

# The Pompas

Paving the way for more than 60 years



Family's stone quarry built on a rock solid foundation



Pompa Bros. construction equipment outside of the family homestead back in early 1950s. In the early days, Nelson and Dan were joined by their brother Stephen as documented in the photo taken at the saw mill on Old Post Road around 1947.





Dan (left) and Nelson worked side-by-side at Pompa Bros., Inc. for more than 60 years -- and many more before that on the family farm near the intersection of Old Post Road and Malta Avenue. PHOTOS COURTESY OF THE POMPA FAMILY.

## These brothers paved the way together!

Daniel Pompa can't remember the first time someone asked him and his late brother Nelson about their connection to The Flintstones of Bedrock fame. Dan DOES recall laughing about it with Nelson and joking about which one of them looked more like Fred Flintstone and who bore the more striking resemblance to Barney Rubble back in "The Stone Age."

The strong foundation for the rock solid business partnership that was ultimately cemented between the fraternal pair was actually laid long before any formal papers for Pompa Bros., Inc. were drawn up six decades ago.

Asked how the nicknames Fred and Barney came about, Dan insists credit (or blame) goes to a county engineer named Jessie Chase. "He had a good sense of humor and liked to watch the cartoon show about the adventures of two guys who worked in a stone quarry that was really popular back then." The difference, of course, is that Fred and Barney lived in prehistoric times while Dan and Nelson literally paved the way for history to be made throughout many parts of New York State!



Favorite





Favorite photos in the Pompa family album include those of a teenaged Nelson carrying milk pails from the barn and an even older shot of Nelson with big brother Dan petting a work horse. The siblings went on to found a business worth millions.

Raised on a 140-acre farm on RD #3 near the intersection of Old Post Road and Malta Avenue in the aftermath of the Depression, Dan and Nelson learned the values of honesty, integrity and hard work early in life from their parents, Susan and John Pompa.

“The term 24/7 wasn’t used back then, but you really had to be ready to roll up your sleeves to do the work when it needed to be done and you didn’t quit until the job was finished,” recalls Dan, adding that he didn’t hear many complaints along the way from Nelson or their other siblings: John, Mary, Stephen and Cecelia. “Ours was primarily a dairy operation, but we also planted and harvested corn, oats, wheat and hay as well as growing enough fruit and vegetables to feed our whole family,” says Dan.

Watching deals being sealed with a verbal promise or a handshake — from their mother selling eggs and milk to neighbors to their father purchasing tools and machinery from visiting dealers — Dan and Nelson grew up firmly believing a man’s word was his bond. Throughout their nearly 60 years in business together (Nelson passed away suddenly in 2003), neither of the brothers promised more than he was confident he could deliver. The same held true for Steve, who helped his two younger brothers lay the groundwork for the fraternal business before deciding to pursue an occupation that led him down a different road shortly after the firm’s founding in 1947.



“Things were a lot less complicated in those days,” recalls Dan. “You didn’t need permits for every little thing. There wasn’t the amount of red tape you run into today.” The first truck Pompa Bros. ever used for business was an old Federal cab over engine that Nelson bought in 1945.

“The brave men and women had all come back from the service after the Second World War and there was a residential and commercial building boom going on in Schenectady and parts of Albany, especially around Central Avenue. The different contractors all needed help digging out cellars and grading homes for fill,” remembers Dan. “You could get as much work as you wanted. So about two years later, we added a dump truck and a used dozer in response to the demand. It was around the same time we decided it would be a good idea to form a partnership.”

Turning points came as Dan and Nelson began to acquire such pieces of heavy equipment as a backhoe, an Allis Chalmers HD5 bucket loader and CAT trucks which made it possible for them to bid on pipeline work as well as other construction projects. One might say the misfortune of a contractor who parted with his machinery one Autumn based on a promise from a dealer that he’d be receiving brand new equipment in the Spring turned the tide in favor of Pompa Bros., Inc. after the competitor’s delivery failed to appear.

The unexpected turn-of-events led to a windfall of work on behalf of builder Kenneth Sacks, Sr. who was constructing new houses in the Burnt Hills area.

Specifically, Dan and Nelson were kept hard at work on projects associated with the construction of homes on Orchard Terrace and Woodside Drive in Burnt Hills and surrounding a rural property off of Goode Street owned by veterinarian Dr. Stanley Garrison. In those days, the fee for the services of Pompa Bros. single axle dump truck was \$4 per hour while the loader fee was \$8 per hour. (Prices have increased at least ten-fold since then.)

Another of the company’s memorable early jobs involved cleaning out the silt that had accumulated behind the Blue Mill Dam on Mechanic Street.

“Gravel and silt built up, making sand wash into the water that was used by the Ballston Knitting Mill. They needed clean water to wash the socks that were being manufactured . . . we usually waited until the Fourth of July weekend when the mill was closed down for the holiday to clean the sediment out of the filters.”

There was also a safety issue, recalls Dan, because the presence of the dam meant there was just enough water beneath the trolley trestle to tempt kids to jump off and into the creek.

It was shortly after Nelson wed Agnes Zepko in 1957 and Dan wed Noreen MacMillin in 1958 that the two brothers also began work on such projects as paving the way for two and a half miles of roads plus parking lots for the Saratoga National Battlefield on the outskirts of Schuylerville. “After that, we completed four or five other roads, but there were so many problems with the union that it was often difficult to get materials. Finally we agreed it wasn’t worth all of the hassle and bought a stone crusher that made it possible for us to work more efficiently.”

During this period, the competition was reportedly fierce with companies especially eager to get in on construction projects tied to the Northway. In yet another wise move, Pompa Bros. Inc. rented out their crusher for use in lane construction for the Northway. “For the first time in our lives, it almost felt like we were making money while other people did the work,” quips Dan, adding that over the past 60 years, Pompa Bros. has employed as many as 30 workers, but the numbers have fluctuated with the seasons and the type of work available.

By the time the 1960s and early 1970s rolled around, Pompa Bros., Inc. was also being called upon to tackle such massive projects as the development of the Geyser Crest subdivision (then little more than a few dozen houses along and branching off of Hathorn) as well as the Columbia County Airport and projects based as far away as Richmondville and Corinth. In addition, Pompa Bros. did extensive roadwork in Malta and Clifton Park as well as along Weibel Avenue and Henning Road which today lead to and from the highly commercialized Wilton Mall area. The last such job completed by Pompa Bros., Inc. was Ballard Road.

In the early days, Pompa Bros. bought gravel from a pit behind the old Curtis Lumber location on Charlton Road and the Carters on Malta Avenue. Rocks were purchased from a Saratoga-based competitor, but Dan and Nelson eventually came to the realization that they’d need their own source of materials if they were to remain in business on a long-term basis.

“We had to change with the times; it was all about supply and demand,” adds Dan, quipping there are very few photographs of early projects because “we were too busy working to stop and take pictures.”

## “We worked and played hard together ...”

And so in 1972 the company moved its headquarters from Malta Avenue — where the firm’s original garage still stands — to vast acreage just off the intersection of Route 29 and Rowland Street.

The site (divided into some 30 acres on the side of the road where the stone quarry is situated and 50 acres across the way where the black top division is based) has provided the business a wellspring of raw materials.

“We’ve been blessed with an abundant supply of natural resources that should keep the family business operating for generations to come. The land will eventually be reclaimed by Mother Nature . . . of course, we’ll help things along by seeding and planting just like we used to do on the farm,” smiles Dan, who is happy the Pompa family’s agrarian homestead still stands at the intersection of Old Post Road and Malta Avenue even though the structure — which dates back to the late 1800s — is in dire need of refurbishing.

“No one has lived there since around 1940, but we were recently told that one of the historical societies has taken an interest in the property. It will be interesting to see what happens to it in the future.”

Looking back on the evolution of Pompa Bros., Inc., Dan quips that “Nelson and I knew we were making progress because we didn’t have to travel all over the state to go to work anymore!”

He also marvels at the self-sufficiency that was necessary in the days before car radios and cell phones when workers got their orders early in the morning and reported back at the end of the day. “If you broke down, you were on your own so it helped to be mechanically inclined if you didn’t want to be stranded some place in sub-zero weather.”

At Dan’s side through the best and worst of times was Noreen who worked for the New York Telephone Company for almost a dozen years before she and Agnes got the word from Nelson and Dan that they were needed to help run the family business.



Prosperity and spiffy wheels followed hot on the heels of hard work. Clockwise from top right are Nelson on bicycle; Dan and Steve on break; Dan with 1939 Ford; Nelson in new suit; and Nelson and Dan with sister Mary around 1945.





Happy times are re reflected in the portraits of Agnes and Nelson Pompa taken with son Ed and daughter-in-law Nancy, daughter Marianne and son-in-law Bill LaRoche, and in-laws Noreen and Dan Pompa. Top image was taken at 40th wedding anniversary in 1997 when Noreen, Dan and the Rev. Paul Bondi joined in the fun.



Although Noreen and Dan have taken a number of European holidays in recent years, vacations were few and far between in Noreen’s youth. Despite this, she insists she never felt shortchanged.

“Dan and Nelson and Agnes and I worked and played hard together. Disagreements were rare, but when something did pop up that we didn’t see eye-to-eye on, we’d put our cards on the table and resolve it right then and there. If we hadn’t been able to do that, we wouldn’t still be in business 60 years later!”

Noreen and Dan also fondly recollect Ballston Spa as being a bustling community with many shops and professional services during the early years of their marriage. “You could buy anything you needed in the village from groceries and flowers to clothing and jewelry. You didn’t hear about people needing to drive to another city to buy things back then.”





"We always kidded each other about who was the boss. I'd say Nels was the boss, but I was the Speaker of the House. Either way, we loved and respected each other . . . and I feel that was a blessing. We never went to bed or off to work without a kiss and a hug. Every goodbye was sealed with a kiss," reflects Agnes Pompa, seen with her beloved partner in 1957 wedding portrait and after the arrival of children Ed and Marriane. The couple agreed early on they would not hand their own offspring everything they wanted on a silver platter. "Some people couldn't fathom why we'd insist that Ed and Marianne buy their first bicycles and first cars when we could easily have handed them the cash for these items. We'd say: 'They eat, don't they?' But seriously, we felt it was important that they acquire certain goods with money they had saved on their own so they would appreciate them more and take better care of them."

-- Agnes Pompa

# When Nelson met Aggie

Agnes Zepko was a high school senior selling yearbook ads when she first went to the rural homestead of her future husband, Nelson Pompa in 1954.

“Our parents were friends . . . my father bought eggs and milk from the Pompa farm on Old Post Road.” The fact that Nelson was nine years older than Agnes meant they’d had little in common — until that day. “We started talking and just sort of hit it off,” smiles Agnes.

Nelson soon began offering her rides home from St. Mary’s Church on Sunday mornings and before long, Agnes found herself agreeing to “clock miles” with him checking out job sites in and around the county. “Nelson had quit school during his senior year and had saved enough money by 1947 to buy a truck and start a business with his brother Dan . . . by the time the two of us hooked up, the groundwork for Pompa Bros. had already been laid,” notes Agnes. Over the better part of the next half-century, the couple would have a blast as “best friends who also happened to be husband and wife” while raising two children, Ed and Marianne.

Work hard, play hard, laugh hard — and often! That was the key to a marriage that was never ever rocky — despite many challenges over the decades. While Agnes did not immediately join the family firm after she and Nelson wed in 1957 (due to a pre-existing career at General Electric where she was a highly valued employee from 1955 until 1962), she was a Rock of Gibraltar behind the scenes from Day One — never wavering in her encouragement and support.

“Nels and I always kidded each other about who was the boss. I’d say he was the boss, but I was the Speaker of the House. Either way, we loved and respected each other . . . and I feel that was a blessing. We never went to bed or off to work without a kiss and a hug. Every good-bye was sealed with a kiss.”

The fact that this was the case came to mean even more to Agnes after Nelson succumbed to a massive heart attack just a short time after they’d bid one another a hasty, but affectionate, adieu — fully expecting to be reunited at a dinner table a few hours later — in June of 2003.

Agnes credits the firm faith foundation laid by her parents during her formative years and the fact that Nelson always insisted she develop hobbies and interests that helped her cement her own identity in the community with helping her carry on after his untimely passing.

“I never thought I’d be facing retirement as a widow . . . I always envisioned enjoying The Golden years with Nels at my side . . . but the fact that I’ve got a wonderful family and many friends has been a Godsend. I don’t know what I’d have done if my childhood and marriage had not been exactly as they were. Both experiences nurtured me and made me stronger in different ways.”

Although her father’s ancestors hailed from Czechoslovakia and her mother’s came from Ireland, parents Margaret (nee Foley) and Joseph Zepko were both born in Ballston Spa and shared a commitment to the teachings of the Roman Catholic Church.

“My parents were lifelong village residents and communicants at St. Mary’s. My Dad worked hard all week in the tannery and later in the Post Office and at G.E. while my mother was a true homemaker who baked bread and sewed all of our clothes, but Sunday was The Lord’s Day — a day of rest and renewal. I truly was blessed to have grown up in a household where we children (Margaret, Joseph, Jr., Mary, Agnes, James, Patrick and Anne) were taught right from wrong and to treasure the things in life that really matter,” reflects Agnes. “I think my brother Jim summed it up best when he said: ‘We may not have had everything we wanted, but we had everything we needed.’ And you know what? We did!”

Inasmuch as Nelson felt the same way about his childhood in the Pompa family, he and Agnes agreed early on in their marriage that they would not hand their own offspring everything they wanted on a silver platter.

“Some people couldn’t fathom why we’d insist that Ed and Marianne buy their first bicycles and first cars when we could easily have handed them the cash for these items. We’d say: ‘They eat, don’t they?’ But seriously, we felt it was important that they acquire certain goods with money they had saved on their own so they would appreciate them more and take better care of them,” explains Agnes. “The rule in our house was that half of all the money that came in by way of gifts went into their savings accounts for things they might want in the future that were not in the family budget.”

That the plan worked (perhaps even better than expected!) is illustrated in the stories Agnes tells about the time around Ed’s 12th birthday when he approached his parents about getting a CD — not the kind used to play music, but the kind that yields far higher interest than a savings account! By the time he reached young adulthood and was ready to marry, Ed already had \$20,000 socked away to use as a downpayment of a house.

In addition to learning fiscal responsibility from his parents, Ed — who is now President of Pompa Bros. Inc. — says he was impressed with his hard-working father’s unique sense of time.

“His watch was different than everyone else’s; it read in ‘Nelson Time.’ There was a job he wanted to get done, it was either a Saturday or Sunday, and he asked if I had some time to help. I asked if he had a rough idea how long it would take, the response was ‘about half a day’. So I thought, four or five hours and it’s done. When we got done, 12 hours had gone by, and I kidded him, ‘Half a day, huh?’ His response: ‘Well, yeah, there are 24 hours in a day.’ OK, you got me!”

For those wondering, explains Ed, Nelson Time had special definitions. Follow along:

**Nelson Time:** “You got a minute?”

**Real Time:** Half an hour

**Nelson Time:** “You got a few minutes?”

**Real Time:** An hour, easy.

**Nelson Time:** “You got an hour after work?”

**Real Time:** Call the wife, you’re not going to make it for dinner . . . and don’t wait up.

“These were observations from 25 years of working with my father. It took almost that long to catch on,” laughs Ed, who has been married to the former Nancy Noel of Massachusetts since 1988. As of the Bicentennial year, the couple had three children: Jeff, Tim and Elizabeth.

Years before Ed or Marianne were ever allowed to set foot inside the stone quarry where their father worked, they picked up much knowledge about the business through osmosis while playing beside their mother as she worked in a home office near the original site of Pompa Bros. Inc. on Malta Avenue. While still pre-schoolers, both Pompa children also spent considerable time running business-related errands with their mother.

“The kids caught on pretty early in life that their Mom wasn’t like June Cleaver,” laughs Agnes in reference to the mother on television’s “Leave It To Beaver” who always had an apron tied around her perfectly tailored Fifth Avenue suits and wore a pearl necklace and high heels while dusting the furniture.

Long before The Women’s Liberation movement of the 1970s, Agnes had demonstrated the truth of the lyrics to the famed Helen Reddy’s tune about women being able to “bring home the bacon and fry it up in a pan.” In the case of Agnes, that also meant juggling the demands of motherhood with a demanding career and a broad spectrum of community service endeavors.

In addition to serving on the Board of Trustees of St. Mary’s Roman Catholic School in Ballston Spa and the Foundation Board at Saratoga Central Catholic School (formerly St. Peter’s Academy on South Broadway in Saratoga Springs), Agnes served as secretary of SCC’s Beyond The Classroom program and volunteered her time and treasure to a variety of enrichment and extracurricular activities at both St. Mary’s and SCC — from cheerleading coach to fundraising organizer.

Her decades of service to the Women’s Republican Club further distinguished Agnes as a leader as have her years on the Board of Directors of the Double “H” Hole in the Woods Ranch in Lake Luzerne. Her devotion to the mission of the Double “H” Hole in the Woods Ranch is rooted in the fact that Agnes was afflicted as a child with a condition known as “Torticolis” which resulted in a lengthy and lonely hospitalization far from home at the age of seven.

“Torticollis is a condition where a one cord in your neck is shorter than the other. Lef uncorrected, one side of your ody grows, but the other doesn’t. Today, the condition can be corrected through chiropractic care today, but in those days — we’re talking about the 1940s— chiropractors were considered quacks and most doctors didn’t have a clue how to treat it. That didn’t leave a whole lot of options!” Ultimately, a school nurse in Ballston Spa told Agnes’s father about an experimental operation that was being performed at Mary McLelland Hospital in Cambridge that involved cutting the cord on one side and stretching it. “I guess you could say I was a bit of a human guinea pig, but it was my only hope of growing normally and it was a chance my parents felt they had to take. I’m glad they did because the operation accomplished what it was succosed to accomplish and I was able to go on to lead a normal, healthy, productive life. But because of what I went through as a little girl, I’ve always been more grateful than most that I’ve got two arms that work.”



One of the last photos taken of Nelson Pompa .

Another thing also occurred during this time that left an indelible mark on her soul. “My parents couldn’t afford to leave the other children behind and stay in Cambridge (this was also a time in our history when parents before parents were permitted to stay with children in their hospital rooms) and I got terribly homesick at times. When I heard about the kids with life-threatening illnesses who were spending lengthy periods of time at the Double “H” Hole in the Woods Ranch, I just had to do get involved.”

Agnes is proud that daughter Marianne (who wed pilot Bill LaRoche in 1988) shares a desire to combine marriage, motherhood and a career with community service projects. Like her mother, Marianne volunteers at Double “H” fundraisers such as the annual gala at The Great Escape and an annual fashion show at the ranch in which children Kelsey and Eric (aka “Half Nelson”) because “he and Nelson are cut from the same cloth”) have participated.

After college and a period of independence working in sales, Marianne asked if there was a place for her in the family business and recollects the sense of pride she felt as she grew to appreciate what my father and uncles had built. She knew she wanted to be part of its future.

“My father and his brothers came from little, worked hard, persevered through many roadblocks, and built their business on handshakes, rock solid promises and sound business values,” muses Marianne. “Working with my dad for 17 years was my second chance to get to know him. Although he showed little emotion, I discovered the soft, caring side of him. I was sure to break his tough exterior for a smile and a laugh when I’d remind him: ‘I am your only daughter, you know.’ When I’d look for praise for a job well done, he’d always respond: ‘If I’m not yelling at you, then you must be doing it right, keep doing it.’”

She adds: “I greatly valued the knowledge my dad had and always tried to tap into it. He’d never give me the answer to a question, but instead answered with a question, making me think for myself, and use what I had upstairs. I’m guilty of taking him for granted and thinking he’d be here forever — or at least a lot longer than he was. I deeply admired my dad for his energy, drive and overall business savvy.

He’d out work people half his age and not break a sweat doing it. There was no task he wouldn’t tackle and he’d never ask an employee to do a job he wasn’t willing to do himself. He also believed that you shouldn’t buy something until you could afford to pay cash for it. This was a great business practice until he tried to buy a cell phone not long ago and he was told he had no credit. I will always remember him asking me, his only daughter, if I could buy the cell phone for mom with my credit card. I got a lot of mileage on that one.”

Marianne says she holds close memories of the humorous side of her father that few people ever knew existed. I recall dad at the Great Escape for a Double “H” Hole in the Wood Ranch fund-raiser, riding the Comet roller coaster continuously, trying out each seat to see which one gave you the most bang for your buck. Be it in business or in pleasure, he was always trying to do that — ask any salesman that knew him. Sharing the laughter together in those seats is a memory I’ll forever treasure.”

# How a family made the best of their first Christmas without their beloved Papa Bear

December 25, 2003 dawned bittersweet for the Pompa family. Although Agnes had decked the halls and trimmed the tree in anticipation of a traditional holiday gathering with loved ones, the recently widowed grandmother could not bear to look at the empty chair where her beloved spouse had traditionally sat and led the conversation at Christmas dinner. That's when the idea dawned to take a large brown bear from Gund out of hibernation so he could be propped up in the vacant chair at the head of the table. The huge bear's warm, fuzzy presence served to lighten the mood for the three generations gathered at the table and to honor the memory of the patriarch whose presence was so deeply missed at the traditional Yuletide gathering. He's still there and affectionately referred to as Papa Bear.

There was, of course, joy as Agnes exchanged festively wrapped gifts with her grandchildren and their parents. Yet there was a sadness in realizing there would never again be any presents that had been picked out by Nelson. Agnes says she was "bearing up well" until the guests began to leave and the house started getting quiet. It was then that her daughter Marianne took her aside and gently informed her mother that Santa had brought one more gift that wasn't with the others because he wanted her to open it when she could be alone.

"That's when the dam broke," recalls Agnes. "I opened a little box and inside was a beautiful pair of custom-designed Druzy quartz earrings to go with a pin that Nelson knew I cherished . . ." The story of how they got there is one sure to be treasured for generations.

Marianne says that a few months before his untimely death from a heart attack, her father had insisted that she contact Dennis deJonghe (the nationally-acclaimed goldsmith who had designed and crafted the pin) to make sure Agnes would have earrings to go with it in time for Christmas.

"It was only April, I think and here my Dad kept asking: *How are those earrings for your mother coming along?* At the time, I couldn't understand the urgency," says Marianne. "I was like — *Gee, Dad, Christmas is months away. What's the hurry?* . . . but he was insistent. He kept reminding me that finding Drusy quartz stones to match the pin might take a long time. . . as you can imagine, one of the first calls I made after Dad passed away so suddenly in June was to Dennis deJonghe."

A precious Druzy stone deJonghe had acquired from Idar-Oberstein in Germany had been used to design the pin the previous year and finding a perfect match would, indeed, be a challenge. deJonghe would, however, give the search his best effort and was overjoyed when a local lapidary artist agreed to custom cut two matching drusy leaves to match so that he could make Nelson's Christmas wish for his beloved wife come true.

The gifted Saratoga Springs, New York jeweler says he was honored to be entrusted with the design of the Druzy quartz keepsake jewelry set at left. "I knew that Nelson Pompa loved nature and appreciated the beauty of the stones that were so often hidden beneath its surface. It is very gratifying and rewarding to be able to use my artistry to create something with value that transcends adornment — that, as in this case — promises to become a family heirloom passed on from generation to generation."

Four years later, on what would have been the couple's 50th wedding anniversary, Agnes had yet another amazing experience involving a piece of jewelry that made her feel certain her late husband was with in spirit on their special day. While on a sojourn to Aruba, she stopped into a shop and discovered a sapphire and diamond pendant that matched exactly a ring custom designed by Harvey Fox Jewelers in Saratoga Springs that Nelson had given to her on their 25th anniversary. Although she had looked for matching pieces over the years, none had surfaced until this golden moment.

*Nelson Pompa “paved the way” for many in the region during his lifetime and was “a rock and a Teddy Bear” to his wife Agnes, whose own legacy includes being a model of mountain-moving faith, hope and love. The following is a tribute to the late co-founder of Pompa Bros, Inc. — who is remembered as “a man with a heart as big as all outdoors.”*

Sources of consolation in the aftermath of Nelson’s untimely death included letters penned by friends and associates which collectively illustrate the self-made-man’s endearing -- and enduring -- brand of wit and wisdom. A sampling of excerpts follows:

“When most people hear the name Pompa they automatically think stone quarry or cement plant. I think family! I remember talking with my grandfather about Nelson Pompa. My grandfather had the highest respect for him. He told me he never met a more honest and hard working man. My grandfather said Nelson also knew the importance of family. Every Sunday was family day. They might talk about business that day but were still all together. My grandfather said in this day and age it was nice to see such a man who cared so much, not only for his family, but for others. I did have the chance to work right along side of Nelson. He didn’t just supervise, but worked with us on many projects. I feel I am a better person because of the time I spent with Nelson Pompa and the things I learned from him.” — Paul M. Davis, Jr.

“I first started dealing with Dan and Nelson Pompa shortly after starting our business in 1979. Through the years, Nelson became as much of a friend as a business associate. We would talk almost daily at the height of the season, about deliveries, scheduling, and up coming work. Those early morning calls would always end with us talking about our business, something we both shared a passion for. No matter how busy he was, he always made me feel like I was his only customer. The secret to getting to know Nelson was to talk with him early or late in the day, but NEVER during the heat of battle, as many a salesman came to find out. My favorite times talking with him was to catch him on a Saturday afternoon in the shop or up on Coy Road. We solved many world problems during those times.” — Bill Morris

“I’ve been president of a small contracting company in southern Saratoga County for over 40 years. Nelson was a great role model and mentor as Riberdy grew. He helped our business become (the success that it is) today. He was a great and successful businessman who treated his customers equally and with respect, regardless of the size of the account. He was kind, generous and flexible; he would go out of his way for you. It was clear that he loved what he did and did it well. Of course, he was busy, but never too busy to stop and chat for a moment if he ran into you at the shop or at a social function. Nelson was an inspiration to us all.” — Frank Riberdy

“Nelson Pompa was a very hard working man. Every morning when I picked up the keys to the cat trucks, he would be there dressed in his green work clothes and ready to work. Nelson set an excellent example for his family and employees. Although I did not know Nelson well, I know that we employees miss his presence at work. Nelson is no longer there in the morning to ask me how the trucks are running and to find out if they need to be fixed. I have only worked for Pompa Bros. for four years and therefore I did not know him well, but for the time I knew Nelson he was a good influence to me. His hard work and determination were that of a great man and I respected him for that. My deepest sympathy goes to his family and close friends and may he rest in peace.” — John Jones, employee

“I knew Nelson Pompa since we were in school together. Both of us came from rural country schools to Ballston Junior High (7th grade). Coming from the country school to Ballston was quite a change for us and a friendship formed between (us). I remember Nelson as an extremely hard worker with a daylight till dark approach to a day’s work. One day I was working for Thomas Oil Co. at the corner of Milton Avenue and Saratoga Avenue when Nelson came down Milton Avenue and turned into Saratoga Avenue with a dump truck towing a low bed trailer with a bulldozer on it. He was going a little fast in making the turn when all of a sudden the bulldozer went flying off the lowbed trailer, landing on its tracks. Quick as a flash, Nelson stopped the truck, put down the loading ramps for the trailer, started the bulldozer and ran it back to the flatbed. I walked over to ask him if he needed help with it but all he had to say was: “Next time I’ll take time to chain the dozer down on the trailer.” — Wilbur Trieble

The trauma of our first home ownership was almost a memory. We had purchased the circa 1830 home in July of 1975 and it represented all of our savings and reserves. Each day as I came home and the house came into view, I wondered if it would still be standing . . . (and) each night as my wife Melinda and I went to sleep, a new sound came out of the floor or ceiling or window. Was it a critter or structural settlement or after 145 years was the house about to fall down? As the weeks passed, we got to know each and every sound. We were getting used to our very old, very new house. There was almost a comfort in its living sounds. We had made it through the summer rain, the autumn deluge of Maple Sugar leaves and were prepared for the upcoming winter. We had even saved enough money to buy a plastic shovel to dig out our 300' dirt driveway, Life was good. Then the inevitable happened. The first winter storm was headed our way. The sound of falling snow lulled us into a deep, comforting sleep (when) I was awakened by a sound that only a nightmare can conjure up. Surely the snow load was caving the roof in. Or did a locomotive from a nearby track (half a mile away) come off the rail? Was it crashing into our heretofore wonderful home? I jumped out of bed, then crashed into the closed door, then opened it to survey the damage. Nothing! The crashing locomotive was outside. I skipped every third step as I went downstairs to look out the front window. There it was . . . the biggest front end loader I had ever seen! It was plowing our driveway. It mounded the snow into a 10-foot pile, completely out of the way of future use. It circled our circular driveway with great skill, leaving in its path a 10-foot wide, perfectly groomed driving lane. Had we forgotten to cancel a contract? It was perfect . . . but dollar signs filled my still blurry vision. The mystery snow (removal) man was Nels. For as many years as anybody could remember, he had plowed the driveway of this home. Why? Because we and the previous long-term tenant were neighbors in need and Nels needed to help. His need was in his character. He plowed our driveway for years. Out of sheer guilt, we finally purchased a snowblower. Nels was a good man. A good man of a bygone era . . . and we miss him. -- Bob Allen

"If the man had a middle initial, it must have been "W" because that is the start for the word

WORK.  
W- Work  
O- Order  
R- Reliable  
K- Kindness

Nelson was always there for the work, no matter what it was. When Nelson was in a loader, loading, he was always after us drivers to get just one more load; no matter what time of day it was. He sure was an all-around working man." —Chet Brunell, employee

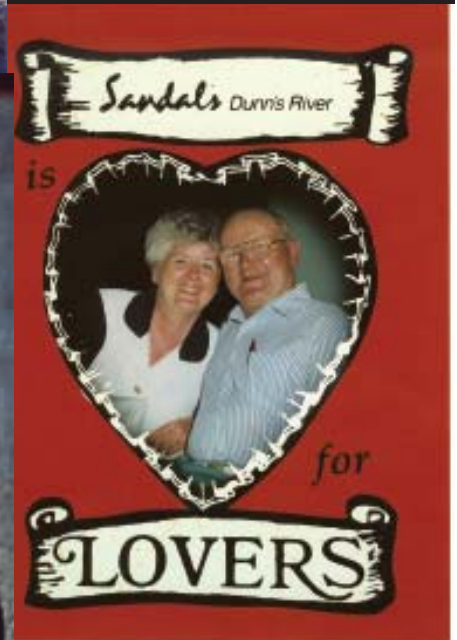
"Nelson worked hard at the quarry, but also liked a good time. He was fun and had a good sense of humor on vacations. Over 30 years, we traveled to Maine, Hawaii and the Caribbean. We had a lot of laughs on a drive in Maui to see Hale-Bopp Comet at 2 a.m. Nelson bought an extra fine telescope for a better view." — Elaine and George Rifenburg

"My early associations with Nelson (involved) construction of Orchard Terrace and Woodside Drive in Burnt Hills on my farm off of Goode Street. Pompa Bros. first construction equipment was a small Ford bucket loader and a single axle dump truck. Nelson and his brother Dan moved tons of fill from the Van Vorst farm next door, so builder Ken Sack, Sr. could build new houses. They later bought a used Allis Chalmers HD5 bucket loader and a bigger truck and were definitely in business. This was as I remember it, when they lived in Ballston. (They subsequently) purchased the property off of Rt. 29 in Saratoga where the company is still in business. I remember Nelson and Dan sold me the Allis Chalmers HD5 and they bought a newer and larger tractor. One day they got the new tractor stuck in a swamp and Nelson, like a little boy, came to me and asked me to help pull him out, which I did. Our acquaintance with Pompa Brothers has been great over these many years. Both brothers and their wives went to a Rotary Dinner Banquet in Saratoga at the City Center to help us raise money for Polio Plus in 1988. My father-in-law, Harris Miller, was used to negotiating work for me with Nelson. Recently I was reading his journal that he kept everyday and there was a quote of Pompa Bros. Charges back in the early days when we were putting roads in which read: Single axle dump truck fee was \$4. per hour and the loader fee was \$8. per hour. I remember seeing Agnes riding in that early dump truck while being courted by Nelson. . . business and pleasure at the same time." — Dr. Stanley Garrison, Author,





Hearts  
in the  
sand





Strolling along Caribbean beaches was something Agnes and Nelson had looked forward to doing together during mid-winter vacations.

True soul mates who could almost read one another's minds, the couple's favorite spot to unwind and count their blessings was a stretch of shoreline on the island of Aruba.

So it was not surprising that Agnes's heart was heavy when she set out for an early morning stroll on the familiar beach early in 2004 knowing that Nelson would never again leave footprints in the sand as he walked at her side. His sudden death from a massive heart attack while alone behind the wheel of a Pompa Bros. Inc. vehicle the previous summer had left what sometimes felt like a hole in his wife's heart. Now she was in Aruba with some family members who had accompanied her and Nelson to the island in happier times.

When it came time for a 7 a.m. walk on the beach, Agnes put her best foot forward. What happened next was something right out of a "Touched By An Angel" script.

"Nels and I used to pick up sea shells as we walked, keeping the ones we thought were especially pretty or unique . . . that would make nice souvenirs," recalls Agnes. "Well, while I was searching for shells the first time after his death, I noticed something that looked kind of unusual. I bent down to pick it up and it wasn't a shell at all . . . it was a piece of coral shaped like a heart."

Immediately Agnes thought of Nelson and the heart attack that had robbed them of a final farewell. Each day of her vacation, Agnes returned to the beach and each day came back to her room with another "pebble heart" to treasure. But it was what she found during her final stroll before heading home that convinced Agnes once and for all that the hearts were "heaven-sent" to reassure her that all was well with the soul mate she missed so much.

In the course of the week, she found five perfectly shaped "pebble hearts" — one for each of the five years she had previously vacationed on Aruba with Nelson. The largest of the five hearts had a hole in the middle of it. For Agnes, these would become cherished keepsakes that symbolize the awesome power of faith, hope and love.

Although there were no footprints in the sand, Agnes is sure her husband — remembered by so many as having "a heart as big as all outdoors" — was with her in spirit as she strolled the beaches an ocean away from the stone quarry he had worked so hard to build during his lifetime. The hole in her own heart is still there, but Agnes will be forever grateful for the priceless souvenirs bestowed upon her in the unlikely form of tiny coral hearts in the sand. Indeed her heart has leapt for joy during each of the several return trips she made to the island and other seaside destinations during 2005, 2006 and 2007. Among the priceless finds was one life-size heart with a hole in it . . . this one worthy of being called a stone rather than a pebble.

In addition to the hearts Agnes has discovered along shorelines and in other more commonplace settings, she has photographic proof that a large letter "N" recently appeared on the side of the very mountain range in Alaska that she and Nelson had always dreamed of visiting together.

PHOTOS OF ORIGINAL HEARTS FOUND IN ARUBA IN 2004 BY ANN HAUPRICH;  
PHOTOS OF HEART COLLECTION AS OF EARLY 2007 BY MICHAEL L. NOONAN.



*"While I was searching for shells the first time after his death, I noticed something that looked kind of unusual. I bent down to pick it up and it wasn't a shell at all . . . it was a piece of coral shaped like a heart."*



*The hole in her own heart is still there, but Agnes will be forever grateful for the priceless souvenirs bestowed upon her in the unlikely form of tiny coral hearts in the sand. She considers these to be truly heaven-sent.*



## Couldn't bear not to share this warm, fuzzy Zepko tale



The former Agnes Zepko has loved stuffed bears since she was a tyke on a trike. Decades later she posed with some newer bears for author Ann Hauprich.

Agnes Zepko Pompa does not fit the stereotype of a foothills bear hunter. For starters, the petite silver-haired Saratoga County businesswoman does most of her hunting decked out in fashionable office attire.

Armed with a checkbook or credit card, Mrs. Pompa lures out of hibernation bears of all shapes and sizes. Some were ribbons around their necks; others are bespectacled. Still others sport hats. All are adept at giving and receiving bear hugs. Perhaps the thing that sets Mrs. Pompa's bears apart from others in the county is that their fur is, well...not quite a match to what you'd find upon closely examining a bearskin rug! You might say they're bear-faced imposters!

Some of Mrs. Pompa's bears started life as muskrats. Others spent their formative years as members of early 20th century mink, beaver, seal, sheep, squirrel or possum families as far away as Europe and Australia. What all share in common is that they went on to a second life as someone's fur coat a generation or more ago to be saved from the scrap heap by Erika Schroeder of Mutti Bears in Hudson.

Ms. Schroeder's shop is, quite literally, a happy hunting ground for customers like Mrs. Pompa, who bear witness to the adage that one is never too young or too old to be warmed by the presence of a Teddy Bear in their bedroom – or anywhere else in their home for that matter!

The fact that “mutti” is a German term of endearment for “mother” says a lot about the love that goes into every stitch of the bears crafted by Ms. Schroeder. Among the most beloved bears in Mrs. Pompa's collection – which at last count numbered well over 100 – is one named Miss Margaret in memory on her late mother, Margaret Zepko.

The fur from which Miss Margaret was sewn was originally part of the sealskin coat that Mrs. Pompa's mother wore to Mass at St. Mary's Roman Catholic Church in Ballston Spa during the cold winter months as far back as the 1930s. Mrs. Pompa has been a lifelong communicant there and enjoys making and donating silk flower arrangements to enhance the magnificent altar inside.

“I can still see my mother going out the door for Mass dressed in that coat. There were four of us girls, and my mother would never let any of us wear her coat – nor would she consider giving it to any of us for fear that it would show favoritism. She was the type who if she couldn't do for all of us wouldn't do for any of us. So there we were with one fur coat and four daughters – Mom just didn't know how to dispose of it fairly; so she left it in her closet.”

And so it was, a short time after her mother's death, that Mrs. Pompa came up with the idea of turning the beloved sealskin coat over to Ms. Schroeder so that it might be transformed into a huggable memento for all Zepko daughters. The resulting quartet of bears have since gone their separate ways, making their homes with Agnes Pompa and her sister, Ann Groski, both of Ballston Spa, and with Margaret Peterson of Virginia and Mary Bent of Corinth. Mrs. Pompa also has two brothers, Jim of South Carolina and Joe of Georgia. (A third brother, Patrick, died tragically of a cerebral hemorrhage at the age of 32.)

Each sister chose to outfit her keepsake bear a little differently – reflecting her special memories of her dear mother. Besides giving hers the very special name “Miss Margaret,” Mrs. Pompa has dressed her Mutti Bear in horn-rimmed glasses and a fancy hat similar to the ones worn by her mother. Miss Margaret also sits in a miniature cane rocket reminiscent of one used by Mrs. Zepko.

Married for nearly half a century to Nelson Pompa, the late co-founder of Pompa Bros. Inc., Mrs. Pompa also loves seeking out bears for her grandchildren and their parents: Ed and Nancy Pompa and Bill and Marianne LaRoche. Who knows? At this rate, the children may grow up reciting the story of “Mama Bear, Pompa Bear and Baby Bear!”

Ask her about her favorites in her bear family and Mrs. Pompa finds it hard to sing the praises of one without quickly pointing out the attributes of another! They're all different. They each have some special quality that makes them unique. I love them all.”

Miss Margaret would, indeed be proud.



## The Zepkos dressed in their Sunday Best

In the Spring of 1949, the Zepko Family gathered at the family homestead on the Malta Avenue Extension decked out in what folks used to refer to as their Sunday Best because the extra fine attire was reserved for special occasions like church services. Holding the family's beloved black cocker spaniel named Topsy (so named because the pet -- which lived to the ripe old age of 19) “grew like Topsy” as a pup. In row with Papa Zepko were Joe Jr, Margaret, Mary, and mother Margaret. That's Patrick, Agnes and Jimmy in the middle row -- with baby Anne front and center. Below are the four sisters today (Maggie, Agnes, Ann and Mary at a Caribbean destination where fur coats are considered unbearable, but Mutti bears are welcome. ALL PHOTOS COURTESY OF THE ZEPKO & POMPA FAMILIES.

