Lightning Strike

Bob Beebe
October 1, 2026



- Based on true events that happened to his wife Karen as a trail guide in New Mexico.

Like Lauren in the story, Karen was guiding a group of girls (in her case actually about 5-6) on a mountain trail in New Mexico when she and another girl were struck by lightning. As in the story, a helicopter carried her paralyzed body off the mountain. She spent the next several months in the hospital and fortunately fully recovered.

This incident changed the course of her life. She began traveling with some friends, met her spiritual father in California, and joined the church.

After we were blessed, we traveled to meet her family in Texas. Her dad took us up to the attic where the clothes she had been wearing that fateful day on the mountain were stored. There were holes where the lightning had entered her pants at the waist after hitting and traveling down the metal bars on each side of her backpack and out through her boots.

The Story:

"That's it. Take my hand and I'll pull you up."

Ashley grabbed her hand and Lauren easily hoisted her up to the ledge.

"Now you, Emily."

Lauren extended her hand to the frizzy red-haired 14-year-old down below. Emily looked up at her defiantly.

"I can do it myself, thank you," she huffed as she struggled to pull herself up. Lauren watched for a minute, then tried to assist her.

"Leave me alone, I said! I'll do it myself!"

Lauren drew back and watched Emily claw her way up to the ledge. As she straightened up, she gave Lauren a triumphant look as if to say, "See, I don't need you!"

Emily turned away from Lauren. "Let's keep going," she said to Ashley, taking her by the arm.

Emily and Ashley were best friends from years back. Emily had had a rough ride the past couple of months after her father suddenly passed away in the spring from a stroke. She really missed him. He'd been her anchor in helping her to deal with her emotional ups and downs. Without him, she felt herself spiraling out of control. Her mother wasn't any help. She was as emotional as Emily. After her father died, their relationship became unbearable. Her mother seemed to be always stressed out and controlling.

To escape, Emily took to hanging out at the mall, neglecting her schoolwork and coming home late at night. Exasperated, Emily's mother arranged with Ashley's parents to send them both to a high adventure ranch in New Mexico for the summer.

This was their third day at the ranch. Emily and her friend were hiking through the Sangre de Christo mountains with this ranger who reminded her of her mother. She knew nothing about Lauren. They had just met that morning. But she seemed to be trying to control her, just like her mother, telling her what to do.

"Emily, wait!" shouted Lauren from behind. "We should stay together."

There she goes again, thought Emily. Leave me alone, will you!

Emily ignored her and kept climbing. Ashley turned around.

"Em, let's wait," Ashley said. "Lauren's right. We need to stay together."

"I can take care of myself," Emily shot back gruffly. "I don't need any guide."

She stopped to let Ashley and Lauren go on ahead of her, hanging back but keeping them in sight.

After about an hour the wind began to pick up. Threatening clouds formed over the mountain. Suddenly a bolt of lightning flashed across the sky followed seconds later by a loud boom.

"We'd better find shelter - and quick!" Lauren yelled. "We don't want to be out on the ridge in a thunderstorm."

The wind was howling strongly now. Another bolt hit ahead of them, just over the next ridge. Hail began to pelt down hard, stinging their faces and hands.

"Lauren, I'm afraid!" Ashley shouted through the howling wind. She struggled to stay close to Lauren, who had begun to pick up the pace. Emily trailed behind, stumbling over the slick wet rocks.

Suddenly the entire area went white, and a thunderous blast followed almost immediately. All three hikers went down. Momentarily stunned, Emily struggled to her feet. Peering ahead through the hail she saw Ashley and Lauren lying face down on the trail 20 feet ahead. Shocked and dazed, she made her way to them.

"Ash!" Emily shouted, shaking her by the shoulders. "Ash, get up!"

Ashley turned her head slowly and looked up at Emily. "I-I can't! I can't move!"

Emily looked at Lauren's apparently lifeless body, just three feet away. She nudged her side with her hand. No response.

"Lauren's not moving," she said, with a hint of concern.

Ashley wailed, "Oh, Emily, what are we going to do?"

Emily stood up shakily, her mind swimming. Before she knew it ,her legs were running, taking her down the mountain. Got to get help was all she could think.

"I'll be back," she shouted over her shoulder.

Frantically, she made her way down, trying to avoid falling on the slippery slope. As she desperately tried to remember the way back to the ranch, her mind flooded with feelings of remorse over the way she treated Lauren. What a jerk I've been, she thought. What did she ever do to me? Her mother's image flashed into Emily's mind, but she now realized Lauren was not like her at all. Lauren had always been calm and considerate towards her.

By the time Emily reached the ranch, the storm clouds had receded and the sun was shining. No one was in sight. She ran up to the main office and burst inside, breathing heavily. The girl behind the desk looked up. "What the…?"

"Quick! We need a helicopter right away! My friend and our guide are stranded up on the mountain. They were hit by lightning. Our guide Lauren looks…"

Tears welled up in her eyes as Emily thought of Lauren.

A rescue helicopter was requisitioned to fly to the spot where the hikers were. As it approached, Emily could see Ashley and Lauren below. Ashley was sitting against a rock. Lauren was still lying on the ground, now face up. The helicopter touched down on a level area above the girls. Emily bolted and ran down the incline.

She waved to her friend as she approached their stricken guide. Lauren opened her eyes and looked at Emily gratefully. She still seemed to be unable to move.

"Emily!" she whispered in a soft voice.

"Don't speak," Emily said, kneeling down beside her. She lifted up the young woman's head and cradled it in her arms. "I'm so sorry. Can you ever forgive me?"

Lauren managed a weak nod.

Emily sighed, "Let's get you out of here."



all photos submitted by Bob Beebe