

THE LIFE AND TIMES OF GRIZZLY ADAMS

*What comes to mind when you hear the name “Grizzly Adams”? If you’re like us, you probably think of the lead character in the 1970s TV show *The Life and Times of Grizzly Adams*, not the real person on whom the TV character was based. Well, here’s the story of the original—John Adams (1812–1860), a larger-than-life character who had the rare ability to bond with one of the forest’s fiercest predators: the grizzly bear.*

BACKGROUND

In the Old West, most men didn’t stand out—there were cowboys, miners, farmers, storekeepers, bartenders, and fancy business types. But John “Grizzly” Adams was one of a kind. Here he is described by his biographer:

Adams...was a man a little over medium size, muscular and wiry, with sharp features and penetrating eyes. He was apparently about fifty years of age; but his hair was very gray and his beard very white. He was dressed in coat and pantaloons of buckskin, fringed at the edges and along the seams of arms and legs. On his head he wore a cap of deerskin, ornamented with a fox-tail, and on his feet buckskin moccasins.

During the California gold rush of the 1850s, from Santa Fe to the Oregon Territory, stories were told of this wild man who dressed like an Indian, and rode around on the back of a 600-pound grizzly bear called *Lady Washington*, with two younger grizzlies and a host of other wild animals in tow. In Adams’s time, he was just as famous as other frontiersmen, like Davy Crockett and Daniel Boone. And he was tougher than either of those “greenhorns.” From the look of Adams, you’d think he was raised in the woods. Not quite.

THE ADAMS FAMILY

Born John Adams in 1812 in Medway, Massachusetts, to Eleazer and Sibel Adams, he was related to the famous New England Adamses—a family that had produced two presidents, John Adams and John Quincy Adams, as well as Revolutionary War hero (and beer brewer) Samuel Adams. Not a kid who took to school, when Adams was 14 he got a job as a cobbler (shoemaker) at his father’s shop in Boston, where he learned how to tan hides and make leather. At 21, he headed for the wilds of Maine, where he learned how to hunt, trap, and survive in the wilderness. Before long, he landed a job as a wrangler for a traveling show of exotic animals. In what would become a

recurring theme throughout his life, Adams's natural ease with big predators led to overconfidence. He got the first of many hard lessons during a training session when a Bengal tiger turned on him and mauled him. Adams barely escaped with his life.

GO WEST, YOUNG MAN

After spending the next few months in Boston recovering from severe spinal injuries, Adams went back to work with his father. Within a few years, he had his own family to take care of—his wife, Cylena, and their three children, Arabella, Arathusa, and Seymour. When the California gold rush began, Adams and his father hatched a plan to turn their combined life savings—about \$6,500—into shoes and other garments to sell to miners and prospectors in St. Louis. Those plans went up in flames—literally—in the St. Louis Wharf Fire of 1849. The Adamses lost everything, and Eleazer committed suicide. Broke and destitute, John Adams decided to follow the thousands of other gold-seekers to California. He promised Cylena he would send money home when he could, and that he would return a rich man.

The journey west was rough. Adams nearly died from illness twice along the way, and he was still suffering from back pain. By the time he arrived in California in 1852, he was only in his late 30s, but he was already sporting wild hair and a gray beard.

INTO THE WOODS

Adams tried his hand at ranching and gold mining, both of which were disastrous. He was swindled out of his sluice-mining claim by an unscrupulous partner, and then bank creditors foreclosed on his 160-acre ranch outside Stockton. So, he later explained, “I abandoned all my schemes for the accumulation of wealth, turned my back upon

“I abandoned all my schemes for the accumulation of wealth, turned my back upon the society of my fellows, and took the road toward the wildest and most unfrequented parts of the Sierra Nevada.”

the society of my fellows, and took the road toward the wildest and most unfrequented parts of the Sierra Nevada, resolved thenceforth to make the wilderness my home, and the wild beasts my companions.”

Adams drove his oxen cart into the mountains and settled not far from where Yosemite National Park is today. Back then, it was Indian country. While most white men of his time bragged about taking in the \$5 bounty for every Indian they killed, Adams befriended the Miwok tribe. He shot deer for them, and in return they helped him build his cabin and stables. The Indians

also provided Adams with the buckskin outfit he'd wear for the rest of his days.

It was around this time that he began referring to himself as James Capen Adams (possibly to avoid creditors). That was his brother's name, but John Adams assumed it as his own. Most people just called him Adams, though, or “the wild Yankee.” He was



Liam Neeson turned down the role of James Bond because his fiancée threatened to dump him if he said yes.

known to take in any stranger at his cabin (when he was there), but he often said he preferred the company of Indians over white men, and animals over people in general.

BEAR AND MAN

The concept of animal rights is a very recent one, and much of what Adams did may seem cruel when viewed through a modern lens—and illegal. He captured hundreds of wild animals and sold them to zoological societies and private collectors. He killed thousands more for meat and clothing. Adams and other trappers like him sold grizzlies to animal shows, where they were forced to fight each other or bulls. But in Adams's defense, he never killed for sport, and he trapped more animals alive than probably anyone else in his time.

And he wouldn't have become as famous as he did if it had been any other animal, but the California grizzly bear (*Ursus arctos californicus*) was the most feared beast in the forest. Fiercer and nearly twice as large as comparatively docile black bears, they attacked (and ate) livestock, so when Europeans encountered grizzlies, they killed them on sight.

Adams, however, revered the grizzly: "There is a vastness in his strength, which makes him a fit companion for the monster trees and giant rocks of the Sierra and places him, if not the first, at least in the first rank of all quadrupeds." But even in his reverence, he never thought to protect the species. Once numbering in the tens of thousands, the California grizzly bear survived alongside native peoples for millennia. Only 75 years after the gold rush began, the California grizzly was declared extinct in 1922. Montana and Washington are the only states in the contiguous United States that have a wild grizzly population today.

MAN AND BEAR

Adams learned how to trap grizzlies in 1854, when he spent two years (the best of his life, he said) leading numerous hunting and trapping expeditions throughout the West. He constructed large cages out of timber, and baited them with fresh meat. When the bear took the bait, a trapdoor fell and caged it. That's how Adams brought in the largest grizzly ever captured alive. Weighing more than 1,500 pounds, he named the beast Samson and added it to his growing menagerie. Another method he used to capture grizzly cubs was to kill their mother. That's how he got his favorite bear, Lady Washington, who became his closest companion. "From that day to this," he later wrote, "she has always been with me and often shared the dangers and privations; born my burdens and partaken of my meals." (Sorry, Cylena.)

Adams soon collected more grizzlies—including General Fremont, Happy Joe, and Benjamin Franklin. Tamed at only a year old, Ben was Adams's most docile bear, but he was fiercely protective of his owner. One day in 1855, while Adams and Ben were in the Sierras, a mama grizzly charged at them. Adams couldn't raise his shotgun in time,

Could you tell? Skittles candies have different scents but identical flavors.

and the grizzly walloped him in the head, tearing off part of his scalp. Then she sunk her teeth into his neck and was about to finish him off when Ben bit the larger bear's haunch. That distracted her long enough for Adams to scramble up a tree. He shot the grizzly dead, but not before she bit out one of Ben's eyes and trampled him. Even though Adams and Ben both survived, neither would ever fully heal from their wounds.

THE CITY BY THE BAY

In addition to the numerous grizzly attacks, Adams was mauled by a wolf (which took a chunk of his arm) and trampled by a buffalo (which nearly suffocated him). He needed to find a safer line of work. So in 1856, he and his wild animals (and his dog, Rambler) settled in San Francisco, where he opened the Mountaineering Museum in a basement on Park Street. For the next four years, Adams was a San Francisco fixture. He could often be seen walking through town with one of his grizzly bears; he'd leave it tied outside a restaurant while he dined inside.

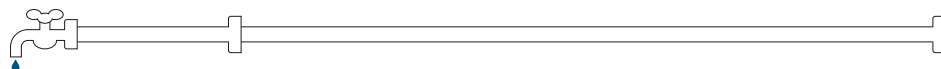
Admission to see the animals in the museum was a quarter. With his whip always in his hand, Adams would bark commands at his bears, make them do tricks, wrestle them, and tell action-packed accounts of their captures. Most of the grizzlies were chained to the stone floor (except for Samson, who was so powerful that he had to be restrained in an iron cage). Adams's overconfidence continued to be a problem; he was regularly swatted, bitten, and kicked—and on at least two occasions his head wound was reopened, revealing on his forehead a silver dollar–sized hole that exposed his brain.

One day in 1857, a young reporter named Theodore Hittell approached Adams and asked if he could interview him for the San Francisco *Bulletin*. That started a friendship that would lead to a widely read series of newspaper articles and a biography. And as Adams's popularity grew, so did the show. He soon had to move his newly named Pacific Museum to a new building.

ADAMS'S ARK

By 1859 ticket sales weren't bringing in enough money to feed six grizzly bears and dozens more hungry animals every day. Once again, creditors were closing in. So the "Barnum of the Pacific," as the newspapers were calling him, decided to leave town and take his show back East, where he would work for the real P. T. Barnum, reconnect with his estranged family, and then take his show to Europe. That was the plan, anyway. Adams sold a half-interest in the museum to cover the cost to get all his animals home. Then he loaded them all onto a clipper ship (the transcontinental railroad hadn't been completed yet) and sailed south around the tip of South America and then north to New York City.

In addition to Samson, Lady Washington, and General Fremont, Adams brought seven other grizzlies and, according to the *Daily Evening Bulletin*, "black and brown and



Op-ed means "opposite editorial" not "opinion editorial."

cinnamon bears...elk, deer, buffalo, coyote, and many birds, including the California condor, various eagles, pelicans, and other species of the feathered tribe.” The arduous 100-day journey took a further toll on Adams’s health. Not surprisingly, he reopened his head wound during one of his “demonstrations” on the ship’s deck.

ON BROADWAY

Adams has the distinction of being the first national celebrity to come from the recently founded state of California. He arrived in New York City in early 1860 and went straight to Barnum’s office to sign a contract. Concerned about his star attraction’s health, Barnum sent Adams to his personal physician, who basically told him two things: 1) it was a miracle Adams was alive, and 2) his head wound would never heal. Adams’s wife Cylena traveled down from Massachusetts to help care for him while he prepared for the new show, and they hired a doctor to dress the head wound daily.

On opening day in the spring of 1860, Adams and three of his grizzlies paraded down Broadway behind a marching band to the big tent where his “California Menagerie” was housed. Over the next few months, thousands of people, most of whom had only heard stories about grizzly bears, showed up to see Adams make them do tricks and wrestle with them. During one performance, General Fremont took a chunk out of Adams’s arm to the horror of the audience. (His dog Rambler saved his life.) At another show, a black bear bit Adams’s leg and flung him several feet across the floor. At another show, a monkey jumped onto Adams’s shoulder and bit his head wound.

Though it was obvious he should have quit immediately, Adams made a deal with Barnum that if he could do the show for ten more weeks, Barnum would pay him \$500. And Adams did last those ten weeks...barely. By the time the engagement was over, he couldn’t even walk. With his contract completed, Adams sold his animals to Barnum and moved back home with his wife. Two days later, he turned 48; three days after that, he died in his bed. Adams was buried in the family plot in Charlton, Massachusetts. His gravestone was paid for by Barnum.

During one performance, General Fremont took a chunk out of Adams’s arm to the horror of the audience.

THE SHOW MUST GO ON

Most of what you just read is true. It’s tough to know for sure, because the primary sources for historians are Hittell’s 1860 biography, *The Adventures of James Capen Adams, Mountaineer and Grizzly Bear Hunter of California* (which didn’t even get his name right), and the writings of known embellisher P. T. Barnum. But when it comes to Adams, any of these stories *could* be true, which is why he became as famous he did. It’s also why Barnum wasn’t ready to let his star attraction go. Barnum took the California Menagerie around the world, hiring actors to portray Adams for the next 30 years.

Most prominent feature on the Louisiana state flag: A pelican feeding her young.

After that, Adams's popularity waned, and wouldn't rebound until the late 20th century, when he was portrayed on the big screen by famed director John Huston in the 1972 film *The Life and Times of Judge Roy Bean*. He appeared on the small screen five years later, in the TV show *The Life and Times of Grizzly Adams*, portrayed by a California animal wrangler named Dan Haggerty.

A WILD LEGACY

As for the dozens of wild animals that Adams "tamed," many of them ended up in zoos on both coasts, with a few of their descendants living well into the 20th century. And despite some embellishing, Adams's observations of the now-extinct California grizzly—an animal he knew more about than anyone else—have been invaluable for naturalists who study bears. In 1953 lawmakers in Sacramento gave the California grizzly the posthumous honor of being designated the official state land animal (as evidenced by all the high school teams and landmarks called the Grizzlies). There was a petition in 2014 to reintroduce the grizzly to California, but the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service rejected it. Reason: it would be nearly impossible for a predator that requires such a large ecosystem to live in a state populated by 40 million people.

One final legacy: Theodore Hittell's biography about Grizzly Adams was illustrated with wood carvings by one of California's first celebrated artists, Charles Nahl. Unlike most wildlife illustrators of the time, who used taxidermied animals for reference (such as John James Audubon, who killed thousands of birds in order to draw them), Nahl preferred live subjects. His 1855 portrait of Adams's largest grizzly, Samson, was later used for the California state flag. Here's Samson:



A TIP FROM UNCLE JOHN

A bear can and will attack if it feels threatened or thinks you're food. If you hike on marked trails, you'll probably never encounter one, but if you do, stand still, and wave your arms slowly. That will let the bear know that you're people, not lunch. (It also makes you look bigger and, thus, more imposing.) Remain calm, and do not make any sudden movements or sounds that could agitate the bear. Then back away slowly.

What happened when Grizzly Adams returned to American pop culture in the form of Dan Haggerty? To find out, turn to page 485.



Fingerprints are unique. Heel prints aren't.

THE LIFE AND TIMES OF GRIZZLY ADAMS, PART II

You have probably heard of the legendary mountain man we told you about in part one of this tale. But there's much more of the story to tell—the story of the classic 1970s TV show and the mountain man who portrayed him. (Part I of the story is on page 365.)

BACKGROUND

“They call me Mad Jack, and if there is anybody in these mountains that knows the real story about James Adams, that'd be me. So I'm putting it down in writing just how it happened in hopes of setting the record straight.”

If you're of a certain age (old), then that introduction should sound familiar. It was the opening narration from *The Life and Times of Grizzly Adams*, a one-hour drama that aired on NBC on Wednesday nights in 1978 and 1979. But the show didn't really “set the record straight.” That would have been a pretty bad idea for a family show, because the real Adams was a mountain man who killed thousands of wild animals. The TV Grizzly Adams was much kinder and gentler. A lot of that had to do with the sensibilities of the 1970s, and a lot of it had to do with the man they hired to portray Adams.

MUSCLE MAN

If anyone was born to play Grizzly Adams, it was Dan Haggerty. As a teenager in the 1950s, he worked at his family's wild animal attraction in Pound, Wisconsin, where he learned, among other things, how to train bears to do tricks. Like Adams, he had a favorite bear that followed him around. Also like Adams, he left home to make it big in California. His mom had wanted him to be a priest. Instead, he went to live with his dad, a movie technician, in Hollywood.

Young Haggerty grew into a tall man with broad shoulders, a barrel chest, and sandy-blond hair. His good looks and powerful physique landed him small roles in 1964's *Muscle Beach Party* (starring Frankie Avalon and Annette Funicello) and 1965's *Girl Happy* (starring Elvis Presley). Acting didn't come as easy, though, and he wasn't getting any good parts, so he supplemented his income wrangling wild animals for various Disney productions and TV shows. An avid motorcycle rider, Haggerty also worked on the bikes, including the ones that Peter Fonda and Jack Nicholson rode, in 1969's *Easy Rider*, and he plays a hippie in the film. Because, as Haggerty often joked, “actors don't like animals leaping on them,” he also found steady work as a stuntman. That's what he was doing in 1974 when he was plucked to play Grizzly Adams. But this was a much different Adams than the real-life character, and a much different time.

Camels were used as pack animals in Nevada until 1870.

BACK TO NATURE

After 150 years of rapid growth and industrialization, by 1970 the United States was a polluted mess. A river caught fire in Cleveland, and a blanket of brown smog was smothering Los Angeles. It got so bad that President Richard Nixon created the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency. With that, the modern environmentalism movement was born. This “back to nature” fad led to popular frontier shows like *The Waltons* (1971–81) and *Little House on the Prairie* (1974–83). Hoping to cash in, in 1972 an up-and-coming TV writer and producer named Charles E. Sellier wrote a novel called *The Life and Times of Grizzly Adams*. Despite the subtitle’s claim that it was “the true story of a man exiled in the wilderness who learns how to survive,” Sellier had no intentions of telling Adams’s true story. His was a sanitized, made-for-TV version that left out all the gory details. Two examples: the real Adams was a failed rancher and failed miner who fled to the woods in part to escape his unpaid debts; Sellier’s Adams was a gentle farmer who was wrongly accused of murder. The real Adams captured his grizzly cub by killing its mother; Sellier’s Adams rescued an orphaned cub from a cliff.

He noticed a burly stuntman with a big beard who was chasing a tiger across a frozen lake and said, “Now that’s Grizzly Adams!”

THE MOVIE

As soon as the book was published, Sellier started shopping it to movie studios. He partnered with Patrick Frawley at Sunn Classic Pictures, and they started filming the movie. But the actor they’d hired to play Adams wasn’t working out. Most of the footage was unusable, and the project stalled. Then, while Frawley was looking at some daily footage from another movie they were making called *The Snow Tigers*, he noticed a burly

stuntman with a big beard who was chasing a tiger across a frozen lake and said, “Now that’s Grizzly Adams!” Frawley asked his secretary, Diane, “Do you know that guy?”

“Yes,” she said. “That’s my husband.”

Haggerty enthusiastically accepted the role, and they scrapped the existing footage—which had cost \$500,000—and used the \$185,000 they had left in the budget to film *The Life and Times of Grizzly Adams* in the mountains outside of Park City, Utah.

The movie opens with Haggerty as Adams heading off into the wilderness, where he finds a grizzly cub he names Ben and befriends an Indian named Nakoma. If you’re a fan of the TV show, watching the movie can be a bit disconcerting because Haggerty’s voice was deemed too “California surfer” by Frawley, and was overdubbed by another actor who doesn’t sound like Haggerty. Nevertheless, the movie outperformed everyone’s expectations, making \$45 million domestically and another \$20 million overseas. It was the seventh highest-grossing film of 1974—coming in just behind *The Godfather Part II*—and is still one of the most profitable independent films ever made.



Yams are more closely related to lilies than they are to sweet potatoes.

When NBC aired the movie in 1976, it drew a huge 45 percent market share. NBC brass wanted a Grizzly Adams TV show, and they wanted Haggerty to play him. For Haggerty, it was a dream come true.

A WILD DR. DOOLITTLE

As one of the characters, Mad Jack, describes Adams at the beginning of each episode, “He had a special kind of way with animals. They’d just come right up to him like he was a natural part of the wilderness.” Haggerty fit that bill perfectly. He was just as comfortable with his wild co-stars as he was with the mountains of Utah where they filmed *The Life and Times of Grizzly Adams* (or Arizona or New Mexico when the weather didn’t cooperate). Unlike the real Grizzly Adams, who killed untold numbers of wild animals, this Adams wouldn’t even eat an animal, much less kill one. “Calm your bones, Ben,” Adams says as the bear pokes his nose into a satchel. “We’ve got to save these berries for Jack’s special blueberry pie. First, the berries go into the fillin’, and then the pies will be fillin’ you. Doesn’t that sound like a dandy idea?” Ben growls in agreement.

Ben was played by a 600-pound female Kodiak bear (a subspecies of the grizzly from Alaska) named Boz (short for Bozo). Haggerty and Boz formed an instant bond, and they remained friends until her death in 1999. Also living at Adams’s cabin are two skunks named Mary Lou and Daniel, a raccoon named Joshua, and a hawk named Hawk. He talks to them like they’re human and, like a western Dr. Doolittle, instinctively knows what they’re trying to tell him.

SUPPORTING PLAYERS

Mad Jack, a roving trader who narrates the show, bears a closer resemblance to the real John Adams, right down to his long white beard, buckskins, and fur cap. Played by veteran character actor Denver Pyle (Uncle Jesse on *The Dukes of Hazzard*), he often got the laugh lines, especially when bickering with his pack mule, Number 7: “You’d better stop bein’ so ornery, Number 7, or I’m gonna have to go and find me a Number 8!”

Nakoma, a member of an unnamed Indian tribe, is Adams’s “blood brother.” He was played by a stuntman named Don Shanks, who is of Cherokee and Illini descent. During a time when most Native Americans on-screen were either savages or sidekicks, Nakoma was portrayed so realistically that he spoke his own language.

Typical storylines revolved around Adams and his friends helping strangers—a girl lost in the forest, a runaway slave, a down-on-his luck hot-air balloonist. In one episode, Adams saves the life of a young “greenhorn from back East” who turns out to be Teddy Roosevelt. In one of the more dramatic storylines, Ben is accused of stealing fish from the chief of Nakoma’s tribe. Can Adams save his grizzly bear while honoring the ways of the Indians?

Wil Wheaton (Wesley on *Star Trek: The Next Generation*) auditioned for the role of Ralphie in *A Christmas Story*.

PEOPLE'S CHOICE

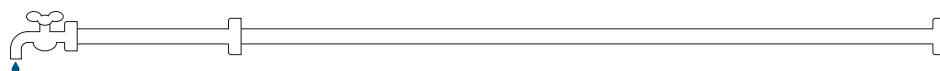
The Life and Times of Grizzly Adams premiered in January 1977 up against ratings juggernauts *Good Times* and *The Bionic Woman*. It performed strongly, bringing in an impressive 32 percent market share. Critics weren't too impressed with Haggerty's acting—which did improve somewhat as the show progressed—but viewers loved his “Aw, shucks” demeanor and strong moral compass (two qualities that helped President Jimmy Carter get elected in 1976 after the messiness of the Nixon/Ford years). Haggerty won the People's Choice Award for Favorite Male Performer in a New Program that year, and (along with Boz/Ben) he became the first person featured on the cover of *TV Guide* twice in six months. Grizzly Adams took his rightful place on school lunch boxes alongside *Star Wars* and *Happy Days*. Part of the show's appeal, said Haggerty at the time, was that it's “a change for viewers who are sick of screaming brakes, cars exploding, and fight scenes. Pretty scenery and a couple of guys traipsing through the woods is a relief.”

In season two, Haggerty wanted Adams to get a wife, but his request was denied. The network told him more women would tune in if they thought Adams was an eligible bachelor. Then, for reasons that are still not known, NBC canceled the show, even though it was still bringing in viewers. Haggerty only got to play the character two more times in TV movies, concluding with 1982's *The Capture of Grizzly Adams*. If Haggerty had his way, he'd have played Adams for the rest of his life, but that's not how it worked out.

PEAKS AND VALLEYS

Like Adams, Haggerty was in his mid-30s when he became famous. And, like Adams, he called that time the best two years of his life. But unlike Adams, Haggerty became less famous when he emerged from the wilderness. The only money he made from the show was his weekly salary. He didn't reap any of the considerable merchandising or rerun profits, and went back to being a struggling actor. (Charles Sellier trademarked the Grizzly Adams brand name and made a fortune off it in merchandising.) In the early 1980s, Haggerty paid the bills by directing animals on movie sets and guest-starring on shows like *CHiPs*, *Charlie's Angels*, and *The Love Boat*. He hit rock bottom in 1985 when he was arrested in Los Angeles for selling cocaine to undercover cops, and served 90 days in jail. Haggerty became friends with the two officers who ran the sting, though, and tried to maintain a positive outlook after he served his time, saying, “The system's been good to me.”

Maybe...but adversity was never far off. In 1987 he was in a serious motorcycle accident. While he was recovering, he was charged with tax evasion. Then in 1991, he was in an even worse motorcycle accident, which left him in a coma and required 18 surgeries to heal. (In 2008 his second wife was killed in a similar bike accident.)



First ever submarine: the *Drebbel I* in 1620. It was an enclosed rowboat.

THE IRONY AGE

Though he tried, Haggerty was never able to rekindle the Adams flame, probably because the world had simply moved on. The 1980s brought Ronald Reagan, who famously said, “A tree is a tree, how many more do you need to look at?” And while shows like *Little House* and *The Waltons* did manage to retain a spot in the cultural zeitgeist, for the most part popular entertainment was getting edgier and more cynical. By the 1990s, “Grizzly Adams” had become fully transformed from “patron saint of the animals” to the go-to joke about any man with a burly beard, as evidenced in *Happy Gilmore*, *30 Rock*, *Veep*, *Family Guy*, and countless more movies and TV shows.

By the 1990s, “Grizzly Adams” had become fully transformed from “patron saint of the animals” to the go-to joke about any man with a burly beard.

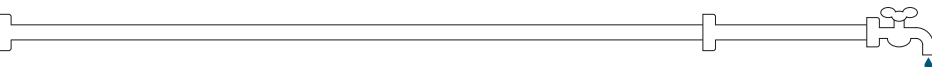
Unfortunately for Haggerty, whose acting range was limited, that led to a lot of “stunt-casting” in low-budget movies. He shows up in forgettable roles in a number of forgettable movies—as a “loose-cannon mall Santa” in the schlocky horror flick *Elves*, as a repo man in the action yarn *Repo Drake*, as an ex-con who gives Rob Schneider horrible advice in the raunchy comedy *Big Stan*, as a biker in *Dead in 5 Heartbeats*, and as a lumberjack in *Axe Giant: The Wrath of Paul Bunyan*. Haggerty’s final performance, as Captain in *The Untold Story*, premiered in 2019, three years after he died.

But none of Haggerty’s acting parts earned him enough to feed all his wild animals and his family at his sprawling ranch in Malibu Canyon. So later in his life, he supplemented his income with convention appearances and—in true Grizzly Adams fashion—he managed a company that sold log cabins. He also opened a restaurant where he sold his own brand of Cajun barbecue sauce, he sold the only surviving original motorcycle from *Easy Rider*, and he appeared on a late-night infomercial for hair transplants.

But the thing Haggerty wanted most—a Grizzly Adams revival—never happened. He was diagnosed with spinal cancer in August 2015. His daughter started a GoFundMe campaign to raise the \$100,000 required for treatment, but it barely brought in \$10,000. Once among the most popular TV stars in America, Dan Haggerty died with little fanfare in January 2016 at the age of 73.

MIXED MESSAGES

Watching *The Life and Times of Grizzly Adams* today is like watching an idealized version of the 1850s as told by an idealized version of the 1970s. On one hand, the storylines revolved around tolerance, racial harmony, pacifism, and environmentalism. On the other hand, impressionable little kids got to watch a nice man hand-feed wild animals, which we now know is harmful to wildlife. Even worse, kids saw Adams walk right up to large predators and talk to them as if they were human. When Haggerty



Hugh “Wolverine” Jackman holds the record for playing the same superhero in the most movies: 11.

was later asked about the dangers of his chosen profession, he offered this advice: “Working with a bear, it’s like being married. It has its moments. But anything with teeth and claws, be careful.”

To see the worst-case scenario of how this mindset can play out, watch the 2005 documentary *Grizzly Man*, about Timothy Treadwell, described by one critic as a “New Age Grizzly Adams with a video camera.” Treadwell’s attempts to make friends with—and humanize—the grizzly bears in the wilds of Alaska ended up getting him and his girlfriend killed.

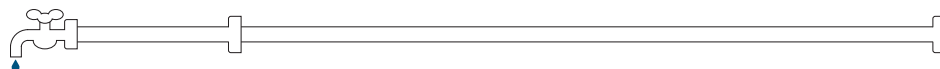
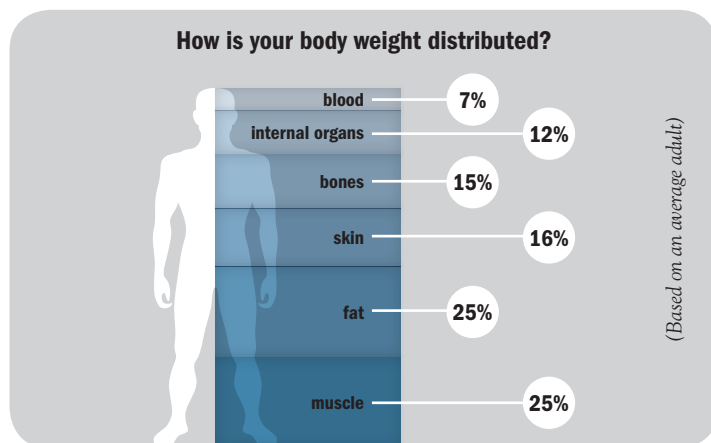
THE RETURN OF GRIZZLY ADAMS?

Who knows if *The Life and Times of Grizzly Adams* TV show will see a resurgence in popularity, or if the character will ever be rebooted for modern audiences? That’s happened for other shows of the era, such as *Battlestar Galactica* and *Hawaii 5-0*. By the time you’re reading this, Adams may already be back. For now, though, the series is available on DVD. So if you want to be transported back to a simpler time, make yourself some flapjacks and gather your family ’round, because Mad Jack sure has a whopper of a tale to tell ya.

Bonus: If someone tries to tell you that Dan Haggerty was the only actor to lose his star on the Hollywood Walk of Fame because of his 1985 cocaine arrest, it’s just an urban legend. It came about because of a typo on *Don Haggerty’s* star. Don played a lot of cowboys in the 1950s and ’60s, but his name was misprinted as “Dan.” The name was changed from Dan to Don shortly after Haggerty’s arrest, leading to the rumors. In 1994 Dan Haggerty did get a much-deserved star on the Hollywood Walk of Fame.

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A RANDOM BIT OF FACTINESS



The wooliest sheep on record held 90 pounds of wool.