



## Be Bear Aware Campaign

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# Chuck Bartlebaugh's Interview with Todd J Orr

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### **Overview:**

Todd John Orr was hunting in Montana's Madison Valley on October 1, 2016 when he encountered a female grizzly bear that was with her two cubs. Despite Mr. Orr's efforts to avoid the bear and then utilize bear spray, he was mauled not once but twice. This is a synopsis describing Chuck Bartlebaugh's discussion with Mr. Orr regarding his experience. The two main questions that arose from Mr. Orr's mauling experience were: "Did the bear spray work?" & "Why did the grizzly bear attack twice?"

There are two basic types of charging bears (as a simplification.) The most common charge, incorrectly called "The bluff charge," is a **warning** and **information** gathering charge. In this case, the charging bear almost never makes physical contact. This often leads to people thinking *bear spray works instantaneously*. The second type of charge is when a highly agitated and aggressive bear is charging to protect its cubs or a fresh kill. This bear intends on making contact and is ready to fight.

### **Disclosure:**

The comments by Chuck Bartlebaugh are based upon the Carrie Hunt's bear spray research done at the University of Montana, as well as Steven Herrero's research pertaining to bear maulings. Additional credit goes to the bear management biologists with the Inter-Agency Grizzly Bear Committee, Wildlife & Land Management personal that have dealt with aggressive or charging bears. The monitoring of newspaper articles, TV shows, incident reports where bear spray was or wasn't used successfully in stopping charging bears. They do not represent the opinions of Chuck Bartlebaugh.

## Todd J Orr's Interview continued...

### First- visual contact with grizzly and her cubs:

Mr. Orr, while hiking, was periodically calling out "Hey bear!" and was monitoring the area around him, alert for any possible bear activity. All of a sudden a grizzly bear stood up about 80 yards away. The grizzly appeared to be in an agitated state and charged at Mr. Orr. The grizzly bear and her cubs disappeared into a bend of trees that was located between Mr. Orr and the grizzly bears. He hoped that would be the end of the confrontation. Unfortunately, the grizzly then emerged, even more agitated, through the group of trees now charging directly at Mr. Orr from approximately 50 yards.

- **CB Note:** Many people think if you call out, the bear will become forewarned and not become aggressive. Note that this isn't entirely true- the bear very well could become aggressive, resulting in a warning charge or even a full contact charge.

### First Bear spray use:

Mr. Orr immediately removed one of his two cans of bear spray and prepared to spray the grizzly bear in the face. Mr. Orr waited until the bear was approximately **25 feet away** before **aiming** and dispersing his bear spray. The grizzly bear ran right through the cloud of bear spray. Just moments before contact, Mr. Orr turned and dropped to a fetal position on the ground to protect his face, neck and vital organs. Mr. Orr believes that he had less than 10% of the bear spray in his can after he had dispersed it.

- **CB Note:** There are multiple reasons why the bear spray appeared to be ineffective. They are as follow:
  1. Mr. Orr waited to spray the charging bear until it was 25 feet away. At this distance, the grizzly bear (traveling at approximately 30 mph) met the bear spray cloud somewhere between 10 & 20 feet. This is only **two tenths of a second** away from contact. The grizzly bear would have had less than a half a second to feel the effects and divert its charge.
  2. He described **aiming** for the bear's face. The National Rifle Association (NRA) states that "**aiming**" takes just less than one second for an experienced person to do. Bear spray was designed to be dispersed in a powerful, well atomized and expanding cloud to

## Todd J Orr's Interview continued...

eliminate the need for aiming. In a charging situation, do not waste time trying to aim – it's one second you may not have.

3. At less than 30 feet, the bear had established the exact location of Mr. Orr. Whether the bear spray had reduced the bear's ability to see or not, the bear was fully aware of where Mr. Orr was standing and was capable of completing its charge.
  4. The momentum of a charging grizzly bear only 10-20 feet away (again – only two tenths of a second from contact) enabled it to plow through the cloud and make contact with Mr. Orr.
- **CB Note:** It should be noted that Mr. Orr did not spray for a short duration of time or in any type of pattern. He sprayed directly and continuously at the front of the bear until he dropped to the ground to protect his vital organs.
  - **CB Note:** The public is being told a variety of distances in which they should attempt to spray a charging bear including 10, 20, or 30 feet away. These are incorrect distances and multiple inaccurate messages are causing confusion and leading the public into ineffectively using their bear spray.
  - **CB Note:** You may have no choice but to spray the bear within 30 feet, but if you can spray sooner, your odds of having no physical contact increase significantly. (These incorrect messages may have confused Mr. Orr on when he should have sprayed the charging bear.)
  - **CB Note:** Bear spray is designed to disperse in a powerful, well atomized and expanding cloud and can reach 30 feet away. In order to spray a charging bear when it's, you need to spray when the bear enters 60 feet from you. The bear and the cloud will then meet at approximately 30 feet, giving the bear a chance to feel the effects of the bear spray and divert its charge before making contact.

### First physical contact:

Mr. Orr determined the grizzly bear was going to make contact. He turned and dropped to his knees, curling up into a fetal position. The grizzly bear began to maul Mr. Orr causing severe damage to the side of his head, arms, shoulder and ear. She bit him repeatedly and then suddenly disappeared.

## Todd J Orr's Interview continued...

- **CB Note:** When an attacking bear suddenly runs off, it means it's responding after being sprayed with bear spray at a close proximity. Once the bear has had time to feel the effects on its nose, throat, lungs and eyes, it almost always abruptly turns and retreats. The word "**works**" when a bear is sprayed at close proximity it reduces the length and severity of the mauling.
- **CB Note:** Mr. Orr did not lie flat, which has been the recommended procedure for the past twenty years, but instead curled up into a ball giving the bear more of a target to maul. This is another scenario demonstrating how the public is not properly informed in regards to knowing what to do if being mauled or attacked by a bear.

### First attempt to flee the area:

After the bear left Mr. Orr gathered himself and stood up. He states he saw the mother and her cubs running up the mountain and away from him. He then proceeded to head a different direction from the grizzly, down the trail and towards his vehicle located at the trail head. Five to ten minutes down the trail, the grizzly bear re-appeared behind Mr. Orr and charged at him for a second time. Mr. Orr stated that he believes the bear ran up the mountain but, due to the steepness of the incline, ended up coming back down the mountain and intersecting paths with him.

- **CB Note:** Mr. Orr made a definite attempt to travel in a different direction than the grizzly bear. Unfortunately, and from no fault of Mr. Orr's, their paths intersected again.
- **CB Note:** Because the bear appeared behind him, Mr. Orr did not have time to retrieve his second can of bear spray he needed to defend himself.

### Second physical contact:

Mr. Orr heard the bear behind him, and immediately turned to see the grizzly charging him again from about 30 feet away. The bear began to maul him for the second time. Mr. Orr responded to the pain by flinching and gasping for breath, which brought on even more aggressive biting and clawing from the grizzly. He determined his best bet was to remain as still as possible and stay quiet. The grizzly then stopped, stood up on top of him, and then just like she did the first time, she was suddenly gone.

## Todd J Orr's Interview continued...

- **CB Note:** It's one thing to say "remain still and quiet" but it's a whole different story when it comes to actually doing it. Mr. Orr did a remarkable job of this, and it couldn't have been an easy thing to do.
- **CB Note:** It should be noted that at this point, Mr. Orr's first bear spray was nearly empty. This is a good example of why bear spray quantity and duration is essential.

### Second attempt to flee the area:

Once again the grizzly bear had gone a different direction, and Mr. Orr stood and started to head again up the trail and towards his vehicle. It took him approximately forty-five minutes to get to his truck and head towards the hospital.

### Lessons Learned:

Mr. Orr has a great deal of information to share from his experience. He is a well seasoned hunter, and very articulate. The following points illustrate what he has learned from his experience:

- **The importance of spray duration:** Spray sooner rather than later. A longer duration of spray gives you a better chance to deflect a charging bear.
- **The ideal situation for spraying:** The best time to use bear spray and avoid contact is to spray when the charging bear enters within 60 feet. Direct the spray downward and point it at approximately 30 feet in front of you. The charging bear traveling at close to 30 mph will then meet the powerful, well atomized and expanding cloud at about 30 feet away from you. The bear will then have time to feel the effects of the spray and divert its charge at around 15-20 feet.
- **Special Note:** Bears can often charge from as little as 30, 20 or even 10 feet away. They could be lurking in a day bed, a berry bush, a brush pile, etc. In these cases, be prepared to spontaneously draw your bear spray and disperse it directly at the front of the bear. Prepare to drop to the ground and lay flat because there is a probability of swatting, nipping or biting, but the bear spray should at least reduce the length and severity of the contact. Just like Mr. Orr's case- the bear did make contact but after feeling the effects of the spray ran off.

## Todd J Orr's Interview continued...

- **The importance of laying flat** and protecting the back of your neck versus curling up into the fetal position. Bears seem to respond to this position better than if you form a ball. Mr. Orr can attest to the importance of remaining as still and silent as possible – as well as how difficult this actually is to do when in such a situation. If you're wearing a backpack, you'll have even more protection in this position from the attacking bear. In several bear attack cases, backpacks have prevented the bear from making physical contact with the person.
- **The importance of not aiming but directing** the bear spray downward at the front of the bear until it stops its charge. This allows the bear spray to billow up – it's natural tendency – into the bear's face and nose. Testing has showed bear spray rises in the air and may not fall until it reaches 25 feet. This allows for the bear to run under the cloud of spray and make contact.

### Conclusion:

As advocates of bear safety, avoidance and bear spray use, it is essential that we provide a clear, concise and consistent message for the public regarding proper use of bear spray and bear avoidance. We need to correct the misinformation that “bear spray works instantly” or “It works like hitting a brick wall.” It is crucial that the public learn the proper terminology for bear spray. It is not called pepper spray, and if the public goes to the store asking for “pepper spray” they may end up purchasing the wrong product. If they research it online using the term “pepper spray” they will receive the wrong information on how to properly use bear spray.



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