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Joe Neil MacNeil, Gaelic Storyteller Joe Neil MacNeil is an important source of tales, old sayings, family and community histories • and an inspiration to Gaelic learners. Much of his recollection and reconstruction of Gaelic stories has been encouraged, collected, transcribed, and translated by John Shaw of Glendale. A portion of their work together will be available in a new book from McGill-Queen's University Press entitled Tales until Dawn. The following is taken from our recent conversation with Joe Neil MacNeil. We offer it here to honour Joe Neil on the publication of Tales until Dawn. (I just wonder sometimes how you see yourself, Joe. Somebody told me that you once used an image of a dandelion when you were talking about yourself. Do you know what I mean?) Well, I suppose that would be referring to myself on the time. The dandelion is in full bloom for so long, and then all of a sudden there's nothing--nothing left, but just something with a bunch of gray down on it, and the wind blows that away, and it's gone. No more. So there's nothing left, unless you had the pictures of it • (Or the memories.) Yes. Unless those stories are caught up within time, in Cape Breton--unless you grab it while it's going by you--once it goes, well, it's not coming back any more. It's not going around. It's only going the one way. The Gaelic language doesn't seem to be getting its support. They commercialized--it's all--everything that's going on is practically for a tourist attraction. The Gaelic is only just a stamp, a rubber stamp. It's only used to sell the product • They're not giving it enough support. The Gaelic College--they might come up yet. But as yet they're not strong enough--there's not enough support. Oh, I've nothing against the dancing and the piping and the drumming. No, that's good enough. But (that's) not upholding the Gaelic at all. There's no great support for the Gaelic. And in the first place, what they're piping has no Gaelic in it. To them, anyway. They may be playing the odd number. There may be a tune that was really set up in Gaelic, but they haven't got a clue as to what it means or anything today. They haven't got the touch. So, I don't know. They're not going to hold up their Gaelic at all with their piping. They'll hold up that much of culture, yes, but not the foundation of it. The language is the foundation of their culture, the Gaelic culture, the Scottish Highland culture. That's the most important part of it. If they lose that, they lose an awful lot. They've only just got something else. . . . The Englishman does not know the Gaelic--hasn't got the love for Gaelic. He has nothing--he was never anything but an enemy of the Gaelic. They even tried to do away with the language, because they figured in doing away with the language, they'd weaken them down, bring them down right to their knees. They'd have their full control over them, if they could kill off their language. That's what they liked too much. They didn't approve of their music--they cut off--they were against their piping. But then, the piping was used for military purposes.... Well, of course, the Scottish regalia--the kilts and all that--that was an army issue to begin with. That's not original. The tartan is, but not the kilt. It's only an army issue.... If we believe that



there's something in Gaelic, and that it's worth the while, naturally it has something. But as far as I'm concerned, the worst weed in the garden, if you're cultivating the Gaelic--the worst weed you have in the garden is the one that asks, "What is the good of it? What's the use of Gaelic? What's the good of it?" And if they're trying to put a value on it in dollars and cents, well, that's a weed that's going to kill off--going to ruin your crop. You can never have a good crop with that kind of a (65)