

Peninsula Diary Mayo Hayes O'Donnell

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### **More About Grizzlies**

"A wounded settler saves his life by feigning death as bear again attacks," was the headline for the story of a fight with a grizzly bear by Henry Chambers and a group of friends in the fall of 1871.

In a previous issue of the Peninsula Diary we told the story of the hunt for the bear, after it had killed a number of sheep and several head of stock near the Chambers ranch, and how Chambers had been seriously injured in the fray, as well as several of the other participants.

After Chambers was injured, and hearing Short's man yelling, he started to crawl to him but finding he could not do so, rested the gun on his foot, pointing it in the direction he supposed the bear would go, according to the facts as related to his oldest son in later years.

"Instead of coming facing Pa, the bear came in behind and was on top of Pa again" J.M. Chambers relates. "McHaley had climbed a tree before the bear returned and Button was hiding in the brush. He said afterward the bear had passed by his hiding place two or three times. The huge animal was as active as a cat, easily jumping over the chaparral bushes while hunting for the men, almost seeming to know how many there were in the party."

"Pa, realizing that he was entirely at the mercy of the grizzly as it stood over him, pretended he was dead, remaining motionless in any position to which the bear moved him." "His suffering no doubt was intense," his son declared "but he knew that the animal wouldn't leave him as long as he showed signs of life. The bear, chewing and tearing a hole under Pa's left arm to the lungs, so that when he breathed the air rushed from the wound, breaking three ribs, pinching and rolling him about, finally left him for dead and went down the mountain side to be seen no more."

After the other men found that the bear had gone, they began to crawl out of their hiding places. Hunting Chambers, Short, it is told, cried like a baby, when they found him so nearly dead. While the bear was biting Chambers, Short had been on the hillside firing his rifle and pistol to scare the bear away, without avail.

The next move was to get Chambers home. The party later told how they managed this feat. They hunted up

some poles to make a stretcher having about two miles to carry him over the rough, rocky, brushy mountain to Short's place. From there he was taken in a wagon two and one-half miles, getting home about midnight.

When Mrs. Chambers saw her husband and learned what had happened she woke her son, J.M. Chambers, who later told this story. She told him that his father was dying and started him for the New Idria mines to get Dr. Green leaf. The youngster had never been there before and as it was dark and foggy, he lost his way. He reached the summit of the mountain between his home and New Idria, and then could go no further. Letting the horse have its way he brought the youngster home. The next morning an uncle named Anderson went for the doctor.

Mr. Chambers lingered between life and death for some time and then began to gradually improve.

"About two weeks after the bear fight, one of our neighbors, Sam Smith, went to the scene of the encounter to look for the gun McHaley had lost," young Chambers wrote in his story. "The bear had struck the gun with such force that the muzzle was driven into the ground and it was in that position that Sam Smith found it. It was still cocked."

J.M. Chambers declared when he told the story as his father had told it to him that "this happened exactly as I have related. I have heard my father, McHaley and Short tell this dozens of times, and always the same in every particular."

The hero of our story, Henry Chambers, was born in Kentucky in 1827, and his parents moved to Texas while he was yet a small boy. That state was still a Mexican province, with but a few American residents. It was very much in the "wild and woolly" stage.