

## **Giuseppe Costantini**

Gloria Costantini was nine years old when the RCMP came to her home on June 10, 1940 to arrest her father Giuseppe Costantini. It was already a difficult time for the family, as their mother Teresina Sabetti had died the year previous. Gloria thinks of the day that her father was interned as the day the music died. Before then their household was vital, always full of people who dropped in for dinner, socializing, with lots of music.. Her father always played Caruso recordings. Today the only concrete reminders of her father's time in the internment camp are the pencil portraits of her father drawn in the internment camp by fellow internee G. Casini and the soup bone with its ornate design that Mr. Costantini carved to pass the time.

Sitting in her niece Trina Costantini's dining room, Gloria, at 82, still recalls the day she came home from school to see the RCMP searching her home. She remembers grabbing a Mussolini statue that graced their front entrance, hiding it under her sweater and running out of the house. She was not quite sure where she was running but she was eventually caught by the RCMP and brought home. Somehow even at that young age she understood that anything associated with Mussolini had become problematic. One day they were sending their gold to Italy to help fund the changes Mussolini wanted to make, and the next anything associated with being Italian became suspect. For her older sister Kay, then 18, she had other memories.

"It was June, 10, 1pm. I was home; my father was at the bank. All of a sudden I heard a knock at the front and back doors. They went simultaneously to all the houses so no one could warn anyone. These big, tall, burly guys came in, real Gestapo types. They said they wanted to search the house. I never even asked for a search warrant, I was so stupid. They cornered me and asked where my father was. They searched upstairs, downstairs. We had this closet in the kitchen and they looked in there and they saw these wires. They asked if the wires were a direct line to Italy. I said, 'No, it's the front door bell.' They said they didn't believe me. I went with one for them and I rang the front door bell. There you go,' I said." i

By the time her father finally came home at 3:00 p.m. on that fateful day in June 1940, the RCMP had already confiscated all of Mr. Costantini's documents including letters, receipts, and bills. When they said goodbye to their father, both Kay and Gloria thought he would only be a couple of hours. Everyone was crying. They did not see him again for nine months. He was taken to the Carleton County Gaol, and after a few days put on a train for Petawawa, north of Ottawa and about a two hour drive away.

For Kay, and the Costantini household, things would change dramatically. For Gloria, she remembers having to learn how to cook to help feed her siblings because they of course had to let go of the live in household help, because there was no money coming in. Therefore, she had to do more chores around the house. She remembers that her Italian lessons given by the Sons of Italy were cancelled and noted how one of her teachers at Dante Academy, Sister Bertha, watched over her and the other Italian children. Sister Bertha was concerned that the children of those who had family members interned would not be harmed or humiliated in any way, so she paid special attention to them.

For Kay, Gloria's sister, the change would be more challenging. Not only had she become the mother of the family, she was now going to become the father as well. She

would be left to take care of the rest of her family. She not only took over the running of the household, taking care of her siblings, and trying to pay the bills; however, she also took over the responsibility of lobbying various government offices becoming the voice for her father. She, along with Rosa Tiezzi, whose husband Gino was also interned, went up to Parliament Hill daily, speaking to anyone they could, trying to find any information on their loved ones and lobbying for their release. They would not be successful.

Mr. Costantini lost his job with the CNR as a Baggage Master. However, after his internment, he would eventually get it back. He then worked his way up to the role of Assistant Station Master, a job he held until his death in October 1951. He was never reimbursed for the loss of income during his time interned. Additionally, Giuseppe Costantini was part owner of the Prescott Hotel of Ottawa, known then as the Preston Hotel with Mr. Antonio Disipio. Mr. Disipio was also rounded up in the initial arrests but after being interrogated by the RCMP officers, for eight hours, he was then released. The Costantini family were concerned with the hotel being confiscated by the government so they sought the help of a lawyer to transfer the hotel temporarily to Disipio. According to Disipio, during that time, the hotel was no longer issued its liquor license because "the property belonged to an Italian."<sup>ii</sup> Giuseppe Costantini's brother Ilario (Larry), who also worked at the hotel, then lost his job there. The reality was that under the circumstances the hotel did not make an income during the time that Italians were considered *enemy aliens*; however, more disconcerting yet was that after Mr. Costantini was released he was never able to re-acquire the ownership of the Hotel. The family's investment was lost after some legal manipulations of individuals who took advantage of the illegal imprisonment of Giuseppe Costantini.

While this was going on back in Ottawa, inside the camp there were other humiliations for Mr. Costantini. Those interned were allowed mail but it was heavily censored. They were not allowed radios or newspapers. Mr. Costantini was one of the internees who was given the responsibility of being a liaison between the prisoners and the soldiers. One day when he was delivering some information to one of the offices, he took a newspaper on one of the desks as he, like the others, were craving any news at all. For that small act, he was put in solitary confinement for eight days, in order to teach him a lesson and to teach the others as well. When his family found out about this, they cried.

As both daughter and granddaughter discuss this past traumatic history, they are united in their determination to not let the memory of what their father/grandfather Giuseppe Costantini went through, and what they lost, be forgotten. This dark and difficult chapter in Canadian history affected the family's emotional, psychological, and financial well being. As Mrs. Kay Pavia noted in a 1990 interview, even up until the death of her father in 1951, he never forgot that he was kept away from his family against his will and for no reason other than he was Italian. <sup>iii</sup>