



Florida Man's Shoe Found in Stomach of Slain Black Bear

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Associated Press

KNOXVILLE, Tenn. —

Authorities cut open a slain bear and found a shoe lost by a Florida man while fighting off a bear that attacked his 8-year-old son in the Great Smoky Mountains National Park.

The footwear was discovered in the black bear's stomach during a necropsy at the University of Tennessee Veterinary Medical Center, Smokies spokeswoman Nancy Gray said Monday.

It leaves little doubt rangers killed the right bear.

John Pala, a 43-year-old health insurance salesman from Boca Raton with no backwoods experience, literally ran out of his shoes racing to the aid of his young son Evan when the bear pounced on the boy during a day hike Aug. 11 along the popular Rainbow Falls trail.

Twice, Pala grabbed the young male bear's face, pulled its mouth apart and pushed the 86-pound animal away before Evan finally escaped.

Then Pala and Evan's 10-year-old brother Alex pelted the bear with sticks and stones until they could slowly back away and run to join Evan in a parking lot where they left their car.

Pala could hardly walk the next day because of the beating taken by his bare feet. Evan had bruises on his back, stitches in his arms and staples on his scalp, but otherwise OK. Alex was unhurt.

Rangers killed the suspected bear a few hours later in the same place where the Pala family was attacked. They shot the animal when it charged them. One of Pala's shoes was found nearby.

Pala, now home, said in an e-mail to The Associated Press that rangers called him Friday to say they'd found his other shoe "inside the bear's stomach." The boys "really got a kick to hear that," he wrote.

He doesn't expect to see the shoe again. "I don't think there is much left of the shoe to send back," he said.

But Evan has hopes for his own memento. "They do have the bloody Lynyrd Skynyrd T-shirt that Evan had on and plan to send that back," Pala said.

Gray said the necropsy results were still preliminary, but it confirmed the bear did not have rabies.

Authorities say the attack was unprovoked, though Pala said their clothes might have smelled like fried chicken from a meal an hour earlier.

"The three of us are going to be fine," Pala wrote. "Evan, of course, will take a longer bit, but has only stitches to overcome, fortunately none on his beautiful face. The attention the media has provided him has been very therapeutic for him mentally. Not to mention making him quite a little star with his friends."

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This was only the eighth bear attack in the past decade on a visitor to the Great Smokies, which is home to about 1,600 black bears and receives more than 9 million visitors annually. However, the attacks included one fatality in 2000.

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