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Boxing's Sailor Don McKinnon Sailor Don McKinnon was born in St. Mary's Hospital in Inverness, Cape Breton, in 1923. The following is a selection from a recently published little book. The Fighting Sailor • an autobiography of the scrappy fighter who became "The Pride of New Brunswick." This book is another fine job of oral history produced by Peter McGahan, who brought us last year's vigorous autobiography of John "Lofty" MacMillan, The Boy from Port Hood. Here's a sample from The Fighting Sailor. Sailor Don McKinnon: Boxing was what I wanted. When I left school in grade eight, I began to work in the mines with my father. I should have gone to school longer to get a better education and get a better job. I worked in the mines for just one winter, in 1939. It was dangerous down there, very dangerous. You'd be down in the mines and you'd see water coming through the roof and it was cold and very damp. I said, this life is not for me.

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Becoming a fighter was in my mind all the time and never went away. When I worked in the mines in Inverness, I used to save my money. I was paid \$30 a week. I'd go to St. Mary's Church and put ten dollars in. I'd give my mother ten dollars. The rest I saved. It took me nine months to save \$90 which I used to pay for my first formal training as a boxer. There was a lot of boxing in Cape Breton in those days. You could see fights there just about every week. I saw Johnny Nemis' name in the paper. He had been middle-weight champion of Eastern Canada. His four brothers were all fighters too. Johnny Nemis was known all over. He fought in the States. His father had moved from Italy in 1904 when Johnny was still in his mother's arms. They came to Cape Breton and lived in New Waterford. When I was 16, I sent him a picture of myself and told him I wanted to be a fighter. He wrote back and said, "Well come on down and I'll train you." I then quit the mines. My father never said anything about me leaving. The day when I left my mother felt bad. She didn't like it, but felt, let him do what he wants. He gets hurt, he might quit. I stayed at a boarding house owned by Angus MacDonald, a distant relative of my mother. He was originally from Inverness but had moved down to New Waterford. I stayed one month, until my money ran out. I would have stayed a lot longer but I just didn't have the money. Johnny trained me during that month. He trained many fighters after he quit boxing in 1938. He had me shadow boxing. He had me skipping rope. He had me hit the heavy bag out in the yard. I sparred with other fighters, including Joey Nemis, his brother. Early every morning I



ran a quarter of a mile or half a mile. Johnny said, "I'll put your name in the paper in a couple of weeks' time." It came natural to me. Lots of time if you were showing fighters, it would take them weeks or even months to catch on to the style of boxing. But it was bom in me to be that way. And when it's bom in you, it comes naturally. You can see a great fighter or a good average fighter and you can catch on to his pose and his footwork, and his jabs and hooks to the body and to the head. Johnny told me that I could go a long ways. A year later, when I was fighting down in the State of Maine and The Shopping Centre for Everyone from Cape North to Gabarus! 116 King street NORTH SYDNEY (902) 794-4703 I or 794-4704 Sobeys Food Store OPEN 24 HOURS I NORTH SYDNEY Zellers Department Store OPEN 8:00 AM Sears Reitman's 1-2-3 Dollar Rolling Phones Island Donuts Super Touch Fashions Mostly Books Agnew Ducky's Electronic Avenue Alteens Gals & Guys Hair Salon Schwartz Furniture Carlton Cards Lotto Booth Nova Scotia Liquor Commission Open MONDAY through SATURDAY Shoppers Drug Mart OPEN 9:30 AM • And introducing our newest stores: • Jay Set (Factory Outlet) • Basket Express • Northside Paint & Paper • Jean Depot • Music Shop 10 AM-9:30 PM 47