

## **The Handbook for Lightning Strike Survivors by Michele Young-Stone 2010, Random House, 372 pages**

Becca Burke was eight years old the first time she was struck by lightning. It happened on a sunny summer afternoon in the driveway of her Chapel Hill home. No one saw it happen, and her parents didn't believe her, but Becca knew why the hands of her watch ran backwards. She knew why every photo of her taken after that day featured a halo of light around her head. She was a lightning strike survivor.

The second time it happened, Becca was sixteen. The circumstances were similar. It was a sunny summer afternoon and Becca was standing in her driveway. The second time it happened, her boyfriend saw it all, and her mom did believe her. Her dad, however, still had his doubts.

Buckley Pitank was thirteen when he saw his mother get struck by lightning on a pier in Galveston, Texas. Abigail Pitank did not survive. Buckley, wracked with survivor's guilt, spent many years trying to understand the random nature of lightning.

Buckley interviewed survivors and studied lightning strike statistics. His research culminated in his book, *The Handbook for Lightning Strike Survivors*. It brought him no closer to understanding why he survived when his mother did not. Becca was the only person to order a copy of *The Handbook* from a magazine ad, and the only reader to write him a letter.

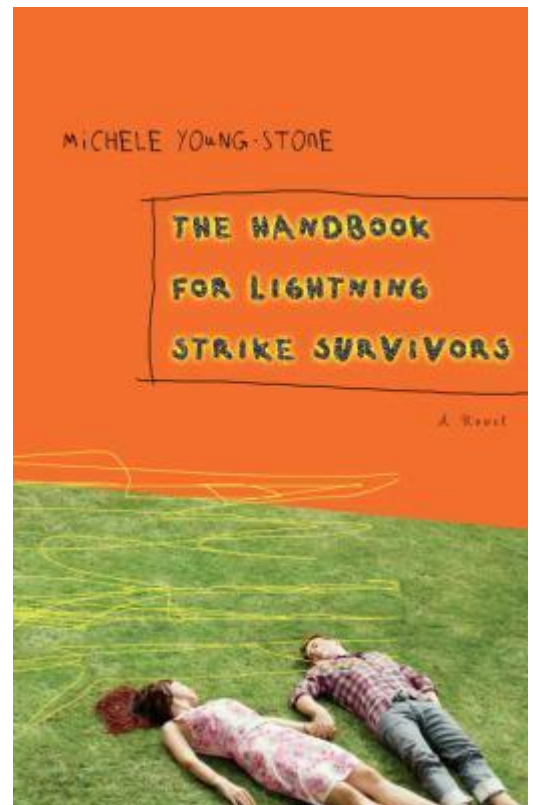
For years after the second lightning strike, Becca struggles to capture the intensity of lightning in her artwork. She pours her soul onto every canvas, but remains frustrated by the difference between her memories and her paintings. The night of Becca's first gallery opening, Buckley decides to attend the opening of an up-and-coming new artist. He is stunned to see Becca's name on the program.

When Becca and Buckley finally meet for the first time, they realize that their lives have been loosely intertwined for years. They are just getting acquainted when lightning strikes again, and the consequences are unexpected for everyone.

Michele Young-Stone has penned a beautiful, moving debut novel. Her characters are an endearing group of damaged survivors who are trying to make sense of world. Becca and Buckley are utterly compelling, and the suspense of wondering when and how their paths will finally cross really kept me turning the pages.

I couldn't put this book down. The prose was lush with beautiful, descriptive passages and packed with emotional punches that brought me to tears more than once. Ultimately, *The Handbook for Lightning Strike Survivors* is a wonderfully realized story of faith, hope and redemption that deserves to be savored.

Young-Stone is a lightning strike survivor. As I was reading, I had the sense that, like Becca, she has poured her soul into her art in an effort to perfectly capture her memory of that life-changing instant. I hope that she is as satisfied with the final product as I was.



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