

Claudia Richards spent a year in Paraguay. Now her host family is paying her a

## Return Visit



Part of the two families gather outside the home of Vern and Melba Richards. From the left are Leo and Nylda Rodriguez, Claudia and Melba Richards and Dani Rodriguez.

by MARK FLOYD

Claudia Richards spent a full year in South America, living with a family in Paraguay and learning a new culture.

Now her Paraguayan family is paying her a visit. Nylda Rodriguez and her two sons, Leo and Dani, arrived in Sandy 10 days ago on their winter vacation. Nylda's husband, Miguel, remained in Paraguay to take care of business — he is head of the accounting department for the Ministry of Health.

The Rodriguez family, and the family of host Vern Richards, has spent the time adjusting and trying to cope with the language barrier. Claudia speaks Spanish well, and Dani has become fairly adept at English, but the rest of the group usually needs an interpreter.

"We use a dictionary a lot," laughed Melba Richards, Claudia's mother. "It's hard to carry on an extensive conversation when you only know a few words."

The Rodriguez' are just thankful to be here. Leo had trouble getting a visa from the American embassy in Paraguay and it finally took a family vacation to convince authorities that he wasn't going to take up permanent residence in the United States.

"They wouldn't give Leo a visa for three months," Claudia said. "They were afraid he wouldn't come back. Leo would like to stay longer and Dani would like to study here, but he would have to lose a year. He wants to become a doctor."

Since being in Oregon, the Paraguayans have made the rounds, visiting Mt. Hood, Multnomah Falls, Mirror Lake, the Washington Park Zoo and the Oregon Museum of Science and Industry. Trips are also planned to the coast and Mount St. Helens.

With the aid of Claudia as interpreter, Nylda said that she likes the scenery, the trees and the mountain. Dani would like to visit more of the tourist

spots and appreciated the crafts and music of the Sandy Mountain Festival.

And Leo? He also went to the festival and appreciated the beer and the girls, not necessarily in that order.

When asked to compare Portland with their home city of Asuncion, the Rodriguez' felt the cities were similar in styles of architecture with the skyline buildings. But they all agreed the biggest difference was the roads.

"The roads are a lot better here," Nylda said. "There are only a few in Paraguay that have four lanes. Most of them are two-car roads, like this one here (Bluff Road), kind of bumpy. There are a lot of trees here and less industry. It makes the air cleaner."

The Rodriguez' also are impressed with Sandy, where the houses aren't so bunched up as in Asuncion and the people are quite friendly. They all enjoyed the Mountain Festival, although they missed the appearance of Lindsay Wagner, who they have seen on the television show *The Bionic Woman* in Paraguay.

Paraguay is a cultural melting pot when it comes to television, the Rodriguez' noted. In addition to the American shows, such as *Different Strokes*, *Benson* and *M.A.S.H.* for example, there are a lot of concerts, programs from Europe, foreign movies and live sporting events. Most of the shows are translated into Spanish in Puerto Rico or Mexico, then sent to Paraguay. But the Rodriguez family saw the American version of *M.A.S.H.* recently and had little trouble following it.

"People think the country is backwards, but it is very advanced," Claudia said. "In fact, they're building the biggest dam in the world now between Paraguay and Brazil."

Leo and Dani also recognize most of the songs on the radio and are celebrating their Americanization by growing beards, a distasteful custom in



Claudia acts as a translator for Leo and the rest of the Rodriguez family.

Paraguay, according to their mother.

Music livens up the evenings of the Rodriguez family. Dani plays the piano and trumpet and Nylda teaches singing and dancing in Paraguay.

"She's fairly well known," Claudia said. "She's made several commercials down there. The Paraguayans are very talented people; they do a lot of singing, weaving and work with leather."

American food has been no problem for the visitors, although meal times have been adjusted slightly. One thing that is different is the price of the

food. In Paraguay, beef is plentiful, and good cuts of meat are sold for about \$1 a kilogram, which is 2.2 pounds.

The stay will be a short one for Dani and Nylda, who are returning to Paraguay this Sunday. Leo will stay until September, travel to California to visit a friend and, of course, look for more girls.

"He wants me to invite all my girl friends over," Claudia said.

A true American already.



Nylda, who teaches singing and dancing in Paraguay, performs the difficult bottle dance for the Richards.



Melba and Nylda look over some Paraguayan weaving and embroidery.

photos by Mark Floyd