Blackfeet like to say that no Tribal member has ever been killed by a grizzly bear.

So when a big old grizzly came crashing out of the woods a couple weeks ago and ran into two Blackfeet, one of whom was Chairman Sharp, the bear stuck to tradition and nobody got hurt.

“Nothing gets your heart beating faster than coming face-to-face with a huge silvertip grizzly,” said Chairman Willie A. Sharp Jr. shortly after the encounter. “Later, after we realized we were out of danger, all we could do was thank the Creator that no one was hurt. After all, we were in the grizzly’s domain, and he was only doing what bears do to get ready for winter, so this was the best possible outcome.”

Here’s the story:

Willie and his son Arlen were bow hunting for elk south of Heart Butte on September 15th. The terrain was hilly, partly open, partly aspen and pine. The two hunters were separated by about 25 yards, each moving by stealth, occasionally bugling and cow calling trying to lure in an elk. In the silence, they heard twigs and branches breaking nearby so they froze and readied themselves to take down a bull the moment it showed itself.

Suddenly, in full view of Arlen, but not yet visible to Willie, a big grizzly came out from cover between their positions. Arlen grabbed his gear to make a fast exit but in his haste left behind his elk cow calls. Willie was still focused on taking aim at what he assumed was an elk ready to emerge when he saw Arlen frantically waving at him to get out of there.

Willie got the message and moved fast, joining up with Arlen on a trail that led to a vantage point on top of a nearby hill. There they realized to their great relief that the bear had chosen not to pursue.

ARLEN SHARP MT