

Grandma Pierce's bear killing became legend

by MICHAEL P. JONES
Post Correspondent

She came to the mountains as a refuge from the city sometime prior to the 1900s, and soon became one of Mt. Hood's most interesting legends.

Her name was E.A. Pierce, but she was better known as Grandma Pierce, or "the Bear Woman."

She took up residence in Brightwood on what is now known as the Barlow Trail Road.

She lived in a two story, cedar (split by hand) house.

Grandma Pierce weighed less than a hundred pounds, and was a few inches short of five-foot.

She was said to have been as rough as the bark on a tree, and meaner than a bear.

She had short, curly hair that was wound up on her head like a bun, but always ended up sticking out on the sides.

Most old-timers describe her features as sharp, almost "witch-like." They say her small, beady hazel-green eyes would sparkle, almost as if they could "see right through you."

Grandma Pierce was a legend. It wasn't her self-sufficient nature that made her a conversation piece,

nor was it her ability to out-work any man. No. of E.A.'s claim to fame was a fight with a black bear. She was armed only with a short-handled hoe. The fight occurred on March 6, 1914. Grandma Pierce was 70 years old.

Needless to say, the incident created quite a stir amongst the community's more gossip-inclined residents. And, the facts changed some as the story was passed along. One bear later became two, then three, and eventually it became a Grizzly.

A year later Grandma Pierce penned her own account of the fight, which was published, and although a clipping remains, no one knows what magazine or newspaper it came out of.

"I was working in my garden hoeing," wrote Pierce, "when the woman at the next place came over and told me there had been a bear in her yard, and that her husband had gone to the neighbor's after a gun and a dog."

While Pierce and the neighbor were waiting for the man's return, the chickens began to "make an awful noise." The bear was close at hand.

Grandma Pierce dropped her hoe and made a

beeline for the chicken house. But by the time she got to the coop, that hungry old bear had a change in appetite. The bear decided to dine on the milk cow instead of the chickens.

Pierce distracted the bear long enough to allow the cow a chance to escape. Snarling mad, the bear made for the tiny and wiry grandma.

The old lady ran back to her garden where she picked up her hoe and stood her ground. The neighbor yelled for her to run, but she knew it would be fruitless. A bear can outrun even the best racehorse at a distance of 350 yards.

"I'll do my best," Pierce yelled to her neighbor, "but if you see I'm getting the worst of it, help me."

Pierce had killed hogs for food, but was now about to take on one of the most powerful creatures in the forest. The bear, six-foot tall when standing on its hind legs, and weighing about 350 pounds, made the situation appear helpless.

"I have killed many hogs and knew just where to strike to kill," wrote Pierce. "So I raised the hoe and braced myself and waited for the bear to come right at me."

"When he got almost to me he reared right up; then

I struck him between the eye and the ear—just where I aimed for. He tumbled on his nose."

"The first hit was no accident, but when he raised up again I hit him right in the same spot; that was an accident, as by that time I was getting a little nervous."

"But I never moved. He fell again; then the third time he tried to raise I hit him again, not an eighth of an inch from the first hit. He fell and never came up again."

Pierce's third blow was the fatal one, but as she put it, she was taking no chances and "played the drum on his head" until she was positive the bear was dead.

With the aid of neighbors, the bear was dragged into her house, where she skinned and tanned her trophy.

Grandma Pierce quickly became a heroine. Her bear-killing tale put most hunters, who had their own whoppers to tell, to shame.

People came from miles around just to visit with the old woman. Lottie Bailey, who now lives in the lower Welches valley, remembers that there was a well-beaten path from the early-day resort (which was operated by her father, Billy Welch) to Grandma

Pierce's.

Bailey said that a visit to the area also would always include a stop at "Granny's place," which would be a highlight of the excursion.

Bailey said that she can still picture Grandma Pierce today, sitting on her front porch rocking, rehearsing the events of her match with the bear again and again.

In her hand would be a crude-looking pipe, which she fashioned herself out of a cob of corn. Next to her would be a jug of "white lightning."

But Bailey's memories of

Grandma Pierce go back beyond the bear killing. As a child she was one of the old woman's closest friends. She spent many hours by the woman's side.

Grandma Pierce had single-handedly built her own springhouse out of boulders, where she kept her food stored.

She had seemingly the largest and finest flower and vegetable garden on the mountain.

She raised her own hay, and naturally, cut it herself by hand.

Nobody knows for sure where Grandma Pierce

came from. Bailey said that she never spoke of her past, but it was rumored to have been a bit on the shady side.

Grandma Pierce had two children who lived in Portland, a son and a daughter, and they would visit occasionally.

She lived alone with her parrot and cat, and she spoke to both when she wasn't talking to herself.

The parrot had a vocabulary that might be associated with that of an old salty sailor.

Bailey said that Grandma Pierce was also quite a cook. Her biscuits were very good, Bailey remembers, as long as one didn't break them open to see what the mice might have left behind in previous rendezvous in the flour sack.

Even when Grandma Pierce was whipping up a batch of her famous baking-powder biscuits, it was difficult for Bailey to watch.

She had long fingernails that were generally filled with dirt from doing work in the garden.

"I used to cringe over that but I would just go out and look the other way," Bailey said. "I'd think, surely she puts them in that

hot oven. That ought to disinfect them."

Bailey also remembers Grandma's artistic ability. She made tiny little baskets out of straw from the field.

Bailey said that this task seemed almost impossible to her as Grandma Pierce's hands "were all knarled up from hard work and arthritis."

Bailey doesn't remember how old Grandma Pierce was when she died, nor even when she died.

She thinks the free-spirited lady probably just dropped over working out in her garden one day.

But she'll never know for sure, nor does it really matter, for Grandma Pierce still lives on in her memories.

"She had a lot of characteristics and traits that I think went into making America," said Bailey. "She was tough. She could take it and she could make the most of nothing. She wasn't afraid of anything."

Bailey said that her admiration for the old bear woman has not ceased after all these years. She was one of a kind, and so much part of the mountain.

Bailey said that maybe, just maybe, Grandma Pierce may have had an effect on her life.



Photo courtesy of S.L. Tipton
Grandm. Pierce

ESD gets the opportunity to polish closure system

With winter officially here, school systems around the state had Monday to polish their procedures for dealing with emergency closures from ice and snow.

For organizations like Clackamas Education Service District (ESD) the problems created by emergency closures were many times more difficult.

"Three factors compound hazardous weather problems for our student transportation system," said ESD Superintendent Bob Burns. "First, the children we transport are those in our programs for the trainable mentally retarded. Many of these children have other physical handicaps as well, so they can't take care of themselves in an emergency as well as a non-handicapped child."

"Also, our transportation system stretches over the entire county. Our 12 handicapped transportation vans and wheelchair buses traveled almost a quarter of a million miles last year," he added. "Road and weather conditions can change considerably as you cross the county."

"Finally, students in our program may cross school district lines to attend a classroom in another district. A student may be picked up in one district

where he lives and be bused into another district where there is a classroom suited to his particular needs. This can lead to confusion when one district is open and the other is closed," Burns said.

The ESD, like most school districts in the tri-county area, is a member of the school announcement system which announces school closures each morning over area radio stations.

In addition to the school announcement system, the ESD has five guidelines to help prevent confusion for parents and others who work with the handicapped transportation system.

ESD buses are based in Oregon City. If Oregon City School District is closed due to bad weather, ESD buses will not run anywhere in the county.

If the school district in which the student lives is closed as happened Monday in Sandy, Welches, Cottrell and Bull Run districts, ESD buses will not pick up the student.

If a school district between Oregon City and the student's home is closed, such as Boring's, the student will not be picked up. This also applies if a school district is closed between the school district where the child lives and the school district where the classroom is located.

If the school district where the student's classroom is located is closed, then the bus will not pick the student up.

In cases where the students lives in the same district in which the classroom is located, the child is transported by the local school district is closed, the child will not be

picked up either.

The same general guidelines apply if schools open late, and should hazardous weather require schools to end the school day early.

According to Burns, the 12 ESD bus routes cross 24 of the 28 school districts in Clackamas County.

He said that the ESD's main concern during bad weather is for the safety of children.

If there is any doubt

about student's safety, the ESD sometimes closes its classroom even if other districts stay open.

ESD buses are also radio-equipped, and should the weather turn bad, the radio base station stays open as long as any ESD buses are on the road.

Burns added that ESD bus drivers call the parents of students who ride their buses if the children will not be picked up.

Speaker to discuss migrant workers

An International Community Forum Luncheon, sponsored by Mt. Hood Community College and the Gresham Area Chamber of Commerce, will concern migrant workers, on Jan. 11 at noon in the Town and Gown Room at the college.

The speaker will be Dr. Thomas Gonzales, president of Linn-Benton Com-

munity College. The topic is "Migrant Workers: Current issues and future directions."

He will address the present and future status of migrant workers, especially in relation to future agricultural systems.

The cost for the buffet lunch and presentation is \$4.75. For reservations, call 667-7313.

Szymczak joins U.S.A.F.

Donald A. Szymczak Jr., son of Don and Donna Szymczak, 13695 S.E. Frank, Boring, recently enlisted in the United States Air Force Delayed Enlistment Program, according to Staff Sergeant Dan Baker, local Air Force recruiter.

Szymczak, a 1981 graduate of Sandy Union High School, is scheduled for enlistment in the Air Force Feb. 2, 1982.

Upon successfully completing the Air Force's six-week basic training course he will receive further training in his chosen career field, mechanics.

He will be earning credits toward an associate degree in applied science through the Community College of the Air Force while attending basic and other Air Force technical training schools.

2 receive academic honors

Two persons from Sandy received academic honors recently from the Oregon Institute of Technology in Klamath Falls recently.

Bernard J. Grassl, an auto-diesel technology major, was one of 225 to be included on the fall quarter president's list.

Inclusion on the list requires that a student attain at least a 3.70 grade point average.

John M. Stroup, an electronic engineering technology major, was one of 304 students to make the fall quarter dean's list.

Inclusion on the list requires that a student attain at least a 3.33 grade point average.

Players postpone show

The Mountain Players' Jan. 16 performance of "Barefoot in the Park" has been postponed indefinitely due to scheduling conflicts.



Staff photo
Jeff Hoard, left, and his brother Steve, right, and Byron Stamm prepare to let loose with their snowballs.

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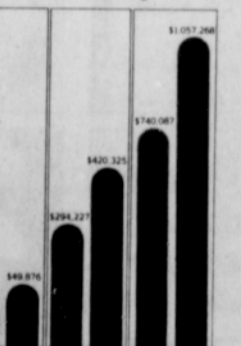
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