

Grieving gran tells of lightning terror

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By Phumlile Ntsele and Jauhara Khan



A traumatised Dukuya Mdluli gathers her thoughts outside her family's gutted rondavel in Bergville after lightning struck the home, setting it alight and killing her daughter-in-law and four grandchildren. Picture: Patrick Mtolo

"I still don't know what happened. I heard a loud bang and I saw everyone fall down. Suddenly the house was on fire. I just remember grabbing the children and crawling to the door."

Confused and in a state of shock, Dukuya Mdluli, 75, is struggling to come to terms with a lightning strike on her home at Mhlwazini, Bergville, that claimed almost her entire family on Wednesday night.

The rondavel was set alight and gutted by flames, killing Mdluli's daughter-in-law Busisiwe, 37, and four grandchildren Khayelihle, 10, Dako, 8, Ncebo, 2, and Amahle, six months.

A short distance from the Mdluli home, Mfundo Mngomezulu, 31, was killed when lightning also struck his home on Wednesday night.

Mdluli, who was picking through the burnt items in her ash-strewn rondavel on Thursday, said the family had been preparing supper when the lightning struck.

"I heard a noise coming from the roof, and flames blazed through. The electricity went off and everyone fell flat on their stomachs. I remember being dizzy and I couldn't breathe.

"I grabbed two of the children near me, dragged them to the door and crawled out the house," she said.

The rondavel's thatched roof caved in, while Mdluli and grandchildren Vamisile Shabalala, 11, and Siphesihle Mdluli, 4, cried for help outside.

"I don't know how we escaped. It's a miracle that we got out," said Mdluli.

One of Busisiwe's older children, Snothi, narrowly escaped the fire as he had luckily gone to visit a nearby tuck-shop.

The children's father, Mangwane Mdluli, was in Gauteng, looking for work when the tragedy struck his family.

Neighbours surveyed the aftermath of the lightning strike in disbelief on Thursday, with many saying that they could no longer live in a place that was being plagued by natural disasters, which included flooding.

Lightning also killed seven people in Pongola in November 2010, and a further seven near Eshowe at the beginning of 2011. - The Mercury