

LIGHTNING STRIKE AND ELECTRIC SHOCK SURVIVORS, INTERNATIONAL

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Abstract

Often the first call a survivor of a lightning strike or one of their family members will make when seeking information and help is to their local weather broadcaster or National Weather Service office. As a result, it is important that broadcast meteorologists and the National Weather Service Weather Coordination Meteorologists know about a support group to which they can refer survivors.

The purpose of this short report is to introduce the Lightning Strike and Electric Shock Survivors, International, Inc. (LSESSI), a support group for those who have suffered these types of injuries. LSESSI is a non-profit, 501c(3) organization specifically founded by a survivor of a lightning strike to provide support for lightning strike and electric shock survivors, their families, physicians, and counselors. Several professionals from various fields (e.g., medicine, rehabilitation and psychology) serve on the Board of Directors as well. LSESSI is available by telephone (910-346-4708), Internet (<http://www.lightning-strike.org>), and e-mail (lightnin@nternet.net).

1. Introduction

Before 1989, there were few places a victim of lightning or electric shock or their families could go for information, support, and understanding of their injuries or referrals to other survivors. Few physicians were knowledgeable in the treatment of these injuries and survivors would go from physician to physician seeking answers and help. Often the families or survivors, either soon after the injury or later in desperation after so many dead ends medically, would call their local weather broadcaster or National Weather Service office seeking information. For that reason, it is important that broadcast meteorologists and the National Weather Service Weather Coordination Meteorologists know about Lightning Strike and Electric Shock Survivors, International.

This report gives the mission statement, history and make-up of the Lightning Strike and Electric Shock Survivors, International, Incorporated, a support group. It also provides a list of current publications that the organization can provide to inquirers as well as contact information by phone, e-mail and Internet so that weather forecasters and broadcasters will have a resource to use for referral.

2. Goals and Mission Statement

Initially the Lightning Strike and Electric Shock Survivors, International, organization was primarily concerned with support of survivors and their families. The current mission of Lightning Strike and Electrical Shock Survivors, International is to provide a resource of continuous support and education in health and well-being. This will be achieved by:

- a. Acting as a resource for information.
- b. Encouraging family members to better understand physical, emotional, and psychological symptoms associated with lightning and damaging electrical shocks.
- c. Support network... Supporting victims by listening to their health issues and concerns.
- d. Providing an avenue for members to express their feelings, fears, and emotions.

As the organization has grown, survivors have been able to go on with their lives and they now consider prevention to be one of their missions as well.

3. History

As a result of his own lightning injury in November 1969, Steve Marshburn, Sr., was deemed permanently disabled in 1988. He and his wife Joyce, with the encouragement and help of his psychologist, Dr. Gerolf Engelstatter, began a local support group with one lightning strike survivor and one electric shock survivor. In February of 1989, the organization of Lightning Strike and Electric Shock Victims was founded for the purpose of providing support to survivors of these types of trauma. Because survivors of electric shock and lightning strike seemed to have similar physical, mental, and emotional problems and had equal difficulty finding understanding and help, survivors of both types of trauma were welcomed as members.

The organization is open to anyone with an electrical or lightning injury, their families and friends, and to professionals seeking to help their patients and clients. The membership has grown from an initial membership of three in 1989 to over 1,000 members in 2001 and has members from many foreign countries including

Australia, Canada, the United Kingdom and China. About 30% of the members are lightning survivors, 30% electrical shock survivors, about 35% family or friend members, and 5% professionals from the fields of medicine, psychology, rehabilitation, law and journalism. The growth in membership has been due not only to word of mouth between survivors but also to the media's coverage of the activities of this unique organization and victims of this type of trauma in numerous documentaries and news broadcasts. Inquiries have markedly increased as a result of the organization's Internet Web site and links to it from other lightning Web sites as well (see Table 1 for contact information).

Initially, Steve and Joyce Marshburn funded the organization from their personal funds, which posed many financial hardships. They initially asked for postage stamps from many members to help defray the cost of mailing newsletters. After two years, membership dues were set at \$6. A few years later, these were raised to \$25 for individuals and \$35 for families (extended families often belong and request additional mailings). Applications are available on their Web site. While many are unable to pay dues because of their disability and the financial hardships they suffer, the organization has chosen to rule that "Once a Member, Always a Member" and continue all the benefits and mailings to them. Steve and Joyce continue to give enormous amounts of time as well as what funding they can to the organization and now have some volunteers who assist them at times.

Many who call or contact the organization never become members but still receive support from Steve, Joyce or other members.

4. Acceptance and Recovery

In 1995, the organization incorporated and the members voted to change the organization's name from Lightning Strike and Electric Shock Victims, International, to Lightning Strike and Electric Shock Survivors, International, Inc. They no longer wanted to view themselves or be viewed by others as victims, but rather as survivors who are bravely facing their disabilities and deficits. While many members are permanently disabled and unable to work in their prior vocations, they have come to understand that while they may never be the same persons they were before their trauma, they are still good, whole people who can have happy, productive lives. Many have learned to overcome, accept, or accommodate their disabilities and some have gone on to new professions. Their dreams for the future may be different from before, but they can still have dreams and still accomplish them.

Some in the organization are now becoming more activist, wanting to prevent injuries, providing networking opportunities for parents addressing learning disabilities in child victims, providing a Web site and e-mail/listserv for those searching for help and support, and acting as articulate subjects and witnesses for media documentaries of the effects of lightning and electrical injuries.

5. Publications and Meetings

LSESSI provides publications (Table 2) for sale to members as well as professionals and has an annual meeting in the spring of each year where members can meet and discuss their problems, gain understanding, receive support and hear how others have managed their injuries.

6. Finances

LSESSI is a non-profit 501c(3) organization and all contributions are fully tax deductible. Its main sources of income are from the sale of books, media contributions for interviews, contributions from professionals, membership fees and funds derived from an auction of member-made crafts and mementos at the annual meetings. Media contributions are derived primarily from donations required by professionals for interviews for documentaries and news programs about lightning and electrical injuries. Four years ago, a small endowment was started by one of the members who pledged 10% of her medico-legal and lecture fees to the group in an effort to get others to contribute as well. The endowment fund has nearly tripled over the last few years and income from it is used to partially fund travel to the annual meeting for new member families who would be financially unable to make the trip otherwise.

7. Conclusion

Broadcasters and other operational meteorologists have an opportunity to help reduce the number of lightning strike injuries by continually publicizing lightning safety rules. In addition, they now have a unique opportunity to have a major impact on lightning strike survivors and their families by referring them to the Lightning Strike and Electric Shock Survivors, International, support group.

Authors

Mary Ann Cooper, MD, earned her BS in Biochemistry from Michigan State University in 1971 and continued at Michigan State for her medical degree in 1975. Her residency training was in Emergency Medicine (1978) at the University of Cincinnati, the first emergency medicine program in the US. During her residency she developed an interest in electrical injuries and progressed to lightning injuries for which she is now considered one of the world's experts in this narrow field. She remains a practicing emergency physician and senior faculty member at the University of Illinois Hospital. In addition to seeing general emergency patients in the emergency department, teaching medical students and residents, and serving as a senior faculty member on university and medical school committees, she directs the Lightning Injury Research Program. Her research interests span prevention to clinical interventions to development of an animal model of lightning injury. She also holds faculty appointments in the Departments of Neurology and Bioengineering.

The Lightning Injury Research Program at the University of Illinois conducts basic research into the cellular mechanisms of lightning injury. It also attempts to foster public understanding and recognition of the injury by participating in documentaries and media interviews, to network inquirers and lightning victims and their families, to work with individual physicians for the benefit of their patients, to communicate with other lightning researchers (e.g., meteorologists, physicists and engineers), and to encourage injury prevention.

Among Dr. Cooper's awards, three stand out as her favorites: 1) A Special Recognition Award from the Lightning Strike and Electric Shock Survivors, International, support group for 'wisdom, mercy, gentility, and humanity' in serving on their board of directors, initiating an endowment fund and gathering donations for it, publicizing the group and providing support, advice and guidance for the officers and members of the organization; 2) Dedication of the LSESSI member's publication *Life After Shock II* to her in 2000; and, 3) A "Special Award" from the American Meteorological Society "for outstanding work on the medical effects of lightning which has enhanced the treatment of lightning strike victims and revolutionized lightning safety worldwide."

Steve Marshburn, Sr., attended Dixon Elementary and Dixon High School where he graduated with honors. At his graduation ceremony he was honored with the "I DARE YOU" award, an award signifying that he had the potential to achieve his goals in life. He was accepted at East Carolina University in Greenville, North Carolina, but due to limited family resources was never able to attend. He worked at a number of jobs after high school and was recruited to the first Citizen's Bank & Trust Company where he suffered his injury in 1969 while working at the drive-up-teller window. Through twenty-one years of employment he progressed in rank to become Assistant Vice President and Manager of the Installment Loan Department. In 1988, his neurologist mandated his disability due to the physical, emotional and psychological problems that resulted from the lightning strike in 1969.

Steve and his wife Joyce have been married for 34 years and have a son, a daughter and three grandchildren. He has served on the local board for the American Cancer Society, has been active in his local church as an officer, youth director, Sunday School teacher and deacon. His motto, learned from a high school teacher, is "whatever the mind of a man can conceive and believe, it can achieve." He is the founder of Coastal Genealogical Society, wrote "A Tree Grows in Onslow," a record of his family tree, and is the co-founder and president of Lightning Strike and Electric Shock, Survivors, International, Inc. He has been held up twice at gunpoint, struck by lightning, and given six months to live after a diagnosis of cancer in 1987.

In searching his life for why he was injured by lightning and for why his life was so changed, he has come to realize, like many survivors, that his injury opened up a new world for him even if it is not the one he had planned. Through their work with LSESSI, Steve and Joyce can be directly credited with saving at least fifteen people from suicide, with giving uncountable hours of

support and comfort to those with electrical and lightning injuries, and with helping survivors, their families and their physicians gain a better understanding of the injury through their work with the media, the publications that he has encouraged and the organization of the annual meetings of LSESSI which bring together so many of the survivors and their families.

Joyce Marshburn and Steve share more than their marriage and an interest in lightning injuries, although she hastens to point out that she is the younger. They also have the same birthday. Their keen interest in lightning stems not only from Steve's injury but also from the fact that three of Steve's cousins have been struck, one killed, and two of Joyce's cousins struck, one killed.

Joyce was previously employed with a State House of Representative and a State Senator. She is currently an insurance agent for A. D. Guy Insurance where she has been employed for twenty-four years. She and Steve reside in Jacksonville, North Carolina.

Table 1. Contact information for the LS&ESSI, Inc.

Lightning Strike and Electric Shock
Survivors, International, Inc.
P.O. Box 1156
Jacksonville, NC 28541-1156
Phone and FAX: (910) 346-4708
e-mail: lightnin@nternet.net
Web site: www.lightning-strike.org

Table 2. Lightning Strike and Electric Shock Survivors, International, Inc., publications. View their Web site for additional resources.

1. *Life After Shock I* (1996), *Life After Shock II* (2000), collections of stories of lightning and electric shock survivors and how their lives have changed, LS&ESSI, Inc., Morris Publishing, Nebraska.
 2. *After Effects Study*, LS&ESSI, Inc.
 3. *Psychological and Neurological Sequelae to Lightning Strike and Electric Shock Injuries*, by G.H. Engelstatter, M. Primeau, and K. Bares (Psychologists)
 4. *Emergency Care of Lightning and Electrical Injuries*, M.A. Cooper (Physician)
 5. *Can Long Term Cognitive and Emotional Problems be Caused by Electric Shock and Lightning Strike Accidents or Is Anything I know About Brain Injury Applicable to Electric Shock and Lightning Strike Victims*, by C.N. Simkins (Attorney, practice in brain injury cases)
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