

SMART NEWS

# For the Only Person Ever Hit by a Meteorite, the Real Trouble Began Later

The “Hodges meteorite” brought problems to the woman it struck, but good fortune to at least one neighbor

**Kat Eschner**

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Not the meteorite that struck Ann Hodges, this five-inch-long chunk was recovered from Siberia. H. Raab / Wikimedia Commons

Only one person in recorded history has ever been directly hit by a meteorite.

Ann Hodges, 34, was napping under quilts on her couch in Sylacauga, Alabama, on November 30, 1954, when a nine-pound meteorite came through the ceiling and bounced off a radio before hitting her in the thigh. It left a deep bruise and catapulted her into both quiet fame and a major legal dispute with her landlady, who thought she rightfully owned the rock.

Ann's bruise, seen in a photo in *Time*, looks painful. But the real trouble started for Ann after the meteor strike, writes Phil Plait for *Slate*. Between the protracted court battle with her landlady and the media attention, Hodges' mental and physical health went downhill, he writes. She separated from her husband and eventually died of kidney failure in a nursing home at the age of 52.

The meteorite did bring good fortune to one of her neighbors. Julius Kempis McKinney, a local farmer, found a chunk of the "Hodges meteorite" that was less than half as big as the one that struck the woman it was then named after. McKinney told his postman, writes the *Decatur Daily*, who helped him get a lawyer to negotiate the sale of his find. In the end, he made enough money to buy a car and a house.

Another neighbor, Bill Field, told the *Daily* he remembered seeing the meteorite as a five-year-old. "I was standing in the back yard with my mother, who was at the clothesline," he told the newspaper. "I remember this object shooting across the sky with a white trail that I pointed out to my mother. There was a loud boom and black smoke."

Sixty-two years after her brush with the heavens, Hodges remains the only well-documented case of somebody being hit by a meteorite. But humans have continued to be affected by space junk. In 1992, a meteorite blazed across the sky in Peekskill, New York, before striking a woman's parked car. The repair bill probably stung a bit, but she wasn't injured in the strike. In 2003, a 40-pound meteorite crashed through the roof of another home, this time in New Orleans, though fortunately no one was hurt. And in 2007, a meteorite strike made people sick in Peru when it released arsenic fumes from an underground water source, writes Brian Howard for *National Geographic*. In 2013, a meteorite exploded over central Russia. The resulting shock wave injured 1200 people and caused \$33 million in damage.

As Hodges's unique case demonstrates, the odds are on our side when it comes to meteor strikes. One scientist found the lifetime odds of dying from a meteor strike near you to be 1:1,600,000—to put that in perspective, your odds of being struck by lightning are 1:135,000. The odds of dying as the result of a meteor strike anywhere in the world—like the kind of rare but catastrophic geologic event that shapes an eon—are 1:75,000.

The odds of winning the PowerBall lottery? 1:195,249,054. Stop buying lotto tickets and watch out for meteorites, folks.

## **Kat Eschner**

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## **METEORS**

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