

# Hot tub is front row seat for Mother Nature's play

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There are lots of ways to weather thunder, lightning and hail, but I think my cousin and I discovered the most bizarre way of all last night — outdoors in a hot tub.

We should have known we were in for something when we arrived at a normally busy downtown hot tub spa at 8 o'clock and found it almost completely empty. Nevertheless, we paid for our outdoor room underneath an enormous eucalyptus tree and as water jets beat away at our sore backs Diane said how lucky I was to live in Santa Barbara, that she was fed up with the ridiculous weather of the East Coast.

When it started to rain lightly we both thought how nice it was of Mother Nature to cool us off from the neck up while we boiled ourselves from the neck down.

But then the raindrops got a little bigger. And heavier. My head was wrapped in a towel so I didn't notice it so much, but Diane's hair was soon flattened.

Then came a flash of lightning, followed by thunder. Nothing serious, just enough to remind Diane of the weather she'd just said she was so glad to get out of.

Suddenly there was an enormous flash of lightning, which illuminated her head like a neon sign.

"Wow," she said. "I've never been in anything quite like this before . . ."

She was cut off by an explosion of the sky, and a sudden wind which blew

the door of our peaceful little spa open with a crash. Then the hail started.

"Ow!" yelled Diane, "Ow! OW!!!"

Hailstones were followed by eucalyptus pods, leaves and twigs raining down from the majestic tree above our spa. Then a hurricane wind blew the hail sideways and knocked over a potted tree.

I leaped up to close the door and another flash of lightning, more violent than the last, tore the night air apart. Diane leaped from the hot tub as if she'd been electrocuted — which was something we now began to wonder about.

Neither of us were trained meteorologists but we knew there was some-

thing about lightning being attracted to water (like little hot tubs).

But after standing in the hail while figuring what to do, we were now freezing and our previously sore backs were back to their original states.

So, as more eucalyptus twigs and pods rained down with the hail, we jumped back in the water.

And then, while potted plants lay on their sides in hurricane winds, while the sky boomed and thundered, and while we were being pummeled by hailstones and flying eucalyptus branches, we had a snowball — or hailball — fight.

And THAT, in downtown Santa Barbara on a mid-March night, was a first for me.