

Lightning Strikes by Kieran McGovern *Intermediate*

In 1942 lightning struck Roy C. Sullivan for the first time. The US park ranger was working up in a lookout tower when a bolt shot



through his leg. It knocked his big toenail off.

'I was lucky,' Roy told his friends. 'I can live without one big toenail. And at least it won't happen again! Lightning never strikes twice.'

Unfortunately this is not quite correct. Lightning is unlikely to hit the same spot on the ground twice.

But tall buildings and structures are different. A 60-meter tower in Florida can expect a hit every year.

Check Understanding: True or False

1. Lightning struck Mr Sullivan on the leg.
2. Lightning never strikes in the same place twice.
3. Towers in Florida are hit every year

Another Strike

From then on Roy did stay away from towers. And for nearly thirty years nothing happened.

Then in 1969 Roy was driving along a mountain road during a storm. He thought he was safe inside his car. He was wrong.

The lightning bolt knocked Roy unconscious. It burned off his eyebrows. 'Why me?' Roy complained when he woke up in hospital. 'This is the second time!'

Check Understanding: True or False

1. Lightning struck Mr Sullivan on a mountain.
2. Lightning never strikes in the same place twice.
3. Towers in Florida are hit every year

Another strike happened just a year later. Roy was walking across his yard to get the mail. The lightning bolt burned left his shoulder.

Hat

Roy's bad luck continued. In 1972 he was standing in the office at the ranger station. Perfectly safe? Not for Roy.

This time the lightning set his hair on fire. 'This is not fair!' cried Roy as he threw a bucket of water over his head.

It took a year for his hair to grow back. He began wearing a hat. Surely he was safe now?

The next strike went through Roy's hat and set his hair on fire again. Throwing him out of his truck, it knocked his left shoe off and it burned his legs.

A sixth strike came on a campsite in 1976. This one injured his ankle.

Check Understanding: True or False

1. Lightning struck Mr Sullivan indoors.
2. Lightning burnt his hair.
3. A truck hit Mr Sullivan

Why?

Why did Roy suffer a record seven lightning strikes? Nobody knows for sure. Roy came from Virginia, in the south of the USA. Storms and lightning strikes are common in that part of the world. And Roy's work did put him more at risk.

Perhaps it was just bad luck. But in a way Roy was a very lucky man. After all, he was the only person to *survive* seven lightning strikes.



Writing

1. Imagine you are Roy Sullivan. Write a short newspaper article about your life. *100-200 words*
2. Write Roy's diary entries for the days of four the lightning strikes. Include the first and the last strikes.
3. Write some guidelines on how to reduce the danger from lightning strikes.
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