suddenly vanishes.

LITTLE BOY (Cont’d) (peevishly)
Who is next? Come on, come on. We haven’t got all war, you know.

A trembling NUNZIO steps forward.

LITTLE BOY (Cont’d)
Name?

NUNZIO
Tremonte, Nunzio.

LITTLE BOY (excited)
Mr. Tremonte!

LITTLE BOY climbs off his chair and comes around the desk. He takes NUNZIO by the hand.

LITTLE BOY (Cont’d)
There’s been a terrible mistake, Mr. Tremonte. A terrible mistake.

LITTLE BOY starts to lead NUNZIO away — towards a door flooded with daylight.
the business. He is taking care of things and the workers are still making the best cheese in Ontario. I think he's planning to send some to the camp.

I love you, Antonio. We are waiting anxiously for your return.

_Mille baci ed abbracci_,
Angelina

... ... ...

With the help of his lawyer, Antonio filed a Notice of Objection against the detention Order of the Minister of Justice under Regulation 21 of the Defence of Canada Regulations.

In preparation for the proceedings Bellows obtained a document from the Department of Justice in Ottawa citing the specifics of Antonio's detention. It read:

The authorities have reason to believe that you were a member of the Italian Fascio Abroad, which Organization was declared illegal in Canada by Order-in-Council P.C. 2537, dated June 12, 1940, and you have, therefore, been detained to prevent you from acting in any manner prejudicial to the welfare of the State.

_The Particulars of the Reason for Detention:_
1. That you were a member of the Italian Fascio Abroad and particularly the Goldfields section of the Don Cesare Caravadosi Fascio of North Bay;
2. That you organized meetings of the Fascio at the Italian Club of Goldfields; and
3. That you took part in the activities of the Fascio which was declared illegal in Canada by Order-in-Council dated June 12, 1940.

In his submission, Bellows provided a summary of Antonio’s life in Canada, and attached as exhibits statutory declarations and letters from prominent citizens as well as news clippings attesting to his good citizenship and generosity:

- Mr. Leone organized the Italian community’s participation in the Town of Goldfields’ celebration of the coronation of King George the Sixth;
- One week before his arrest, he organized a dinner to honour Goldfields boys who were on their way to Toronto to enlist in the Canadian army, and gave each of them a lighter inscribed with their names;
- Mr. Leone arranged a spaghetti supper at the Italian Club to raise funds for the Canadian Red Cross;
- L&D Cheese, of which Mr. Leone is a co-owner, furnished a room at the Goldfields Hospital and paid for a playground at the Children’s Aid Society;
- Every year, L&D donates money and cheese to service clubs that provide hampers of food for poor families at Christmas;
- Mr. Leone made generous donations to the building funds of the Catholic Church and the Salvation Army.
- There is no evidence to suggest that Mr. Leone took part in activities of the Fascio or any other Italian organization that might be of a subversive character. He was too busy attending to the business of L&D Cheese and taking care of his family and the Italian Club.
Julie Campagna
Julie Campagna lives in Toronto and has been a sculptor since graduating from the Ontario College of Art and Design in 1991. In 2001 she established Campagna Bronze Studio Gallery which offers a unique window into the sculpting process and the opportunity to learn wax carving. Campagna’s sculptures are in private and corporate collections world wide. “My quest for clarity in this tangled existence is why my ideas take form,” says Campagna. “I persist in creating sculpture with the intention to provoke and through the process find a kind of liberation for and from myself.” Her work can be viewed at www.campagnabronze.com.

Licia Canton
Licia Canton is the author of Almond Wine and Fertility (2008) — stories for women and their men. She is also a literary critic and translator, and the editor-in-chief of Accenti — the Canadian magazine for lovers of all things Italian. As editor she has published several collections, including The Dynamics of Cultural Exchange, Adjacencies: Minority Writing in Canada, and Reflections on Culture. A member of the Writers’ Union of Canada, she is currently President of the Association of Italian Canadian Writers. She holds a Ph.D. from Université de Montréal. She lives in Montreal with her husband and three children.

Domenico Capilongo
Domenico Capilongo lives in Toronto. He teaches high school creative writing and practices karate. He has had work published
director and in operational planning. *The Italian* is Pappone’s fourth book. He resides in Gatineau, Quebec.

**Joseph Ranallo**
Born in Vinchiaturo, Molise, Joseph Ranallo emigrated to Rossland, British Columbia in 1952. He holds a B.A. (Honors English, University of Victoria) and an M.A. (English, Washington State University). He is a B.C. qualified, practicing Acupuncturist. He has taught and been an administrator at the elementary, secondary, college and university levels. He has presented on Educational, Oriental Medicine, and Italian Canadian issues in six Canadian provinces, the U.S., and China. His writing has been published in Canada, the U.S., Australia, Italy, and China. He currently resides in Rossland where he manages a part time acupuncture practice.

**Jim Zucchero**
Jim Zucchero grew up in Toronto and now lives in London, Ontario. He teaches Canadian Studies and works as an academic counsellor at King’s University College at the University of Western Ontario. He earned a Ph.D. in English at UWO and has published creative non-fiction and essays on Italian-Canadian writers and Canada’s National War Memorial. In 2010 he co-edited *Reflections on Culture* (with Licia Canton and Venera Fazio).

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Founded in 1986, the **Association of Italian Canadian Writers** is a nonprofit organization that brings together a community of writers, critics, academics, and other artists and promotes Italian Canadian literature and culture within an ethnoculturally diverse society. To learn more, please visit www.aicw.ca