

They were in the basement frantically preparing for a flood. Then the landslide hit

BY MARTHA QUILLIN
mquillin@newsobserver.com

BARNARDSVILLE

Kelli Ball felt the landslide in the bones of her chest before she could see it.

She and her husband, Dakota, were in the basement of their house on Stony Fork Road trying to move stuff out of the way of the rising water. The water was coming from the creek behind the house, normally a little trickle way down the hill, that had climbed the bank Friday morning with all

the rain from the remnants of Hurricane Helene.

Their boys, Canaan, 8, and Macon, 4, were upstairs on the couch.

It was around 10 a.m.

The family had been awake since 5 a.m., and all morning, the mountains around them had been groaning in the deluge.

"If you've not experienced a flood in the mountains, you just hear these boulders rolling and trees breaking and it just rumbles in the mountains," Kelli said. "It echoes everywhere. We had been hearing that all

morning."

The flooding was happening all around Barnardsville, a farming community in Buncombe County north of Asheville along the normally friendly Big Ivy River and laced with creeks that come down from the hills. The Big Ivy itself was coming out of its banks and spreading all over the lowland, snatching double-wide mobile homes and stick-built houses off their foundations and sending them downstream in shards. It emptied out a catfish pond. It blew out a wall of the local diner.

In the Balls' basement, the water was just coming up too fast, and Kelli told Dakota, "We've got to go. We've got to go!" And ran upstairs.

That's when she felt the vibration in her breastbone.

She reached the living room, with its big windows that look across Stony Fork Road at a hay field, then up at a mountain that's part of Pisgah National Forest, just as the mountain turned loose a river of boulders and trees and mud.

It was heading hundreds of yards downhill, coming for the Balls' house, with the potential to also take out Dakota's parents' house, on one side of them, or his grandmother's, on the other.

They had picked this site when they built the home in 2019 because it was on high ground.

"We thought it was the safest place," Dakota said.

When Kelli saw — and felt — the liquified mountain coming at her family,

she screamed at Dakota, who was still in the basement: "Landslide!"

She grabbed the boys and went out the front door just as a whole tree slammed into the house, jamming under the porch.

"It was like a runaway freight train coming down that mountain," Kelli said.

The boys jumped from the porch and first the family started to run to the right, "but the slide kept coming," so they decided to go the other way. By then, Dakota's parents had run outside. Separated by the flow of mud and debris several feet deep running between their two houses, "We formed a human chain and just passed our babies across that river," as rocks and branches ran across their bare feet in the flowing mud.

Dakota Ball said the slide opened up two new springs in the front yard, and he and others had used a track hoe to reroute them into one stream running beside the drive-

way and toward the creek behind the house. The couple had stripped the drywall in the basement, and with the help of people of Barnardsville, had cut enough of the scattered trees to move around in the yard.

A few miles down the road, in Barnardsville proper, volunteers were sorting donations of canned corn and taco shells and bottled water at the old four-bay building that used to house the volunteer fire department. The community, routed by water, already was rebuilding its washed-out roads using equipment on loan from Brock Mountain, a local construction company.

Owners of ATVs were shuttling residents where they needed to go because cars and pavement had been washed away.

"We're lucky," Kelli Ball said. "We're alive."

Martha Quillin:
919-829-8989,
@MarthaQuillin

Free legal assistance available for Helene storm victims in NC. How to get help

BY CHYNA BLACKMON
cblackmon@charlotteobserver.com

As thousands of North Carolinians continue to pick up the pieces from the destruction left behind by Hurricane Helene, **free legal help** is now available to help those in need.

The North Carolina Bar Association and Foundation, Legal Aid of North Carolina, the American Bar Association Young Lawyers Division and the Federal Emergency Management Agency have teamed up to launch a pro bono legal program with local lawyers.

The **Disaster Legal Services hotline (866-219-5262)** is available for low-income survivors to connect with volunteer attorneys to assist with any storm-related questions and disaster benefits, including:

- FEMA appeals
- Disaster Unemployment Assistance
- Insurance claims
- Home repair contracts and contractor disputes
- Contractor fraud and consumer protection matters
- Replacing destroyed legal documents
- Mortgage-foreclosure
- Landlord or tenant

issues

The toll-free hotline is available **8:30 a.m.-1:30 p.m. Monday through Friday and 5:30-8:30 p.m. Mondays and Thursdays**. To be con-

nected to a volunteer lawyer, explain which county you are located in and ask for Disaster Legal Services assistance.

According to Legal Aid of North Carolina, 26 continues have been ap-

proved for the federal assistance: Alexander, Alleghany, Ashe, Avery, Buncombe, Burke, Caldwell, Catawba, Clay, Cleveland, Gaston, Haywood, Henderson, Jackson, Lincoln, Macon, Madison, McDowell, Mitchell, Polk, Rutherford, Transylvania, Watauga, Wilkes and Yancey counties and the Eastern Band of Cherokee Indians.

You can find more information about the Disaster Legal Services hotline and Legal Aid's resource library with tips for replacing lost documents, property taxes, unemployment assistance and more online at legalaidnc.org/disaster.

Chyna Blackmon:
@chynablackmon



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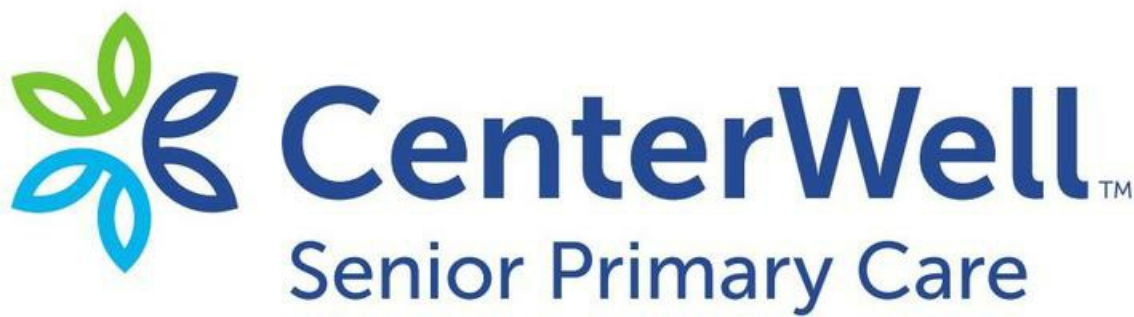
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