

Fred Ross, Jr.

TAPE 67, CR 88, SR 42, TC 10:30:00

10:39:01 Some times Cesar said that your dad was the best teacher that he ever had.

10:39:21 I think one of the uh, qualities he had was of, that he had a drive that wouldn't quit. He had a burning passion inside of him to fight for justice, wherever that would take him. Someone once said that an organizer is part revolutionary, and part educator and part agitator. And my dad had all three of those qualities, to the nth degree. And he could inspire people, and he could win their trust. And one of the reasons he could win their trust was that he really listened to people. When he went into a community he didn't go in with the answers because he knew he didn't have them. and he also knew that in the Mexican-American communities in the late 1940's and the 1950's that he had one strike against him cause he was white. And there was some built-in mistrust of white people. So he had to prove by his actions, by the way he related to people, and by the track record that the Community Service Organization began to build. He wasn't afraid of controversy. As a matter of fact he relished controversy. He loved nothing better than a good fight. And to after the meanest, biggest baddest bully on the block. And help people strategize and plan, and go out and have fun doing it. So people loved to work with him.

10:40:54 What were your earliest recollections of a big fight, a good fight?

10:41:02 I'd say the Di Giorgio fight. I was a teenager, just finishing my first year of college. And uh, I came back for the summer to the San Joaquin Valley, and went down into Delano, and Arvin, Lamont, where my older brother Rob had been born in 1940 in the Sunset Labor Camp that Steinbeck wrote about, cause my dad was working there in the 1940's. And Di Giorgio was the biggest corporate grower in California and had just invited the Teamsters in and signed a sweetheart deal with the Teamsters. And had been forced because of political pressure to agree to an election. And in addition to Di Giorgio, the other big bully there was a guy named Jesse Marquis, who was the big Mayordomo, the big foreman, who intimidated the hell out of people, because he'd fire 'em, he'd threaten physical violence. And they also had a company store. And one of the things my dad did was use humor and ridicule to bring this big bully down to size. It was his idea to start publishing a daily Mosquito Zumbador, which I guess in Spanish means the zooming, zinging, stinging mosquito. And that would publish the daily chisme, or funny story that would come from the workers. And then, so they began to poke fun at Marquis. And that's when he began to lose his power. People could laugh at him. He didn't know what to do with that. And in the end, against all the odds, and all the big national, remember CBS commentator, Terry Drinkwater, was predicting that the powerful Teamsters were gonna win this election and the farmworkers didn't have a chance. Well he didn't know what he was up against. He was up against my dad. He was up against Chavez, and a lot of farmworkers whose loyalties were deep and strong and would come out on election day.

10:43:00 Now you said that a good organizer could inspire...when your dad met Cesar did he think he would have to draw him out? Or did he recognize the passion?

10:43:15 Well they almost never met. My dad heard about Cesar and Helen Chavez, because in a community he'd be talking to people and asking well who might be interested in doing something to change their community and the lives of their kids. And a public health nurse told him about Cesar and Helen Chavez. So this was going to be one more couple that he'd go talk to. And somehow Cesar heard he was coming and, uh, thought it was going to be another anthropologist from Stanford or San Jose State coming down to ask Mexicans why they had so many babies and ate tortillas and beans. He wanted to have nothing to do with another study. So he told Helen to tell this guy Ross that he wasn't home. And he waited across the street I believe at his brother Richard's house. Then he came a second night. Then again Helen lied for Cesar. And as my dad left he said, well I'll, I'll come back tomorrow night. So Helen sensed something real about my dad, and said, "listen Cesar I'm not going to lie for you one more time, if you don't want to talk to him, you tell him." So Cesar finally agreed to talk to him but even then he didn't trust him. And my dad began to talk to him and ask him if he'd invite some people over to have a house meeting. Which was the technique that my dad had begun to use many years before, to bring people together in the privacy of their own homes, with their friends, who they'd have more confidence, wouldn't be afraid of employers or other people intimidating them for getting organized. So Cesar had a plan. And the plan was, he was a smoker at the time. He was going to take a cigarette

from his left hand to his right, and at that signal, one of the guys, and he ran with a tough crowd, guys who had been at San Quentin, and you know, pachucos, and one of these guys was gonna basically tell my dad to get lost and get the hell out of there. My dad had no idea Cesar had this plan...

10:45:11 ...So he comes in, and my dad began to tell the story of the Bloody Christmas case. This was a case in East L.A., Boyle Heights, on Christmas Eve, when a couple of young Mexican-American veterans were taken out of a bar by the cops one night, actually they were standing in front of the bar. The cops pick them up for no reason, take 'em in and beat 'em bloody all night long. And the Community Service Organization, which my dad was the organizer for, took that fight on, and for the first time in L.A. history, this is like in 1949, a police brutality case was not only prosecuted, but won, and those cops were sent to prison. And that story had spread like wild-fire through every colonia in California. So when my dad began to paint the picture of how you build power, Cesar told me and many others later, that a light went off in his mind, "wow, it's so simple, you could really bring about significant change by organizing." So Cesar forgot all about, he got all caught up in this story, and forgot about the signal. The guy, who's a little bit drunk too, and the guy began to get a little bit restless, says you, had to change the plan, and walk him outside, and then get back to the story. Now my dad had another meeting that night, and Cesar went with him that night and for the next three weeks. Uh, and at the time Cesar didn't write well enough to be a registrar of voters, so he did something even better, and that was become the whip of the other registrars and he made sure that they went out every night and registered people to vote.

10:46:52 Now, he met not only Cesar, but he met Dolores.

10:47:95 Well I heard stories later that, uh, Dolores was suspicious of my dad. There's a lot of red-baiting. This is the middle of the McCarthy period and my dad is out organizing all over California and helping stir things up and take on the most controversial issues, whether it was discrimination in the schools or police brutality. Uh, so there were those who accused him of being a communist. So Dolores checked him out. She had somebody who had a contact in the F.B.I. So the answer came back "no, the guys not a communist." So after she checked him out, she agreed to work with him. So again, she told me one time that, my dad was out helping people get registered and, uh, she was single at the time, so anybody who wanted to date Dolores had to go with her to register voters. And, uh, so they worked together for many, many years. And in a book that he completed, he wrote about her, uh, the chapter on Dolores was entitled, I have to stop here for a second...The chapter on Dolores Huerta was entitled, "Woman in Motion," which captures Dolores, cause you're always looking for Dolores, cause she's always in the next town stirring it up, educating people and agitating and organizing, and uh, she was the first woman hired to be an organizer in the Industrial Areas Foundation history, and that was probably early 1950's. My dad hired her to be the, about a year after he hired Cesar.

10:48:52 Now, talk a little bit about...organizing communities, farmworkers.

10:49:07 Well I think the, one of the most important parts of it...

10:49:20 ...Housemeetings were especially important in the early organizing among farmworkers, because there was so much fear. Organizing in most farmworkers minds meant strikes, and the history of organizing, and the history of strikes in California, farmworker history had been a bloody and a brutal one, and they had never won. There'd been a lot of strikes in the thirties and the forties, but the farmworkers in the end lost. So, even the idea, [PIC ROLL OFF] the word union was a word that Cesar didn't even use in the first couple years.

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11:00:10 Fred we were talking about that element of fear.

11:00:19 Because of the past history, of strikes being bro-, broken, of farmworkers losing their jobs, or being blacklisted, which meant they couldn't get a job, uh, farmworkers, if you were going to talk to them you need to do it in private. You didn't go out and have a mass rally and announce that you were going to have an organizing drive, because if you did, every who showed up would be on a blacklist and then no one else would want to talk to you. And Cesar understood this. So when he found a farmworker who was interested, he'd, he'd ask if they would invite a few of their friends over, from their work crew or from other farms to talk about what was going on in the fields. So you have several things happening at house meetings. One, you've got a part-time organizer, the person who's agreed to call the meeting. You're trading a lot on their credibility and the relationships that they have built up, with their friends and co-workers. And it's small enough, cause you only should have maybe six to ten people at this

meeting, because you're looking for leaders. And you're also looking for anger. You want to draw people out, get them to tell their story. Find out what they're angry about, what they'd be willing to organize for. What their hopes and dreams are. What kind of changes they want to see. What do they want to make happen. And at a house meeting, you can get at people's passion if you do it right, if you really listen to their story.

11:02:05 Now, how did you father come to organize farm labor in California?

11:02:13 Well, the Depression. He couldn't get a job as a teacher, and there was a job working with farmworkers in the Roosevelt administration. And so he took it. But he also, one of the things, one of the first things he did was go out and tie carrots, because he wanted to find out what farmworkers lives were like. The people he was working with. And at that time a lot of the farmworkers were Okies, coming in literally from Oklahoma. This was the Woody Guthrie days. My dad met, and got to know Woody Guthrie. And Eleanor Roosevelt came out, being the eyes and ears of FDR, came out to the ranches in the San Joaquin Valley, my dad took her around to see how horrible the conditions were. So, it was the experience of the Depression that, when my dad decided he wanted to go work with poor people, and one of the groups that was worse of in our society at the time, uh, were farmworkers.

11:03:22 Now, he also believed in labor organizing, voter registration, citizenship campaigns, what was the philosophy behind that?

11:03:32 Power. My dad understood, in a very fundamental way, that poor people, farmworkers, were never going to be able to change anything in their lives unless and until they began to build more power. So he would paint a very simple picture, and that's what the growers and wealthy people have, and that's how they get what they want from politicians and business leaders. Politicians need two things to win: they need money and they need votes. And in almost every community he would start organizing in, most poor people didn't have votes. We knew they didn't have any money. What they had access to was the votes, if they became citizens and if they became registered to vote. Finally, if they turned out to vote in big numbers. And the other element, was to learn to hold every politician, regardless of their political party or race, to hold them accountable. And to make 'em, put 'em on the spot and have 'em make commitments. One of the first times I saw politicians put on the spot, I was 16 years old, this was the summer of 1964, I was spending the summer with my dad in Guadalupe, Arizona. Little town south of Phoenix, of about 7,000 people of about half Yaqui Indian and half Mexican-American, and there was a local Republican member of the Board of Supervisors, and he had never come out to Guadalupe, he didn't give a damn about Guadalupe, cause they weren't registered to vote. Well after a few months of a house meeting drive, and a voter registration drive, they registered 900 new people to vote. That got his attention. He was curious. He wanted their votes. He met with them. And the night that I saw him, the sun was setting in this little desert town, and they were having their first town meeting ever. For the GO organization, the Guadalupe organization. And men and women for the first time in their lives are standing up and they're putting this politician on the spot. Cause he had made a number of promises to them. He's promised 10 miles of paved

streets, and 30 new stop signs, and hire somebody locally as the deputy sheriff, and take the post office out of the liquor store, and this was report card time. And he had begun to deliver. So even though he was a Republican, the question was, are you delivering? And he had begun to deliver. And people began to feel their power.

11:06:16 Do you have a recollection of similar experiences of people discovering their power with the farmworkers?

11:06:37 Well, the foreman I was talking about earlier, Jesse Marquez. Went from absolute fear and terror of someone who was in power, to laughing at him, and then, having the guts to vote against the wishes of their employer, Di Giorgio, who was openly in bed with the Teamsters. And essentially, what the organizing meant was that farmworkers for the first time would be electing their own stewards, developing their own contract demands, and holding their employer accountable. Because it was about bringing democracy and economic justice into the fields...And a lot of politicians ended up feeling the sting of farmworkers organizing, and not just in rural areas...

11:07:27 ...I mean the first time I remember going out, in 1968, in Cesar's fast, I went down to meet my dad, and Cesar asked my dad to lead a registration drive in East L.A. cause Bobby Kennedy had just announced to, his candidacy for President of the United States. And this was the first of what would be many, many campaigns that farmworkers would help organize in the cities of California. Because there was a much bigger Latino vote potential in the urban areas than there was in the valleys. So hundreds

and hundreds of farmworkers would stream into East L.A., and to San Jose, and San Diego, to help register and the to turn out people to vote, and to hold politicians accountable.

11:08:11 Recollections of how well Cesar understood power?

11:08:17 Well, like I said, what he said, what Cesar told me was that when he first heard my dad tell that story of Bloody Christmas, and that the reason that they won that battle with L.A. cops and that they made history, was that they had built up enough political power to make it happen. And that's what, that picture of power, is what Cesar got immediately. And when Cesar made history in this country by being the first to organize farmworkers, he did it because he had a very keen sense of power. He understood that if he solely relied on a strike strategy, he'd never win. He went up against all the conventional wisdom by developing the boycott strategy. And that was building a whole different kind of power, crossing racial lines and economic lines, and relying on middle class Anglo consumers across the country, and church people, and students, the idealists on the campuses across the country. So that something like 17 or 18 million Americans, or more, boycotted grapes.

11:09:38 Criticism of Cesar and the boycott, if you concentrate on the boycott solely and forget organizing, then things fall apart?

11:09:55 You've got to have both. And the reason that the grape boycott, and the lettuce boycott, and the Gallo boycotts were successful, was that farmworkers, thousands of farmworkers had gone out on strike. And in the summer of '73 something like 3500 were arrested, two were killed that

summer, and hundreds were beaten bloody by the cops and the Teamster goons. And those photos and the footage from those bloody strikes, we were able to take out into the cities across the country and into Canada and into Europe. So when we said there was blood on those grapes, we meant it. So the boycott weapon is far more powerful when it's based on strikes and farmworkers organizing.

CR 90, SR 43

11:11:24 Correspondence between your dad and Cesar, the bond between them?

11:11:36 Well, I think, one is the historical context of the period that they were organizing in. They were organizing in the middle of the McCarthy period. So every community that they would go into there was suspicion that they would have to overcome, there would be attacks and there would be people within their own community that would accuse Cesar, and, or my dad of being communist. So they were pioneers, and together, along with Dolores, and Gilbert Padilla and others, they organized something like 32 chapters of community service organizations here in California, and in Arizona, against all odds, on a shoestring budget. So anytime you're out, really, in a pioneer situation, uh, getting into a lot of fights, and going up against a lot of opposition, there's a natural bond that draws you together. Cesar was my dad's best friend. And he was Cesar's first mentor. So there was that bond, and that closeness. And they knew how tough it was to go in. And, they had a theory that all organizing is re-organizing...

11:13:14 ...And, I wish I could have been there. There was one time when the two of them went back into Boyle Heights, East Los Angeles, where the chapter had kinda gone, had dipped down in membership. So the two of them go back, and maybe this is 1955 or something. And I got 'em both to tell me the story, but, uh, they go through the 3 X 5 cards, and probably a shoebox full of the old members. And Cesar got on the phone and said, "listen, this is Cesar Chavez, and Fred Ross and I are here, we're kicking off a new organizing drive, and would you renew your membership?" and as soon as, you know, Mrs. Martinez would say "yes," Cesar would give my dad the card, and he'd race out and go pick up the dues. Then they'd trade off, my dad would get on the phone. And then they'd do a house meeting drive, and all of a sudden they'd be filling the Euclid School with six or seven hundred people. And they'd be off, and people would be choosing what issues they wanted to organize around, or fight around, and literally, they were helping to revive one of those organizations. So, it was fighting against the odds, all over California, when most people said it couldn't be done, they were doing it.

11:14:32 Organizing in the fields, did your dad ever tell you what went through his head when he would walk in amongst a bunch of Mexicans, and Latinos?

11:14:48 Well, by the time he rejoined Cesar, because Cesar went out on his own from '62 to '65, and it wasn't until the march to Sacramento, Easter of '66 that Cesar asked my dad if he would come back and lead the organizing drive, and train organizers, in the Valley. By '65 my dad had been working with Mexican-Americans and Filipinos and African-

Americans for more than 20, 25 years, so by that time it wasn't really an issue. But in the early days, he knew he had to go, one person at a time, and to win people's trust. He was very aware of it. But he also knew that the best way to do it was to be real and to be honest, to be direct. And to treat people the same...

11:15:46 ...And to expect the same from people. That if they were to get involved in organizing, there was going to be accountability, and you're going to have to produce. My dad was a big believer in that. He was real patient. But if people were not holding up their end of the bargain, he would lose patience. He's got a saying that if somebody tells you "maybe," it's just a polite way of saying "triple no," it's the worst thing that somebody can tell you is "maybe." So he understood human nature. And one of the things that fascinated him with organizing was that you're always learning something new about human nature. About what makes people tick. What motivates them. How to drive their anger, how to get them to act on what they're angry about. How to get 'em to recapture that capacity to dream about how things could be, if they decided to organize.

11:16:58 What did going to war mean?

11:17:05 It meant going against the biggest and baddest, like Di Giorgio.

11:17:13 What going to war meant was like, the Salinas strike for example, in 1970, 25 years ago. The growers in the Salinas valley signed overnight sweetheart contracts, 24 hours after the grape contracts were signed, in Delano. And Cesar called my dad and said, "listen, we're about to go into a general strike across the Salinas Valley, and I need you. We're

going to war.” A few years earlier it had been Giumarra, the biggest grape grower in California. They were going to go on a big strike against Giumarra. He asked my dad to come back. “Would you help lead the strike?”

11:17:59 A call to arms?

11:18:05 Yeah, a non-violent call to arms. We’re going all out, until we win. And they both had that characteristic of patience.

11:18:17 When did you become involved?

11:18:26 Well, I had known Cesar Chavez since I was a little boy, and I was at high school I remember when a friend of mine, from my school, and I, helped, it was like around 1963, or ‘64. Cesar came up and needed help getting a printing press that my dad helped him get. And I was fascinated by the fact that he was organizing farmworkers, and in my first year of college he came back to Syracuse, it was a national Poor Peoples’ Conference, and, uh, a few months later he was literally leading a march through the valley, to Sacramento, and I decided that I wanted to spend my first summer after college learning how to organize. I had spent some time with my dad in Arizona a few summers before. And I think that’s when I first realized that organizing was in my blood. And here my dad was one of my heroes, and Cesar was my other hero, and they both, had, were about, were involved in a bid war against Di Giorgio, and I wanted a piece of the action, I wanted to see what it was like. So I went down. In the summer of 1966.

11:19:39 What did you find?

11:19:40 I found my life's work. Ah, it was a big drama. It was just a real live drama. And you had the Teamsters on one side, and you had the growers on the same side with them. And every day there was a conflict. Not violence every day, but there was some violence. But the Teamster organizers would be out there, and our organizers would be out there. And I found a system like the feudal system. Di Giorgio had workers segregated by race. There was a Mexican-American crew separate from a Puerto Rican crew, there was a Filipino crew and there was a black crew and a white crew. There was a company store and the Puerto Ricans were the most militant. There was a woman who was their leader. And they would be penalized by Di Giorgio for being so militant. And the way that they would pay a price, they'd be sent out to the worst fields, and when you're picking piece rate, if you get sent out to fields that have been picked a few times, you're not, you're gonna earn a lot less money. But I also began to see what building power was about...

11:20:54 ...That it was a very slow, methodical process. My dad would hold three meetings a day with the organizers. First thing in the morning, to plan what they, the organizers were going to do at noontime, cause that's when you go to the fields and talk to workers during lunch. Debrief with the organizers after noontime. Plan which workers you're gonna go see in the afternoon, the early evening, in their homes, or in the camps. Come back, nine or ten o'clock at night, report back in. What happened? What are you learning? What's happening in each crew? Are we winning? Are we losing? What are the problems? What are the questions? What's working?

What's the chisme? What's the rumor? What can we use for the, tomorrow's mosquito zumbador. So I learned about the importance of detail, and patience, and persistence, and focus. My dad, I think, is the most focused organizer I ever met. And you need complete and total, undivided attention when you're in the middle of a war. And that's what these campaigns were.

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11:30:10 So in 1970 you were in Salinas, you were just fresh out of college...

11:30:21 Well, I wasn't heading up the Salinas strike. Cesar asked me about ten days after I got there if I'd go down and head up the strike in Santa Maria, which was 35,000 workers, and I gulped, and I said, "you think I can do it?" "Yeah, you can do it." But I've never been involved in anything like Salinas. The farmworkers in Salinas were already organized before we got there. They had been quietly and patiently organizing for several years, they'd been signing cards at the border, they'd been signing cards. They'd been waiting for the grape strike to get over, because they wanted a union too. And they were so angry that the Teamsters had come in and signed these rotten contracts given 'em about a nickel an hour raise over five years, that they were just chompin' at the bit to take action. So really, our job was to focus and mobilize the energy and the anger...

11:31:11 ...And the first thing we were doing was signing people up on new authorization cards, and there was a planned march to Hartnell College

where workers would vote on a strike. So we were going, it was like coming into a revolutionary situation almost. People ready to totally overthrow the grower dominated system. And there were these red and black and white banners all over the Salinas Valley just coming out of nowhere, on backs of trucks and cars, and, uh, kind of spoiled you as an organizer. If you weren't careful you would think you were such a great organizer, that's why all these people were coming out, but that wasn't it....

11:31:59 ...These farmworkers were, it was a situation ready to explode. Uh, and it did explode. Again, the Teamsters brought out their goons, and they were packing weapons. They beat Jerry Cohen unconscious. Cohen was the chief attorney for the farmworkers. Some big goon about 6'5, weighing about 300 pounds. Farmworkers were being knocked around and beaten by sheriffs and Teamsters. I re- the story, my father was in a motel room with Bill Kircher who was the director of organizing for the AFL-CIO. And the Teamsters were threatening the both of them. And luckily, the call had gone out to the longshore union here in San Francisco, and the seafarers, to bring in some reinforcements. Guys who were almost as big as the Teamsters to kind of even the odds a little bit, and to lessen the chances of violence. But people's lives were in danger. And then the farmworkers walked out on strike. More that 10,000 farmworkers in Salinas just shut that valley down.

11:33:22 You had some great victories in Salinas during that period, but in 1973, something changed. What happened?

11:33:32 Well, in '73 the grape growers stabbed the Farmworkers Union in the back. They went back to their pals the Teamsters, and brought in the Teamsters and signed sweetheart agreements, and Gallo did too. And overnight, the membership dwindled down to next to nothing. But it provoked strikes all across California. Uh, and more than 35,000 farmworkers went to jail that summer. And hundreds of religious priests and sisters and religious of all faiths, Protestant, Catholic and Jewish. Dorothy Day came out. I remember meeting her for the first time in Delano, and someone asked her, why are you here? She said "I'm here to go to jail." And she did. She went to Fresno. And she joined hundreds of others who went to jail in solidarity with the farmworkers...

11:34:29 ...What was extraordinary was that at the time, from '73 to '75, most of the national commentators were counting the Farmworkers Union out. There was a big article in the New York Times Magazine saying, yes, Chavez is a very charismatic leader, and it was a wonderful cause, but the Teamsters were just too rich and too powerful and this cause was over. And that made a lot of farmworkers and organizers real mad. And that was one of the reasons I came up with the idea of doing a march on Gallo in 1975. I thought it was, we needed to do something really public and dramatic, to show the world the farmworkers were far from dead. And at first, most people thought, oh, a march really isn't a very good idea. But Cesar agreed with me, and supported the idea. And at first we thought we'd be lucky to get about 5,000 people to march with us. Well, by the end of that march, that went from, first from San Francisco, and Luis Valdez and Teatro Campesino came out, and Congressman Phil Burton and the head of the AFL-CIO, and a lot of the supporters who had been with the

farmworkers had an opportunity to come out and stand with them again. And farmworkers came from Salinas and from Stockton and from Delano. And by the final day more than 20,000 people from all across California flooded Modesto, the Gallo headquarters...

11:36:06 ...And by that action we got a reaction. We got two reactions. One was from Gallo. The first day of the march they bought a big banner, they put on the side of the St. Francis hotel in Union Square, where we kicked off the march. They said, "Cesar you're going to the wrong place. You ought to go to Sacramento and get a law." Well that locked Gallo into a public support for free and fair elections for farmworkers in the fields. Jerry Brown was looking at the situation to see, how much support did the farmworkers have? It was a test. Well, it was clear by the end of that march, that we had a lot of support. That we were alive and kicking. And a few months later, we won historic legislation in Sacramento. Some of the growers had to support that legislation, because they had been mouthing the platitudes about free and fair elections and they had to put up or shut up. And that was, kicked off the revival of the union in the fields.

11:37:03 How significant was that act?

11:37:11 Well just as the Wagner Act for industrial labor in the 30's was the catalyst for organizing in this country, the Farm Labor Relations Act was the catalyst for organizing all across California. And I believe there were more than 400 elections in the first twelve months. Thousands and thousands of farmworkers, for the first time in history, had the right to vote for the union of their choice. And through non-violent means, the

farmworkers were able to kick the Teamsters out of the fields, and send a message to the Teamsters and the growers that they wanted their own union, and that was the United Farmworkers Union.

11:37:54 Now, in the late '70's and early '80's, things changed.

11:38:08 Well I think one of the things that happened was that Jerry Brown was no longer governor. And there was a hostile Republican administration, led by Deukmajian, and his lackeys, Sterling and others, running the Labor Relations Act. So instead of swift justice, for example, when farmworkers were fired unfairly, when the Act was being enforced, they'd not only get their job back, they'd get back wages. With Deukmajian, I think there was a case that took 20 years to finally settle. Just last year, the worker finally got paid. Well that's the kind of thing that kills your organizing drive. The people are afraid, and they don't have enough reasons to hope. They're not going to organize.

11:39:05 So what do you think the message was that Cesar got from all that?

11:39:21 I think that Cesar realized that he was in for one more very long haul of a hostile political climate, and that striking in the fields was not going to be effective. That as long as the act wasn't being (PIC ROLL OFF)

SR 44

11:40:03 Cesar in for a long haul. Tell me that story again?

11:40:15 Well the union was up against a very hostile governor, Deukmajian, who was in the pocket of the growers, who promised the growers when he ran for governor that he would basically decimate the LRA, the Labor Relations Act, and the best way to do that was by not enforcing it. Reagan had just been elected President, so the political climate had taken a dramatic turn to the right. So there was going to be a hostile political climate in the 80's. Cesar made the judgment that he really needed to dig in for a long, long haul of a hostile political climate, and once again go back to the boycott.

11:40:58 Period when your dad was teaching people to organize, but in the end there were no people to organize, what was your father's reaction?

11:41:25 Cesar would call on my dad to do special projects. Uh, as I said he would usually call on him when it was time to go to war. So, in the '80's, um, Cesar called on him more rarely, cause it was a different stage in the struggle. And my dad would, whenever Cesar would ask him to help train the organizers, he would do it. My dad was one who understood the nature of patience, and if there ever was someone who was in it for the long haul, it was my dad.

11:42:14 What drove your dad?

11:42:34 He had a lot of anger about injustice. And he just couldn't live with himself if he wasn't doing something about it. So he was, and there was plenty around. There was a reporter who once likened him to Gary Cooper in High Noon. Coming into town and taking on the biggest baddest

bully. But he was not a solo operator, like a Gary Cooper. What he did was go out and teach people, and train people, how they could do it for themselves, cause he understood that would have a, one, that's a lot more respectful of people. And even more important, it's a lot more enduring, cause when you're gone, you want to leave something important in your place. So he left thousands and thousands of people. Ordinary people who learned how to do extraordinary things. Cause they learned about power, and how to use it. And how to build it, and how to strategize. And how to fight...

11:43:55 ...And that burning anger inside of him, that drove him, that flame, didn't go out till he died. He was training organizers with me in the summer of 1988, when he was 78 years old, and that was the last summer that he could do that, because he, he had Alzheimer's the following year. But as long as he could, he was out there patiently going out, he was 78, he was going out with organizers to their house meetings, and then debriefing them afterward, telling them what went well, what didn't, how they could improve, organizers who were like, 50, 60 years younger than he was, were still learning from a master, in the summer of '88.

11:44:54 Spiritual and personal level, who was Cesar to your father, and who was your father to Cesar?

11:45:24 Cesar, for my father, I think was, uh, the organizer that he worked with and trained, that he was the proudest of, that he felt the closest to. So there was both a strong personal bond, a friendship, and camaraderie, a deep, deep bond. And, from talking with Cesar, and listening to him, and

from looking at some of the letters they wrote to each other, uh, which I looked at closely in the the days before my father's memorial service in 1992, letters between these two men, written at, probably the toughest period of Cesar's organizing. When he was quietly organizing farmworkers, and nobody was paying him a salary. And my father and a few others were sending him, ten, fifteen dollars a month whenever they could. And my dad understood how tough that was, and how courageous of Cesar it was to go do it...

11:46:43 And Cesar at a real deep level looked to my dad as the one person in the world that he could really spill his guts to, about what he was going through. Not just the highlights and the victories, but the defeats and the disappointments. and people who didn't come through. So in a way, they were almost like brothers. And my dad was the older brother.

11:47:27 And here you are following in your father's footsteps. What did your father leave you?

11:47:37 He taught me how to organize. He taught me, as my mom did, about justice. And he also taught me that it was a lot of fun. That, to live out your life's passion, not only is meaningful, but it can be a lot of fun. So when I wake up in the morning, to go organize, I look forward to it. He left me a legacy that I'm immensely proud of, cause what he taught me was "do something important with your life, go organize for justice, help people learn about how to build power, take risks, and go out looking for the biggest, baddest bully on the block, and figure out a way to bring him down to size."

11:48:44 Here you are, 40 years later, we're in the '90's...

11:49:06 Well all organizing is re-organizing. Corporations re-organize. People in the poorest communities have got to re-organize. There are new realities out there. Just isn't the late '40's Mexican-Americans who are being targeted, here in the 1990's we've got problems with 187, in California, which was really the symbol of Pete Wilson and others, racial scapegoating. So it's time to re-organize. So I'm involved right now with the network of organizations that both my dad and Cesar Chavez worked for, the Industrial Areas Foundation here in California. And we're involved in a major active citizenship campaign, meaning we're organizing new immigrants to become politically involved, and to learn how to be leaders in their own communities, and to build power. Because it's either organize money, or organize people, two forms of power. And we're out organizing people, so the politicians and others who are engaging in racial scapegoating now, will be afraid to after hundreds of thousands of new people become voters, and not only voters, but active in their community, day in and day out. Year in and year out.

11:50:43 But isn't there a certain frustration... that your dad was out there organizing for fifty years and here we are starting over again?

11:50:56 Sometimes I do [PIC ROLL OFF] get frustrated, yeah. And that's when I get reminded that this is the long haul, and there are going to be victories and defeats. But unless we're out there every day organizing, there won't be any victories. And we're building on the organizing that's gone before.