



Maria Villafranca

AFS - Cultural Living Experience

It takes a lot of love and understanding - and often a sense of humor - to open your home to a foreign visitor for a year.

Buy as the Jay Irwin family, 1022 Church Street, Lancaster, are discovering, it is also an eye-opening rewarding experience.

The Irwins are hosting pretty, 18-year-old Maria Villafranca, an American Field Service student from Honduras. As Maria sits in the Irwin living room with her American "Mom" and "Dad" and her host sister Suzanne, and talks about life in Honduras and her experiences in this country, she is very much like any American teenager, except for her accent.

She is dressed in blue jeans and has long flowing black hair. She smiles easily and often glances at Suzanne with a quizzical look to make sure she has understood the question.

About her experiences thus far Maria says, "I never expected the people to be so friendly."

She said the greatest difference between Honduras and the United States is that in Honduras life is "more leisurely" - there is not all the hustle and bustle there is here. As an example, she said, "We take one break in the middle of the day - a 'siesta' for 2 or 2½ hours." During this time they eat the main meal of the day, and rest.

Honduras is located in Central

America and is almost as large as Pennsylvania. It has a population of three million and its terrain is mostly mountainous. The climate is warmer, with the average temperature about 75-80 degrees. Maria is still waiting to see a real accumulation of snow.

Maria's hometown, Tegucigalpa, D.C. has a population of 200,000 and is the capital of the country. The primary religion in this Spanish-speaking country is Roman Catholicism.

The Irwins are learning a lot about Honduras from Maria, but they are also learning about our own country. Mrs. Betty Irwin said, "You learn to look at things with more open eyes, and in a different perspective. We have also learned to point things out to Maria that we don't normally think about."

Jay, who is associate county agent with Penn State Extension, says, "The only difference since Maria has come is that we plan some activities that we probably should have done before; things that involve the total family." One of these activities was a trip to our nation's capital, one which the whole family enjoyed.

There are four of the Irwins' six children living at home now, and Jay said, "You hardly know there's another one around."

Their children are: Easty Ann, 23, a nurse and Lt. J.G. in the U.S.



Discussing the AFS program at Hempfield High School are (l. to r.): Fay Klinefelter, AFS Club president, Sue Irwin,

Maria Villafranca and Miss Karen Jessen, club advisor. Miss Jessen teaches Spanish and French.



Maria is flanked by her host family as she points out her home town on a map of Honduras. Seated are (l. to r.) Jay, Maria,

Betty. Standing are (l. to r.) Ruthann, Jay and Suzanne.

Navy, stationed in San Diego, Calif.; Linda, 22, now Mrs.

Robert Wilhelm, Elizabethtown, R.D. 1, Jaylene, 19; Suzanne, 17; Jay, 14 and Ruthann, 12.

Betty, who is a teacher of a visually handicapped class for the Retarded Children Day Care Services, Lancaster, said they became interested in applying to be a host family as a result of Jay's work with the International Farm Youth Exchange program, and because of hosting 4-H exchanges from other states. She said they enjoyed those young people and "felt they'd like to host a foreign student."

Jay himself had visited the Soviet Union, Poland, Switzerland, and Berlin in 1964 on a People-to-People tour.

Suzanne, a senior at Hempfield High School who plans to major in languages in college, said, "I've learned a lot about our own country, and have really gained a broader outlook since Maria has lived with us."

Even though Maria is accepted as a member of the family, there are still adjustments to be made. Betty says with a laugh, "I've tempered my Irish temper a lot."

At home, Maria has a brother, 13, Luis Enrique and a sister, 16, Patricia. Her father is a medical doctor and is medical director for the New York and Honduras Rosario Mining Company in Honduras.

Maria admits that she gets homesick occasionally, but she

said she enjoys learning "different ideas and seeing a different way of living."

Maria said the food she is accustomed to in Honduras has "more spices" and more things are "home-made." She said homemakers do not use as many cans and boxes of prepared foods as we do. Her favorite American food is brownies. In Honduras they eat three meals a day, much as we do in this country.

The school system in Honduras is similar to ours in that students may attend three years, plus kindergarden. Depending on your career plans, Maria said, you can attend thirteen years.

Children are obligated to attend at least the first six years of school, although Maria said that in some rural sections the parents do not believe in education and do not send their children to school. These parents are not prosecuted, she said.

The school year in Honduras is from February to November, and the hours are from 7:00 a.m. to 11:30 a.m. and from 2:00 p.m. to 4:30 p.m. All students go home during the siesta.

Public education is completely free to all young people in Honduras. Maria, however, graduated from a private high school. She is a member of the senior class at Hempfield and says she doesn't find the courses

(Continued on Page 28)