

North Phoenix

New River ▪ Sunnyslope ▪ Moon Valley ▪ Deer Valley

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Mary Ellen Collins on storms ▪ LIVING HERE, PAGE 2

Radio planes soar ▪ PEOPLE & PLACES, PAGE 3

Every storm deserves a disaster plan

I'm a sucker for this monsoon business. It makes the hair stand up on the back of my neck when I see Moon Mountain and the rest of my backyard view disappear behind a moving wall of dust. It gives me goose bumps to watch bolt after bolt of lightning streak toward the ground. With a sky this big, there's so much more weather to see — and worry about.

My weather anxiety began when I was a child in western Pennsylvania, where summer meant frequent evening tornado watches. Nothing put a knot in my stomach faster than dark clouds gathering in a strange, yellow sky.

Distressed that we didn't have a storm cellar, à la *The Wizard of Oz*, I relied on a scrap of information I'd heard about one corner of a basement being safer than the others. I could never remember whether it was the northeast or the southwest, so those warnings invariably



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sent me into a tizzy over whether we should cram ourselves behind the furnace or huddle in front of Dad's workbench.

The fact that we never experienced a real tornado doesn't mean I lost my knack for expecting, and preparing for, the worst. One evening when I was a teenager, the forecast was for heavy rain accompanied by hail and damaging winds.

My parents weren't home, and I was left with the three younger siblings. I listened to the weatherman's warning about flying glass and his suggestion to crack the windows as a way to equalize pressure inside and outside the house. Happy to have a

plan of action, I sent my brother and sister to the basement to get several hammers, which I strategically placed on each major windowsill.

When Mom came home in the middle of what turned out to be a windy thunderstorm, she noticed and asked about the hammers. I explained the pressure-equalizing maneuver, and she seemed stunned, though her lips were twitching with suppressed laughter.

"Tell me you weren't going to break the windows."

"I was just going to rap them with the hammers — enough to make a crack that would equalize the pressure."

"They meant ... open ... the ... windows ... a ... crack."

"You're kidding."

"Tell me you're kidding," she answered.

I've since learned not to take things quite so literally, but my weather instincts remain intact. My husband is probably grateful that I know enough not to stand by our

sliding glass doors with a hammer, but that doesn't mean I enter monsoon season without a plan.

I keep the TV on while I write in another room, making sure I can always hear the beep-beep-beep signaling those bottom-of-the-screen advisories. I make frequent trips between the kitchen and the front door, comparing the cloud build-up in the south to the action in the north. This is the only time I can bear to listen to the local weather personalities, as I worriedly track the movement of the yellow and red hot spots on the metropolitan map.

We're in our third summer here, and I have yet to witness what I would call a seriously scary monsoon storm in our corner of Moon Valley. That doesn't stop me from fretting about the possibility. After careful analysis, I've determined that the pantry and the master bedroom closet are the two safest places to ride out a really bad

one.

Of course, then I start wondering if it's better to be on the second floor when the roof blows off or the first floor when the house caves in. I guess I'm just left to hope that when the big one

hits — I'll see it coming — and duck in the right direction.

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