

**Mark,  
An Island Champ**

Mark:

I'm very determined, I try and try and try until the very end and then if I can't do it, I'll try a couple more times.

I've always kept that farming aspect in my life, if we go to shows where there's animals I always enjoy seeing them and you sort of know the little bit of background, you know what type they are and what they're like. If a neighbour farm needs help I always go out there and help, and it's just kind of nice to notice farming and to also have that experience where you have to do a lot of hard work to get maybe a little bit of a nice result.

My family, we're all really tight, we always joke around and have fun, and just different things, and we always know what's going on in each others lives, so we're a really close family.

Johan (Mark's father):

Mark, like being a farm boy, he helped out then already in all kinds of odd little things. He was always there to help me. One day, well there was a grain truck coming into the yard and we started unloading it.

Janny (Mark's mother):

It was just before school was starting again; it was the 19<sup>th</sup> of August. My mother she was visiting from Holland. We were just taking the day, the two of us, to go to Moncton and shopping.

Johan:

When you unload the grain, the flow you want to have it exactly right, so we set it up and I had to go back to the barn.

Mark:

I just walked by and saw that some of the grain wasn't flowing right. I just gave a little push with my left hand, but then I pushed a little too far, and I started losing my balance. As I started to fall I shot my two hands out to brace my fall. With that, my right hand landed on top of the shield and my left hand went through the guards.

Janny:

On the way back I felt something really strange, I felt like something happened, but I didn't know what. I was really...I wanted to get home.

Menno (Mark's brother):

I was four, and I don't remember much about it but apparently the truck driver told me to go get my father.

Johan:

Mark, Mark, he's in the auger, so you know I came running out of the barn, and by golly yes he was in and it looked pretty bad, and by this time the driver had already took the feed belts off, which I think is amazing, it can be done but it is a very courageous thing he did, and here we had this boy laying in this hopper. And you know we had to take him out, there was no other way. So we returned to the auger, got him out and then it was a matter of getting to the hospital as fast as we could. We put a note on the table for mom.

Janny:

It said Mark had an accident, gone to the hospital.

Johan:

First, you're scared to death, you think how can one live without an arm, I mean that couldn't simply, you couldn't be done you think.

Mark:

At first, I didn't realize that I lost my arm, I had a really large bandage on my stump, I thought they just folded my arm double.

Janny:

The doctors advised us not to say anything about the amputation. They kind of wanted him to you know get more stable. After a while, well the doctors told me he's stable enough and you can tell him. So I told him, and I said, they had to amputate your arm, and he said, "No, no, no, no, I know where the auger cut me because I can feel my hand moving. So no, no, no, it's all there, it's just folded up, you're wrong, it's not amputated. So he really was totally in denial.

Mark:

It didn't really sink in, until they took off the bandages and I could see it, so that was the first time I actually realized that I had only one arm.

Johan:

At first, the real scary part is are we going to keep him alive, because the grain being dirty so we were really afraid for infection because it was so high up on his shoulder and you know you're so close to the heart, and the blood stream and everything. The first five days I think there was still a possibility that we were going to lose him. What is an amputation then?

Janny:

When Mark first came home, he was kind of timid. He wasn't sure what he could do yet. He stayed in the house a little bit more, and he wasn't sure how to handle friends and things like that either too much.

Johan:

For a while there he was kind of a quiet boy, because before he was quite outgoing.

Janny:

He wasn't allowed in the barn, we didn't want him there, because of infection at that time. And he couldn't ride his bike with one arm, so that was a no-no too, so he was kind of lost.

Johan:

It was a big concern, you know, what is this boy going to do with his life?

Janny:

We knew about The War Amps but we didn't know what exactly they were doing. In my mind it was still more for the veterans, and then they gave us a call, there was going to be a seminar within a week if we were interested to join it. We didn't really know what a seminar was all about but anyway we decided to go.

That was the best thing that I guess ever happened for him to see okay, there's all the kids and they do all this kind of stuff I can do too.

Johan:

He fitted in right away with the other kids, you know, and they played along, and yes, he right away took off.

Mark:

So that was a great experience to know that I wasn't alone. I hung out with a junior counsellor named Chris and he was quite a role model for me. He really helped me a lot. He was sort of my guide.

Janny:

He really was into drawing and picture making, so he drew a lot of pictures over the weekend. I didn't sleep for two nights I think after that because it was so much information came in three days, what would have taken us forever I guess to gather on our own.

I saw all kinds of arms floating around, and when I was asleep it was like I was dreaming about arms. It was a big help. After seeing all those kids there with all their dreams and what they could do and what you know what they were planning to do, it was like wow, why do we even worry.

Johan:

That actually was a big eye opener.

Janny:

So it really was the perfect timing I think for him to go there.

Before he was a determined little guy, and after he was even more determined.

Mark:

From then on I really didn't let it bother me. I just did whatever I wanted.

Johan:

Life went on. He got fitted with a prosthesis and he took down every cliff and then went around it, or took the problem on straight head on, he was amazing. In many ways he helped us more than we helped him, because we thought we had to help him, we are the parents right? But in a lot of ways I think he had the answer already, or he just did it.

Mark:

I would describe myself as a very sportive athletic person who doesn't give up quite easily. I started with my biathlon a couple of years ago. I do a lot of running for my training and also for track and field for my school. I usually use this arm, with the weight at the rubber fist at the end just for balance and better muscle in the shoulder and upper body.

Janny:

The first time he was fitted with the prosthetic limb was the full arm cable version with the shoulder strap and everything.

Johan:

At first they really tried to imitate the other arm I remember, so a lot of time was spent in measuring and then making sure that one arm looked exactly like the other. Which of course with him being growing, that would only last a week.

Mark:

I found the longer limb heavier and just dangling there by my side and useless.

I took the attitude that you don't need real, it's not going to be a real arm so why bother, so I decided to go with the shorter limbs which made a great difference for me. I went from wearing an arm two to three hours a day to wearing it 12 to 14 hours a day and doing different sports, and working with it, and doing training for my biathlon.

In the summer I work at a complex of six soccer fields, and I just do all the maintenance on it. There have been some challenges in that. I had to take one of my arms and sort of re-tweak it a little bit so that I could easily manoeuvre the tractor. It works really well for me because it also gives me the freedom to do my training there, and I'm also handy if a ref doesn't show up and I'm working I can just stop working and just ref that game. And it's really near by and it's a passion I have for the soccer.

Johan:

As much as I can, I better watch his game than hear all the stories later about it. So then I can at least say, oh you did that well, and oh you did that well and can coach him because he really tries to be, you know, on top of his game. He really pushes himself to be better.

Mark:

I started playing before my accident. I had to start over again playing soccer, so it took a little while to develop my skills that I used to have, running and everything.

Johan:

At first, he played without a prosthesis. He fell all the time.

Mark:

One of the coaches at my club said you should wear an arm because it's better for your balance. And then we found out that I was allowed to wear the rubber hand because it wouldn't hurt the other kids as much if I hit them or if we banged shoulders, or whatever. So I started wearing the arm.

The first year was a little awkward because it was balance on and off, but I could definitely see that there was an improvement in my kicks and everything, and that's been going on for the last three or four years.

Before I found the other kids were a lot less aggressive. If they get a good couple shots on you, you sort of think hey, that's a good player, if you have mark him. Some players are a little rougher, because they know I can take it, then they'll get a nice little nudge back if they start nudging me so that goes back and forth.

I have a really good relationship with my brother. He always fools around with my arm.

Menno:

Some of them are pretty cool looking, and they're pretty fun to play with.

Mark:

And it's sometimes funny and sometimes really annoying.

Menno:

I'm proud of him. Sometimes he asks for help, I only help when he does ask for it.

Mark:

My parents supported me a lot, but they also let me decide what I wanted.

Janny:

At first we were really trying to do everything for him, so did everybody else. In school they tied his laces, closed his coat, they put his books away, they carried his bag. He really thought it was fun, you know, because everybody catered towards him.

Mark:

But soon I realized that I still wanted to be independent and then it moved on to me saying no, I don't want the help. I can do it myself.

I just got my full driver's licence, here on the island. Highway Safety wanted me to get a medical certificate to say that I was safe to drive, to get my beginners. So I went to a doctor. He didn't quite know me and he started writing down all these restrictions...that I should only drive an automatic, I should have a spinner knob, and all different restrictions.

Janny:

And the last couple years when we went to The War Amps seminar, they talked about driving and how to deal with it. So you know, we were prepared for whatever was coming, and it turned out you know it was quite a struggle to get them to see that he wasn't missing something, but he was still an able bodied person that could drive.

Mark:

I can drive both automatic and standard. Just to give me the freedom, I learned to drive both. The automatic, I can keep both hands on the steering wheel. With the standard, I keep my stump where it is on the steering wheel right now and then I can just with my right hand, shift gears, and then I can put both hands on the wheel again. And for signal lights and everything like that, I can just put my stump on, and reach the levers, turn for a signal light, and or window wipers, or something like that.

I can do whatever anybody else can.

**IN CLASS: MARK'S ACTUALITY SOUND**

Actually today, nine years ago I lost my arm, my left arm, just above the elbow in a farm accident.

Mark:

I just say that I lost my arm in a farm accident, and the kids understand that and they ask the questions, it's kind of cute sometimes, the kids are like, why?, and you explain it again, you explain it a little differently, and they're like why?, why do you have that arm?

Well because I lost my other arm, and they're like, no you just broke your arm, where's your real arm? And the little kids just don't believe it because it's not something they see everyday.

IN CLASS: MARK'S ACTUALITY SOUND

And it just came right off when I was running. And everyone is like, your arm fell off, and I'm like, oh.

What about in your backyard? What kind of dangers are in there?

Janny:

Mark is involved with a lot of presentations, maybe 15 to 20 a year, he does in different schools. It's important for him to give it because I think he himself feels that by doing it he can prevent somebody else from getting hurt. He seems to really enjoy that, he always did, from age seven on, and he's still doing them.

IN CLASS: MARK'S ACTUALITY SOUND

Some have put on dolphins for their swimming arms and swimming legs, but I really like soccer, so I put in some of the great countries that play soccer.

Alright guys, I hope you learned a lot in today's presentation.

PARADE: MARK'S ACTUALITY SOUND

So watch the ground for horse poo, now. So all good. Right? Ready? One, two three, go! PLAYSAFE, DRIVESAFE!

Mark:

I have been in eight parades now as a safety ambassador.

Johan:

All over the middle part of the island, people almost all know him. He loves being involved in all kinds of volunteering. He loves it. It's around people.

## SAFETY WALK: ACTUALITY SOUND

Mark:

So what should we do when we come to this intersection here?

Child: Stop, look both ways.

Mark: Which way should we go first?

Mark: Can we play around those?

Children: No!

Child: Does the white stuff hurt?

Mark: No.

Child: How old are you?

Mark: Seven

Child : Why does it need that?

Child: You're not seven!

Mark: No when I was seven it happened.

Child: Why does it do that?

Mark: So I can take it off.

Child: So how old are you now?

Mark: I'm 16 now.

Child: So you have a lot of experience with it?

Mark: Yes.

Mark:

Being a role model to the younger Champs, I find is a great opportunity. It puts a little more responsibility on you to sort of go out there and find what's the best way to do something, so that you can take it back to the seminars and explain it to the other Champs and the younger Champs.

I've gone to eight seminars since my accident. I'm now a junior counsellor for my fourth year.

We help each other with the different sessions. So it's a great bond and you get friendships that last forever.

#### CHAMP SEMINAR: ACTUALITY SOUND

Junior Counsellor: Oh I missed you, I'm so happy to see you!

Champ: Me too!

Junior Counsellor: You've gotten bigger.

Janny:

It is really important for us to be involved because it's like a big family that you can rely on whenever you need them for whatever reason, and it makes things possible that wouldn't have been possible without it. He kind of grows up with them. They're all taking care of each other.

Johan:

Then there is the Dutch connection and a Canadian connection. Every 11th of November we realize that we've been liberated by the Canadians and The War Amps are a part of that. It all comes full circle.

Janny:

When he comes back from a seminar he's recharged and he's really eager to do whatever it takes, so even more than before.

Mark:

Higher end biking can be real difficult for leg and arm amputees because the biking relies on all limbs to work together.

When I was younger I could get away with simpler designs but then they would start breaking once I grew up and got stronger.

Then I had to progress because when I got into a road bike, it became much faster and since the tires are so thin, you rely on the steering, and shifting, and capability of holding it.

When you are going up big hills, you want to stand on the handle bars. So you have to rely on both arms as equal as much as you can.

Johan:

We realized how much money was spent on arms. He has specialized equipment lately so you don't do it lightly.

Janny:

Well we couldn't really afford to buy the arms that he really needed. When at The War Amps they said ok we'll help you financially, that was like, whoa! You know, that is great!

Mark:

The War Amps cover all the costs for the arms for daily use. They also cover the recreational limbs, because they believe that amputees should be able to do whatever they want. So now I have this arm, it's more durable and then I can rely on it more and it's a lot safer with the quick detach on it.

If I start to fall I can just pull a little rope and it pulls and it takes the arm right off the bike, so the bike doesn't follow me.

I do a lot of cycling for the biathlon again, for long distances, sometimes 12, 13, 14k.

Johan:

If he thinks he can do it, he can do it. Not at first, but with a little bit of innovative technique and him trying, you get amazing results. Of course there are limitations but it's almost what you want to be the limit that is the limit.

In the beginning, Mark was a downhill skier, and Menno was the cross-country skier, I don't know why but that was the way it was. But we as parents, we kept talking to Mark; we said, you know you should cross-country ski because your shoulder will develop, it will help your whole posture.

So he took our advice, and he went with his brother a few times, and I think by the third time, he started liking it. And this has developed, and developed and developed.

Janny:

Two years ago, Menno started with the biathlon, and his instructor asked if Mark wanted to be involved too, and Mark said, no no no no, I can't shoot and I don't want to do it. But then the following week he asked him again, and he said, okay, I'll try it, and they put a sand bag down and let him shoot. The five shots he did them all right, so he thought, oh I can do this. Then he started biathlon too.

Mark:

So now I had about four weeks before my first competition which was the Provincials. If we did well there we'd go to Nationals. In these four weeks I had to train a lot and keep on shooting but I also had to make a device that would allow me to ski, and without switching arms, be able to shoot at the same time, because in the rules, you have to start and finish with the same gear and you're not allowed to switch. I just put a bunch of old arms together and had it made.

I can lock it at an angle. When I'm skiing, I can just put in my pole and then I just go like this, and when I have the ski pole in, it sort of shoots forward, digs into the snow, and then when I come above it a little bit, when I raise my shoulders, and then I can push it back with my stump and then it sort of springs back, and then I can bring it up again for the next time.

Then for the biathlon, I unlock the elbow, I lay my rifle on this little rubber piece on top. Put the rifle into my shoulder and I can shoot. About three weeks before the competition, I actually got the arm.

Janny:

They went to the Provincial championships, and they did really well. That was last year and then this year, this past winter, they won the Provincials and they went to Nationals.

Mark:

Coming back with Menno, having the best junior finish ever for the island, myself tying the island record for the best male ever to go to Nationals, and our team doing the best ever for an island team.

This winter I was also invited to an International Paralympic Committee Development Camp in Norway, learned a lot and developed my technique. Just raced quite a while and got two gold and a silver.

Janny:

Late July, they announced that he was going to be on the National Development Team. He's determined to make it so, he'll do his best.

Mark:

Some of my dreams... one is to become an architect or engineer, but I also hope to ski and do biathlon for as long as I can.

I'd love to go train for the next couple years and try to make the Canadian Paralympic team, representing Canada. That is my biggest goal.

Janny:

He will be successful whatever he chooses to do. He makes us really proud.

Johan:

If anything the amputation makes him stronger, more determined, more willed, more focused.

Mark:

I think my amputation has helped me develop as a better person. It gave me more drive to do whatever I wanted and be the best that I can be. You get stronger from different experiences, and you become someone who can also give the younger kids the right message, that anything is possible if you believe in yourself, and that's not only for amputees, but just everybody. Nothing is out of reach.