

A Striking Survival Story



There's a saying that "lightning never strikes twice." Well, tell that to Roy Sullivan. Roy was struck by lightning seven different times and lived to tell about it. He became known as the human lightning rod.

Roy Sullivan was born in 1912 and became a United States park ranger in 1936 for the Shenandoah National Park in Virginia. Since part of his job was to patrol the enormous park, Roy often worked outside. Being on patrol meant that he could not always find a safe place to take shelter during thunderstorms.

Roy was struck by lightning for the first time in 1942 while out on patrol. He tried to escape the storm by hiding under a newly built lookout tower. But being new, no one had installed the lightning rod yet.

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Lightning rods are long metal rods attached to the outside of buildings. They protect buildings from lightning by grounding the electricity. A lightning rod runs from the top of the roof down the side of the building and into the ground. When lightning strikes the rod, the electricity travels down the rod into the ground, saving the building from major damages.

In 1942, the tower under which Roy hid was struck by lightning seven or eight times and caught fire. Roy ran out into the rain to escape the flames and was struck by a bolt of lightning that burned a strip along his leg, hit his toe, and left a hole in his shoe.

Over the years, Roy suffered many lightning-related injuries, which were mostly burns to his body. His hair caught on fire and his eyebrows and eyelashes were burnt off.

Roy holds the world record for most lightning strikes. Over time, Roy became sure that lightning followed him.

Lightning hit Roy for the last time in 1977 while he was fishing in a small pond. The lightning hit the top of his head, setting his hair on fire and burning his chest and stomach. Dazed, Roy painfully turned around in the direction of his car and came face to face with a bear—which was after Roy's catch. He hit the bear with a stick and ran to his car. He said it was the twenty-second time in his life that he had to hit a bear with a stick.

Roy died in 1983 at age 71. He is still the most famous ranger in Shenandoah National Park.

