

Testimony of Matthew A. Sanderford, Jr. in High Voltage Accident on July 8th, 1999

In the Bible, we find in the book of Isaiah, Chapter 43, verse 2, a promise from Jehovah God of His faithfulness and constant presence towards us. It states, *“When you pass through the waters, I will be with you; and when you pass through the rivers, they will not sweep over you. When you walk the fire, you will not be burned; the flames will not set you ablaze.” NKJ.* This verse came alive to me on July 8th, 1999 when I came in contact with 20,000 volts, was severely shocked, medically dead for a few seconds, brought back to life and completely healed by God’s intervention through the power of His Word.

I am a licensed Electrical Engineer, serving as a professional consultant to the Television and Radio industry. I have been operating my consulting company for the past 20 years with the primary service being the design and building of radio and television stations, along with troubleshooting the antenna and transmitter installations when trouble or failures occur.

On this particular occasion, I was summoned to an industrial plant in the suburbs of Chicago, Illinois due to some sickness being experienced by some employees working near a high-powered UHF transmitter. It was presumed that the cause was radiation leakage coming from the transmitter during equipment testing operations. The leakage was at microwave frequencies and would have the effect of a microwave oven on humans coming near the source of the leak.

The transmitter is composed of three large metal cabinets, with hinged doors in the front for access to the interior circuitry. Inside, a large tube, called a klystron, is mounted in an electromagnet frame and is powered by 20,000 volts, among a myriad of other control circuits of 110 and 240 volts. All the troubleshooting that could be done externally was accomplished, with the problem pointing to the inside of the larger, center cabinet. To further troubleshoot, the door, full of exposed connections and wiring internally, had to be opened, while defeating the safety interlocks that prevented the high voltage from turning on, in order to continue the troubleshooting under operating conditions. The process was to run my hand along a copper tube (coax) that carried the intended radiated power from the klystron to the equipment to be tested. To my left was the open door, full of exposed voltages of 110 and 230 volts and to my right was one of the plant engineers, assisting during the troubleshooting and acting as a backup safety person to shut down the system in case of an accident.

I assumed the safety, sideways position, with my right hand in my pocket, using my left hand to begin the surface examination. I was looking for what is known as a “hot spot” or the source of radiation. During the surface testing, my hand continued following the tube as it doubled back inside the cabinet and exited through the top. I was aware of the exposed voltage cable which was a bare copper wire stretched across the cabinet, mounted in insulated standoffs from the top. Being aware of what I was looking for, I was prepared to withdraw my hand in a downward direction immediately upon finding the leak. Unfortunately, the leak was much more severe than anticipated, since it was a substantial welding crack, and it was much stronger than I expected. My hand found the “hot spot” and it was really hot. Before I could control my reaction, my hand came straight back towards me directly into the high voltage copper wire.

Instantly, I knew what had happened. My entire body began to vibrate uncontrollably with a pain that equaled standing in front of an acetylene torch, covering every inch of my body. The pain was indescribable, yet I never lost consciousness and was totally aware of what

was happening to me. I remembered a similar incident that occurred to me 25 years before and knew what this type of burn meant. Immediately I willed myself to pull my hand away and throw myself onto the floor.

Earlier that day, during the noon meal, I had prayed for God's protection over the work to be performed that day. I not only did this as a routine, I actually believed that God would and trusted Him in it. I experienced His intervention immediately when I fell in the direction towards the floor. If I had moved a few inches to my left, I would have been captured by the open door full of live open circuits and been held captive while being electrocuted. If I had fallen a few inches to my right, I would have extended the shock to the assisting engineer, endangering his life as well. God supernaturally directed the fall into the only safe area available.

When I hit the floor, I remember the engineer running down the hallway yelling "man down". The current through my body was of such magnitude as to interrupt milling machines, metal lathes, arc welders, the whole computer floor and lighting system for the building – no small amount of power. As the engineer disappeared down the hallway, I continued on the floor, experiencing the searing, burning hot sensation of pain on my body, when everything went blank. I must have been out for several minutes, but clearly, the doctors told me that their equipment recorded a trace of 3.5 to 4 minutes that I was officially dead due to no brain activity. It was during this time period that I experienced the most wonderful, blissful, moment of my entire life. For a few moments, I understood that I was no longer in my body and a voice, without words, clearly offered me the choice of going on to Heaven or returning back to my body. There was no color, no sound, no light, no darkness – just a perfect, wonderful peace – the presence of a caring, merciful and loving God. My first thought was of my wife, Margarita, who would be left with the huge responsibility of the new property we had just moved our home and office building onto and the responsibilities we had to fulfill in our church. I could not picture her carrying this burden by herself. At that very moment, words formed from inside me that said "Not now, and not this way". These words compelled me to repeat them and when I did, I found myself opening my eyes and present in my body again.

Strangely, as a confirmation of what I had just experienced, the searing pain that I had experience a few moments before was completely gone. I could smell the burning flesh, but felt no more pain – then or since that time. (This was later to perplex the doctors who could not explain it, state of shock having subsequently being ruled out). The company nurse had already arrived on site, taking the usual preliminary vital sign readings, and having already called for an ambulance, was trying to keep me immobilized on the floor. At that time, my cell phone, hanging on my belt, rang. It was my oldest son, David, calling to report in on the daily activities in the office. He works with me as my right hand, an engineer with exceptional skills in the computer sciences. Since my left side was paralyzed, I had asked the engineer to lift the phone to my ear so I could hear and talk. I was always stressing efficiency, especially in the use of time on cell phones. So it was not a surprise when he called that he immediately began to summarize the office state of affairs before I had a chance to tell him my present condition. When he finished his report, he asked my how I was coming along on the troubleshooting. I simply said that I had been hit, but that I had heard the sound of the bullet go by. This meant that I had been shocked, but, as most soldiers know, the sound of a bullet means that it had missed and passed him by. There was total silence on the other end of the phone. He then said that he would call mom (my wife). I told him to tell her not to worry, that I would be on the flight home that evening, it wasn't that bad. After he hung up, I began thinking about what to do next. What

would my wife, a registered nurse, suggest next. At that very moment, from within my spirit, the words from a verse of scripture came. It was from studies and teachings on the significance of the blood in the Bible and found in Leviticus 17:11 *“For the life of a creature is in the blood...” NKJ*. Somehow I knew that I had to cause good circulation to occur in my body to keep the blood flowing. Lying on the floor, waiting for the medics, did not promote good circulation, at least in my way of thinking. Against the objections of the attending nurse, I asked to be helped up to sit in an old, roll around secretarial chair that was in the room there. By this time, some 30 to 40 plant personnel had gathered to see what had happened and stood across the room from me, watching with unbelief as I scooted around, inspecting the transmitter and what I had done to cause the accident.

Suddenly, I realized that no one was helping me, especially in the way I was acting, and knew that they did not know how to handle this situation. Again, the Lord was present with me and another verse from the Bible came to mind. In Proverbs 17:22 it says, *“A cheerful heart is good medicine, but a crushed spirit dries up the bones.” NKJ*. This translated to me that a good laugh was in order. I failed to mention that I am a son of missionaries. Missionaries are preachers, and most church goers know that preachers can tell some of the corniest jokes imaginable. I learned from the best. I knew that my life was at stake, and I knew my God had equipped me with weapons from his arsenal, the Bible, and one of the main weapons is His kind of faith. I exercised this faith in the form of laughter. I did not care what anyone present thought of me at this moment. It was my life and survival at stake. I began cracking jokes like “Wow, this sure did light up my life”, “This is the most shocking experience of my life”, “I wonder how long this charge will last”, etc. I know that my bewildered audience thought I was in shock or had gone completely crazy.

The ambulance arrived and three medics rushed in looking for the remains of a body. I had to call myself to their attention because they could not locate who had been hurt. They followed the usual vital sign recordings and asking questions about the accident. My blood pressure and pulse were normal. The head medic simply said that they were going to take me in to emergency as a routine procedure and that I would probably be out in a couple of hours. He continued to examine me and then told me he was puzzled that he could not locate an expected exit wound. The voltage had entered through my left hand, causing it to swell to approximately three times normal, welded the rear cover to the case on my Titanium watch (heat exceeding 4,500 degrees F) and caused my wrist and forearm to swell to twice its normal size. The burning smell of flesh continued. He asked me if they could examine my feet. I told him that would be fine and they proceeded to remove my left boot first. I immediately knew something was wrong by the expression on their faces. The head medic asked if I had blisters or calluses on my foot, and when I said I didn't, he immediately said “We have an exit wound”. Suddenly, the whole atmosphere changed as they initiated a totally new set of procedures. An IV was inserted, neck brace positioned, monitor samples hooked up all over my body, and finally placed on a stretcher. I was still feeling fine; nothing had changed on my part. Now I was being sent by ambulance to the local hospital emergency room.

The doctors in the ER were having a difficult time assessing the situation. I showed all the signs of extremely severe shock and trauma, but was acting totally normal as if nothing had happened. Blood and urine samples were taken as they looked for signs of heart and liver damage normally associated with this type of injury. All tests showed negative. A hole the size of a silver dollar had formed in the bottom of my left foot. It was still boiling from the microwave effect that the high voltage had caused. It had cauterized to over ½ inch in thickness

and continued sizzling. The doctor there informed me that I had been clinically dead for approximately 4 minutes and that the effects of the shock, under the conditions that it happened, should have completely split the left side of my body much like an overcooked hot dog splits down the side while on the grill. Furthermore, he could not explain the lack of pain that I obviously exhibited. It was then decided to send me to the Chicago Loyola College Burn Center – a highly advanced and well known burn treatment center.

Following my conversation with my son David, he had contacted my wife and shared the news. I was able to talk with her while at the ER and, after she had talked with the nurses and doctor there, decided she should take the next flight from Fort Worth to Chicago. The industrial plant was most gracious in helping with the flight arrangements and providing transportation and lodging for her. I also had the opportunity to talk with my pastor and share the recent series of events and what I now know as a true miracle of God.

As I entered the Loyola Burn Center, a medical team was waiting to take charge of this severe electrical shock victim being sent to them. They encountered a man, wide awake, smiling and greeting them as I rounded the corner. Nevertheless, I was taken into the burn emergency prep center where the team cleaned, examined and assessed the situation. I was offered the choice of any pain medicine in whatever amount I desired for the burning pain I was supposed to be experiencing. I refused any pain medication, and it was pushed so emphatically by the doctor, that I finally had to sign papers stating that I deliberately chose to NOT take any pain medication. I was placed in the intensive care unit. A constant parade of doctors and interns came through the room to examine and talk about the injury. The chief doctor on duty, I seem to remember, told me that this type of shock should have opened me up like an overcooked hot dog splits on the grill. They could not understand first, how I survived and second, why was I not having the symptoms and side effects that normally follow.

It was in the evening that my wife walked into my room. When I saw her, all of the emotions and guarded feelings seemed to well up inside me at the same time. I realized then how much she meant to me, why I had chosen to come back, and also that the two of us together, with our united faith in God, could overcome this situation. Soon after, the doctor returned and unwrapped the injured foot to show my wife. At that time we had been married for 28 years and I have seen my wife able to handle difficult medical situations, but when she saw the hole in the foot and the extent of the damage, my heart failed me as I watched her gasp and shrink back against the wall. We then thanked God for the reality of the miracle of not only being alive, but also being free from pain and more extensive damage.

Without going into further detail, I will say that the doctor and nurse care at the burn center was superb; however, the nurse aides had no business working in a hospital, much less in the intensive care unit. The night was a nightmare. My wife had gone onto the motel for the night and I was on my own, which would normally have been absolutely fine. A shower in the middle of the night, forgetting how to replace the myriad of sensors all over me, forgetting that I had a catheter in me, and trying to make me walk when I had a foot injury wrapped and full of medication. I had to constantly ring for the nurses' station to be rescued in each situation. It was truly a nightmare and caused more pain than the injury ever did. I was never so glad to see morning come around and my wife walk back into the room. The doctor informed us that I would be there a couple of weeks. When I told him that we were from out of town and that I wanted to go home as soon as possible, he was still reluctant to release me. We finally "negotiated" that if I could pass the urine and blood work, and the physical therapist examination, he would sign the release order.

The physical therapists came in, had me perform a number exercises and examined me very thoroughly. They, too, were puzzled, but passed me on the examination. After waiting for another hour, the urine and blood samples showed to be in good order, clearing the final obstacle to leave. At 10:30 on Friday morning, less than 24 hours since the accident, my wife and I walked out of the hospital, collected our belongings from the hotel and the complex where I had been working, and boarded a plane back home.

Over a period of the next couple of months, medication was placed on open sore area in the foot to promote healing and prevent infection. The following Monday, 3 days after the accident, wearing a sandal on a bandaged foot, I was on a plane to work on another transmitter. Everywhere I go now, I share how God spared my life, and what a beautiful experience the transition out of life can be into the presence of the peace of God, can be for a Christian. God kept His written promise; He was with me when I walked through the fire. I was not burned to death or damaged permanently because he protected me, minimized the injury to my body, accelerated the healing and removed the pain.

As I write this, two years later, I can say that my foot is completely healed. There is a scar in the sole of the foot that is continuing to heal, and the only effect I am experiencing is a periodic itch in my foot when my feet are real dry. What a remarkable reminder. This testimony has now been shared across the United States and, besides being a safety poster at some transmitter sites, has been used to open the eyes and answer questions relating to what happens when a person experiences death. I cannot say that this is how it happens to every Christian, but the peace of God I experienced is available to every Christian believer. To a person who does not believe in Jesus Christ, and is therefore not a Christian, I know that this peace cannot be offered when they die; instead, a horrible fate of an everlasting hell is all that is left. I can think of no better reason to believe in Jesus Christ as Lord and Savior BEFORE dying, to be able to experience this perfect peace and avoid an everlasting hell.