

PAID ADVERTISEMENT

Young Carolina Fears For Her Life Amid Violent Storms

Carolina Rodriguez, 10, is afraid she's going to be struck by lightning. It's a child's normal reaction to thunderstorms, except for one thing, her fears are not unfounded. You see, her makeshift house is constructed from black plastic. About one quarter of the roof is missing and provides no shelter or protection from thunderstorms. Carolina is petrified lightning will strike her as she lies on her metal-frame cot each night.

A safe, sturdy home would be a miracle for Carolina.

Carolina lives in a rural village in Nicaragua. When the rains come, as they do frequently, her dirt floor turns to a muddy bog. Her sparse cot and single sheet become soaked and her nightmare of being struck by lightning becomes very real for her.

"I'm so scared of the lightning, I try to cover myself up if the sheet is dry. I'm worried because it's going to rain tonight and there will be another nightmare," she says.

When the lightning flashes through the sky, Carolina squeezes her fingers into her ears and prays it will go away. She curls into a tight ball on her bed with her two

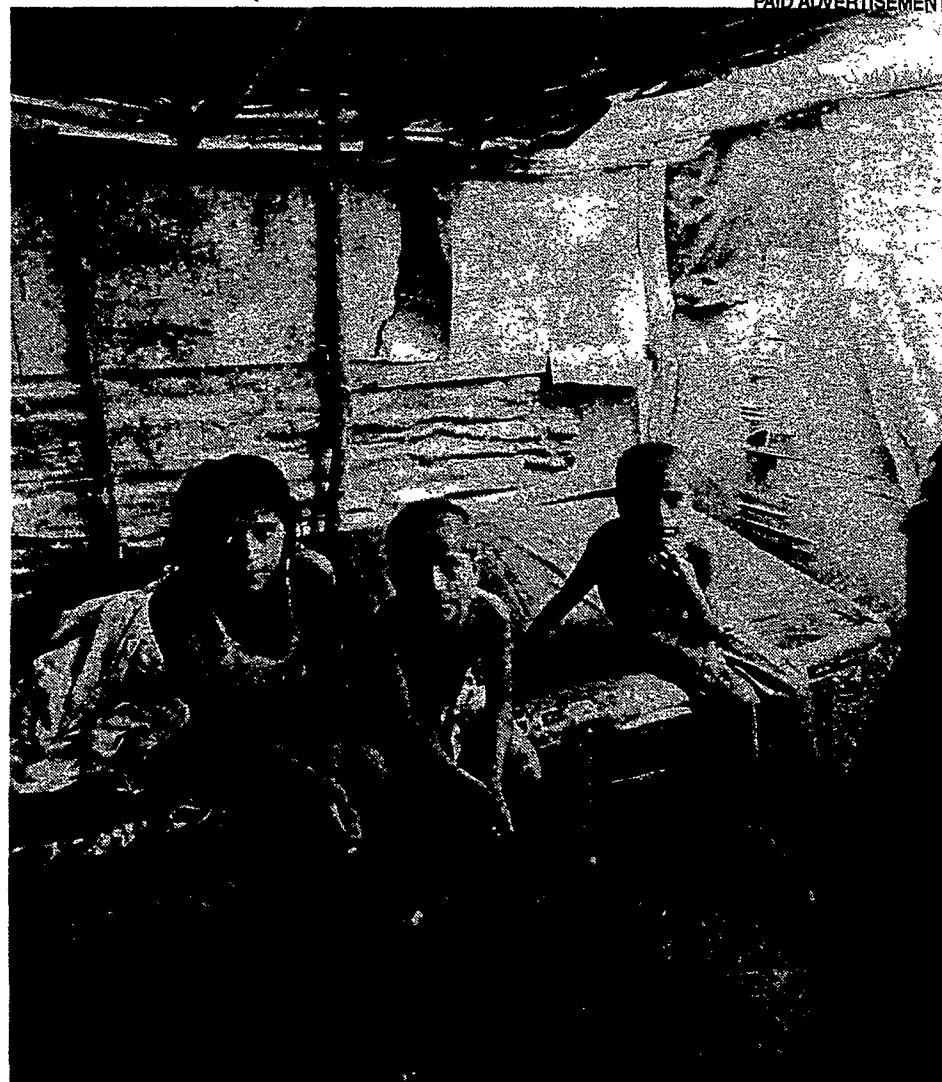
brothers and hides under the sheet. She can't even turn on a light for comfort because their tiny shack has no electricity. Carolina and her brothers share the one small cot. Their grandmother, Aura Elena, is worried about their future.

"I pray constantly to God to provide a house for my grandchildren. I have no one else to turn to," says Aura.

Carolina is petrified lightning will strike her as she lies on her metal-frame cot each night.

Grinding poverty keeps families like Carolina's struggling just to survive. The hope of a secure shelter, a shelter from the storm, is all this little family has right now.

Sadly, the suffocating poverty Carolina endures daily is not unique. Thousands of children in Nicaragua and other developing countries live in poorly constructed shacks that provide little shelter and no safety. There are no doors to lock, windows to close, and no refuge for a young girl seeking shelter and protection.



Carolina, 10, Norlan Jose, 7, and Juan Jose, 9, long for a safe shelter to protect them from the rain that constantly soaks their cot.

Rapid Flooding Leaves Chantal Homeless and Frightened



Carolina isn't the only little girl who is scared of rainstorms. Chantal Anthony, 6, is afraid of the rain for an entirely different reason: flooding.

Chantal has lived in a tiny wooden shack for years with her mother and five siblings in a dangerous slum in Jamaica. The dilapidated door doesn't lock out strangers. With its dirt floor that slopes down toward the middle of the house, rain falls in through holes in the roof and collects like a small lake in the shack. Chantal's little hovel is a miserable place to live. Yet it was the only home this

cheerful, bright-eyed little girl knew. She squeezed onto a corner of the lumpy mattress at night and listened to her mother's prayers as Delores begged God for a safe, comfortable home to raise her family.

Chantal wasn't comfortable in the hovel, especially when it rained and water dripped on her bed. The family would have to get up, shuffle the beds around to find dry spots and try to go back to sleep again.

And then one day, the rain kept falling. And did not stop. Chantal and her family were lying in bed, trying to sleep when the water gushed inside in a furious tide. They immediately woke up in horror to find water rising from the ground, creeping up the legs of the bed, soaking the mattresses.

The children began to cry, fearing the worst.

"We saw the water rushing in. We just packed up, woke up the children and carried the smaller one to my sister's house," said Delores, Chantal's mother.

Chantal and her family lived in a cramped, stifling hot shelter for two days until the waters receded. When she trudged back to her house, her yard had become a sticky bog covered with diseased mud from the outdoor latrines overflowing. The inside of their home had been coated with the same disease-infested water. Still, Chantal retrained her gritty optimism, the cheerfulness a child may have when faced with new challenges. She desperately wants a new home so her mama will stop worrying about them, but she wonders if God will hear Delores's frantic pleas to Him at night for a safe shelter for her children.

Chantal Anthony and a friend maneuver their way over a pallet set over a deep mud puddle filled with disease left by floods that ravaged Delores Anthony's Jamaican shack.