Grizzly Dude shares story of resilience

FRANK MCTIGHE
GAZETTE EDITOR

Jeremy Evans never expected to become an advocate for mental health support and the importance of resilience.

But a 2017 grizzly bear attack that left Evans, known as The Grizzly Dude, with physical and psychological damage started the Alberta outdoorsman on a personal mission to help others.

"In the face of every fear, every obstacle, every dark moment, you have to power to rise, strive and endure," Evans told his audience. "Most of all, you can bear it, even when you think you can't."

Evans delivered that message Nov. 7 during the Legacy of Our Land banquet at the Fort Macleod and District Community Hall.

The Legacy of Our Land banquet is organized each year by the Agricultural Service Board of the MD of Willow Creek to celebrate local farmers and ranchers.

Evans delivered a harrowing tale of the events of Aug. 24, 2017 that would change his life.

Evans explained he had been hunting for a ram through the entire season, finally locating one in the back country. He rose at 2:30 a.m., excited at the prospect of the hunt.

In his excitement, Evans jammed his bear spray into a backpack — rather than putting it on with a harness that crossed his chest to provide easy access — and climbed on his bicycle to ride 12.8 kilometres into the backcountry.

Evans had warning signs along the way — fresh bear scat covered the trail and at the top of the range was a huge berry patch. "I was just way too excited, and didn't realize the situation I put myself in," Evans said.

When he spotted the ram he coveted, Evans took off his backpack, leaned it against his bicycle and focused his binoculars on the sheep. Then a little brown flash crossed his vision.

"I knew immediately what it was, this cute and fuzzy little brown thing about 10 feet away," Evans said. "A grizzly bear cub. I got this overwhelming feeling that I was in the right spot at the wrong time. Where was mama?"

Evans got the answer to that question seconds later as he grabbed his backpack to locate his bear spray. A branch snapped, Evans turned around, and there was the mama grizzly, charging right at him.

Evans hit the bear once with his backpack but as he prepared to deliver a second blow, the bear sank her teeth into his hand.

"I remember just feeling her teeth separate the bones in my hand . . . that was very painful and I was trying to pull my hand away."

Evans battled the bear, bashing it relentlessly with the backpack, using its metal supports to inflict as much pain as possible.

The bear backed off and Evans scrambled about 30 feet away. Evans took his eyes off the bear to reach for the bear spray again in the backpack. When he looked up, the bear was preparing to charge again.



Photo by Frank McTighe

Jeremy Evans, known as The Grizzly Dude, told his harrowing story at the Legacy of Our Land banquet hosted by the Agricultural Service Board of the MD of Willow Creek.

"I took my backpack and I chucked it at her. I was hoping she'd eat my peanut butter and jelly sandwich instead of me, because after all, that probably tasted a lot better."

Evans scrambled up the mountainside and jumped into a spruce tree, climbing about six feet off the ground, all the way hearing the grizzly crashing through the bush like a freight train.

The bear grabbed Evans with her paws, and, when she couldn't separate him from the tree, bit him on the hip and shook him "like a rag doll."

The bear pounced on Evans, pinning him to the ground with a huge paw, and bit him on the left side of the face.

"I remember just feeling bones in my face crack and pop," Evans said. "There was a fiery burn right after."

Evans fought back, punching and scratching the bear's face. When the grizzly opened her mouth, preparing to bite, Evans jammed his left hand deep into her mouth and grabbed her tongue. He remembers blood, drool and the smell.

"That smell will give you nightmares," Evans said.

Evans grabbed at the bear between its legs and twisted and the animal screamed, ended the attack and ran away.

As Evans tried to collect himself and load his gun, he heard the sound of ice cracking. The grizzly had returned, and had him by the back of the head, dragging him 10 to 15 feet.

The bear reached its paw across Evans and peeled back his face, part of his nose and broke the right eye socket, all the while chewing on the left side of his head.

When the bear dropped him, Evans reached up, grabbed on and wrapped his legs around the grizzly. The animal started to roll around and buck like a bronco. When Evans let go, the bear ran down the mountainside towards her cub, and disappeared.

With no cell phone service, Evans considered the long trek back to his vehicle. Parts of his face were torn off, his right eye was out of the socket, his jaw was hanging loose, fingers pointing in different directions, unable to stand.

Evans used his phone to write text messages to his wife that he hoped she would get when his body was recovered.

Believing that he would die and not wanting to lie there and suffer, or to have the grizzly or other animals attack him again, Evans tried to kill himself. The rifle just clicked when he pulled the trigger.

Confused, Evans grabbed the rifle's bolt and pulled it. The gun went off, the bullet missing Evans' face by inches.

"It really scared me," Evans said. "Because what was I doing? I owed it to my wife and daughter to at least make it somewhere they would find my body."

Evans gathered parts of his flesh, wrapped them in a shirt and, using his rifle as a crutch, began the long, arduous journey toward his truck.

Evans detailed a slow journey, as he inched along, setting goals of small distances to cover.

"I remember the entire time crawling back up that side of the mountain I was thinking about my wife and daughter — about my rock, my reason, my purpose to keep trying," Evans said.

Evans reached his truck, drove 22 kilometres to find help, and was airlifted to Foothills Hospital in Calgary, arriving 12 hours after the bear attack ended.

Evans spent five weeks in hospital recovering and undergoing physical and mental therapy, eventually going home and return to work. Three and a half years after the grizzly attack, the monthly nightmares became more frequent, day and night, and Evans began isolating himself from others, and overreacting at small things.

"My wife and daughter were afraid to be in the same room with me," Evans said.

Evans was having thoughts of suicide when a friend encouraged him to try something different, perhaps a new therapist.

Evans did some on-line research and tried accelerated resolution therapy, or ART. After his first session, Evans went home and enjoyed seven uninterrupted hours of sleep for the first time in 3 1/2 years.

Evans ended his speech by encouraging others to be willing to ask for help with their mental health, and to try several treatments, if necessary, to find the one that works.

"In those moments of pain, darkness and uncertainty, well, they're not the end of your story," Evans said. "That's where resilience is born. You have the strength to face the storms, to rebuild when everything feels shattered, and you have the strength and power to rise again and again, no matter

Willow Creek MD a 'shining example' in Alberta

FRANK MCTIGHE
GAZETTE EDITOR

Producers in the MD of Willow Creek were praised earlier this month for their work ethic, commitment and innovation.

The tributes came Nov. 7 during the Legacy of Our Land banquet at the Fort Macleod and District Community Hall.

"Agriculture is the backbone of Alberta, and nowhere is that more evident than the MD of Willow Creek," Livingstone-Macleod MLA Chelse Petrovic said.

The MD of Willow Creek's Agricultural Service Board organizes the banquet each year to pay tribute to the farmers and ranchers, and the western way of life.

Guests were treated to a prime rib dinner, recognition of some award recipients, updates on projects, and guest speaker Jeremy Evans, who told his story of being attacked by a grizzly.

Petrovic said the MD of Willow Creek is rich in history, and in the spirit of its people.

"Our farmers and ranchers . . . you are innovators, conservationists and entrepreneurs," Petrovic said. "You are up before the sun, working through the wind, snow and heat . . . you face challenges that most people will never see, volatile markets, unpredictable weather, rising costs, and yet you keep going."

Petrovic said people outside the agriculture industry often wonder why farmers and ranchers keep going.

"Because you believe in what you do, because you love this land," Petrovic said by way of answer. "Because you know that feeding this province, this country and this world is a responsibility to shoulder."

There is wisdom in agriculture that doesn't come from a textbook, Petrovic added.

"It's passed down in muddy boots, calloused hands, and in quiet moments in the field," Petrovic said. "And it's in the way that a rancher knows his herd, or a farmer reads the sky. It's in the stories told over coffee. It's in the decisions made with both heart and grit."

Petrovic said the MD of Willow Creek, and its people, is a shining example of rural Alberta.

"The MD of Willow Creek is a place where neighbours help neighbours, where community isn't just a word, it's a way of life," Petrovic said. "It's where innovation meets tradition, and where the future of agriculture is being shaped every single day."

Examples of that spirit include the Vandervalk family, who was the MD of Willow Creek's 2025 nominee for the BMO Farm Family Award presented in July at the Calgary Stampede, as well as John Smith and Laura Laing of Plateau Cattle Co, which received the 2025 Alberta Beef Producers Environmental Stewardship Award.

Petrovic promised to stand by farmers and ranchers, and the rural municipality, in her role as MLA.

"Your voice matters, your work matters, and your legacy deserves to be honoured, not just tonight, but in every single day," Petrovic said.

This is the 70th anniversary of the establishment of an Agricultural Service Board by the MD of Willow Creek.

Area residents are invited to submit recipes for inclusion in a farming and ranching cookbook.

Agricultural fieldman Carla Preachuk invited people to join the board, which at present is made up of councillors John Van Driesten, Brian Nelson, Glen Alm and Evan Berger, along with producer members Cory Hawk, Josh Fankhauser and Cecilie Fleming.

The board will undergo some changes since it was an election year.

Preachuk and assistant agricultural fireldman Ryan Dovell spoke about their work, and that of the Agricultural Service Baord.

The staff works with land owners to control invasive species, rodents and other pests, predators, recycling grain bags and twine, and renting equipment such as cattle scales and livestock tanks.

Workshops were held on Richardson ground squirrel control, pesticides, trees and firearms, and water licenses.

The ASB partnered in hosting the Willow Creek Outdoor Adventure for students, and the Southern Alberta Grazing School for Women.

The team also maintains the Old Macleod Trail signs found throughout the MD of Willow Creek.

Guests were reminded of an environmental farm plan workshop on Monday, Nov. 24 at the MD of Willow Creek office in Claresholm.