

In May of 1999, nearly five years have passed since what we in the family, we three survivors, call “the accident.” Simon and Emily are living in Fremont, California, near San Francisco where Simon is a graduate student at UCSF. I’m in Baltimore visiting Teddy who is nearing graduation in Emergency Services at UMBC.

“THE POOR COWS,” I say. It’s out of my mouth before I can call it back. I wonder if Teddy has heard me.

Someone else, a female undergrad, says, “Poor things.”

Then, I don’t feel so foolish about my outburst. The image of the cows is still on the screen at the front of the classroom.

The five cows lie beside a barbed wire fence that slices diagonally across the photo. Legs deep in soggy marsh, the beasts were vulnerable to a lightning strike. Now the Holsteins appear like black and white blobs of paint, two-dimensional figures having lost the vigor of being three-dimensional.

I strain to see. Is the photo blurred or are the cows bloated and their deaths so gaseous that the air is fogged?

Teddy clicks the remote and the next photo appears. A relief.

He is midway through his presentation on “The Successful Triage and Treatment of Electrical Injuries.” He has already covered the protocol for the assessment of injuries. His fellow upper classmen and I have followed along as he described the possible bodily systems impacted by electrical accidents.

In laymen’s terms, electricity can cause your heart to stop, your breathing to cease, your skin to be burned, and your nerves to fray. Then, there’s blunt trauma force. How could I forget that? And injuries to eyes and ears. And of course, electricity can kill you.

I hope the class understands in more sophisticated terms than I do what they should examine and treat. But I can sense that all of us are being emotionally affected by Teddy’s presentation.

He has shown us photos of horrific burns on the chests and backs of male power company employees. Now photos of lightning hitting trees, buildings, and airplanes alert us to a section about statistics, more statistics than we can absorb. To be brief, in the US, most lightning injuries and deaths occur in Texas and Florida. To males between fifteen and nineteen. Between May and September. In a typical year in the US, three hundred victims will be injured by lightning, but only one hundred will die. And in the rest of the world, Uganda is a country where lightning injuries and deaths are high for no discernable reason.

Teddy reminds us that while lightning hits the Earth often, people are rarely injured or killed. Getting hit by lightning *is* rare. The odds *are* one in a million.

Then he returns to the photo of the cows, the black and white puddles of paint. The surreal image.



TEDDY INVITED ME to come see this presentation. He will graduate in a month, and I will travel again to Baltimore to witness his graduation, an achievement once unimaginable.

Today, he and I arrived early. He settled me in a desk at the rear of the classroom. He opened his laptop and confirmed that he could summon up information and images on the screen. I sat quietly as his fellow students filed in. His professor introduced himself, and I was friendly but restrained. I hoped to be a model mother.

This is Teddy's day. Usually I am weary of professional PowerPoint presentations, but Teddy's use of carefully chosen photos enliven his teaching. Plus, I think I know where he is heading.

Still, I am surprised when a yellowed newspaper clipping appears on the screen. A Portsmouth, New Hampshire headline crisscrossed with crease marks proclaims, "FATHER AND SON HIT BY LIGHTNING."

The classroom is still. I can hear the hum of the air conditioning. I hold my breath. Teddy clicks the remote. I breathe.

The next image is an excerpt from a patient's chart dated July 23, 1994. It is Teddy's chart. Upon his arrival at the emergency room of York Hospital at approximately 4:05 p.m., his feet had no pulse and appeared purple. Two hours later after receiving treatment, he had a pulse in his feet, and they appeared pink.

"I was hit by lightning," Teddy tells his classmates. Some might have known, but I don't think many of them did. His professor nods at me. He knew.

Teddy zeroes in. He says, "Triage in the treatment of electrical victims is different from what you're used to. Among multiple victims, one may appear to be a lost cause—no heart-beat, no breathing." He makes eye contact with each of us. "But," he says, "in the case of a power accident or a lightning

strike, the unconscious victim without a pulse may be saved.” He stops. We all look up. He begins again. “If you don’t remember anything else from this presentation, remember this: triage in the case of electrical injuries needs to be counter-intuitive. Treat the victim who appears to be a lost cause. He or she often can be saved.”

Teddy knows.

When Teddy and his father were discovered on the concrete floor of a WWI bunker at Fort Foster on the Maine coast, both he and his dad appeared dead. Both appeared two-dimensional. Teddy’s father did die. But Teddy rose from a two-dimensional puddle to fully inhabit his life. He rose. He is my miracle. He will always be my miracle.

Teddy clicks the remote. The screen becomes blank. His classmates shake his hand, thump him on his back. His professor walks to me. I wipe at my tears and compose myself.