

Alfred Harkin celebrates

Alfred Harkin put on a rare smile since he entered the Bourget Nursing Home four years ago. Last Saturday, he celebrated his 100th birthday, but that is not the only reason for his happiness. He was surrounded by his family and close friends who came from Rockland, Hawkesbury and Stoney Creek (near Hamilton) to visit him on this special occasion.

^{May 29/98} Paulo Casimiro Bourget

"There's really nothing I can do. I don't have any choice," said Alfred Harkin when asked how he felt about reaching the 100 year mark. He admits he would feel more upbeat about this milestone if he wasn't in a wheelchair and for the melanoma on his face. "I wouldn't be here (in a nursing home) if I felt good," sustains

the senior citizen who usually keeps to himself. For him there is no joy in living longer. Don't get old he tells the one who dares asking.

He admits his newest favorite passtime is sleeping. "I can sleep all day," he says. But that is probably because he doesn't fall asleep until 4 a.m. He spends his time reading, two-three hours every evening, especially mys-

his 100th birthday

tery or ghost stories, keeping his mind working. He would read a lot more, but his eyesight is failing.

"That's my grandfather," said Ernie Harkin, not surprised about his comments. "He's very stubborn, opinionated".

Ernie Harkin is proud of his grandfather, proud of the relationship they have since his own father died when he was only four years old. The loss of his son in a tragic car accident in the prime of his life and the loss of his wife twenty years ago were certainly devastating, but he kept going. "I wouldn't be surprised if he outlived us all," said Mr. Harkin. "He has a great memory. He can talk about things that happened 70 years ago".

Master cheesemaker

Apart from a few complaints about the food, Alfred Harkin has nothing much to say about his stay at the Bourget Nursing Home. He wouldn't mind transferring to Maxville, though, where he knows more people. Before coming to Bourget, he stayed a few years in a residence in St-Isidore.

Born May 23rd, 1898, in Fournier, Alfred Harkin lived a full life. Apart from an episode in Western Canada during the Great Depression, he was a master cheesemaker from 1926 to 1964. He owned and worked in a number of cheese factories in the Ottawa Valley (the secret could be in the cheese).

Alfred Harkin quit smoking four decades ago. Not for health reasons, though. He stopped cold turkey when a store owner told him the price of cigarettes would increase the next day by 10 cents... a carton. As for alcohol, he admits he used to "like" drinking at one point.

Another great passion in his life: driving. He owned close to 50 cars, recalls his grandson. Some years, he even bought two cars. He was lucky to be able to drive his car until he was 84.

"To him, a car was freedom. I thought it would kill him the day he lost his licence".

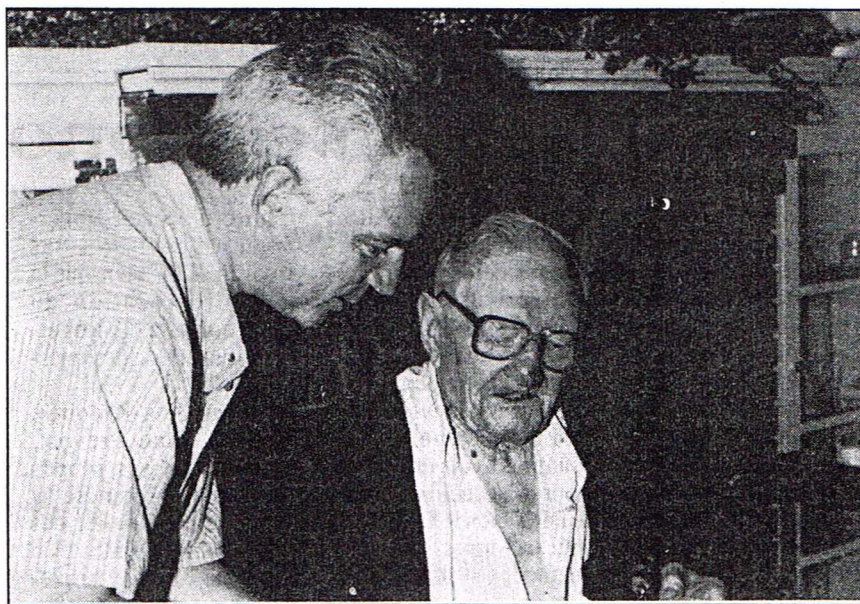


Photo Paulo Casimiro

Ernie Harkin kept his promise. He gave his grandfather a certificate signed, not only by the prime minister of Canada, but also one from the Her Majesty Queen Elizabeth II, Roméo Leblanc, Governor General of Canada, Mike Harris, Premier of Ontario, federal minister Don Boudria and Prescott-Russell MPP Jean-Marc Lalonde.