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Partici-Paper

July 1991 Volume 12, no.7

Back in print!

Down North

The Book of Cape Breton's Magazine

by Mary Anne Ducharme

Anyone perusing a copy of *Cape Breton's Magazine* is observing an idea made visible: that history told in the words of the people who lived it, is history in its purest form. The underlying attitude is one of respect for the truth, and for the people whose words and faces appear in the pages of the magazine.

Editor Ron Caplan presents Cape Breton people as they are; he does not try to impose his own views or preconceptions. There it is: living oral history, testimonies to first-hand experiences, as valid and interesting decades from now as it is now. Let others interpret, analyze, make assumptions and conclusions. The unspoken challenge is there to those who would paint portraits of Cape Breton: this is what is accurate and real. Put aside preconceptions and see the truth.

Another part of the unwritten sub-text of this magazine is that Ron Caplan loves these people, and Cape Breton. That there is desperate urgency to the work of collecting oral history is also clear.

For those who save and cherish every issue of *Cape Breton's Magazine*, it takes but a few minutes looking at back issues to realize how many wonderful people have passed away since 1972 when *Cape Breton's Magazine* started publication. In Number One, Red Dan Smith of Jersey Cove shows us how to make rope from wood, now virtually a lost art. That we are now privileged to be instructed by Red Dan in his own words is due to the vision of Ron Caplan who made oral history his life's work. He is acutely aware that with the passing of each individual, there is irreplaceable loss of memories, experiences, perspectives, wisdom acquired.

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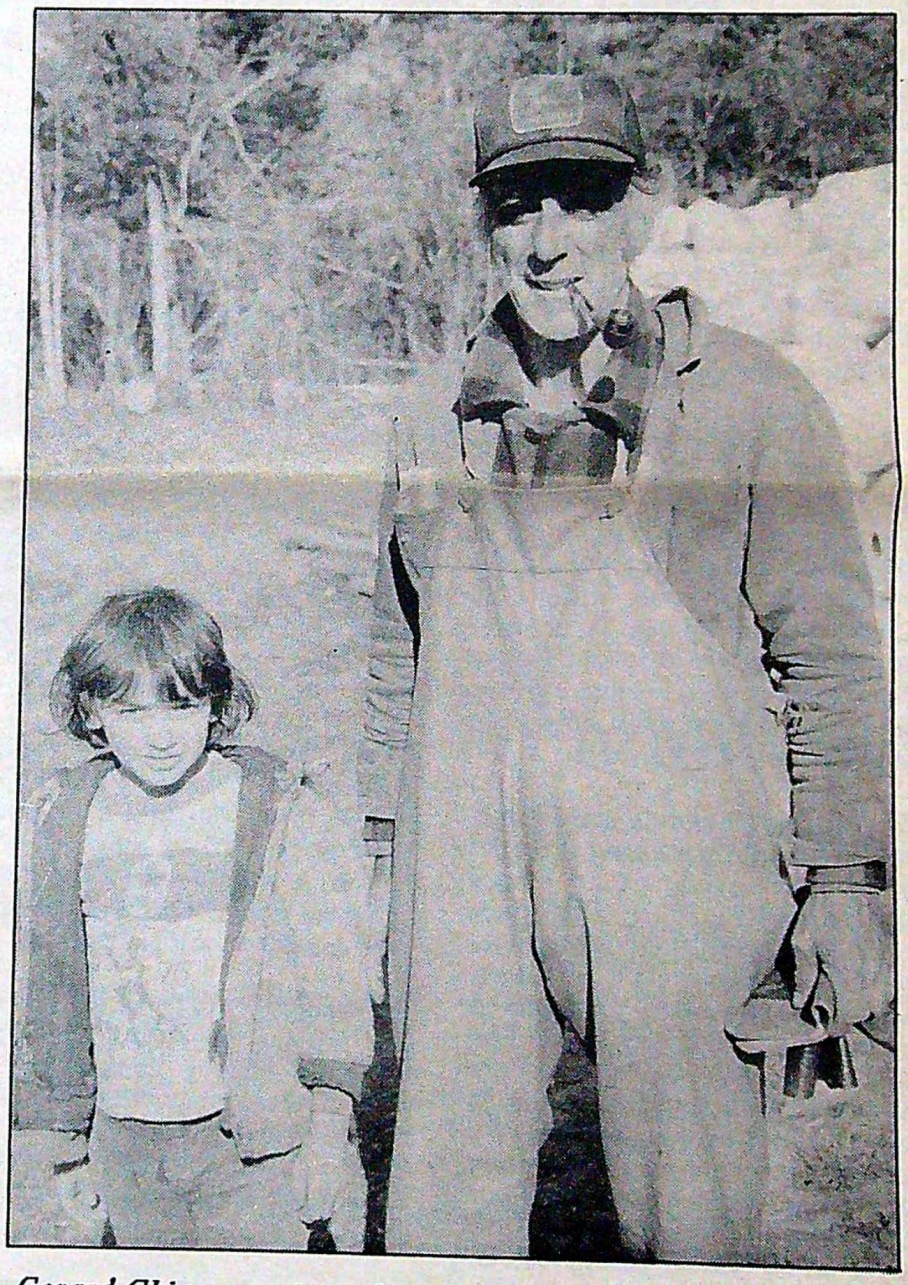

***Gerard Chiasson**, pictured here with his son, is one of the well-known Inverness County people featured in Ron Caplan's second printing of the book **Down North**. "I fished gaspereaux with my dad, down at Margaree Forks, from the time I was fifteen," says Gerard." - My great grandfather, Captain Mose, had a schooner and he used to haul them from Margaree Harbour up to Halifax in 1885 - the market to the West Indies has been going a long time, is still going on. . . . My great grandfather fished them the same way we do now. Same kind of trap, on the river." The visit with Gerard in **Down North** is titled **"Fishing for Gaspereaux on the South-west Margaree."** (see page three for another Margaree man, Johnny Murphy).*

More on the Catholic Church in Marble Mountain

The article in the last issue of *Partici-Paper* about St. Joseph's Church in Marble Mountain generated a sharing of information among those those who are in various ways connected with its history. It should be pointed out that while the church was preserved in a Protestant community, a number of Catholics took key roles in the survival of the building.

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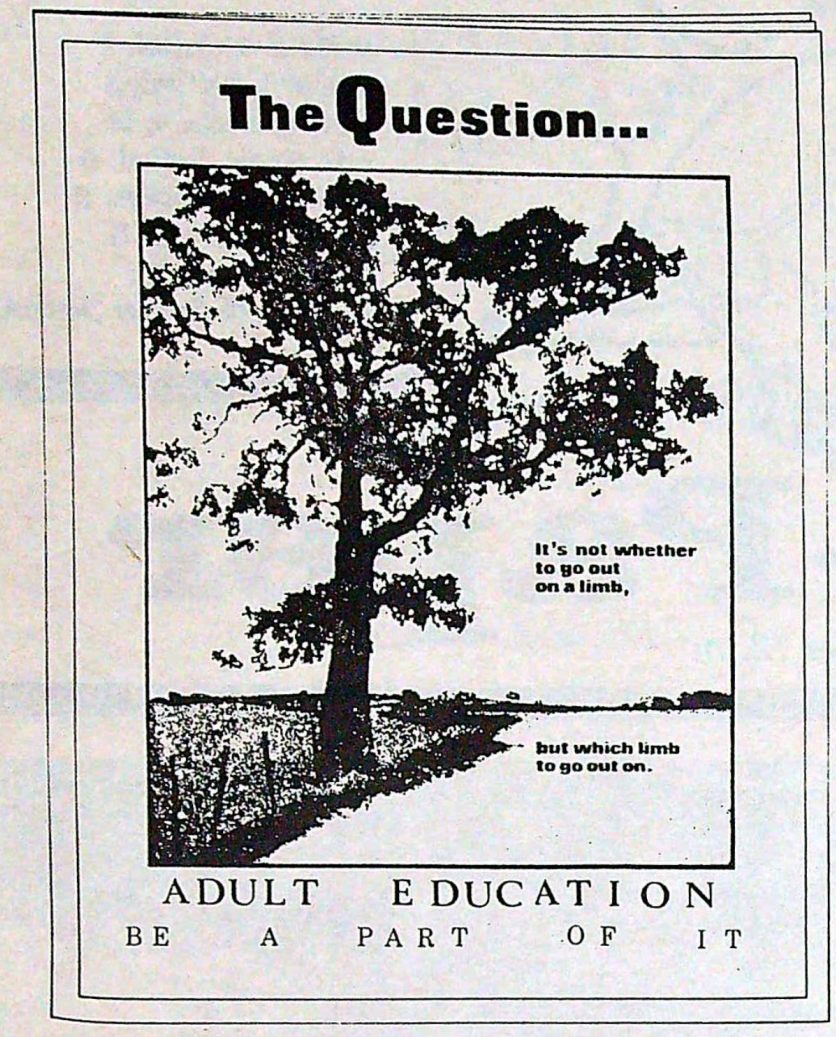

Literacy volunteers needed in each community

by Francene Gillis

The 1990's, the decade of literacy. What does that mean and what do we mean when say literacy? The dictionary defines literacy as the ability to read and write. The decade of literacy then, pertains to a period designated to help people in acquiring the reading, writing and mathematical skills needed to function in today's society.

We are now living in a world that is technologically advancing at a rapid pace, becoming ever more complicated. What was once considered a sufficient reading level to function effectively is no longer. Computers and complicated government forms have added new difficulties for those who are struggling with basic reading skills or are functionally illiterate. We can no longer pick up a magazine or form and expect to read it if our reading skills were only enough to allow us to do so ten or fifteen years ago.

Reading and writing are learned skills that some develop and others do not. It is not a matter of intelligence, but choice or circumstance. Anyone can learn to read and write, with effort and time. Those who lack literacy skills do so for various reasons: perhaps a boy had to quit school in grade six to go and fish with his father; perhaps the snow plough did not come close enough to the house and a family lived too far away; perhaps a young girl had to leave in grade nine to help a sick relative. Any number of reasons could be contributing factors in not acquiring literacy skills. But it is never too late to begin learning.

There are programs being developed to help non-readers and to help those who want to improve basic skills. These programs will be on a one-to-one basis with complete confidentiality! No one need know you are getting help.

In Inverness County, we are now in the process of setting up local volunteer literacy committees in each of the communities. We are recruiting people who might like to serve on these committees and we are looking for anyone who might like to tutor.

We are only at the beginning stages and some communities are further ahead than others at this point. It is our hope that in the next month or so we will have a contact person in each area to call if you are interested in serving on a volunteer literacy committee in your community. In the meantime, call the Recreation Office at 787-2274 and ask for Donna MacDonell.

Whatever your reason for wanting to be part of this exciting venture, if you have an interest, let us know. In September, the committees will start working in their respective communities. At this time, they will look at the needs and concerns in relation to literacy in their area and now they might help. The aim over the next year or so is to train tutors to work with learners on a one-to-on basis and to encourage those who would like to improve their reading and writing skills to come forward.

We need volunteers to put an infra-structure in place. With such a structure, more can be done to meet the literacy needs of our adult learners.

Literacy
Be a part of it!

Marble Mountain continued

As the article suggested, much research and documentation remains to be gathered before its complete history unfolds. Material now brought together would be a wonderful addition to the archival material already in the Marble Mountain Museum, and would provide another insight into County history. I hope that those who may undertake the task of gathering information from residents and various records will share their findings with the readers of *Partici-Paper.*

There is much history being lost throughout Inverness County every year. Not because we don't care. Not because we don't understand the value of it. It is because time slips away from us. Our older residents pass away and their knowledge with them. We think that what we know is "common knowledge," but the fact is that what each of us knows about our communities is far from commonly known, and other sources of information are scattered far and wide in public records. Familiar customs, memories, personal histories and buildings are in reality more important than we can ever know.

Where would our understanding of Inverness County be if J.L. MacDougall had not travelled the length and breadth of the county and gathered all of the material for *The History of Inverness County?* There have been a lot of changes since this book was published in 1922, among which are vastly improved means of getting around and communicating with each other. Right now there is no J.L. MacDougall, however, and no one undertaking the enormous task that he accomplished with horse and buggy.

Perhaps you can be the J.L. MacDougall for your own family. You will soon discover that it is more interesting than you ever dreamed. It is also fun, and an excuse to get out and visit. You could get even get hooked on history!

Collecting the knowledge a living community has about itself is something that all of us can take part in, young or old.

It does not cost much money and it is not difficult to make a tape recording. It costs very little more to make a copy of this tape and leave it as a part of the collection of a local museum. That way, the information is preserved as part of community history and it is accessible to researchers, writers, and historians.

I would be happy to transcribe tapes that could form the basis for *Partici-Paper articles.*

You might even discover that Great Uncle Angus is the only one left alive who knows who built that church in Marble Mountain!

-from The Editor

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We welcome contributions of articles, photos, letters dealing with issues and opinions, information and promotion about community events.

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