



JOHN STORMZAND/staff photographer

Power eighth grader Allison Streit (right) asks her grandfather, Arnold Gelf, of Farmington, about life when he was growing up.

Questions can evoke memories

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Q: What jobs did you do as a child?
A: I babysat a lot and made 25 cents a day, which usually was spent on haircuts. I also had a paper route when the papers sold for three cents and made \$4 a week, which was a great deal of money, back then.

By Brandon Cagnon
special writer

An interview with my grandfather, Paul Pintar:

Q: Would you describe to me your childhood, please?

A: I was born in 1933, in October. This was the year the Great Depression started. I was born in Acmeek, Mich., better known as Copper Country, in the Upper Peninsula. My father, grandfather and uncle all worked in copper mines. The summers were short, but beautiful. We would trout fish in the streams. There was a short and very colorful fall.

The winters started in October. The average snowfall was 300 inches a year. The snow would drift so high against the house and garage, my father had to build a tunnel to get the car out. He would dig playhouses in the side of the tunnel for us kids to play in. We would ski, sled, toboggan and more. I enjoyed the ski jump, but only on little homemade hills.

Just before leaving Acmeek to Detroit, I was given the opportunity to join a ski club, but we moved to Highland Park before I could join. Back in Acmeek, winter was rough because I had to walk two miles, which seemed like five, to school. When I was a boy, the locomotives were driven by coal, steam locomotives. I used to stand beside the tracks when the trains went by and

get covered with soot. I learned early, "Never eat yellow snow!" In the springtime, I enjoyed going in the woods with my family to pick berries. We had to watch for black bears. My mom would make jelly and jam. Because of the Great Depression, we grew most of our food; that's how we survived. My dad made 50 cents a day. For Christmas, we each got a

homemade toy. The first pair of skis I got were homemade. I had one brother and one sister until, when I was 19, my mom had a little boy. I really miss my hometown. It was small, with a population of only 500. It has less than that today. The good thing, though, was that everyone knew everyone. My hometown had a fire station, a gas station, a hardware store, a butcher shop, and, most of all, an ice cream parlor. I can recall when I was good, and my father had extra money, I would get a double-dip ice cream.

When I was 4, I learned to ice skate, and by age 6, I played ice hockey on outdoor rinks. Everything we did, we had to walk. We were poor for bicycles. The only transportation was by horse and buggy. When my dad got a good job, we got a horse and buggy.

Some of our summer treats included rides to Lake Superior to swim in August. We used to have weenie roasts and picnics on the shore.

During winter, we usually stayed inside. We used snow plows. Big trucks with snow blowers cleaned the streets, and made 10-foot-high drifts. The roads looked like nothing but deep trenches.

Q: Thank you, Grandpa.
A: You are welcome, Brandon.

Interviewing is an art

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Take your question sheet and pen with you. Introduce yourself with direct eye contact; offer your hand and smile as you do so. The interview may then proceed. A good starting point is to briefly review the purpose of the interview.

I interviewed my mother, Margaret Najjar, who was born in Pennsylvania, but has been a long-time resident of Farmington along with my father, Victor. I asked her to recall a favorite memory of her high school days at Garfield High in Johnstown, Pa.

This is what she said: "I was in the 10th grade and my home economics teacher was Miss Welsberg. I enjoyed her class and I learned a lot from her. She was very patient and kind. Our class consisted of 20 girls.

"One day, Miss Welsberg told us to prepare a fruit salad and she would judge the best ones. She had all the fruit on one table and the plates beside it. The second she said we could start, the girls rushed to the table and began piling on all the fruit their plates could hold. I took my time and made a plate of very attractive fruits, just a little of each kind. Miss Welsberg looked over all the plates and chose mine for first prize. I was pleased and delighted. We did eat our fruit salad."

This recollection, as vivid as could be, made my mother's eyes dance. The year? 1951.

Victoria Day Najjar is a Farmington resident, a journalism teacher at Bloomfield Hills Andover High School and a nationally published poet.

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