

The following interview was conducted on behalf of the Oral History Program of the Washington County museum and Century High School. The interviewee is Denny Mann. The interviewer is Michael Wilson. The interview took place Thursday, May 13th, 2004, at Century High School.

Mike Wilson: What has been your occupational background?

Denny Mann: I started teaching junior high school in 1967, English and Social Studies, in Kansas City, Missouri. I did that for 8 years there, then I moved to Oregon, substituted for a year while I was in graduate school at Portland State, I was hired as a teacher/counselor by the migrant program in Washington County in 1974 by North Plains school. I was there for 3 years as a teacher/counselor, and this was when North Plains was a separate, independent district in those days, Hillsboro was a separate district. Then I was hired by the Hillsboro High School district in 1977, I was a counselor at Brown Junior high for 19 years, and then the last 7 years I was a counselor at Hillsboro High School.

MW: What has been your involvement with the Hispanic population?

DM: Starting in 1973 in the summer, I and my wife volunteered, we were both certified teachers in Missouri, and I had a cousin, his name was **Bob Mann, who was the principal of the summer migrant program for Washington County, and we worked as volunteers in that program, we were teachers but we weren't paid as teachers, we were basically not paid at all, we volunteered, we lived in a labor camp for the summer, Ron Tankersly's upper, which is the top of Pumpkin Ridge. I would get up about 5 o'clock in the morning, take a hot shower, because there was always hot water in the mornings because the workers would take hot showers in the evening, and they would run out of hot water. Then I'd get on the bus and we'd start going from camp to camp, coming down Pumpkin Ridge, picking up kids, and sometimes small children because there was also an infant program, and we'd get to the school about 6:30 in the morning, the gym would be open, breakfast would be served, and we'd start school about 7:30. There was a swimming component to the program at the Forest Grove pool; we'd take them swimming everyday. That was in 1973. In 1974 my wife came back from Missouri. This time we were paid as aides in the program, even though we had our own classrooms teaching, we did not live in the camp that summer, I rented an apartment in Hillsboro. But I still drove a school bus that summer, too. I would drive the bus up, pick up kids, and bring them back in the morning. Pretty much the same program as the year before. I worked in the program in the summer-time for about almost 20 years, and during that time I served as a home-school consultant, as a teacher, and then as the head teacher or what you might call principal of the summer school program. During that time, the number of Hispanic migrants continued to grow. **The main crop was strawberries in those days. Many migrants came from Texas, many migrants came from Mexico, South America, Guatemala, Chile, but mostly Mexico and Texas and California. The majority of the Hispanic students spoke no English, so we had to have bi-lingual teachers and aides, mostly. The classes were conducted in Spanish and English, probably in about****

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agricultural employer for migrants in the whole state, as well as Washington County. There are still some Strawberries, but not nearly as much as there used to be.

MW: Did you have any involvement with the ESL program?

DW: We hired staff from the ESL program, ESL teachers from Hillsboro, Beaverton, Forest Grove, people working as aides in the program, in terms of employing them, using their skills, yes.

MW: How important is it to have that kind of program for these students?

DW: For many of those students it was a stepping stone to a high school diploma, we've had migrant students go on and earn scholarships, go on to college. I'm not a good one to give you up to date numbers, because I have not been involved directly in the program since the early 90's. But just serving as a counselor in a high school, those ESL services are still on going to this day. We offer ESL classes, and again, we students coming not just from Mexico, but Guatemala, Chile, other countries in South America. Many of them don't speak Spanish, many of them speak an Indian dialect, or some speak Portuguese. But still, the support is there at the high schools and for many of them its critical in terms of learning English, earning their credits, having a plan post-high school, staying in school, that's all part of it and very important.

MW: After working in the migrant school, when you became a counselor, what kind of involvement did you have with the Hispanic students after that?

DW: I was a counselor, or learning to be a counselor, early on when I first moved to Oregon, starting like in 1974, I was in graduate school and learning to be a counselor. I worked with the summer program up until the early 90's. But it certainly gave me a unique perspective of what migrant students, or ESL students, minority students, whether, see we also had a large influx of Asian students come in in the late 70's, early 80's because of Vietnam. Working closely with those families gave me an extra perception of what some of those needs were, and how difficult it is to be in a culture where you are a minority, your language is not spoken in the school, where many aspects of your culture are unknown to the majority, and there's a real opportunity for learning there.

MW: What did you do specifically to try to help them as a counselor?

DW: I was involved in setting up assemblies, looking at various cultures over the years, helping with scholarships for minority students at the high school, looking at home school visits when appropriate and necessary, you know with someone who was bilingual, I'm not bilingual, never have been bilingual, I understand some Spanish, but I always knew who to go to in terms of who I could get help with, in terms of bilingual skills. I also did take a couple of conversational Spanish classes, and I wish I could tell you they made me fluent, but that's not the case.

MW: What did you use these home school visits for?

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19...I'm going to say the early 80's, we started a high school program, because the program I've been describing up until now was basically an elementary program. In the 80's, I would say early 80's, we developed a high school program, and transferred high school credit, basically all over the United States, into Mexico. The North Plains school district in Washington County was one of the early providers of migrant education. There were other sites around Oregon, other states were involved but the Hillsboro component of the Oregon migrant program has been a strong one. The first director of migrant education was Jose Garcia who had been a Hillsboro High School teacher. He was the head of the program in the state of Oregon for probably around 15 years. He retired probably around 10 years ago, probably in the early 90's. He was also a primary leadership person, leadership figure, around the state, and he was from Hillsboro. Anything specific you want to ask me?

MW: What was it like working with all the students in the migrant school, how was it different from a regular school?

DW: Well let me make it as plain as I can. **Many, many families came to the Hillsboro area because there was a school for their kids. And one of the main differences, and it exists to this day, between a truly migrant student and somebody who lives here year round, is the migrant students love to come to school. Many of them have not had the same opportunities in their home state, home countries, and these kids, and especially the high school program starting in the 80's, those kids would pick all day, and they would come, rush to take a shower, clean up, and get on the bus, come to school for another 3 hours in the evening. And their attitude was 99% positive I want to be here, I want to learn. And it's a joy to work for kids like that.**

Mike: Did they get bussed to a regular high school?

Denny: Well, it was always one of the regular buildings, and as soon as we had air-conditioned schools, which wasn't the case in 1973, but starting with Glencoe, and Evergreen, when those schools were built and were totally air-conditioned that's, the summer program would alternate between schools, and I'm going to talk now, when I say summer program, I'm basically talking about the secondary program, because from the early 80's on that's what I was involved with, not the elementary or the preschool program. **Another service that directed migrant families to Hillsboro and the Washington County area was the opening of the Virginia Garcia clinic. It offered free or near-free healthcare to migrant families. Again, families would return summer after summer, year after year, because of the educational and medical services that were available in Washington County that were not available in most other counties around the state. So Washington County, Hillsboro, ever since the 70's, has been a leader in attracting migrant families to the area. And also the agriculture has changed a lot in the 30 years. Strawberries are no longer the draw that they were 30 years ago, now its nurseries, I think probably nurseries are the number one**

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DW: Usually it was to find out why a student was not coming to school, there would be a concern about attendance, that was usually what it was. Sometimes it had to do with an ill parent, or some other kind of problem, maybe there was some kind of an abuse issue. One of the things I was responsible for, and every teacher is responsible for is noting abuse, reporting abuse, its one of the most difficult, least pleasant, and yet one of the most important things that a counselor or a teacher does, is be an advocate for kids who are being abused, or who are in some kind of abusive situation. Abuse happens throughout all cultures, it happens throughout all financial levels, class levels, and schools are one of the main areas where we can intervene and hopefully get it stopped.

MW: I forgot one question actually, how important was it, back to the migrant school, how important was the migrant school for these students, coming here and having something like that?

DW: Let me see if I can give you an example. **An integral part of the elementary, and also the secondary, were field trips. And the funding for the migrant education program came out of federal funding, separate from the Hillsboro or Washington County tax dollars, these were federal tax dollars. They were pretty generous in those days. We could afford to take field trips about once a week. And with the elementary students one of the field trips we always took was to the beach. Now you realize, we're in Oregon, we're in a coastal state, and as we would get close to the beach, we would ask the question in Spanish, how many of you have never seen the ocean before? Most of the hands would go up. So again, the things we take for granted, as growing up in Oregon, were some real significant experiences that happened because of the field trips, in terms of seeing the ocean, walking on the beach for the first time. The secondary programs, one of the field trips that we always took with the secondary program was to the zoo, because many of these students, even though they were teenagers, had never been to a zoo, had never seen live many of the kinds of exotic animals you can see in a zoo. So it wasn't just the reading, the writing, the math, and the learning of English that was important, it was some of the other things that we tend to take for granted, that many of these students have never experienced in their life. For the first time through the migrant program, got to feel the beach, got to see an elephant, got to feed a monkey. Stuff like that.**

MW: How important is it for these students to kind of learn our culture, and learn us to help them in their learning, how is that important to it?

DW: Well I'm going to give you a little bit of personal opinion on this one. I think it works both ways. I think the Anglo community can and has learned a lot from the Hispanic community. But I think one of the most important things, most important skills, that any migrant student, family has to learn is English. And the sooner and the more fluent they become in English, the sooner they'll be able to progress through school, progress through occupation, and to be bilingual is so much more of a strength than to be monolingual, whether its English only, Spanish only, and my personal opinion is, and

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I've been working this as a counselor, as a teacher for 30 years, English is the single most important skill to learn as you move into this country.

MW: What kind of change have you seen in the education system from when you first started with the migrant school until now?

DW: Well I think there's, and this is coming from the perspective of an Anglo, and I don't know what you'd get if you asked a Hispanic the same question, but here's my perception. **My perception is that there's a lot more tolerance now, there's a lot more appreciation now of a different culture, of a different skin color, there's a much more of an appreciation of the aesthetic qualities of Hispanic culture, than there was 30 years ago. And I'm not going to tell you that there isn't still discrimination, that there still isn't racism to be overcome, because there is. 30 years ago there weren't gangs like there are now, that's a negative that has developed. Those are some of the changes I've seen, I guess.**

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MW: What kinds of differences would you say, in the educational system, like how we tried to help them out?

DW: **There's certainly more ESL staff, there's more ESL services available at all levels, starting with preschool all the way through college. We now have Portland State and other universities coming on to the high school campuses, trying to get underclass minority students interested in college. Talking about scholarships, meetings, clubs, support groups, those are all positive changes for all minority students, its not just Hispanic, but certainly they're our largest minority.**

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MW: More and more as time goes on, the Hispanic community is becoming more resident than migrant. How has that caused change to what we're trying to do to help them?

DW: **One of the interesting aspects of the community is there tends to be a real class division, and again I'm just going to speak, this is just my personal observation. There seems to be more of a class division among the Hispanic culture sometimes than between the Hispanic and the Anglo culture, and I'm talking about settled out migrants, settled out Hispanics, or Hispanics whose families have been here many, many years, not being real supportive of the true migrants who've just come into the community. And I don't know whether it's a competition for turf, a competition for services or whatever, but I do see some real dynamics and conflicts between those two groups of students, and that's just an area that I think we need to do some more work with them, and we are. But again, I see the schools, I see that from the school board members and the administration on down, realizing that not only do we need to support our ESL students, but they have real contributions and gifts to make to our community, and they do.**

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MW: What are some of the recurring issues that Hispanics have moving up here and trying to settle in?

DW: One of the big issues is the drop out rate. We've had an outreach for all students that are at risk for dropping out, and I am not, again, the best person to talk to you about what is currently being done for ESL students only, but I know that the school board, the administration, the teachers, the counselors are all working to try to diminish and decrease the amount of students dropping out. Hillsboro has had an alternative school program for close to 20 years, we had one of the first ones in the state, you know, its an outstanding program. They have a much higher graduation rate at the alternative school than say, Century does. I believe their test scores are among the highest in the district as well at the alternative school. They started a 7th and 8th grade alternative school, probably 10 years ago, and minority students are included, welcomed, in both of those services. There is a program run through Pacific University, through Forest Grove, that has credit make up for minority students, and again, all with the idea that we want these students to get a high school diploma and have a good plan for after high school.

MW: What improvements do you think we could make to better address the needs that these students have?

DW: Well, I'm going to talk about all students, because your question is true for every student in Hillsboro, what I'm going to say. We need smaller class sizes, and that takes dollars, because you have to hire more teachers in order to have smaller class sizes. One of the issues, its not just in Hillsboro but its in the state of Oregon, in terms of how we fund schools, you know, we closed 17 days last year, that's more than any other school district in the state. There were some decisions made at the board level on down that were detrimental to the interests of individual students, whether they're Anglo, Hispanic, Native American, African American, and one of the key things is the reduction of class sizes. **Because you can be the most outstanding educator, caring educator, you don't want to let anybody drop through the cracks, and yet, when they keep adding bodies, keep adding chairs, and I can't tell you where the line is because sometimes it varies between class to class, and I think we are losing students, both minority students and the rest, because of the class sizes. So if there was any one thing that I think needs to be done, its put more dollars into hiring more teachers.**

MW: What is the greatest obstacle for Hispanic students trying to get a better education?

DW: Probably language, you know, learning English, you said the greatest obstacle, you know, I'll just go back to that, I can't think of anything more important that will make them have an easier time with education, an easier time with employment, than the learning of English, so again, its language, in my opinion.

MW: Do you know of any programs specifically that are in place to address the needs that these Hispanic students have?

DW: Well I've already talked about some of those. The universities are reaching out to them. I'm trying to think of the program in Forest Grove, hopefully I'll think of it, because you know I've been out of the schools for over a year now, but I'll think of this

program in a bit. There are programs out there that are relatively recent to try to support ESL students in terms of being successful in school.

MW: So, lets see, what do we have here... What type of feedback did you, when you were still a counselor, what type of feedback did you receive from Hispanic students?

DW: Well, my last year at Hilhi, I received a plaque, an award, that was voted on by, I think it was the Hispanic united club, and I kept it, you know, and I did a lot of work with ESL students at Hilhi, in terms of credits and, you know, getting into college, letters of recommendation. **I was also the coordinator for the peer mediators, and I always would recruit several bilingual students to serve as peer mediators, because some of our mediations had to be done in Spanish, because we had Spanish speakers only, that would have conflicts, and they'd work through that.** And I think some of the, I know, some of the Hispanic students noticed that, and I was surprised and pleased at the end of the school year. I didn't know it was coming.

MW: Is there anything else I haven't asked yet that you can think to tell me?

DW: Well this is a true, and I don't know if it's a funny story, but it's a true story, and it happened over and over with our migrant students. They would come into a school like this, for the first time having been in a modern, technologically, up to, and they would see, the red things on the wall. What do you suppose those red things were? Maybe Century doesn't have them, let me tell you that Evergreen has them, Glencoe has them, fire alarms. You have them here?

MW: Yeah.

DW: Are they red?

MW: Yeah.

DW: Well, **one of the things that we would try to do at the very beginning, the very first night, is have teachers talk about those red things on the wall -- don't touch them, they're fire alarms, you know. But because it's a migrant population, you would have brand new students everyday who were there for the first time. And inevitably, it would happen probably once a week, a fire alarm would go off. And the kid wouldn't run away, that pulled it, you know, he did not know, it was not done out of mischief, it was just a curiosity, what's this thing here? And we had a brand new superintendent, his name was James Tachini, and I was the head teacher of the program at Evergreen. And he came out to visit the night program, and we were standing there in the commons, and the kids were going to class, and the meal was just over, and he asks, what are some unique things about this program? And I said, well, one of the things that tends to happen quite often is the fire alarms go off, because these kids don't know what they are. It couldn't have been two seconds after I said that to him, the alram went off. Somebody, you know, had pulled it somewhere.** So anyway, that was something that we as a staff, when we were planning

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for the opening of the summer program, you know, the first day we had students, that's one of the top things we discussed, you know, what are we going to tell kids, and how are we going to tell them, and we need to mention it at the beginning of class every night, you know, don't touch those red things, unless you see a fire. But that was one of the, well you know, I look back on it as kind of funny, it wasn't funny at the time. Because the thing that wasn't funny about it, we never knew, we always had to investigate, is this a real fire? We didn't know, so that would always take some time, but you had to do that pretty quickly, because if you didn't, the fire trucks were on their way. We had one go off at Glencoe, one summer, and the alarm that went off was in a part of the building that was closed. And we could tell where it was, and we had all the kids outside, you know, every time they went off, the building emptied, automatically. So we had all the kids outside, the firemen came, because this was not pulled by one of our students, and we actually thought something was on fire, way in the upstairs of Glencoe. So the firemen were in investigating, we're out sitting on the lawn, it's a warm night, its probably 8 o'clock, 8:30, the alarm still goes off, its still going. And the firemen could not find a fire, they found where the alarm was pulled, and they could not shut the alarm off. So the buses normally came about quarter to 9, and we're sitting on the lawn when the buses pulled up, so we just dismissed, we just told the kids get on the bus, go home, that's it for the night, but they probably sat out there for an hour, you know, because it was just one of those, you know, there was no fire, it was a short. I guess as I look back on my summer migrant experiences, the fire alarms were always a significant part of it.

MW: Just one more question. Since you started, and until the time you retired, do you believe we've made much change in trying to help the Hispanic population?

DW: Yes I do, **I think there's been a lot of positive change. You know, it took Washington County, at the county level to initiate the program. It took North Plains Elementary district and their school board to allow a summer program to use their school. Those were politically not easy decisions in the early 1970's. There was a lot of resentment of, why should our tax dollars that built these buildings, go to house these visitors? We're way beyond that now, that's no longer an issue. Washington County no longer administers Hillsboro's migrant program, its all done in district, and we've had a director, Henry Wiens, for many years, was instrumental in making positive changes. So no, we've come a long way in 30 years.**

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