

Lightning Victim Calls Husband a Hero

Written by Steve Frank
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Details have emerged about how close a lightning strike last week on the Blue Ridge Parkway came to claiming a Catawba County woman's life. Dave Faherty caught up with the couple in Newton, Bonnie Elander saying that her husband is a hero, saving her life. Park rangers say lightning struck the top of a large hemlock tree, the bolt traveling down through the tree and out through its roots, striking the couple. Greg and Bonnie Elander had been on their way to Linville Falls by motorcycle when the strong storm hit the Linville area, flooding some areas, lightning striking the overlook where the couple pulled off—no shelter to be had. Bonnie Elander said she remembers little about the trip including the strike that hit this tree causing it to split open. "I don't remember the storm itself or stopping to get off the bike to take cover." Her husband, Greg, says it was raining so hard they pulled off at the Grandfather overlook, and that they knew to stay away from trees, but because the lightning traveled through the ground it didn't matter. Greg, who learned CPR when he was younger, found his wife not breathing and started chest compressions. First arriving emergency units from Avery County rushed the woman toward US 221 where they met an Avery ambulance, then rushed Bonnie Elander to Cannon Memorial. She was then transferred to Carolinas Medical Center, and was released over the weekend. Bonnie has to wear a back brace now after the strike fracturing her sternum and her back, but she is thankful to be alive and doesn't hesitate to describe her husband's actions, calling him "a hero," saying "I thank him every day of my life and I would not be here without his efforts to revive me." The couple is very thankful to people who stopped to help and risked their lives during the storm including the EMTs and firefighters here in Avery County. Photos: Dave Faherty, WSOC-TV