

Chapter 19: Engaging and Amplifying Community Voices: An Interview Assignment Sequence

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2. “Struck by Lightning” by Brent Poling

Transcript

Community Member Paul Hutson: Every house I’d been living in growing up was struck by lightning. When I was born over on Camp Rotary Road, the television set was knocked out, just at the fringe of my earliest memories, struck by lightning. We moved to a house near Byron, Indiana, and for some reason it was on a higher mineral deposit, and it was struck more than once. The time I remember vividly was in 1969. In early summer, my father was taking a bath. He was finishing his bath. The tub was draining out. It was coming on a big storm. Lightning struck while he was standing in the tub, a sand cast porcelain tub. Didn’t shock him, but the bolt followed the television aerial, the old flat television cable, 300 ohm cable, followed that down, went under a picture window, exploded, and broke the picture window. I believe it scorched the drapes without setting them on fire. Rolled a rather large fireball out of the television set.

My brother and I were just getting ready to lay down. My mom was in the bedroom with us, one room away. I did not see the fireball. My brother claims that he saw a large fireball roll out from the cathode ray tube. Blew the fuses out of a 60-amp fuse box, and the bolt then followed an old countertop, similar to this one except it was covered in linoleum with a metal trim, like a ’60s diner. It had a metal trim around the front. Popped the nails out like carpet tacks. Popped them all out as it went around. Blew the refrigerator door open, which I think it destroyed the refrigerator too. It must have gone to earth right there. About 15 feet away from the bathroom, it went to earth and didn’t shock my dad. Burned out our television set just before the moon landing, so we had to go watch the moon landing at my aunt’s house.

My brother and I witnessed a strike, watched the lightning strike a poplar tree, maybe 50 meters away. We were sitting on our concrete front porch, and I actually at the time didn’t know what plasma was, but yes, I saw the effects of the plasma balls. Looked like it was water dripping off the tree. It was the last year that little poplar leafed out. I suppose it was around 15 inches in diameter. Never leafed out again. That was the end of such a tree.

And you can smell ozone when you . . . I think for me it’s hard to imagine that such a bright light can happen from what we now know to be a bolt of electricity, probably three or four centimeters wide at the widest. The bolt of electricity itself is extremely small. It’s the plasma we see around the ionized air.

When we lived at my father’s home place, a good friend of mine went to high school with, his father lost 20 head of cattle from one strike. They tend to congregate under a tree to avoid the bad weather, which is the worst thing in the world. Cattle and horses are the most sensitive, and they lost 20 head.

Student Interviewer Brent Poling: Dang.

Paul Hutson: In one strike.