

Bloemfontein, South Africa

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Bloemfontein - The sister of Olympic swimming champion Ryk Neethling, herself a promising swimmer, was lightly burnt on Monday after apparently being struck a glancing blow by lightning. Jean-Marié Neethling, 14, was practising with team-mates in the pool at Bloemfontein's Hoërskool Sentraal when it started raining. Her mother, San-Marie, said she told the children to get out of the pool until the rain had stopped.

"The children dived into the pool after the rain, and then we heard a loud rumble. "Jean-Marié was the first child out of the pool and stood behind the starting blocks." San-Marie is unsure what happened next. "I did not see anything, but one of the other women who was there said a lightning bolt hit the ground about five metres from where Jean-Marié was standing and whipped her feet from under her like a knife."

Taken to hospital, then released San-Marie said she thought her daughter had died. "She was lying dead still. When we got to her, I saw two white dots, one on her ankle and one on her knee. "On her hip there was a round large grey-white spot. Blood started seeping from the wounds after a little while." Jean-Marié was taken to hospital and released that evening.

San-Marie said: "She is at home and will know only later on Thursday if she can take part in the inter-schools swimming championship on Friday and Saturday. She's determined to take part and says the injuries are not bothering her one little bit." San-Marie says Ryk teases Jean-Marié and says she is now a "superhero" just like Spiderman. "He was bitten by spiders and she was hit by lightning." Edited by Iaine Harper