

Fran Leeper Buss. *La Partera: Story of a Midwife*. Women and Culture Series. (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 1980) viii, 140 pp., \$6.95 paper.

La Partera is the story of Jesusita Aragón, one of the last traditional midwives of northeastern New Mexico, as written from recorded interviews between the author and Jesusita. Before telling Jesusita's account of her own life, the author introduces the reader geographically, historically, and culturally to the area of San Miguel County and its main city of Las Vegas. Buss clearly shows her love and understanding of this region where she and her husband served as United Church of Christ ministers in 1975. She writes, "the weather is dominated by striking turquoise skies and a brilliant, penetrating sun" (p. 2) and describes the area as "a largely rural county which straddles the forested mountains, the foothills and the plains." (p. 4) She states that the majority of the people in west Las Vegas are Hispanic New Mexican, touching on the Hispanic settlement, religious customs, and health care practices of the region. At the turn of the century, curanderas, médicas, and parteras, a female network, delivered health care to the area until the early 1930s, when Anglo medical personnel, again mostly women, began to take over these services.

In telling the story of Jesusita's life Buss carefully preserves Jesusita's style of expression, unique to those in the area from a bilingual culture. Jesusita speaks of growing up on a ranch in Trujillo in a big family, of her life alone with three children in Las Vegas, and of her position as a "partera." Buss elaborately describes Jesusita's home, which served as office and delivery room. Through these details the reader experiences Jesusita's warm, efficient manner in caring for her patients and their babies. A chest with medical records contrasts with images of saints to form her clean and orderly setting.

The author captures Jesusita's skill and dedication to her work: "I help people in lots of ways. I get so many calls, and people come so much to my door. . .lots of people come to know if they should go to a doctor or to the hospital." (p. 75) As Anglo medicine arrived, Jesusita took special classes to become a licensed midwife in New Mexico. Mutually respecting and trusting each other, the Anglo medical personnel and Jesusita often cooperated in caring for patients. As fewer babies were born and as the Anglo medical system grew, Jesusita

found she needed to supplement her income as a midwife by boarding mental health patients in her home.

At the end of the book are photographs of Jesusita in her youth, with other midwives, and in the delivery of a baby. These give impact to an already vivid and moving personal story.

In the appendices, Buss presents a summary of how medical needs were met in northeastern New Mexico from the 1880s through the 1970s. She includes short biographies of the early parteras and medicas and also the early female Anglo medical personnel. Here, too, are found footnotes as a glossary of Spanish words.

The book's main strength lies in Buss' integrity in preserving Jesusita's personality in the account which brings to the work a feeling of warmth, openness, concern, dedication, strength and independence characteristic of Jesusita herself. This book will well serve introductory courses in Women's Studies, Chicano Studies, and Nursing.

Caroline White
College of St. Catherine