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LINDA CHAVEZ RODRIGUEZ

TAPE 13, CR 3, SR 2, TC 7:00:00

7:02:19:00 What are your earliest memories of your father, early days in CSO etc.?

07:02:27 In LA? I remember we had just moved up from San Jose and we went to LA and my dad at that time became president of CSO. I remember him being just as active as he was when we lived in San Jose and Oxnard, all of us helping out. He always had us there to help out. I remember going to the office and helping collate flyers and distribute flyers to the neighborhoods and stuff. So he kind of kept us busy all the time. There was eight of us, and the first five were the ones that were the most active.

07:03:05 You said he kept you busy. Did he incorporate the work and the family?

07:03:10 Oh yeah, that was real important to him.

07:03:20 Please incorporate question in answer...How was he able to work in his work and the family and all that?

07:03:23 Well I think the thing he did with us is that he involved us and everything and the time that we had, like our summers I remember spending working with him and you know the holidays and just after school, helping out as much as we could. But he always involved the family. He's always been like that,

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even when he started the union, it became one big family. It wasn't just his immediate family, meaning us, the kids, it was the farmworkers and everyone else who supported...kind of brought everyone together.

07:03:56 In the previous conversation, either you or your sister Liz mentioned that, "I don't remember being alone with my father, we seemed to belong to everyone." How do you feel about that, the feeling of belonging to everyone?

07:04:12 Well, I guess we, that's all we knew, we shared him all our lives, and I mean, I think it was kind of natural to us. Always my Dad, he was always involved in something, whether it was the CSO or farmworkers or whatever, there was always someone around, and he took us along and so it just became part of the everyday that we knew. Just being with him and being with other people, and sharing him. I didn't know it any other way.

[PAUSE]

07:04:54 It seems like you as kids were never alone with your father. How did you feel about your dad belonging to everybody?

[SLATE]

07:04:59 Well, we kind of grew up that way. We knew that just being with my dad, that he was always with someone, at a very early age, and so we knew that we shared him with everyone. Like when he started the union he was always around farmworkers, and even the work he did in CSO we kind of always did things, a lot of things, together, and we knew that that was part of what my dad did, that was part of his job.

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[PAUSE]

...and so we knew that we shared him with everyone. It was like, when he started the union he was always around farmworkers, and even the work he did in the CSO, we kind of just always did things [CUT]...

07:05:27 Was there resentment?

07:05:30 No, I don't think there was. Not on my part, and I don't think on my brothers and sisters either. I just, we just grew up that way. And the little time that he did spend with us, the private time, was little, but it was precious times that we remembered.

07:05:46 So when your dad would go off to L.A. or to Bakersfield or wherever and take you guys, what did he do? Did he make it an event?

07:05:54 Yeah, he did, he did. It was always a treat with him. I remember when he first started organizing farmworkers, he'd take us into these small farmworker towns to leaflet. And he would make a day of it. He would take us at the end of the day, get us an icecream. Make sure it was enjoyable, not just the work, but that we got some fun out of it. It was enjoyable, not just the work but that we got some fun out of it.

07:06:13 Was he easy to talk to?

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07:06:15 Um, yeah, he was. He was. I found it more difficult for me than my children do, his grandchildren, to speak to him. They had a, I think they had a closer and tighter relationship with my father than I did anyway.

07:06:32 Why?

07:06:33 Well I think he was around more. They built that. I think he took the time to be with them...and I think they got to know him more, in a different way. It was their *tata*, so it was a little different.

07:06:50 Do you remember if he had any special times, special times of the year that he set aside just for the family?

07:07:02 Yeah, there were certain holidays that he really looked forward to and in fact he planned. Christmas was one of those days. He made that an event for us. It was a traditional thing that we did, we got together at my mother's and made tamales and of course he was there sticking his hands in the masa and stuff, and midnight mass was a thing that we did as a family, we went to midnight mass. And then, after mass we'd all come to my parents' house and then we'd exchange gifts, and we did that. That was an annual thing we did. Then we'd have a Christmas dinner. So it was kind of like, that's the one time the family would come together. Especially after we all grew up and everyone moved out. It's one of those times that we all got together. Another special time was Easter. Easter was a real important day for my Dad, or holiday rather. We'd start off with an early mass, and then we'd have an Easter egg hunt, and then we'd have a big baseball game, with all the grandkids and everyone in the community, and of course he was always the

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pitcher. He was the one that kept score and everything, kept the game going, kept the...It was really neat. But those were the special holidays for him.

07:08:10 A sense of tradition, was that important to him?

07:08:11 Oh yeah, I think it was. I think it was. What he taught us, we now teach our kids. At the time we made a fuss about tradition and stuff, but I think that's something that we learned and that we now teach our kids. It was important to him.

07:08:32 Why do you think it was important to him?

07:08:33 I think the values, and the morals and just the things that he said. He was very religious, and he made it a point that we always went to mass, and we made a fuss about it all the time, but we find that we're the same way. I'm the same way with my children. "Oh, we got to go to mass, everybody get ready." So it's those things you just, it's just something that we just carry on.

07:09:02 Your perception of your father and your mother, were they, when it came for the movement, came for the family, were they on the same level? Were they fighting together?

07:09:18 Yeah, she supported my dad from the beginning. In fact, when he decided that he wanted to go organize farmworkers, he asked her what area would she like to go to, 'cause he knew it was going to be hard on her, and she chose Delano because she had family there, she had two sisters and she had two brothers who lived nearby and she figured that if we needed help that she'd have

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her family nearby. And yeah, she helped him all the way. In fact, she worked for the union full-time. She started the first credit union and she worked there till she retired I guess about maybe five years ago. She ran the whole thing.

07:10:20 You said that he was closer to the grandkids than he was to you. What evidence do you have of that?

07:10:26 Well, the kids could go to him and talk to him all the time and he spent a lot of time with them, and he invited them to a lot of places he went to. When we were growing up he wasn't home as much, because of the organizing he did with the CSO and then later on with the union, but we moved to La Paz, there was still a lot of traveling, but he was here more often, and so the kids all, I know my daughters worked in his office so they spent a lot of time with him and they became very close. Built a real good relationship with them.

07:10:55 When you were a kid and you moved from L.A. to Delano, what was life like when you and your siblings growing up as Cesar Chavez kids, going to school with growers' kids, what was that like?

(PIC ROLL OFF)

TAPE 13, CR 4, SR 2 TC 7:11:18 (SLATE)

07:11:27 What was it like being children, living in Delano. Any special consequences?

Oh, gosh, well, in the early year of the union was pretty tough for us, for the five older kids...

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[END SLATE]

07:11:35 It's funny, we get that asked all the time. It's like... what's it like being Cesar Chavez's daughter. Well, I don't know anything different, just that he's my dad. We grew up that way. I remember when the union first started there were problems because, it was a new thing, people were scared, but for us growing up there and going to school, and having to go to school with the growers' kids and the labor contractors' children was difficult. We were harrassed a lot. You know it was always...the town was kind of divided, those who were for the union, those who were against. But my brother Fernando, the oldest, I think probably had it the toughest.

07:12:14 Why?

07:12:16 Well, I mean, he was picked on a lot by the growers' kids. In fact he got into a fist fight one time over that, and it seemed to be harder for him. I think it's cause he was the oldest maybe.

07:12:30 There was a story I think I heard you tell one time that you couldn't possibly [be Cesar Chavez' kids?]. Can you tell that story?

07:12:39 I had one of the grower's kids, in fact it was Zaninovitch, in one of my classes. The teacher, it was a history class, I remember clearly the teacher, I was wearing a button and the teacher asked me if he could wear that button. And I told him I'd give the button only if he would wear it in class and he said he would, so he put it on, and the grower's kid was sitting there and he got very upset and he said "No, you can't wear that button. That's against the law. You can't do that.

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You can't..." and made a fuss about it and then one of the kids said, "That's Cesar Chavez' daughter," and he made a remark like, "Oh yeah, Cesar Chavez's daughter. If you were Cesar Chavez's daughter you wouldn't be here! "...all his kids go to private schools in Switzerland," or some remark like that.

07:13:20 So what did you do?

07:13:23 I laughed. I laughed. But gosh, if they only knew. If they'd only come by and see where we live. [laughs] Look at our little house. Yeah, it was funny.

07:13:36 How about the teachers, how did they react?

07:13:39 There were some, like this teacher in particular, there were some teachers that were for the union and knew about the union and stuff and there were some that were a lot like the growers. I had a teacher who taught civics I think it was, who said all year long "We're going to have to debate this issue about the UFW and the union and stuff" and we never did, but I know he never liked the union. I know that any time I wore my button he would make a remark and stuff. In fact, it was like that, the whole school board was like that, because my sister and I had got called in to the Superintendent's office because we were wearing buttons and they told us that if we didn't take the buttons off we would be suspended. And we told them, Well, we had the right to wear the buttons and we weren't going to remove them. So they called my father. He happened to be in town. And he came to the school and they told him, "We're going to have to suspend your children because they won't take off the buttons." He goes, "Well, you do what you have to but that's what they believe in and they're not taking them off." So they told us we were suspended. We walked out of the office and my dad, we were getting into the

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car to leave, and the superintendant came back and he said, Well, no, that they had made a mistake, that it was OK for us to wear our buttons and stuff. But my dad had gone down to the office there with a couple of attorneys and I guess maybe that changed their mind.

07:15:06 You had over the years a lot of people come through your lives, farmworkers as well as important people in government. What was your perception of that as a kid, to have the Kennedys or somebody come through?

07:15:23 Well, the Kennedys, everyone knew the Kennedys and still knows them. I guess we were pretty excited about meeting them, I guess, because everyone else was, and they were so well-known and stuff, and they were just as excited to meet us. So it was kind of funny. But, growing up as a kid, I wasn't real impressed with that stuff. We had people that came all the time, and met with my dad or helped out our march and stuff, and I guess it was just one of those things that it was just an everyday thing that you did, it was part of growing up in the union and people just got involved because they believed in the union and these people were here to help, just like the farmworkers were, so it was kind of like that kind of thing.

07:16:04 Did you think your life was pretty normal?

07:16:09 Yeah. Yeah, I did. I'm still doing it, you know, so it's kind of like, this is all I've ever known.

07:16:18 So, do you think, if your life had been different...?

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07:16:27 Well, I know this is what I wanted to do. I knew that for a long time because [laughs] when I went on the boycott, that's where I met my husband, and I had told myself that I would have to marry someone who was going to be as dedicated as I was in the movement because I was going to stay here, there was no way I was going to leave. And so when I met Artie, I found that he was more dedicated than I was. It was funny, but it's what I want to do for the rest of my life...I just chose to do that.

07:17:00 No regrets?

07:17:03 No, no. None at all. In fact, if anything I'm glad that I got to do all this, because it's something that I get to carry on to my children. When I see them doing the same thing.

07:17:19 Tell me the story about when you and Artie decided to get married and you called your father. What happened?

07:17:27 Artie tells it best. I met Artie in Detroit, Michigan. I had gone down for the, it was the grape, Gallo and I think lettuce boycott, and it was back in 1973. It was the first boycott I had gone out to. And the only reason my dad let me go was because my older sister was going with her husband. It was kind of funny though. But Artie had just graduated from the University of Michigan and he had come on staff and he was organizing a region of the state, it was all broken down and the state was divided into about I guess four or five different regions, and I had met Artie there and when we decided...we started to date and then we decided to get married he called my dad. I told him, "You have to call my dad and you have

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to ask for my hand in marriage.” And he couldn’t believe that but I told him “yeah, you do,” and he did, he called my dad.

[SLATE]

07:18:30 When you went on your first boycott, did you have to do some convincing of your father to do that?

07:18:35 Yeah, I did. I had always worked in the office there. I worked in his office right out of high school and I went to work with his assistant, I helped her out, and then I worked in the medical plan, and then I did some accounting. Well, when everyone was getting ready to go out on the grape boycott I thought, Well, I want to do something different, I think I’ll...[CUT]

[SLATE]

07:19:35 Was it tough to convince your dad to let you go on the first boycott?

07:19:38 Yeah, it took a little convincing. I had done a lot of work out in his office. I worked in my dad’s office with his assistant, and then I did some work in the accounting department and then I did some work in membership, and I thought I wanted to do something different so when the grape boycott started and everyone was going out I thought, Well, this would be something different. Well, when I went to him and I told him I wanted to go he told me, Well, I don’t know, I don’t know if you should really be out there and stuff, and then when my sister and her husband at that time were both working for the organization, my brother-in-law at time was a union organizer, so they were sending all the organizers out there. He

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says, “Well, if [?] and George go you can go.” So [?] and George decided they’d go, so I got to go. That was my way out there.

07:20:27 And what happened when you got out there?

07:20:29 It was different. It was tough. It was the best experience I’ve ever experienced, but it was not easy at all. I don’t know what I was expecting. I mean, it was tough work, having to go and talk to the different organizations and talk to the church and trying to convince people that you were there, that you needed their help and stuff, and I didn’t know anything about organizing and I didn’t, I was afraid to get up and speak and it was just like, I was just thrown out there and said, Alright, gotta learn how to swim. And I guess that was my best teacher. But I met Artie out there, my husband. He had just graduated from the University of Michigan and he was one of the organizers there. And we started dating and then when we got a little serious we decided we were going to get married and I told him that he would have to call my dad and ask for my hand in marriage, which was a little shocking to him. And he did, he called my dad and he asked for my hand in marriage, and my dad asked him “Well, where are you planning to get married?” He says, “Well, you have to get married out here.” Meaning La Paz. And he says, “yeah, yeah, we’ll do that. We’ll get married out there.”

07:21:46 Did that make you nervous, calling up your dad and telling him you’re going to get married?

07:21:51 No, because I’ve got five sisters, and I had three sisters that had already gone through that and their husbands had to do the same thing, so I knew Artie had to do that.

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07:22:05 Was your dad perceived as being tough?

07:22:10 In what sense?

TAPE 15, CR 5, SR 2, TC 8:00:00:00

08:00:00 Your dad was no pushover, to do the things that he did. What was your perception of him? Was he a tough guy?

08:00:11 Yeah, he could be. He could be. My dad could be a tough guy, yeah. With us though he was, it was different with his kids though I think. I don't think he...well, I don't think of it as him being tough. I think of him just doing what he did as a father, you know? Like, he always stressed if you start something you've got to finish it, whether you don't like what you're doing, but until you get the job done, and that kind of stuff, but not like, to the point where it was, you have to do it, and that kind of stuff. But I guess you're right, you know, if, to build the union he had to be tough. He really had to be tough.

08:01:21 Was it hard on your mom and on your family, all the time away and all the things that he went through, like the fast? Was it hard on you kids?

08:01:31 Oh yeah, yeah. As we got older we understood more. Yeah, it was hard. The last fast was very hard on everyone. And we were all worried, we were very concerned. He had a doctor there all the time with him, but yet we were seeing him every day, every day before he went to the mass we'd walk into his room and, just to see him, he looked like he was deteriorating, and it was scary.

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The grandkids were very upset and I know that Artie was very concerned and some of the board members, but, yeah, it took a toll on us, that fast. And probably on my mom, probably the hardest. She seemed to be the strongest though. I mean, she's always kind of been, always been by his side but she's always been the one that's been, the one that's kind of helped everyone through it, like with the family. And even with, I remember during the fast even sometimes when the farmworkers would come up and be very upset and my mother was there, "It'll be fine," kind of just comforting them.

08:02:35 Did anybody ever try to talk him out of fasting or doing something like that?

08:02:38 No, I don't think so. I think he had his mind set and he knew exactly how long he was going to fast. Not that I know of, I don't think anybody did.

08:02:49 What about your uncle Richard. Was your family close to him?

08:02:51 Very close. In fact, my uncle Richard's family and our family grew up together. We would take trips together and vacation together and his kids always helped out. They were always with us on the weekends, passing out leaflets and stuff, and my uncle Richard was always there organizing with my dad, so we, both our families grew up together.

08:03:15 Was there a special bond between your dad and your uncle Richard?

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08:03:18 I think there was. I think...he's got two other brothers and I think my uncle Richard because he was around and helped a lot, I think they developed a real close bond. I think his kids too, I think they're closer in age, so they spend a lot of time together.

08:03:33 Who are the two or three people who you feel were the closest to your father?

08:03:40 During what time?

08:03:42 Throughout his life. Who were the people that your dad trusted most?

08:03:48 Well, my mother would be the one that he probably trusted the most. And then maybe a couple of the board members. I know the last, oh I guess, maybe the last ten, fifteen years he got very close to Artie Rodriguez who's now the president, they built a real close relationship, and I think he trusted Artie.

08:04:08 Early on in his life he had a pretty close relationship to Fred Ross. Do you remember...?

08:04:22 Yeah, I remember Fred. I remember Fred when we were living in San Jose, oh gosh, I must have been around four then. It was funny, 'cause the only way I would remember Fred is that, Here comes that tall man to come and take my dad away again. It was like, every time he came my dad would leave, and of course they travelled together and organized together. So I always remembered Fred, the guy that would come and take my dad away. Then I got to know Fred a

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little better when he came to work with us in the Oxnard-Santa Paula area when Artie was assigned there to work in the citrus, Fred came down and worked with Artie. In fact Fred stayed with us for I guess several weeks off and on.

08:05:05 Were they close, your dad and Fred Ross?

08:05:07 Oh yeah, very close, yeah.

08:05:09 Why do you think they were so close?

08:05:12 Well I guess because they spent so much time together and he worked with my dad and taught my dad organizing. And then I guess just over the years they kept in touch and stuff. When my dad would go through some hard times I know it was Fred that he would call.

08:05:33 The new generation, your kids, how are they different? How is their life different from yours?

08:05:39 Growing up in the union?

Yeah.

08:05:42 It's different than our lives. All we thought about was the union and then everything we did was based on the union, and our kids seem to do a little more. I mean, they still work for the union and they're still active and then they still have time for their social life and, I have a seventeen year old who's a perfect example. She works in Artie's office after school every day, and yet she has time

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to socialize with her friends and go to parties and proms and stuff, and then she's real active in the church. She's one of the team leaders at the church, and so she gets involved in a lot of stuff they do. So she kind of just spreads herself a lot. She's the real organizer of the family.

08:06:28 Do you feel that your family is still carrying on like your dad did, where it's able to incorporate family and the union and the movement?

08:06:38 My immediate family?

08:06:39 Your kids.

08:06:40 Oh yeah, yeah. We do everything together, even, I guess it's the one thing my dad taught us, is to, the work and the community, we combine together, and that's what we do here in La Paz too. Any activities that go on we make a deal of it We just recently had a baptism where there was five kids that were baptized and one child made their communion, and the community got involved in it and we had, the church from Tehachapi, the priest came down and with the choir there, and so we made a big event of it. Yeah, we do. We try to incorporate that all the time in everything we do.

08:07:17 Is there something that your dad has passed on to you, something that you really feel is that one thing that keeps me going?

08:07:25 Well, it was his commitment.

What was his commitment?

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To serve others.

08:07:30 Can you incorporate the question? Is there something that really keeps you going, that your dad handed down to you?

08:07:38 Well it was my dad's hard work and his commitment and his service and taught us that we had to work for others, that, like he did. I don't really know how to explain it but it was just something that, over the years just working with him and being with him is that he taught us that you're here to service someone, you're here to work and help others, and that's kind of what we do and that's what I hope to give down to my children and to their children, is that the commitment and the service for others.

08:08:16 One final thing, you mentioned earlier that your dad was a religious person. What was your perception of your father as a religious person?

08:08:27 Well, he was a very strong believer in Christ. He went to mass regularly, and he expected us to go also, and everything was done through prayer. If we were going to have a big election or if we were going to have a rally or anything, anything we ever did we always started off with a mass, to get started. And he just, I don't know, it was just one of those things that he just, his faith in Christ, and he believed strongly in faith and I think that's why he was so involved with the church, and that's why I guess we're that way, because of the way my dad brought us up and I'm the same way with my children. But he just had a very strong faith.

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08:09:22 What kept your dad going?

08:09:25 Gosh, I don't know. I really don't know, because I know there are times that really get tough and you think about the work you're doing and stuff, but... (SOUND ROLL OFF)

TAPE 15, CR 5, SR 3, TC 8:09:54 (SLATE)

08:09:57 What do you think it was with your father that kept him going? What gave him that drive?

08:10:08 Gosh, I don't know what it was that kept my dad going. I just know the commitment he had for the farmworkers, and to service others, but I think it was his faith. I think my mom had a lot to do with it, I think her encouragement and her support. I think that helped him. But I honestly can't say deep down inside what it was. I really don't know.

08:10:40 Do you think anybody knows?

08:10:41 Maybe my mom. Maybe my mom does, but she doesn't do interviews.

08:10:50 Why doesn't she do interviews?

08:10:51 I don't know. She's always had this thing about the press. She just, I guess too many negative things. She says that, she once said that she would never do an interview because they won't...

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(PIC ROLL OFF, WILD)

...they'll put on what they want or they'll say what they want, and so she just never does them. Very often, not very often will she...she'll go accept awards and stuff, as long as she doesn't have to say anything, but to get up and speak and stuff, she doesn't do that. She'll thank people and say a few words, but as a public speaker or to do interviews, she just doesn't do it.

I can understand that. Thank you. Anything else?

I don't want you to put words in your mother's mouth, but what do you think, everybody around here has talked about this film, what do you think she would want? What picture of your father do you think she would want to come out of the film? What do you think she thinks is important? I remember she told me some stuff when we met at a board meeting around a year ago, about getting the thing started and how we worked and so forth, and she seemed to have some issues that were really important.

Yeah, she'll speak up at the board meetings and stuff because it's people that she knows and stuff, but have you tried to meet with her while you're here?

Well, we'll talk, but I don't want to impose on her in terms of an interview.

Yeah, she won't do an interview. But she might sit with you for a minute or two and talk.

Would you talk to her and see if she would?

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END OF INTERVIEW