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ACROSS THE ISLAND

Courage Asset To Island Man

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I'VE BEEN seeking unusual Islanders, to bring you their story, since I started this column but none, I suggest, is more unusual or praiseworthy, than Cornwall's Daniel Gass, whom I want to tell you about this week.

I'll give you any odds you name that very few of the several hundred farmers who heard Danny - everyone calls him that including himself - give the keynote speech at the cattlemen's marketing meeting here last month, had any idea the man's a semi-invalid, who rarely spends six hours per day out of bed. He's been that way for six or seven years and he was a complete invalid for 20 years before that.

Danny did a tremendously good job at the meeting. He injected more pep and enthusiasm into it than any other single speaker. He even accepted the challenge of chairing the committee named to probe the whole marketing problem, and bring back recommendations. And he's working hard at it. Several meetings have been held already and others are being planned.

BUT EVEN more amazing to me is the fact he buys, feeds and markets upwards of 100 beef steers each year. It's his answer to the problem of making a living that faces all of us. I suggest that his approach is most unusual with his crippling handicap, for most of us find the challenge tough enough even when we have normal health.

The man with the unconquerable spirit - he "never can get any pep" physically - buys 55 to 60 steers, one and one-half years old each fall, and puts them in the barns of good cattle feeders because he is unable to feed them himself. He buys 25 to 30 more in the spring, puts the entire lot out on 150 acres of leased pasture in late May, and markets them in late October to packers, or to other buyers, depending on who pays the best price.

Mr. Gass buys the animals at 16 ½ cents per pound and pays the farmer who feeds them through the winter 18 ½ cents per pound in the spring.

250 Pounds Gain On Pasture

CAREFULLY managing the pasture by clipping and rotation, he gets an average monthly gain of 50 pounds and 250 pounds through the season. He has had steers that gain more but found they "outgrew their finish" and made less desirable beef carcasses in the fall.

He likes the animals to have "a fair finish" when he turns them out to pasture. More heavily finished animals do not do so well on pasture. He handles beef crosses almost exclusively, though there are a few beef-dairy crosses at times.

Even in the latter part of the period when he was a complete invalid - he spent many years in the Provincial Sanitorium - he purchased and pastured some cattle with the help of his brother. "I had to do something", he told me when my eyes must have indicated my surprise.

I asked Danny how he became interested in beef cattle and his reply is interesting.

HE "HELD cattle" for a neighbour, Fred MacPhee, when he was a boy and sometimes skinned a shank bone where the odd knife slip wouldn't hurt much.

It jumps from there to the latter Twenties when he was 19 or 20, and Webster's Corner at Fort Augustus where he managed a store, and persuaded the owner to "let me try just one beef carcass." Danny promised to take the loss if there was a loss, but the store would get any profit/. There was a profit and the business developed into three carcasses a week.

Next summer the enterprising youngster, who had a special reason for his urge to make money, talked his father into backing his loan of \$300 and put it with a like amount he had saved, to purchase 16 heifers, and put them on 75 acres of pasture he had rented for \$75.

### No Steers Were Raised Then

THE HEIFERS were purchased because there were no steers then. Bull calves were sold for fox meat, or merely destroyed.

Mr. Gass bought the animals with the idea of having his own meat supply, and, of course, making money. But he got a chance to sell them early in the summer for enough to get his money back plus the season's pasture rent, so he let them go. It was impossible to get animals for beef then until late June and pork was sold in the interval. He put two other lots through the pasture before the fall.

Even the best beef was poor by today's standards, and even the Easter beef wouldn't make better than today's Standard or Brown brand, he told me. The normal carcass of beef was so thin that chunks of suet or fat had to be given the customers so they could fry it in the pan, I was told.

Mr. Gass went to Boston just before depression struck in 1929, came back to work in Charlottetown for several years, and then returned to the Webster's Corner store, got cleaned out completely by fire, and was fighting his way back when his health broke under the grind of continued heavy work without enough rest.

### Loss Of Foot Was First Blow

I SAID he had an unusual reason for the urge to make money. He had a foot amputated at the ankle when he was a boy, and was trying to make enough money to get a proper amputation, and buy a properly fitting artificial limb. He couldn't get one that would fit at the ankle without causing constant discomfort.

The man has been battling adversity all his life, and battling it gamely in spite of severe handicaps. But what do you think he asked me to emphasize when I wrote about him?

“DON’T FORGET” he asked me, “to emphasize that had it not been for the exceptional friends, we could never have carried on. It was their deeds, as well as their kind words and thoughts, that made it possible,” he told me.

I’ve skimmed over lightly some of the most difficult periods of his life, for I feel he would want me to. But I hope I’ve given you enough information to let you know something of the wonderful fight some people put up to exist in this world many of us think is difficult enough when we have all of our limbs and normal health.

I find I’ve not mentioned Mrs. Gass, but I know she shared the trials and heartaches with her husband and family, over the most difficult years and is still sharing them. I certainly did not mean to leave the charming lady out of the story I’ve been trying to tell you.

LET ME give you one more flash back before I leave this story.

Mr. Gass got \$25 a month when he started as store manager at Webster’s Corner, but nobody had much money then. Many customers took a 12-dozen crate of eggs to the store and got \$1.44 at 12 cents a dozen. Take out 25 cents for three figs of tobacco, as many did, and they hadn’t much left to buy their groceries for the week, Mr. Gass recalled.

### Unusual Treats Are Received

AN OLD friend of mine, Wallie Walker, sent me this week a couple of cans of Fiddleheads packed in New Brunswick, a can of Cod livers, and a small bag of Island oatmeal.

I tried the Fiddleheads at 3 o’clock one morning. I was doing an emergency shift on the night desk and had just got home - we tried the Cod livers at noon and found both to be delicious.

Another treat is in store when I get enough thick cream to make the good old fashioned Scotch dish of “Stapag” - that’s the way Charles MacDonald, Wood Islands tells me it’s spelled. The phonetic spelling I’d been using was “Sthapach” and Mr. MacDonald tells me that’s also correct.

THE STUFF is too “hot” for my stomach but I’m going to have at least one feed, just to refresh my memory on the excellent taste.

The Fiddlehead is a fern and they grow it in some areas of this province but I don’t know that they’re put up here. One man told me yesterday, the Island variety doesn’t taste the same. But that is passed along without any comment. Personally, I just don’t know.

I asked Wallie where he got the Island oatmeal but he told me “that’s a navel secret.”