

Children of Paraguay

May, 2002

Our names are Ed and Linda Baker. We are missionaries with the Methodist Church of the United States, and currently live in Paraguay, South America. The city we live in is called Asunción, and is the capital of Paraguay. We would like to share some information about our new country, and about the lives of the children here.

Paraguay is located in the southern part of South America. It is 700 miles from any ocean. The bordering countries are Brazil on the east, Argentina on the west and south, and Bolivia on the north. This country has 2 national languages, Spanish and Guaraní. The children are taught both languages in school, much like children in the United States are taught English. All other countries in South America, except Brazil, speak Spanish as a national language. People in Brazil speak Portuguese. Since we are so close to Brazil, many words used in Paraguay are a combination of Spanish, Guaraní, and Portuguese.

The money used in Paraguay is the Guaraní. You can get almost 5,000 Guaraní for 1 American dollar. Jobs are very scarce here, and since the money has very little value, things are very inexpensive. Many of the children have very poor families.

Schools for children are very different here. The school year begins in February and goes through December. Their summer vacation is December to February. Since we are south of the equator, we have summer in December and winter in July. Imagine decorating your Christmas tree when it is 100°! The schools are very crowded, and there are very few teachers. Therefore, the school day is split into 3 different sessions. Children in kindergarten through grade 7 attend classes for 4 hours a day, either 7:00 AM to 11:00 AM, or 1:00 PM to 5:00 PM. The preschool children, age 4, only attend school for 3 hours a day. The high school students attend at night, from 6:00 PM to 9:00 PM. Most high school students work during the day. All the children wear uniforms here, in private and public schools. Some people do not finish high school till after they are married and have children of their own.

Families are very large. We know a family with 12 children! High school students have to work to help the family get money. All children help in the house with different chores. Most of the people in this country do not have clothes washers, clothes dryers, or dishwashers. With large families, every family member has to help with the laundry, prepare food, and help clean up.

Children eat differently here than in the United States. For breakfast, which is around 7:00 AM (unless the child has an early class schedule), the children have cocido and bread. Cocido is very strange. You make it by putting Yerba Matte in a pan with sugar. Yerba Matte is a type of loose tea. Then you add red hot charcoals, the ones used to grill your food. This makes the Matte and sugar catch on fire. You put the fire out by adding hot water. This is heated again, strained, then added with hot milk. It's not very good, and we think that it would make a terrible breakfast! But the children here love it.

They eat again during mid morning for what is called "media mañana". This is at about 9:30 AM, and it is usually a sandwich of bread and butter or bread with jelly. If the child is at school, the mother prepares this and sends it with the child. Lunch is around 12:00 noon and is always eaten in the home. The most common food for lunch is called "guiso". This is like a stew and is made with ground beef, pasta, and tomatoes. During mid afternoon, about 3:00 PM, the children have a snack called a "merienda". This may be cocido again with bread, or bread with juice – depending on the

weather. Dinner is about 7:00 PM. It may be guiso again, or rice with cheese and a hard boiled egg. We do have McDonald's, Burger King, and Pizza Hut; but these are considered a luxury, and many children have never been to either of them.

Something very special here is the birthday party when you are 15 years old. This is mostly for girls, but boys do have a big party too. We celebrated a "Quince Años" party with a friend of ours. It was very much like a wedding, except no groom. If the family is Christian, everyone goes into the sanctuary. Then they all stand, with the birthday girl's friends standing in the aisle with lighted candles. The girl enters wearing a long white dress. She walks down the aisle her friends have made. She comes face to face with the preacher. We have a time of singing, sharing our love for the birthday person, a short sermon, then she is dedicated as being an adult. We then have a reception with what ever type of food the family can afford. At the party we went to, we had hamburgers and hot dogs.

One thing that is very different here is what happens when it rains. EVERYTHING is closed! Today is Sunday, and we left for Sunday school at our usual time. There were no people on the roads. When we got to church, no one was there! Our church is in an area called Santa Rosa, which by American standards would be called a slum. It has only dirt roads and yards, so the roads and yards were full of water! People weren't able to leave their houses! Also, the children do not go to school when it is raining since they all have to walk. There are no school buses.

Most of our roads do not have pavement. Some roads have rocks, which make them very bumpy to drive and ride on. Most roads outside of Asuncion are only dirt. They are very difficult to travel when there is lots of rain. Gracias a Dios (thank you God) we do not have really cold weather, so it never ices or snows here.

We really like living and working here in Paraguay. Since we are missionaries, we work for the Methodist Church here, and we get to do a lot of different jobs. But most of all we like doing jobs that will help the families here, and the children. That way we get to tell them about Jesus, and how he died for our sins. That is the reason why God has called us to be missionaries and why we live in a country so far from the United States. But when you have Jesus in your heart, you are really never very far from home.

Please say a prayer for the children of Paraguay, for their families, and for us too.



This family supports themselves by picking up yard trash from homes.



An easy way to mow your lawn - use a horse!



Children at the Iglesia
Methodista Central
during evening service



This is Lorenzo, he
is selling chipas,
sorta like bagels,
to support his family.



These children are in a private
kindergarten for children ages 2-5. They
attend all day from 7:00 AM – 5:00 PM.
They receive breakfast and lunch, plus 2
snacks a day. The kindergarten and play
ground were built by a North American
team of missionaries.





This little girl is a Toba Indian. They are a tribe of Indians who live in Paraguay.



These children are looking at a water well at a village named Yrybucua. They are Guaraní children.

A 15th birthday party is a very BIG event in Latin America. These next pictures are of a “Quince Años” birthday party for a friend of ours whose name is Ester.



Ester's friends share in the party too. Her girlfriends are pulling pieces of lace out from under the cake. One of the pieces will have a ring on the end. The girl who chooses this one will be the first girl to marry.



This is a friend of ours named Maria Mongas. She is 4 years old.

This is a Methodist, private preschool, kindergarten, first grade.



This is a first grade class in the Methodist school above. They meet in the afternoons.



This little boy begs for money from cars as a way to help his family. His family is sitting in the background.



This is a playground at a local public park.