

# When down is the only

It's a solitary thing and yet it's a social thing. And if you love snow and the outdoors, look into skiing.



The Najarian family: Mark (left), Sandy (standing), Berge, Raffi and Mary, with Taleen.

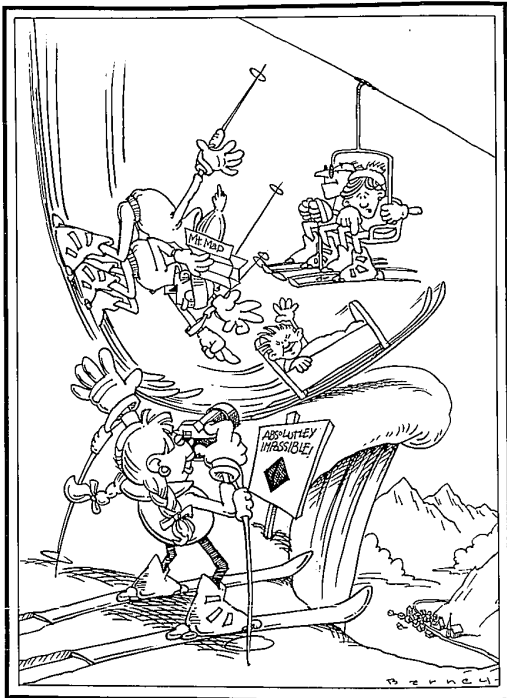


photo by C.D. STOUTER

# way to go

by Sharon Dargay

**T**he family that skis together . . .  
"Keeps from arguing as much as if they hadn't skied."

— Berge Najarian

Never mind that the chairlift stalled. Or that one of the kids twisted an ankle. Or that the cost of going downhill has steadily climbed up hill.

There's no skiing like snow skiing. And for the Berge Najarian family there's no better place to be than on the downhill slopes.

"You don't do other sports like skiing. In skiing you go away someplace to do it, you're together with friends. Everyone can work at their own level," says Mary Najarian, relaxing with daughter Taleen, in the family's southwest Troy home.

"It's probably not for everyone. For us, it happens to be something we can all do together."

"It's because we like to spend money," interjected Berge, teasing. "No, really, it's expensive."

Cost may be a major obstacle for some families on the downhill slopes and to a lesser extent the cross-country trails.

But the Najarians, whose ski bill last year ran into a few thousand dollars say the sport is worth the price.

"It's peaceful. I love the outdoors. I love the snow. You're out there all by yourself. It's just you and the hill," Mary explained.

"It's a solitary thing and yet it's a social thing with all the kids. You see them grow, too. You know, they started out not being able to stand up and now they're better than us."

Mary skied during most of her pregnancies. The Najarian kids were born practically with bindings on their booties.

Berge made equipment out of wooden slats for each beginner's pair of tiny feet.

Steven, 17, started skiing when he was 4.

Sandy, 16, and Mark, 11, were out on the slopes by age 2.

And Raffi, 7, whose walk is restricted by cerebral palsy, can "schuss" (that's Alpinesepeak for ski very fast) with the best of them.

Taleen is the only non-skiing member, but at 10 months old she has only just mastered walking. Give her another year and she'll be gliding and sliding. Effortlessly.

"It's the one thing we can all do together," soft-spoken Mary explained.

"It's just one of those family things," Berge added with a shrug. "You know, you go boating together, have a picnic together, go skiing together."

"Most of it is where you are and the people you're with and what you're doing — right?"

In fact, that undercurrent of camaraderie is precisely what prompted the Najarians to start skiing.

It happened during a "dental weekend" when the couple, several of their dentist friends and their spouses, headed north.

"We all took lessons and had a ball," Mary recalled.

Later when Berge studied orthodontics at Michigan State University, prefers the "awesome" slopes of Aspen but finds challenge in any course.

"The skiing there was so gorgeous, so inexpensive, we just started taking the kids," Mary said. "Sandy was about 2 at that point. Steven was 4. And everyone who came along after that point just fell (no pun intended) into it."

Steven, a tall, sandy-haired freshman at Michigan State University, prefers the "awesome" slopes of Aspen but finds challenge in any course.

"You can test yourself with what the mountain has to offer. There's different skiing for different people. There's easy skiing for the parents."

Does he ski with the family?

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