

Interview with Ruth María Flores Maldonado ¹

T. NEVIN SIDERS V., MEXTESOL

Journal: What do you recall about the first convention?

Flores: I remember I was walking with Bertha (Gómez Maqueo) to the Sunday (business) meeting. And all the objects that were going to be raffled among the teachers were on the floor in a big circle, and I told her, “Look at my TV set!” “Why, is it yours?” she said. “No, I’m going to win it,” I said. And in fact I won it, and it was the first thing I ever won in a raffle.

Journal: Excellent! What else do you recall from the first convention?

Flores: Well, I remember the atmosphere. All the teachers were very friendly, and there was this sense of friendship and that we shared the same interests; that sort of thing.

Journal: What do you recall about the place? Where was it?

Flores: It was in Tampico. It was lovely, I don’t remember the name of the hotel, but it was a nice hotel. Of course there were just a few teachers, really, compared with the numbers we have now in the convention. But, we had social activities as well as cultural ones. And we had an evening by the beach with fires, and some food and dancing and singing. (smiles warmly) It was lovely!

Journal: About how many people attended?

Flores: I remember perhaps 60 maybe, or less. Not many.

Journal: What do you recall of the predecessors to MEXTESOL? You were saying you went to some organizing meetings.

Flores: Yes, a colleague of mine from *Prepa 6* ² invited me to these pre-meetings, to these meetings that were going to lead to MEXTESOL. She said “Why don’t you go to CEMAC? ³ There is a group of teachers who are

¹ Ruth María Flores Maldonado was interviewed on Saturday, January 18, 1997 in Mexico City.

² *Escuela Nacional Preparatoria 6* in Mexico City.

³ Today CEMARC.

trying to make a association of English teachers in Mexico, and I am sure that you would like that.” So I went there, and I met these teachers and we worked together, and the result was MEXTESOL.

Journal: You worked in the public schools [Ms. Flores is retired.] MEXTESOL has worked very hard over the years to try to offer teachers its knowledge, and also to receive recognition for our event from the Secretary of Education. In some states we have had quite a lot of success; the state Secretary of Education officially opened the convention in Zacatecas. What do you recall of your experiences, and can you give us any advice for the future?

Flores: Yes. At the beginning it was very difficult to try to get all the teachers from the public schools to go to MEXTESOL. Some of them liked it very much, and these are the ones who always go. The main thing was that they used to go to the convention, and that’s all. They didn’t follow up during the year, and they didn’t go to the monthly meetings or anything. Mainly just for the convention.

Journal: Why do you think so?

Flores: Well, I suppose they have many other activities and many other responsibilities at home, etc. And some of them are just not interested. which is a pity, because I used to invite all my colleagues in *Prepa 6* and the *Normal Superior*. Well, people from the *Normal Superior* were interested. But mainly the private institutes are the ones who really worked hard, and a few of us from the public school, but unfortunately not everybody.

When I was president of the Mexico City chapter, 1983 to 1984, we had a meeting every month and we had enough people, at least 25, 30 every month, which was very nice for us. Then, when we had a lot of people was in the mini-convention every year. We used to have it at *Colegio de México*, and we had many people attending, about maybe 200, and it was a real success.

Journal: What advice would you have about reaching into the public schools again?

Flores: Well, we should invite them, and keep on inviting them, and giving them perhaps recognition. SEP⁴ gives them extra points, and recognizes their attendance to our meetings or to the regional convention.

And besides the lectures have to be, some of them, especially for *secundaria* teachers, which is very different from teaching in a private institute. Teaching in a public school is *completely* different.

Journal: What do you remember of the academic history of the events we've given?

Flores: Well, at the beginning the same teachers from the private institutes gave the talks, most of them. Then the British Council started bringing lecturers, and the [U.S.] embassy used to send two speakers to the national convention. And we had many important people coming for our conventions, especially when we had conventions in Acapulco. It was the place where the hotels were better for our conventions, with such attendance.

Journal: What were some of the topics, and people who spoke? In the interview with Vince Carrubba we reviewed how the profession has changed over the years.

Flores: Let me tell you something I remember. At the beginning, the Americans and the British were the speakers, mainly. But then we Mexicans started. I was very afraid to take part in one of the conventions as a speaker, but at the *Normal Superior* where I used to work, I remember Sergio Gaitán prepared a workshop in which another teacher, Marilinda Rosales and I were going to work with him. And he gave us all the strength we needed to face a convention group, you know. And that was very good, because that was the first time. And then the next year we had a different one, and so on. At the beginning I used to present the workshops with him, and later on I did by myself. So, that was nice when there were Mexicans giving the talks, workshops, as well. And as I said we received many guests from the States and from England and interest grew and many more people attended conventions.

Journal: Today convention organizers are very conscientious to try to mix native English speakers in Mexico, and Mexicans who are good teachers

⁴ *Secretaría de Educación Pública*

Flores: Yes, certainly I think that a well trained teacher has everything in his favor. I'm a very practical person, I don't like only theory. I must have a little bit of theory or some theory, and then more practice. That's why I always gave workshops this way, what I always did was I gave the theory very briefly and then I had all the teachers take part in the practice. I used to teach what we call now *didáctica de la especialidad* which is methodology at the *Escuela Normal Superior*. I suppose I had to give them theory, but I gave them more practice than theory.

Journal: What sort of workshops were popular at that time?

Flores: I think the most popular ones were those for *secundarias*, with games, songs to make the class a little more enjoyable. Not just to follow the book. Like extra activities in the classroom, those were most popular among *secundaria* teachers especially, and *prepa* teachers as well.

Journal: You were mentioning several people who were attending those conventions.

Flores: In the first conventions we had people from the Anglo-Mexicano, who were Paul Davis and Richard Rossner, Grace Scott from the Mexican North American Institute. Enrique Gutiérrez he used to work for Oxford University Press, he was one of the first presidents of MEXTESOL. And Nick Shepherd, of course.

Maybe I should talk a little bit more about the Mexico City chapter. It was the largest in the country. As I said there were monthly meetings, and there were many, many people who attended these meetings. Some of them were regular attendees; they always went to the meetings every month. Sometimes we had a little bit of work trying to find speakers every month. We had to find them at the institutes, from the *Normal Superior*, or any other institution. And we always had a meeting. People were happy with that. They really attended because they thought it was useful for them, and they were learning, and they could use what they learned in their own classrooms. There was a group of ladies, who always were there! about five or six.

Journal: Did they work in the same place?

Flores: No, they were just friends. I don't know if they became friends there or they knew each other before. Some of them were from *secundarias*.

In those days we had people from the *Politécnico*. I don't know if you still have many people some there.

The first convention was in Tampico, and the next one was in Cocoyoc. I couldn't attend that one because I was in England. I had a scholarship. Other than that I attended all the conventions. I think we all looked forward to the convention every year, and we made plans, and a lot of things to get a leave of absence in order to go to the convention. I always managed to get there somehow.

Journal: I understand there used to be two chapters in the Mexico City metropolitan area, one in the city and one in Naucalpan.

Flores: Yes, I remember that. But it didn't work. Two years, I guess. We used to go to their regional convention there. The first one was OK, the second not so much, and then I think it died out. I suppose they were so close together that one seemed to be enough.

Let me tell you an anecdote. I used to work at SEP and at *Prepa 6*. And once one of the students said; "Miss Flores, Miss Flores, why is it only our English teachers know our names? All the other teachers never know our names, but the English teachers always call us by our names." I said, "Well, because the English teachers are special." It is true. You need to know their names in order to have a class. To move, to participate. To make them participate, you must know their names, otherwise it's dead. At first the largest groups we had were about 32, 33 sometimes, but that was the fourth graders⁵. The fifth grade and sixth grade were much smaller. So it was not difficult to learn their names.

I remember two other teachers: Richard Rossner and Paul Davis. They wanted to get closer to the *secundaria* teachers and see what their needs were. So they took a group of normal students in *secundaria* and they taught that group that whole year. And so they realized what the teachers' needs were and gave workshops about it. It was excellent for us! We got many things.

Journal: I've seen some of the SEP textbooks for the *secundaria* and they are *trying* to be communicative.

⁵ First year of high school, 10th graders.

Flores: It's very difficult to be communicative because of the size of the groups in English. The children are not interested in English yet, they think it's just another subject. If they get a good class they get interested. Because they think if they go to the English class they're going to learn how to pronounce the words for the pop songs, and that they will understand for them. And when they get there and see "that is a chair," and "that is a table," they are disappointed, they don't like the class.

In conclusion, I myself got many things from MEXTESOL. I always used to go there very happy because I always learned something, something new. And I always had new ideas to use in my classroom, and it gave me the interest to become a better teacher, to study and to learn more about teaching. So, I really am sorry I had to stop going because I have personal problems. I always went there looking forward to something new, something different, or maybe just to see friends and talk to them.

Journal: Thank you very much.