

TRANSCRIPT OF AN ORAL HISTORY INTERVIEW

WITH

MARILYN McCLURE

This interview was conducted as part of a series on the Mexican American in Minnesota.

Marilyn McClure, was born in Blooming, New Mexico. She came to Minnesota to attend Macalaster College. She worked for the St. Paul schools, as a social worker, and at the time of this interview is a bi-lingual, bi-cultural social worker for the Ramsey County Mental Health Department.

Ms McClure, discusses the Ramsey County Mental Health Spanish American Project. She makes reference to the history of the program and its future.

This is a transcript of a tape recorded interview edited to aid in clarity and ease of comprehension for the reader. The original tape recording is available in the Audio-Visual Library of the Minnesota Historical Society.

INTERVIEW WITH MARILYN McCLURE

AUGUST 2, 1976

INTERVIEWER: GRANT MOOSBRUGGER

Moosbrugger: This is Grant Moosbrugger, interviewing Ms Marilyn McClure, at the Ramsey County Mental Health Spanish American Project.

Could you start off by telling us who you are; and how you came to be involved in this division of Ramsey County Mental Health?

McClure: I was born in Blooming, New Mexico. I grew up there, and went to high school in Albuquerque, at the Presbyterian Mission School, called Menal. I attended Macalester College, which is why I came to Minnesota. I obtained my bachelor's degree at Macalester. I worked for the Ramsey County Welfare Department for three years. Then I went to the University of Chicago, for, a master's degree.

Moosbrugger: You finished at Macalester in what year?

McClure: In 1964. I worked until 1967, at the Welfare Department. Then I went to graduate school and finished that in 1969, at the School of Social Services Administration. I worked for a Mental Health Center in Chicago, which is called the Pilson Mental Health Center. It is a community of about 95% Spanish speaking people. I worked there for a year. Then we moved back to Minnesota. I worked for five years as a school social worker, in the St. Paul Schools. The person who was working in this program before me, let me know that she was leaving. I was interested in working here, so I explored it and decided to come in January, 1976. I have been working here for seven months.

Moosbrugger: Who was the previous person in this position?

McClure: Sally McKay.

Moosbrugger: You are professionally acquainted?

McClure: Yes.

Moosbrugger: Do you know, either from personal experience or from hearsay, was this program initiated through pressure? Or was it the realization of the department or someone in the department?

McClure: I believe that it started as a result of one of the social workers in the Mental Health Department who saw the need for such a program. Especially in terms of the linguistic needs of migrants re-settled into the city. That's how it started out, as an advocacy kind of program. It was a person who could interpret for people; to see what they got; and what they needed to get out of established agencies.

Moosbrugger: Perhaps you could tell us what your experiences have been: both your personal experience and your knowledge of what has gone on before? What types of special needs have been met by the program? Who have your clients been? What are some of the types of services provided for your clients: who are Latinos; or who have special requirements: linguistically; or in terms of cultural values?

McClure: The program has a two-prong kind of emphasis. The first, of course, is to provide direct services to the individual, and families, for whatever mental health-related problems there might be. The other, is to use myself in such a way that I am an impetus for social change, and for the benefit of what they call the target population, which would be Latinos. As a result, I am involved in various committees and organizations, in what I call "community development".

Moosbrugger: When you refer people to various professionals, what are some of the areas you refer people to? Is there any scarcity of the professional personnel who help bring specific needs to these people?

McClure: Basically, I believe in working with individuals and families. To make a referral is a cop-out. Whenever possible, I will service the case myself,

McClure: or through the program. People get lost when they are referred from one agency, to another. Basically, that's how I feel now. Obviously, there are some services that I can't provide; or I can't see that they get provided. For instance, this is not an agency that deals with foster home placement. In those situations, where a foster home is necessary, then I would refer them to the appropriate agency. In most cases, it would be the Welfare Department. If you look at the Welfare Department right now, I believe there are sixteen people who speak Spanish and work in the Welfare Department. However, only two of those can be considered professional. One works in the Outreach Program, on the West Side, and the other works in Services to the Mentally Ill, she works part time. There are several people in the financial part of the Welfare Department. That is good, because at least people can get money. In terms of counseling kind of help, it doesn't seem to be available. We checked other agencies, and the situation seems to be very similar. I have gotten referrals for marital counseling, which is really the realm of the family agencies; like Catholic Social Service; or Family Service, but because they have no personnel to service that need, they make the referral to me, which doesn't make sense.

Moosbrugger: Just the reverse of what you are.

McClure: I should be making the referral to them for marital cases. If you stick to a narrow interpretation of what mental health services are, then I should be dealing with the neurotic kind of people; psychotics, children who are emotionally disturbed, that sort of thing. But for parent-child relationship difficulties, or marital difficulties, those really should be handled by the family agencies; at least the way the service network is set up.

Moosbrugger: When you say that they are referring such cases to you, instead of you to

Moosbrugger: them, would be an indication, that there is no efficient or qualified help, who are bi-lingual and aware of the cultural nuances of the Latinos?

McClure: Oh, that's definitely true. Some of the agencies have advocate, outreach-type people, who can serve as liaisons, which is kind of what the beginning of this program was like. Now other agencies do have that kind of personnel. But in terms of counsel itself, there just isn't anybody.

Moosbrugger: Do you have occasion to refer people to psychiatrists and psychologists? If you do, are there available personnel in these areas to serve the Spanish speaking?

McClure: No, there aren't any. There is one psychologist in the Metropolitan area. We have recently employed her on a consultant basis, so she works by appointment. There are no other Spanish speaking psychologists who have clinical skills to do counseling. I believe that the school system has come up with the same problem. They have hired, as consultants, students, in the various psychology programs, to do some of their evaluations. So right now, in the city, there is one psychologist, and she's leaving in September. In Ramsey County, I thought there was a psychiatrist, but I just discovered that he has left town, so I am not sure that we have a Spanish speaking psychiatrist in St. Paul at all. I'll need to check that out.

Moosbrugger: Is anything being done by anyone in the Metropolitan area to encourage people to qualify themselves in these areas that need people, who either have the special skills to learn something of the Spanish culture, or in the Spanish language? Does anyone encourage those who are knowledgeable in the Spanish language and culture to qualify themselves in these specific social need areas?

McClure: I'd choose to take the easy way out, which is to train the people who already know the language and the cultural. It's harder to train the

McClure: professional in the language and the culture, than it is to train the person who is knowledgeable in the language and the culture into one of the professionals. Maybe it's a longer way of doing things.

Moosbrugger: To become steeped in a language and culture is a thirty or forty year process, unless a person has been born into it.

McClure: Right. Although I think a person, who has learn a language, can be educated in terms of the culture, if he is immersed in it, kind of on-the-job training. I think that's possible. The advantage of being bi-lingual bi-cultural, is that you consider yourself as speaking Spanish and English. The other person, who speaks only English, and who is not bi-cultural, can only understand in terms of the ^{mono}lingual person.

Moosbrugger: Are there significant numbers of Latinos enrolling in these programs, to fulfill these needs?

McClure: No, I suppose the University of Minnesota is the largest trainer in the profession. I believe that in the medical school there is a good number of Latino students. I also believe most, if not all, of those students are from out of state. So most of them will probably be returning home when they are finished. The law school at the University has a number of Chicanos, but the same thing applies there. Most, but not all, students are from out of state. The school of social work has a bad reputation in terms of training minorities, and specifically Latinos. They are initiating a program to begin this fall. They call them Learning Centers. One is for Native Americans they will be establishing a training center in Minneapolis. There will be a Learning Center for Latinos in St. Paul. Those should be bi-lingual. In the fall, there should be at least four, perhaps six Latino Social students in that school. That's like a 200% increase. From our information, the School of Social Work has only graduated five Latinos in the history of the school.

Moosbrugger: Would you like to tell us about graduate students in social work?

McClure: A couple of years ago, I wanted to become involved, because it was good for me professionally. I wanted to do field supervision for social work students. In a graduate program in social work, the students have to do field placements, or internships. They do two of them, one each year, because the program is a two year program. When I was working for the school system, I started having students. I had two students that I did field supervision for. When I changed jobs in January, I told the school social worker, "I am still interested in supervising students, but because of the new job I have, they must be bilingual." The person who is the crew coordinator said, "Oh, you are going to solve my problem, because I have a student from Columbia, who's having trouble with English. I can't place that person in a regular field setting. Will you take this person?" I said, "Sure, he speaks Spanish." So that's how I ended up with Antonio. That relationship with the school, is part of why the student isn't housed here in the fall. It's a two prong thing. It's good for me professionally and also good for training some students.

Moosbrugger: Do you have any hopes or goals of increasing the ability of your department to meet the needs of Latin Americans in our Twin City Metropolitan area? Some things might be within your control, and other things may be outside of your control.

McClure: Mostly they are outside of my control! My interest is in starting other places to incorporate and actively recruit qualified professionals who are bi-lingual bi-cultural would be nice, but at least bi-lingual. I think that's going to happen. I think agencies like Family Service and Wilder Child Care, are two of the big agencies in the city that provide services, and are interested in doing something. What could help, is if some of the governmental agencies, would classify that certain positions require a

McClure: bilingual person. Right now, it's a haphazard thing. It just happens that the person who is employed is bilingual. When that person leaves, maybe the next person won't be bilingual. Services are kind of hampered. People are running from place to place, until they find which agency has a person they can communicate with. I'd like to have that more established.

Moosbrugger: As a policy?

McClure: Yes. Most of that is out of my control. But I think that it has sparked some interest and awareness.

Moosbrugger: Have any of the people been long time community residents? Or do you find they are mostly people who are moving here from the southwest or from Mexico?

McClure: I'd say it's about half. We have divided half of our newly re-settled migrants. When I say "newly", I mean in the last two or three years. The other half have been long time residents.

Moosbrugger: Do you have any idea of the numbers served?

McClure: No, I don't. I can't tell you that, because I haven't counted them all. But I can tell you that fifteen families is my capacity for providing services, at any one time. If one terminates, I can take another family. It's hard to put a limit on that. I imagine that the social work students will be able to take some cases, and the numbers will expand.

Moosbrugger: I see. So fifteen cases would be a case-load of fifteen files, and would be given time. Some would have a duration of weeks, where others would be for many months?

McClure: Right.

Moosbrugger: Do the referrals being made to you come primarily from law enforcement agencies?

McClure: No, the primary referral source is "Migrants In Action." Second to that is the public schools and the next is probably the "Welfare Department."

McClure: The reason why that is so, is because the school system has referred to me. I used to work for them, and they know I left to go to this job. Migrants In Action, has referred to me because they are always looking for places to refer their people. They serve only Latinos. I have not sought referrals. I thought the best thing to do was to get myself oriented with what was going on in different organizations and different issues; and getting some of these other things done. Like a needs assessment, and finding out where bilingual necessities were. If I had advertised for referrals, I think I would have been immediately inundated with them. I saw that as a very narrow scope of work.

Moosbrugger: Do you think your staff would need additional members for the purpose of meeting the needs of the Latinos, if word were to get out?

McClure: Yes. My view is to stimulate the other agencies, to be able to have that capacity, or that service, Family Service and Wilder Child Guidance, can provide. I don't think it should be concentrated in one place. But there are people who differ with me on that.

Moosbrugger: Do you anticipate that your program, in Ramsey County will be able or willing to fulfill those needs with additional staff members, when word gets out?

McClure: I don't know. I can't answer that.

Moosbrugger: That would be a decision of the Ramsey County Welfare Board, right?

McClure: No. It would be the County Commissioners, who are also on the Welfare Board.

Moosbrugger: Do you anticipate a day on which the demands upon you will increase? Is there anything in the foreseeable future, where the word will be disseminated more?

McClure: I guess I'm still very cautious with that, because I don't think that I have the capacity to provide more services than I am doing right now.

McClure: There doesn't seem to be any point in advertising or seeking referrals, because then I'd be opening up an area I couldn't fulfill. Now I think what will happen with the student unit is that they themselves, will serve as an advertisement. That's one of the things that we are very concerned about, that we don't open up some services without being able to fulfill them. That's really a bad thing to do. It's like saying, "We have some money", and then giving it out. You no longer have any money, and ten-thousand people come back saying, "Give me the money", or "How come there isn't any money?" We have to be careful with that. I think that the primary reason for the social work unit, is for educating the social workers. Now, in the process, they're going to provide some service, but that can't be the primary reason for it. They're going to leave, and then what happens?

Moosbrugger: So, for the present, it looks like the only thing we can count on, is your position, and approximately the fifteen cases that you handle at a time.

McClure: Right. That's all that should be counted on. I think that more can be done with the student unit. What should be counted on, is only what I can do. That's all we are getting paid for. As the social workers get educated, I assume the agencies will hire them.

Moosbrugger: I should mention, this interview is for the Minnesota Historical Society, Mexican American History Project. I have been interviewing Marilyn McClure, at her office in St. Paul, and today is August 2, 1976. I had your permission to interview you, for the Minnesota Historical Society?

McClure: Right, you did.

Moosbrugger: Is there anything that you would like to add?

McClure: Yes. I have been here sixteen years. When I first came, I wanted to do something Mexican. I felt very strange, being in a situation in which I was in a minority, coming from a situation in which I had been a majority.

McClure: I went to the Neighborhood House. I worked with a group of girls there. One of the things that struck me, was that their names were very dramatically changed. A person whose name was Vasquez; became Vasques. That seemed to be very strange, I hear now, a different kind of circumstance. I hear people who are calling themselves Vasquez and Perez; rather than Perres and Vasques. I see some changes taking place. People are more comfortable with who they are.

Moosbrugger: Perhaps the decreasing tendency to Anglicize names, might be at the same time an indication of an increasing acceptance of their Latino heritage?

McClure: I think I see that.

Moosbrugger: Thank you very much for the interview.

Mexican-American Oral History Project
Minnesota Historical Society