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ISSUE : [Issue 61](#)

Published by Ronald Caplan on 1992/8/1

case they were making was sewed up in the bag and their opinion of it was beyond rebuttal. Archie Neil stood up, locked his legs so he could stand without the cane, and poked aggressively at an imaginary grammarian with his fists. The troublemaker, disguised as an inverted floor mop in the corner near the door, did not even try to fight back. Archie Neil let him have it. "All right, you devil, if we have to say, 'I lose and I lost,' then we should be saying 'I choose, I • ' Go on, give it to him, Hector Dan," Archie Neil prompted. "I choose and I chost," Hector supplied. Archie Neil whacked the grammarian on the nose. "If the plural of man is men, then the plural of pan should be • " with an elaborate flurry of left jabs. "Pen!" Hector finished in a loud voice. "Case closed. The sentence is death!" With a fatal thrust Archie Neil sent the mop clattering to the floor. He turned to his fellow boxer. "What we need. Hector Dan, is more evidence. So people know what's going on. This stuff should be on the radio. If two foots are feet, then two boots should be beet! If teachers taught, then it should be the rule that preachers praught. It's an out? rage! We'll write a letter of complaint, that's what we'll do. We'll send it to the grammar police. We'll tell them what we think of this stupid stuff." Now Hector Dan belonged to Archie Neil. He sat down beside the boy. His tone simply said that they were in this fight together. "Look," said Archie Neil, "it doesn't always make sense. And we're having fun here because we're breaking the rules. But you have to know the rules to know when you are breaking them. You won't soon forget that meese should be the plural for moose. And that'll help you to remember that it isn't. And next time we have coffee, we'll have just as much fun getting it right." Word got around that the teacher played fiddle. That started as a fiasco. At his first dance, he played his best Cape Breton strathspeys and reels, but nobody was getting out on the floor. Fred Kennedy came up to him, and asked if he could play polkas. "What tempo?" Archie Neil whispered back. Fred put up his hand to hide his mouth and he whistled a tune into Archie Neil's ear. Archie Neil tentatively picked it out on the fiddle, Fred still whistling, then got the gist of it. Polkas and quadrilles, it dawned on him, were what these people wanted. After that he received plenty of invitations. Archie Neil was an occasional driver-escort for Jenny and Donnie, and the older MacNeil children. He took them to dances at Lochaber and Giant's Lake. He took this responsibility seriously, keeping a sharp eye on them and making sure they had a jolly time on the way going and coming back. It was fun. He didn't drink much at those times, just one or two. But it seemed that at every dance someone offered him drinks. He was careful. At first he refused. He told himself that there was too much at stake; he was responsible for too much. But gradually, he accepted a few drinks, and then more. Here's one for an equalizer, he thought to himself. One Sunday night two brothers had to bring him home, one driving Archie Neil's wagon, the other driving their own buggy. They helped him to his room, tiptoed back down the stairs and got away unseen. Archie Neil taught that Monday with the worst hangover he could remember. Never again, he told



himself, no more. But he took the drinks, anyway. Somehow the bottle got into his hand and up to his mouth at the same time he was telling himself that it was a stupid thing to do. I will have to control it, he told himself. At a dance in St. Andrew's, Tom Chisholm and two trustees came up to the stage and asked him to consider becoming the principal of St. Andrew's School for the 1927-28 school year. It was a three-room moral school. "I've heard excellent reports of your teaching," Tom told Archie Neil. "I don't want to be unfair to South River Lake, but we can make you an offer of \$425.00 for the year." Principal! He was just not yet 21 and he was being asked to be principal of a school! "Yes, that would be agreeable to me," he said, trying to conceal his eagerness. Then he added: "I'm going to be spending the summer at the Normal College in Toronto • working on my teacher's license." Margaret and Archie Neil Chisholm Actually, Archie Neil had been thinking about studying in Toronto, but he had not made up his mind until that moment. From Archie Neil by Mary Anne Ducharme, published June 1992. Mary Anne Ducharme worked closely with Archie Neil Chisholm to produce this book from his life and stories • Archie Neil. Born 1943 in Plattsburg, New York, Mary Anne came to Cape Breton in 1979, with her husband Richard and their children, Richard and Kathryn. For the past twelve years she has edited Participaper, produced through the Inverness County Department of Recreation. Mary Anne has a Master's Degree in English, and has been a schoolteacher and a playwright and director. With her husband, she raises acres of strawberries in Whycomagh. Archie Neil is now on sale everywhere. Or you can order direct. See next page. Overlooking the Margaree Valley at the Junction of Route 19 and the Cabot Trail A full-accommodation Lodge featuring: DINING ROOM LOUNGE SWIMMING POOL SPACIOUS ROOMS Take advantage of nearby recreation: BEACHES GOLF FAIRWAYS CAMPING FRESH AND SALT WATER FISHING HIKING The best of Nova Scotian musicians entertain in our lounge every weekend. Check with us to see who is playing, and drop in for an enjoyable evening. P. O. Box 550 MARGAREE FORKS Nova Scotia BOE 2A0 Phone (902) 248-2193, William F. MacIsaac, Manager RELAX in THE BEAUTIFUL MARGAREE VALLEY