

US man dead after lightning strike

News

Sam Beattie falls victim to unfathomable odds in lightning strike

Aaron Langmaid, Herald Sun

December 9, 2016 4:16pm

Subscriber only

THE odds are almost unfathomable. That American backpacker Sam Beattie would board a plane with his girlfriend, fly to Australia, trek through a national park, pitch a tent beneath a tree — then place his feet against it.

When lightning struck just before dawn during a thunderstorm at the ominously named Mt Warning this week, the 24-year-old's number was up.

One in three million to be exact.

Some say wrong place, wrong time. Others call it fate.

Mr Beattie died instantly. The young traveller became one of around 100 people struck by lightning in Australia each year and among the list of around five to 10 who die as a result.

It is a killer scenario with spectacularly wide odds.



Social media picture of Sam Beattie with his partner Michele Segalla. Picture: Supplied

This was a man who had more chance of getting killed in a terror attack. Even falling out of bed.

But University of Toronto statistician Professor Jeffrey Rosenthal, in Australia as part of a national tour exploring chance and probability said such tragic events weren't necessarily as random as they seemed.

"With simple logic and an understanding of a few easy principles, such as how to calculate probability and the law of large numbers, people can make smart choices based on fact and avoid unnecessary fears," Prof. Rosenthal said.

Author of the book, *Struck by Lightning: The Curious World of Probabilities*, the professor said the chance of getting killed in an obscure way was rare but not impossible.

He said Australians had a one in three million chance of getting struck by lightning — and a one in 45 million chance of winning the Oz Lotto jackpot.



📷 Social media image of Sam Beattie with his partner Michele Segalla. Sam died from a lightning strike at the top of Mt Warning

"It is true that if that backpacker had not been camped at that precise tree on that precise mountain at that exact time, then he would not have been killed by lightning," Prof. Rosenthal said.

"For the most part we cannot predict precisely when or where lightning bolts and other killers will strike, so there is not too much that we can do to protect ourselves."

"But the probability that we will be killed in this way is extremely small, no matter what we do."

Chaplains Without Borders Father James Grant said while some would argue otherwise, a death like that was not a question of fate.

"We are not just pawns on a chess board," Fr Grant said.

"This was not just a random event.

"There is meaning and purpose even if we don't understand what it is.

"It looks like a pointless action but there is a reason and a purpose in it."

He said traumatic experiences were often a tipping point in the lives of those affected, even if it meant the death of a loved one.

"As Christians we don't see death as the end of the story."

The Australian Mathematical Sciences Institute will host Prof. Rosenthal at a public lecture at the University of Melbourne next Thursday from 6pm. See <http://research.amsi.org.au/amsi-ssa-lecturer/#schedule>

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THE CURIOUS
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📍 Prof. Rosenthal is holding a public lecture at the University of Melbourne.
