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says, to change his life. What everyone in Wreck Cove wondered was what he was going to change it to when he knew so little about how to live and stay alive in their world. The Caplans rented the Smiths' house and practically lived over the heat vent from the coal and wood furnace until neighbours taught them how to properly bank the fires to heat the entire house. The neighbours also chopped and sawed wood, introduced the Caplans to salt cod, told them stories and sang them songs. By spring Caplan knew one thing for sure: Wreck Cove was where he and his family wanted to be. Cape Breton was where he wanted to be. He liked the people, the country, the great waves that rolled in from the sea, and he has never changed. "Oh yes," he says, "I'm happy. I wake up in the morning thinking of Cape Breton. There may be better places in the world but I don't know of any." The idea that changed everything came in 1972 from a magazine that American schoolchildren put together from talks with people in the hills of Appalachia • which eventually evolved into the highly popular Folio books. Caplan said someone should do that for Cape Breton, and his wife said, "Why don't you?" So he did, and it brought together a number of things: his love of history and poetry, his knowledge of graphic design, his feeling for the island, and the stories people told. He began to tape-record them. He took pictures, typed what people said on a portable typewriter, edited, cut and made up pages. These he photographed and took to a printer and got

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From a Talk with Ronald Caplan
Interview by Michael Taft

Ronald Caplan: How did I come to Cape Breton? Well I should tell you right away, I had never even heard of Cape Breton. I had never heard of it at all. I was living in Pittsburgh, Pennsylvania. That's the place where I was born, and I had returned there • I had been living there for I don't know how long, exactly, but I started a small business. Kind of a design business. And whether it was the period or the times or something like that, the joy of the sixties was already past, and I guess it was just about 1970. And I just wasn't happy. I was in Pittsburgh, married, a small business • not doing very well. And not really wanting to pursue it, and really having a desire not to be pursuing it. Not knowing what else to do with myself. And a friend came over • I hadn't seen for a number of years • and he was living in Canada, or going to live in Canada. But not Cape Breton or anything like that. Possibly he was living in Maine, or something like that, but he was going to go to Canada. We talked about it: "Why don't we get together in Canada? Why don't we try to start all over again?" He had a wife and one kid, and so did I. And somehow the idea was we were going to have just a farm down there. And he gave me a call, as I remember it • and you know you tell a story so many times, you hope it's the truth, do you know?... It doesn't matter, it's folklore, but I hope it's the truth. But as I remember • yeah, he went to live in Prince Edward Island. And he said, "Listen, Prince Edward Island, that's the place." So he said, "This is where we're going to set up." I'd never heard of Prince Edward Island. And we sold what we had. I put everything in a Volkswagen bus, and we started heading for Prince Edward Island. And I think we were actually on the way



when there was this phone call, and he said, "Prince Edward Island isn't the place. No," he said, "Cape Breton Island • that's the place." So to me it was just a little shift to the right. I didn't know either place, or where I was going. And then so I went to Cape Breton. And we met there. Well we weren't exactly going to stay there, he decided. The mainland of Nova Scotia • that was the place. Anyhow, we actually went up there with him for a very short time, but I knew very quickly that my man was never going to find "the place." And I didn't want to be there if he should happen to find the place. And we very quickly parted, not on very good terms. And all I knew was Cape Breton, you know. We did a little travelling around. Winter was coming on. And we took a trip to Newfoundland, first. Thought, well we're this far, we better keep on going. Maybe that's our place. I was already quite confused. Well, it was a terrible trip across Newfoundland. Barely saw it. All I could think of spruce, spruce, spruce, and how am I ever going to make a living here? You know, I wanted to think of myself as someone who could cut a tree, but I just didn't think I was going to make a living that way. And we got all the way to St. John's. I think we had one good meal. And really dis- August 1973. Photo of Caplan by Wm. F. Fredericks. appointed, really miserable. What are we going to do? And my daughter, who had just started to walk, stopped walking. She'd been in the car so long, she stopped walking! You know? Well that's all I needed. Got in the car and I drove right across New? foundland, back onto the ferry, came to Cape Bre- ton,,went to Baddeck. I guess we must have looked like hell. We came in the doors of the Telegraph House in Baddeck, and old Mrs. Dunlop was living then. And she just saw us come through the door • we had stayed there one or two nights before • she knew we were in trouble, serious trouble. And she just called out to someone to bring tea, and instead of taking us in to where everyone else went, she just took us off to the side to this little room by the fire? place and brought tea and everything to us there. And then we went into a room • they had a little mo? tel-like room. And that night the kid started to walk again around the motel room. And I said, "I'm not go? ing anywhere. I'm going to spend the winter here in Cape Breton." And that's how I got to Cape Breton, and I haven't left yet. Need a Radiator? Muffler? Shocks? Brakes? RAD-PRO Specializing in Radiator Repair & Recores Heaters Water Pumps, Etc. TWO LOCATIONS: Sydney i 349 George St. - Downtown ' AND Port Hawkesbury MacInnes Road at Specializing in Yaa'rma'-rS 'MASTER MUFFLER Shocks Springs Sydney: 562-2300 • Port Hawkesbury: 625-3781 Port Hawkesbury Centre Sydney: 539-6691 • Port Hawkesbury: 625-3781