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William and Lucile Mann's South American trip, 1939

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thirty-two

POISE

[[bold]] Don McNeill [[/bold]]

[[bold]] Radio's Breakfast Club Man [[/bold]]

[[bold]][[cursive]] by Cecil J. Schulte [[/cursive]][[bold]]

[[image]] Happy-go-lucky Don is one of the most listened-to men in the radio industry [[/image]]

Six feet two of laughing Catholic manhood. That seems to be as adequate a way as any to describe Don McNeill, ace NBC master of ceremonies, and without doubt one of the most listened-to men in the radio industry.

Don is the M. C. on the daily, Monday through Saturday, NBC "Breakfast Club" program, a program which is famed for its popularity and more especially for its cleanliness. Don McNeill could truly be called "America's Alarm Clock."

The role is fitting, moreover; for the laugh-provoking broadcaster has done a good job of being first in nearly everything he engaged in since he beat Santa Claus to the old McNeill home a scant twenty-four hours before Christmas Eve back in 1907. Don was baptized in a Galena, Ill., parish on January 2, 1908.

Some time later the family moved to Sheboygan, Wis., where, in 1913, the Irish lad entered St. Clement's parochial school. As a boy Don remembers that he was an average student with an above-average yen for jokes and fun. Highlight of his years at St. Clement's was his First Holy Communion in 1915 and his later reception of Confirmation in the same parish church. As may be seen, the good Lord must have blessed young Don with an abundance of the graces of Confirmation; for the boy has indeed been a true soldier of Christ throughout his life.

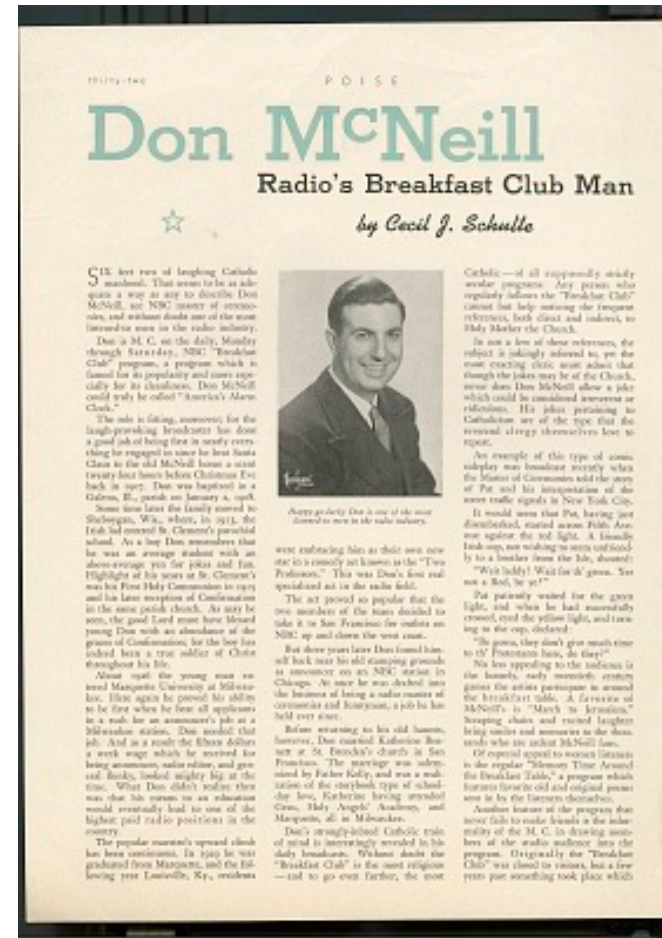
About 1926 the young man entered Marquette University at Milwaukee. Here again he proved his ability to be first when he beat all applicants in a rush for an announcer's job at a Milwaukee station. Don needed that job. And as a result the Bronx dollars a week wage which he received for being announcer, radio editor, and general flunky, looked mighty big at the time. What Don didn't realize then was that his means to an education would eventually lead to one of the highest paid radio positions in the country.

The popular maestro's upward climb has been continuous. In 1929 he was graduated from Marquette, and the following year Louisville, Ky., residents were embracing him as their own new star in a comedy act known as the "Two Professors." This was Don's first real specialized act in the radio field.

The act proved so popular that the two members of the team decided to take it to San Francisco for outlets on NBC up and down the West Coast.

But three years later Don found himself back near his old stamping grounds as announcer on an NBC station in Chicago. At once he was drafted into the business of being a radio master of ceremonies and funnyman, a job he has held ever since.

Before returning to his old haunts, however, Don married Katherine Bennett at St. Brenden's church in San Francisco. The marriage was



solemnized by Father Kelly, and was a realization of the storybook type of schoolday love, Katherine having attended Gesu, Holy Angels' Academy, and Marquette, all in Milwaukee.

Don's strongly-inbred Catholic train of mind is interestingly revealed in his daily broadcasts. Without doubt the "Breakfast Club" in the most religious - and to go even further, the most Catholic - of all supposedly strictly secular programs. Any person who regularly follows the "Breakfast Club" cannot but help noticing the frequent references, both direct and indirect, the Holy Mother the Church.

In not a few of these references, the subject is jokingly referred to, yet the most exacting cleric must admit that though the jokes may be of the Church, never does Don McNeill allow a joke which could be considered irreverent or ridiculous. His jokes pertaining to Catholicism are of the type that the revered clergy themselves love to repeat.

An example of this type of comic sideplay was broadcast recently when the Master of Ceremonies told the story of Pat and his interpretation of the street traffic signals in New York City.

It would seem that Pat, having just disembarked, started across Fifth Avenue against the red light. A friendly Irish cop, not wishing to seem unfriendly to a brother from the Isle, shouted:

"Wait laddy! Wait for th' green. Yer not a Red, be ye?"

Pat patiently waited for the green light, and when he had successfully crossed, eyed the yellow light, and turning to the cop, declared:

"Be gorra, the don't give much time to th' Protestants here, do they?"

No less appealing to the audience is the homely, early twentieth century games the artists participate in around the breakfast table. A favorite of McNeill's is "March to Jerusalem." Scraping chairs and excited laughter bring smiles and memories to the thousands who are ardent McNeill fans.

Of especial appeal to women listeners is the regular "Memory Time Around the Breakfast Table," a program which features old and original poems sent in by listeners themselves.

Another feature of the program that never fails to make friends is the informality of the M. C. in drawing members of the studio audience into the program. Originally the "Breakfast Club" was closed to visitors, but a few years past something took place which

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