

Old Dan as a Foster Parent

By B. Dalton Tipping

OLD Dan opened the door of his cabin and looked out. "Jove!" "but she's a fierce night," he said to himself as he resumed his seat and proceeded with his task of replacing a damaged snowshoe. "This snow is going to give me more work uncovering that line of traps, to say nothing of having to break all my trails again. Never mind, if she had come last night it would have caught me in my brush shelter at the lower end of the lake."

Suddenly he was aroused from his meditations by a knocking on the door. "Who the dickens can be out a night like this," he thought, as he called, "Come in!"

The door opened and an Indian stepped in.

"Hello Joe! Pretty bad night, eh," said Dan as he shook hands. "Take a chair and I'll have a cup of tea for you in a minute. Where are you camped?"

"Half a mile down the lake," said the Indian, indicating the direction with his hand. "My woman pretty sick; we travel these days, and all the time she get worse; papoose twins day sick too. You know Jacob? He come here with me two years ago."

Dan nodded the recollection. "His woman dead two weeks ago; he was awful sick, but he better now."

Dan had heard from a neighboring trapper that the "flu" was raging throughout the whole Dominion, and especially among the Indians, with whom, in the majority of cases it proved fatal.

Then Dan inquired, "Where are you making for now?"

"My house at Lac St. Ann," said the Indian, "but I stay here a few days, and maybe my woman get better. To-day all the time she sick in de head; she take Indian medicine, but it no good. I come here to-night because I think, maybe, you have some white man medicine."

"I'll sure have a look," said Dan. "Get some of this tea in you; there's bannock and meat on the table; while I see what I can find in the medicine line."

From a shelf Dan took down a tin box, which he termed his first aid, but the same box had on a good many occasions been the one and only aid procurable, there not being a doctor within two hundred miles.

After rummaging through the box, Dan picked up a small envelope. "Ah! here we are, some small asperin. I guess that's the best I have here."

"Now, Joe, when you get back to your tepee give your woman one of these," placing one tablet in the palm of his hand. "To-morrow morning give her one more. Understand."

"Yes I know," assured the Indian, and as he departed Dan told him he would call in at the tepee in the morning when on his trap round.

The following morning on finishing breakfast Dan gathered his trap kit together, animal, bait, etc., then putting on his snowshoes he took the path that skirted the lake shore. On nearing the Indian camp he was met by a band of savage dogs. Joe came out to meet him, but by his expression Dan knew something was wrong.

"My woman awful sick last night, and this morning she gone queer in de head. She think she see big bear in tepee, but she quiet now. I not feel good myself. I guess I get sick like my woman, maybe die. Oh! I wish I home."

Dan told him to stay in the tepee and keep his feet dry, then after seeing they had wood and water, went on to his traps, saying that he would call in on his way back. On returning he cut a good supply of wood for them and then went back to his cabin, where he found Shorty McDonald, a neighboring trapper, who had recently made a trip to the settlement, bringing Dan's mail. Shorty's camp was twelve miles east on Otter Creek his trap line extended in the direction of Dan's cabin, and he frequently spent the night with Dan.

"I tell you Shorty: I'm sure worried about those Indians. If the father and

mother should cash in, I'll certainly have to act as foster parent to those little papooses till someone comes after them."

"How old are they?" Shorty inquired. "Why darn it man they are still tied up in those toddled socks. You know what I mean." Shorty nodded. Must be under a year, anyway. "Have you ever had any experience in caring for young un's, Dan?"

"No I haven't," Dan replied, "except raising a bear cub once; but I guess they would be pretty much the same. Feed 'em when they're hungry I reckon is the main point."

Before retiring Dan persuaded Shorty to stay with him through this worrying affair, saying, "If the worst comes to the worst I'll need your help."

The following morning Dan was up early. Breakfast over, he told Shorty he would hike down and see how the Indians were. "I guess I had better take this pot of mulligan along, as they won't be feeling like cooking anything."

Shorty waited until noon and then decided to go down to the camp and see what was keeping Dan.

The barking of the dogs announced his arrival, causing Dan to look out, and

on seeing Shorty went to meet him.

"She has gone over the long road, Shorty, and Joe will be with her before long. Come inside."

Dan raised the flap of the tepee and went in, Shorty following.

A small fire was burning in the center which Dan had kept replenished. The poor squaw lay covered with a blanket, and against some pack bags the two little papooses were propped. Joe lay huddled by the fire. As Dan and Shorty entered he opened his eyes, but his feeble glance showed no sign of recognition.

Dan beckoned to Shorty to sit down and in a low tone said, "Poor Joe asked me when the long night came to take the papooses and look after them until I could get word to his sister or the missionary of the reserve."

They sat in silence for some time. Finally Dan got to his feet and knelt down beside Joe. "Poor fellow, his long night has come."

"Now Shorty for business. I'll put things in shape here, while you hit back to the cabin and get my rifle. Those dogs have got to be put out of the way."

Half an hour later Shorty and Dan left the gruesome camp, each carrying a crying papoose.

On reaching the cabin, Dan at once opened and diluted a can of condensed milk, which he heated to what he

thought was the correct temperature.

While Dan was thus engaged Shorty was frantically jiggling the papooses, balancing one on each knee, and whistling "Casey Jones," which did not appear to have the soothing effect he had hoped for.

Finally Dan had the milk ready, and after having placed a slice of bread in it, these two rugged old trappers undertook the delicate task of feeding the unfortunate little orphans. Through the sickness of their parents they had been very much neglected, so natural instinct predominated, and it was with beaming faces that Dan and Shorty saw them munch the last spoonful.

"Here Shorty, we've got to get them out of these blamed baskets, and then we'll rig up a blanket hammock."

This they suspended from two beams, and then carefully snuggled the papooses in for the night.

"Now," said Dan, "I'm going to write the agent of the Lac St. Ann Reserve, and I think Shorty you had better hike for the settlement in the morning. The sooner we get word to them the sooner we will be relieved of this responsibility. It will take you three days to get out, and that will just hit it right for catching the outgoing mail. Of course, the traps will have to take pot luck till you

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