



Meryanne Aldea lost everything at her house in Juncos when the winds of Hurricane Maria ripped away the roof. The Puerto Rico town remains largely isolated from the rest of the island - and the world. MUST CREDIT: Photo for The Washington Post by Dennis M. Rivera Pichardo

Hot, Isolated, and Running out of Supplies, Parts of Puerto Rico Near Desperation

By Samantha Schmidt and Joel Achenbach

JUNCOS, PUERTO RICO -- In the heat and humidity here in the central mountains, Meryanne Aldea fanned her bedridden mother with a piece of cardboard Sunday as the ailing woman laid on her side, relieving a large ulcer in her back.

The 63-year-old mother, Maria Dolores Hernandez, had cotton stuffed in her ears to keep flies out, since her now

screenless windows were letting all sorts of bugs in. The gray-haired diabetic woman spoke with her daughter about her worries: that she would run out of prescription drugs, that they were almost out of generator fuel to keep her insulin refrigerated and to run the fans at night. With all the heat, she feared her ulcer would become infected.

But she worried most about her daughter's home on the floor above hers, which was destroyed by Hurricane Maria. The shrieking winds had ripped

off the zinc roof and the pounding rains had soaked the unprotected rooms below. While the outer cement walls were mostly intact, everything else was ruined, covered by dirty tree branches, leaves, glass and debris.

Aldea reached out to hold her mother's hand.

"Relax," she said. "It's OK."

Four days after a major hurricane battered Puerto Rico, leaving the entire island in a communications and power blackout, regions outside of San Juan

remained completely disconnected from the rest of the island - and the world. Juncos, in a mountainous region southeast of the capital that was slammed with Maria's most powerful winds, remains isolated, alone, afraid.

For many residents, the challenge of accessing the essentials of modern life - gasoline, cash, food, water - began to sink in. And government officials had no answers for them. Estimates for the re-

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