

## Ed Frankel 1965–1968

## In the Lap of the Angel of History

*“It is our task, to imprint this temporary, perishable earth into ourselves so deeply, so painfully and passionately, that its essence can arise again, ‘invisibly’ inside us.”*  
*(Rainer Maria Rilke, Notes to The Duino Elegies)*

*Our only virtue is to keep alive the memory of whatever has affected us whose only way to say thank you and good-bye is by this act of magic, of storing in our silence whatever we have loved.”*  
*(Carlos Castaneda)*

I can count on my right hand the big things in my life that I can look back on and know they were 100 percent right. Going to Delano and working on the farmworkers' strike is one of them.

I look through a small cardboard box that I keep in the back of my closet: A Western Union telegraph message, Delano to Detroit, from Reverend Jim Drake, dated April 6, 1966: “Schenley signs recognition of NFWA. Release News Statement. See you in Sacramento”; a beat-up, faded red-and-white NFWA membership card dated October 1965, signed by Cesar and Tony Orendain; a United Farm Workers Organizing Committee membership card from 1967, signed by Cesar and Larry Itliong; John Lewis’s thin chapbook of photographs *From This Earth* in its rough brown cover. I open it to the middle. There’s my ex-wife, Ida Cousino, Mack Lyons, Bill and Irene Chandler, Luis Valdez, Fred Ross, Manuel Chavez, Cesar, Doug Adair, Alex Hoffman. It’s a meeting during the first DiGiorgio campaign. Here’s Gene Nelson’s 1965 rush-job first book about the strike, *Delano*; a black-and-white NFWA button, a red UFWOC button, a black-and-white picket captain button. A letter of introduction from Cesar that I used in Detroit during the Schenley time and again during DiGiorgio boycotts.

A copy of the *St. Louis Labor Tribune* shows Macario Bustos, officials from Meat Cutters Local 88, and me sitting around a table talking. The caption reads, “Farm Workers Will Launch Boycott In St. Louis, Business Reps told.” Another photo shows Jerry Vera Cruz, the secretary-treasurer of the L.A. Teamster Local 595 (one of the few teamster locals that stuck by the union), Bill Gilbert, head of AFL-CIO organizing for Los Angeles County, and me on a picket line being interviewed by CBS News. There are also a couple of old *Malcriados*, from 1965. In one of them, I’m wearing sunglasses and a Levi’s jacket with a union button on the collar. A pack of union sign-up cards for Giumarra are in one top pocket, a pack of Pall Malls in the other. I’m looking down at a table and smoking. That’s it.

But opening the box sparks an endless association of memories: smells, images, sounds, colors, tastes, textures, and feelings begin to emerge. The faint tang of purple mimeograph ink. *I haven’t*

*smelled that in 20 years*, the sound of a hand-cranked mimeograph machine, the feel of the slick, special paper, the clicking of a typewriter typing a mimeo stencil, as delicate as tissue paper. *Handle it carefully; if it wrinkles, the flyers will be useless.* I see John Shroyer and me struggling with *El Mosquito Zumbidor* (*the Buzzing Mosquito*), our jury-rigged bilingual weekly newsletter for the workers on the DiGiorgio Ranch in Marysville and Yuba City that we were trying to organize. Many of the shed workers and truck drivers are Anglos, so tall, blond, lanky John has his work cut out for him. I'm translating *El Mosquito* into Spanish and then Manuel Chavez or Eliseo Medina will clean it up. John is tracing the goofy-looking *Mosquito* logo that we came up with, the closest we could come to the notion of a gadfly.

Fear. The smell of it. The taste of it. The sickening black ball in my stomach. My knees shaking when the Texas Rangers pulled Eliseo and me over on that back road. How everything seemed to shift into slow motion.

Oranges, the smell envelops me like perfume. I'm driving through corridors of orange groves.

Food cooking in Filipino Hall. Fish, white rice, and bitter melon, an acquired taste. Menudo—tripe with hominy, hot and spicy. An acquired taste. Best on Sunday mornings for *el crudo*—a hangover.

The nauseating smell of a funeral parlor. Candles burning. The waxy touch of Roger Terronez's yellowish skin. He looks almost bull-like in the coffin. My feet hurt. I'm standing my turn at the head of the casket. My first Catholic wake. It's cold outside but the heater is on in Manuel Uranday's car. The whiskey burns my throat.

I recall reading that when Pandora finally shut her magic box, only hope remained—the one source of comfort within our own control. My box of memories is infused with traces of a hope and possibility I haven't felt in years.

It is no wonder that Mnemosyne was queen of the muses for the Greeks. Her name means memory.

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Up in Bill's water tower, in Delano,  
 in the San Joaquin Valley's pastures of plenty,  
 roll-your-own Bull Durhams and pass the bottle round.  
 "What's the word? Thunderbird.  
 What's the price? Fifty twice."  
 Swallow that lump in your throat.  
 Take these blancos, they'll help you stay awake.  
 Drink Dos Equis—bite the lemon and lick the salt.  
 Menudo for the Sunday morning crudo,  
 Pall Malls—no filters. andale pues,  
 sport a Levi's jacket, blue work shirt, and boots.  
 It's 1965. Que viva la Huelga!

Sal si puedes.  
 Anything is possible.  
 Grow out your hair.

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*Fiction is history, human history, or it is nothing. But it is also more than that; it stands on firmer ground, being based on the reality of forms and the observation of social phenomena, whereas history is based on documents, and the reading of print and handwriting—on secondhand impression. Thus fiction is nearer the truth. But let that pass. A historian may be an artist too, and a novelist is a historian, the preserver, the keeper, the expounder of human experience.*

—Joseph Conrad

*“The Greeks saw the future as something that came upon them from behind their backs with the past receding away before their eyes.”*

—Robert Pirsig, *Zen and The Art of Motorcycle Maintenance*

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I look back to the three years I spent in Delano and with the farmworkers’ strike, and I imagine myself in the lap of Walter Benjamin’s *Angel of History*. She has me in her arms and her back is turned to the future. I stare hard toward the past, through the tule fog of the San Joaquin Valley. The fog thins and lifts, and it is September 1965—the peak of the grape harvest and the beginning of the strike. I open a telescope and gaze intently. I am so close to my memories that I can kiss them, but I have no perspective—I see everything from the eyes of a 20-year-old young man, a young man with stars in his eyes and the music of hope and change resonating in his ears. I can feel his joy and pride to be part of La Huelga. But I am frustrated, because when I put down the telescope, I’m left with the perspective and myopic sight of a 58-year-old man watching the young boy’s memories in the distance. Sometimes the people stop what they are doing and look in my direction, as if they hear a voice or sense a presence. Like shy and careful animals, they keep their perfect distance. What do I choose to record? What do I write down? Whose words and perspective do I take? Eddie, the young man? Ed, the older man? How can I ever hope to speak clearly about all this? How can I get it right? This is not the first time I have tried.

Perhaps if I can get a little closer, it will become clearer. I implore the angel to move toward the past, but even as she tries to flap her wings, she can make little progress against the winds of time. Instead of getting closer to the past, we are being blown backwards slowly into the future.

The Angel of History has witnessed it all. She has recorded the past in her memory but it is as if she is mute, and doesn’t speak. Or when she does speak, it is in the chill of a language so foreign I know I will never translate it. Or she speaks in poetry, conundrums, and riddles like the Sibyl at Delphi. Sometimes she reminds me of Cassandra—even if people could hear her every word, no one would believe her. Her memories are like multifaceted jewels, diamonds, Cubist paintings. They reflect in multiple, simultaneous perspectives; sharp, angular facets; and interpenetrating colors, shapes, forms, and dimensions. Many voices are speaking at the same time: Spanish,

English, Tagalog, Ilocano, Portuguese, fragments of Japanese and Arabic. Some voices are singing.

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I worked with the farmworker union from 1965 when the strike began, to 1968. Afterwards, I made a living as a musician, working sporadically. To support my wife and daughter, I worked for three years in East L.A. with the Community Service Organization (CSO), the organization where Cesar first met Fred Ross. In the 1970s, I started a small social-service program in Pasadena, later taught English as a second language, moved around a bit with my family, and finally started college and eventually graduate school.

I have taught English at UCLA for 21 years. When things are going right in the classroom, I tell my disbelieving students that I learn as much as they do, perhaps more. I bring this up because although I went to Delano to help in the farmworkers' struggle, I wound up with the kind of education I would never have gotten in college. I learned so much, perhaps more than I tried to give, and in those days, like so many people who saw the winds of change rustling the wings and blowing up the robes of the Angel of History, I was prepared and willing to give a lot.

The teenagers I grew up with were watching *American Bandstand*, hanging out on the street corners of northeast Philadelphia singing doo wop, and worrying about what kind of glass packs, skirts, and dual exhaust pipes to put on their '57 Chevies. Or they were signing up for classes at Temple University or getting jobs at the Bethlehem Steel mill, the shipyards, and the refineries. While some of them were signing up or being drafted to join the army and ship out to Vietnam, I was signing up farmworkers at the Giumarra and DiGiorgio ranches and worrying about what the Texas Rangers would do the next time we went out on the picket line in Rio Grande.

I saw a world I would never have been privy to otherwise, behind the lace curtain of the American Dream in Delano, Bakersfield, Lamont, Earlimart, McFarland, Pixley, Visalia, Porterville, Gilroy, Hollister, Livingston, Merced, Fresno, and Weedpatch (where the film *Grapes of Wrath* was shot). I went from house to house with Luis Valdez in Earlimart, listened to him talk about Bertolt Brecht and agit-prop theater as he was putting together *El Teatro Campesino*. I helped start the first union hiring hall with Dolores Huerta and "Fats" after Schenley signed the first agricultural workers' union contract. At age 22, I was the union representative for the Gallo, Novitiate, and Franzia ranches. I was sent to Detroit and St. Louis on the boycotts; to Texas with Eliseo Medina, Gilbert Padilla, and Kathy Lynch to help out with the strike; and to Marysville and Yuba City with Manuel Chavez to organize the DiGiorgio Ranch. I met with Mexican unions in Tamaulipas and along the northern Texas-Sonora border to try to keep Mexican nationals from crossing the bridges at Reynosa, Camargo, and Miguel Aleman and breaking the melon strike. I took 20 strikers to L.A. to picket the markets. I fell in love with Ida Cousino.

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It's 2 in the morning and we have just finished loading up the food and clothing. I'm riding in the back of Paul Rosenfeld's 1960 Ford pickup truck that's laboring up the Grapevine on Highway 99, heading for the San Joaquin Valley and Delano. Four of us are huddled under blankets and all

kinds of romantic foolishness is going through my head. I'm excited and nervous. Strikes can mean scabs with baseball bats and axe handles, and I have visions of Woody Guthrie, Tom Joad, Preacher Casey, and as the song goes, the Union Maid "who never was afraid/of goons and ginks and company finks, and deputy sheriffs who made the raids." I'm wondering what I'll do if one of those goons or ginks comes after me with one of those axe handles. More songs come back to me: "The Springhill Mine Disaster" and "The High Sheriff of Hazard," as do movies—*Salt of the Earth* about the Chicano copper strikes in Colorado, and *The Organizer*, with Marcello Mastroianni. I'm recalling civil rights picket lines and demonstrations I've been in. "Remember to take off your jewelry, glasses, and watches. Girls, take the earring out of your ears. Cover your face and nose with the inside of your forearm, and the top of your head with your hand; cross your legs to cover your groin and lie on your back so as not to expose your spine." I remember watching friends being dragged to jail and singing "We Shall Not Be Moved" and "Ain't Gonna Let Nobody Turn Me Round."

We've been bucked and we've been scorned  
 We've been talked about sure's you're born  
 But we'll never turn back  
 No we'll never turn back  
 Until everyone is free.  
 And we've got equality.

Just writing the words still gives me the chills.

We pull off of Highway 99 and up to the NFWA headquarters where we are going to drop off the food and clothes. It's about 5 in the morning and I have to pee, but there's a huge German shepherd barking and circling the truck and no one wants to get down. I spend an hour wiggling and watching a red and orange sun come up from a horizon flat and straight as a razor. I'm a little too embarrassed to pee out of the truck bed since there are two girls with us. Finally a man comes out of the house, calling "*Callate Oso*," and Bear the German shepherd stops trying to chew on the rear tire and goes up on the porch. Julio Hernandez shows us to the bathroom in the Pink House, behind the office where all the volunteers are rolling up their sleeping bags. Then we follow Julio's car to Filipino Hall for breakfast.

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Filipino Hall is where the strikers eat and hold meetings. Breakfast is in a cafeteria-style kitchen where you help yourself to white bread, peanut butter, jam, tortillas, eggs, oatmeal, and coffee from commercial-size urns. Old Filipino farmworkers sit on chairs around the hall smoking cigarettes. Young Filipino men joke and jostle each other. Young white kids are scattered among all the Mexican strikers. Off to picket and then back for lunch: mystery meat, rice, bitter melon, some kind of fish, and Kool-Aid.

I rode out to the fields in the Perrera, a panel truck nicknamed the "Dog Catcher." Mikey Vasquez, the driver, is wearing a cowboy hat with one side pinned up with an NFWA button like an Australian bush ranger, and sitting next to him is a Chicana woman wearing a red bandana and a

pair of binoculars and talking into a CB radio. A skinny blond boy, about 17 years old, is rolling a cigarette from a Bugler bag, and Ron Caplan, Cesar's secretary, all 6 feet, 6 inches of him, is pulling his hair into a short ponytail. He looks like a lumberjack, but when we begin talking it turns out he's a poet and writer from Pittsburgh who has a bad back and can barely lift up his typewriter. He had quit VISTA in Arizona a month or so ago where he and his girlfriend had been "giving out coffee and doughnuts to the Indians." The three of us will become friends. Three months from now, Bob will get dressed in three layers of clothes and Cesar will give him \$50 and a bottle of brandy and Bob will jump one of the trains to find out where the reefer cars with the scab grapes are going. The beginning of the grape boycott. Desperate measures for desperate times, I suppose. A month later, he'll run off with Cesar's new secretary, Jane O'Hare. Several years down the road, I will join Ron at Frontier Press in Pittsburgh, where he will publish small high-quality books and poetry: William Carlos Williams's *Spring and All*, Haniel Long's *If We Can Make It So*, and Alexander Berkman's *Memoirs of a Prison Anarchist* (written while serving a lengthy sentence in jail for shooting Ford Frick during the Carnegie Steel Strike).

The picket line stretches along the side of fields divided by numbered narrow roads: Avenue 36, Avenue 38, Avenue 40. From the crop duster above, it must look like an endless chessboard. The farmworkers are the pawns. Maybe the sheriffs are the black knights. What are the growers—the kings? Who are we? Perhaps the game has changed and we are playing off the board. The rules of engagement no longer hold. Ron tells me that a similar plane had sprayed a group of strikers by the Disputo Ranch last week. Back in the Pink House that night, Marshall Ganz, Augie Lira, and I trade folk songs on Augie's guitar. Monday, before we drive back to LA, I go into the office and ask Dolores Huerta's permission to move up to Delano and join the strike. I head back to L.A., pack all my books into a footlocker, and leave my things with my German uncle, "Gumpy," out in the San Fernando Valley. I packed a duffel bag with a pea coat, a wool cap, (someone said it would get cold in November), a few clothes and books, a leather-bound *Obras Completas*—the poetry, prose, and plays of Garcia Lorca that my grandfather gave me when I left home for California. I was fairly fluent in Spanish.

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At the beginning of the World War II, Franklin D. Roosevelt drafted all of the Filipino armed forces, 140,000 soldiers, into service under the U. S. military. A recession act, passed by Congress shortly after the war, prohibited Filipino veterans from receiving full military benefits for their service. Only recently have the 25,000 or so Filipino veterans who still survive received those benefits. Several thousand live in the United States today. After the war, many Filipino men came to this country to work as farm laborers in the San Joaquin Valley. The Delano grape strike, which began September 8, 1965, was started by the primarily Filipino union, the Agricultural Workers Organizing Committee, AFL-CIO. Two weeks after the Filipinos struck, Cesar Chavez's National Farm Workers Association voted to walk out of the fields. Because many of the Filipino men came alone to the U. S. to work, they never married or returned to their wives in the Philippines.

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Filipino Town, 1965

At night on Main Street—red lights  
 string muted rubies in the tule fog,  
 histories of Three-Card Monte, and Acey Deucey,  
 shy visits to Elena's place behind the Starlight bowling alley,  
 cockfights, knife fights retold in Ilocano, Tagalog, and pidgin English,  
 Escrima dreams, bahala na, whatever happens, happens.  
 Lucky Lucay, Julian Balidoy, Edgar Sulite, Angel Cabaes,  
 winners of purple hearts, silver stars, and government commendations,  
 scouts, point men, coast watchers,  
 slick-haired boys who jitterbugged in pre-war Manila,  
 dove for oysters with goggles made from Coke bottle bottoms  
 in the lagoons of Cebu and Mindanao,  
 led G.I.s from Hollywood and Chicago  
 through the bamboo jungles.

Now they water gardens of winter squash and bitter melon.  
 Men without women, behind the barracks in the labor camp,  
 cook adobo in outdoor kitchens in Earlimart and Delano,  
 fieldpack the ladyfingers, ribeiras and flaming reds.  
 Thin'em, pick'em, pack'em,  
 Nail the lugs shut.  
 Swamp'em into reefer trucks, cold storage, over the Grapevine,  
 south past Castaic Junction into another valley.  
 Angel Cabaes could hammer the fruit crates shut  
 faster than the machine that killed John Henry,  
 The seeds still warm, the flesh of the fruit still trembling.

Now in winter, in chill fog and thicket,  
 in Army surplus parkas,  
 Anting Anting tattoos fade on their calves and chests.  
 Blood tugs from their limbs back to their hearts.  
 They huddle around fires in 50-gallon barrels,  
 searching for their women, they dream  
 Histories of Lapu Lapu,  
 who killed Magellan in his armor, in the shallows,  
 with a fire-hardened wooden stick and a bow and arrow.  
 They walk toward vanishing points and perimeters,  
 pruning shears slung over their shoulders.  
 The straw boss can't get their names right.  
 Asparagus knives and Texas shorties  
 in hands as hard as the soles of your shoes.

During the strike, I hung around the edges of their fires,  
 warmed my hands, darkened

my own soft face over the smoking drums.  
 A heart with two ears, two thin wings flapping,  
 The least of my glorious brothers,  
 the earnest listener of stories,  
 the sidekick, the unspoken son,  
 installing in his silent ear the braveries of others,  
 relics of the future past, their stories,  
 like your telltale mirrors  
 leaning in corridors and hallways,  
 solemn statues draped with sheets.  
 My friends are my flowers,  
 I told you years later,  
 When you asked me why I didn't garden.

I could never tell the story right.  
 My fear, that I took for cowardice,  
 the rising gorge of embarrassed romances,  
 invisible, confused betrayals, a crow for a tongue,  
 clucks and bitters in my throat,  
 A boy looking at the world of men  
 through his thick horn-rimmed glasses.  
 Let yourself off that hook, you told me.  
 We're all looking out the bottoms of soda bottles,  
 All that bleary thick-marbled, shopworn glass.  
 "The dream world isn't much realer than the real world,  
 which isn't terribly goddamn real to begin with."

And Angel Cabales, in the cold storage,  
 who fought his way through five Anglos  
 and laid them out cold  
 with a 20-inch bamboo escrima stick,  
 Edgar Sulite, Julian Balidoy, Lucky Lukay,  
 those slick-haired island boys,  
 their silver stars and faded purple hearts  
 in beat-up wicker suitcases,  
 are as real, now, as this poem,  
 which stand on firmer ground than history.

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As the grape harvest was finishing, someone came up with the idea to find out where the grapes were going in L.A. and to picket the produce terminals, the distributors, or the markets themselves. This might have been after the longshoremen in San Francisco had refused to load scab grapes on a boat, one of the first concrete showings of union solidarity beyond donations of food and



money. And we were still not even a union at the time nor were we affiliated with the AFL-CIO, or anyone else.

We borrowed Ida Cousino's 1963 brown Ford Falcon ("Just for the night, Miz Ida—we'll bring it back in the morning?") and followed an air-conditioned reefer truck out of the fields where it was loaded with table grapes. South on Highway 99, past Bakersfield, up over the Grapevine and into L.A. The driver parked to sleep near the central produce terminal downtown at 6th and Central and we—Manuel Uranday, Pete Cardenas or Robert Bustos, and I—parked close by. When the driver took his load to the cold storage, we dragged signs out of the trunk and threw up a picket line. Teamster swampers, mostly Chicanos, were getting ready to unload the truck. We told them where the grapes came from, and asked them not to unload them. They called their business agent, Big Bill Williams, a big black man from Teamster Local 626 who rolled up in a big black Cadillac an hour later. He told them not to do anything until he checked with Archie Neal, the president of the local. It took several days before the grapes finally got unloaded. We knew we were onto something.

I think Dolores Huerta was in Los Angeles at that time, staying over in East L.A., either with Suzy Villalobos, Cesar's aunt, or with Delfino Varela, an immigration attorney with a house and office on Soto Street that we turned into NFWA's Los Angeles office of sorts. We slept there on the floor in sleeping bags. People were always driving up with boxes of food and clothing. We talked about following the trucks in a more organized way, and someone from SNCC (the Student Nonviolent Coordinating Committee) offered to put a radio in Ida's Falcon and hook us up with short-wave radios in the Delano office. Miz Ida wouldn't mind just a couple of holes in the roof of her new Falcon for the antennae. I don't think we brought her car back for two weeks. *Para la Causa*, Miz Ida.

When we returned to Delano we set up the system. We parked a radio car on the top of the Grapevine. Strikers in Delano would try and follow a reefer truck south and radio us. We would pick up the semi at the Tejon Pass or Castaic Junction, and the strikers would return to Delano, while we followed the truck into L.A. We would sit for hours, cold and tired in Manuel Uranday's big white boat of a Ford Fairlane. A young white boy and a couple of seasoned Chicano farmworkers from Earlimart sharing thermoses of coffee, cold bean burritos, and the occasional joint or benny, just to stay awake. Talking to each other about our very different lives. We raised holy hell throwing up picket lines at the cold storage units at the produce terminal. We sent more strikers down and raised more holy hell. Local 626 couldn't tell its members officially not to unload the grapes, but every time we threw up a picket line, work would stop, union reps would roll up, and there would be long debates and discussions. Many times the swampers would walk away from the load and go back to the hiring hall to wait to be called to another truck and another job. We got a lot of publicity, caused a lot of confusion, and set the stage for the first real secondary boycotts of markets that sold scab grapes.

All the loading and unloading was done during the night when there was room for the semis to move freely through the downtown's deserted streets. Even with the streets mostly empty, if the trucks were pulling doubles, they would stash one in a holding yard or a vacant lot, unload, then come back and switch trailers. When the swampers tried to take the grapes off the truck, we would

stand or sit in front of the back door of the semis to keep the swampers from running their dollies into the trucks and off loading the grapes. Even Dolores Huerta took her share of knocks. During the day, we went around to the unions in town, trying to raise money and support. Dolores was unstoppable. She begged, argued, cajoled, and took whatever she could get. We made all the rounds, waiting in anterooms and speaking at local meetings. We spread news of the strike to the union longshoreman, autoworkers, retail clerks, teamsters, meat cutters and butchers; to the International Ladies Garment Workers Union; to civic organizations like the GI Forum, LULAC, CORE, NAACP; to students at UCLA and East L.A. Junior College. Just give Dolores a podium or an orange crate and forget the microphone. Fats used to call her “Chispas”—Sparky. She reminded me a little of the famous Spanish Civil War Leader La Pasionaria. In 15 minutes, Dolores Huerta could have the toughest roomful of union guys wiping their eyes and reaching for their wallets. She would walk out of a local meeting with \$2000 stuffed into her long secondhand winter coat. I had stars in my eyes for Dolores. I suppose I always will.

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### Up in Bill's Water Tower

#### I

In the San Joaquin Valley's pastures of plenty,  
 from our Lady of Guadalupe's side of the tracks,  
 we dreamed of Joe Hill, and the Wobblies  
 riding the rails through history's pandemonium,  
 We were volunteers and reluctant, conscripted players.  
 Up in the water tower, we sang  
 “Deportees,” “Siete Leguas,” and “De Colores.”  
 Folks who sing and dance together can be dangerous.

We watched another sun drop a scarlet slipstream  
 into fields of Ladyfingers, Ribeiras, Flaming Reds,  
 strung out on wires in their sugary sweat,  
 gilded, and filigreed under dusted green.  
 In the Central Valley's slow motion sweep and stretch,  
 the ten original dimensions had collapsed  
 into petrified histories, heatscapes, and vanishing points,  
 while friends and children worked the perfumed corridors,  
 the corporate orchards and the stoop crops.  
 A widening into some original time.  
 Another pale of settlement.

#### II

Epifanio Camacho's '51 pickup  
 drives past the water tower,  
 A bull for a hood ornament,

tricked out with running lights,  
 hand-painted on the hood in black letters:  
 “When I go I fly,”  
 Cuando me voy me vuelo.

Children in the back of the pickup smile and wave.  
 Born and raised in Earlimart,  
 they’ve never seen the ocean 70 miles away,  
 the other side of Tehachapi.  
 They think the hippies are gypsies.  
 They’ve never eaten in a Denny’s  
 or an International House of Pancakes.  
 They touch my head to see that Jews really don’t have horns.

Camacho’s radio plays corridos and rancheros,  
 “Jacinto Trevino,” in border Spanish,  
 outdrawing the Rangers in Laredo  
 on the wrong side of the border.  
 “Juan Charasquiado,” Johnny Scarface  
 dances a two-step to a norteño accordion.  
 Villa rides—chasing the trains in Irapuato,  
 “Siete Leguas,” his giant bay, lathered in full gallop.  
 The train’s sundial wheels mark what will stiffen into time.  
 The twin smokestacks breathe heavy,  
 like the volcano lovers who will never be reunited.  
 The train hisses to a stop.  
 Villa’s cavalry circling,  
 Federales lined up and shot,  
 passengers searched, jewelry pulled off fingers,  
 the loosened angles of powdered necks  
 Where are your children tonight, Pancho?  
 Where is the Army of the North when we need them?  
 Where is the army of the south?  
 In San Cristobal de Las Casas  
 Zapata sits his horse in the churchyard’s shadow,  
 cocks back his sombrero, one leg over the pommel  
 and searches the sky for rain.

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What I saw of the strike was remarkably, though not entirely, nonviolent. Once, on the picket line at the DiGiorgio ranch, before the first Schenley contract, one of the foremen pulled a gun and someone came up with the idea to make a citizen’s arrest. Ida Cousino was selected, or perhaps she volunteered. She went up to him and put her hand on his arm and said he was under citizen’s arrest. He pushed her away, maybe knocked her down, and then pandemonium began. All the

Mexican strikers loved Miz Ida; she was the sweetheart of the rodeo. She had set up a child-care center in Earlimart and everyone knew her. Manuel Vasquez tore across the picket line and tackled the guard. The sheriffs, who were lined up with their helmets and clubs waded through the crowd that was enveloped in dust, separating ranch foremen, guards, and strikers. Fists were flying, bodies were flying, and the very reverend Jim Drake, head and shoulders above most of us, hands up in the air in supplication, was pleading for everyone to stop. No matter how many times Cesar stressed it, no matter how many times we sang “We Shall Overcome,” every once in a great while, things just fell apart.

At the beginning of the DiGiorgio campaign, one of the hired guards, maybe a teamster, was walking up and down the picket line cursing and insulting everyone’s manhood, challenging anyone to a fight. He was twirling a golf club, but he didn’t look like he’d ever played the game very well. A small Mexican man stepped out of the crowd of strikers and crossed the picket line. He couldn’t have been more than 135 pounds. The guard had him by at least 50 pounds. There was a heated exchange of words, three seconds of sparring, and a quick exchange of *chingazos*. I think the Mexican guy threw one good punch, knocked the guard out, and disappeared back into the crowd. He wasn’t a regular striker, and I never saw him again, but I remember how fast he hit him and how hard the guy dropped.

There were shadows of darker stories. An AFL-CIO organizer had a run-in with the teamsters during the beginning of the DiGiorgio election. They caught up with him at a motel and stuck a broomstick with a nail on the end of it up his rectum. I wasn’t in the inner circle and I never got the details.

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I was most impressed with the practice of nonviolence when I was I was sent to Texas in 1967 with Gil Padilla, Eliseo Medina, and Kathy Lynch. Starr County in southern Texas was like a glitch in time. The first day of the melon strike, Ranger Randall Nye promptly showed up and arrested Gene Nelson. I was told that there was a law making it illegal to be a union organizer. Eliseo and I were in jail before our first week there had finished.

You felt like you were in a John Wayne movie set in the 1800s, except in Rio Grande, the Lone Ranger was not your friend and Jay Silverheels and Clayton Moore were back in Hollywood somewhere, smoking cigarettes behind their dressing trailers. The Rangers in Texas all wore white Stetsons, holsters, and revolvers. For decades, contraband had been smuggled across the Rio Grande: tequila and mezcal, people, marijuana, and later, harder drugs. Because it was illegal to bring a car from the U.S. into Mexico and leave it there, even cars in pieces and sections went across the ankle-deep parts of the river. There was a long history of border conflicts, altercations, and shootouts between “Rinches” and Mexicans throughout the Valle Mágico. Many of the Chicanos kept 22s and shotguns in the back of their pickup trucks to hunt Chachalaca birds down by the Rio Grande. Many of them knew the words to “*El Corrido de Jacinto Trevino*” by heart:

*Cantina de El Elefanta  
Donde el caso sucedio*

*En donde Ignacio Trevino  
Con los Rinches se topo*

*Cuando los primeros tiros  
La cantina quedo sola  
No mas Jacinto Trevino  
Su canana y su pistola*

*Decia Jacinto Trevino  
Con su pistola en su mano  
No corra rinches cobardes  
Con un solo Mexicano*

At the Elephant Saloon  
That's where the events took place  
That's where Jacinto Trevino  
Locked horns with the Rangers

At the sound of the first shots,  
The Saloon was deserted  
Only Ignacio Trevino remained  
With his pistol and his cartridge belt

Then said Jacinto Trevino  
With his pistol in his hand  
"Don't run you cowardly Rangers  
From just one Mexican."

With his pistol in his hand. Nonviolence was a hard sell, but remarkably, it stuck. The only violence I saw during my three months in Texas was on the part of the Rangers, who beat Magdaleno Dimas, one of the strikers, very badly one night.

The sheriffs in Starr County were considerably less intimidating. In fact, in Rio Grande, several of them were Chicanos. We got to know the sheriff, Roberto Pena, and we got to know his jail. I remember what was scratched on one of the walls, maybe a fragment of a homegrown *corrido*, or just some jailhouse poetry.

I'll give a two-dollar bounty  
For the sheriff of Starr County  
And his crooked brand of order  
On the north side of the border.

The community of Chicanos in South Texas must have been a bit ingrown and interrelated because some of the strikers I was in jail with were related to the sheriff. When they didn't like the

food, they started banging on the bars with their cups yelling “*cunado, cunado* (cousin, cousin), if you don’t bring us something decent to eat we’re going to tell your mother.”

The union had set up a picket line at a railroad crossing in one of the nearby towns—Harlingen, I believe. We weren’t blocking the trains nor did we intend to, but when the train approached, carrying fruit from the struck ranches, heavily armed Texas Rangers were riding on it carrying rifles and shotguns. It looked like a scene out of Black Jack Pershing’s Expeditionary Force going into Mexico to chase Pancho Villa. Very military. Maybe the Rangers thought the ghost of Pancho Villa was going to ambush the train and steal the cantaloupes and melons, and this time there would be no wild-goose chases through the Sonora Desert; they were going to get him. A large group of strikers and volunteers had just been arrested. Eliseo Medina, a volunteer from Austin, and I were walking back from our car with more leaflets when the arrests began. We ran back to our car with two Rangers chasing us. We jumped in the car and took off. We saw them running for their patrol car but they never caught us. We stopped a half an hour later, scraped the union stickers off the bumper and put all the union leaflets and flyers in the trunk of the car. We waited until dark and headed back to Rio Grande on the backroads. We called the office but Gilbert Padilla said that there were Rangers all over the place. We went to Doug Adair’s house in MacAllen, where he was publishing the Texas version of the union paper, *El Malcriado*. He had been arrested, but we jimmed open a window and stayed there for a couple of days. When we returned to Rio Grande, Gilbert told us that a Ranger car had been driving around the office all night. A black representative from CORE (the Congress of Racial Equality) was visiting at the time. He had come to express solidarity, see what was going on firsthand, and give us money. He said that watching the Ranger car cruising the office reminded him of the bad days in Mississippi.

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The spirit of the strike in Delano hit its low point during November and December of 1965. “*La apoda*” (the pruning) had begun and the cold tule fog hung over the fields on what seemed like every morning. We still used to picket every day, but the large numbers of workers were gone, and you could hardly see the pruners through the fog. A lot of the volunteers had left, and lots of strikers had found work in other parts of the county that weren’t being struck. The days got shorter and it felt like La Huelga was winding down. Most of the young Filipino strikers were gone by now, but the old Filipino men were on the picket lines like clockwork in their green-hooded Army surplus parkas. Not many of the volunteers hung out with the old Filipino men. They weren’t as flashy, energetic, and colorful as the Chicano strikers. I liked to hear their stories. Tall tales from the Merchant Marines. Jungle war stories from World War II. Stories of knife fights from the fisheries and packing sheds in Alaska. Being taught Escrima and Kali, the Filipino martial art that uses rattan sticks and bladed weapons. The pineapple and sugar cane strikes in Hawaii. I started learning a few words in Filipino, but Julian Balido took me aside one day laughing and shaking his head. “No, no, little brother.” (The Filipinos strikers called everyone brother). “Rudy is teaching you Ilocano. You want to learn *my* dialect—*mano*—Tagalog.” Politics, even among the Filipino strikers was complicated and messy.

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How to get it right? Maybe as Joseph Conrad proposed, history really is secondhand impression, secondhand experience. Maybe fiction and the embellishment of memory are human history. Maybe none of us ever “gets it right.” Over the weeks I compose these words, I am constantly reminded how evanescent, how unreliable memory is. I wonder how much my Filipino friends must have embellished their stories. And now, how I remember those Filipino friends and their stories inaccurately or doctor them up a bit myself; how I am tempted, compelled to smooth out the edges of my own stories, soften the embarrassing moments or leave them out completely, recast myself to look better for posterity, present myself in a more flattering light. I know I am not going to remember accurately; I’m not going to get it 100 percent right. That just isn’t going to happen. My memories, through a young man’s starry eyes, remind me of a Spielberg film, with the honey-colored Vaseline smeared across the lens. I need to reframe my questions. Perhaps what is most essential are the feelings that Julian Balido and I experienced as we stood out in the fog, stamping our feet, blowing on our hands, at one of the entrances to Jack Pandol’s ranch, while Julian told me his stories. Our shared experience in the moment. Whatever it was that we exchanged between us. Dare I call it a form of love? Subception, the unconscious communication of feelings and information between people. Perhaps our actions are what matter. Perhaps it’s the messy, complicated, admixture of all of this.

Some Jews believe that God doesn’t measure us by our thoughts, because we don’t choose our thoughts, but by our deeds, for we can exercise our will over our actions. The German mystic Meister Eckehart said in his first German Sermon, that you couldn’t try and cut a business deal with God. No quid pro quos. No good works exchanged for salvation. God will not be speaking to us soon and most of us won’t even hear Him clearing his throat in the room, as Eckehart claims he once did. You might as well be a mensch, a true man, who does the right thing. Maybe that is better than trying to get it right.

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Just before Christmas, Cesar put Jim Drake in charge of organizing what would become the first nationwide grape boycott. Jim asked me if I would go to Detroit. I was just 21 and I felt like had been selected to go to the moon for NASA.

New Year, 1966. Ida Cousino and I wound up at Cesar and Helen’s house after stopping at People’s for a beer. Richard and Manuel Chavez were there, and the living room was packed with strikers and volunteers. Ida and I even managed a little norteño two-step after another beer or two. Lots of singing and dancing that night. Lots of menudo at Petra’s the next morning.

Two days later, Ida and I took her Falcon to the union garage where they removed the radio and antennae and sealed up the hole in the roof with Bondo. Four new tires and four of us were ready to go back east to the boycott. Me to Detroit, Ida to Cleveland, Bob Fisher to Philadelphia, and Sal Gonzales to Boston. We stuffed the trunk with leaflets,

copies of pictures from the strike that George Ballis had taken, letters of introduction from Cesar, names of people who offered to put us up, a short list of union and church contacts. We each got \$100 and some gas money for the trip. Somewhere around New Mexico, Bob and Sal began to drink “Siete” (Seagram’s Seven) in the back. Ida and I did most of the driving. In Texas, the car wouldn’t start. We jumped it, drove straight through and didn’t shut it off until we got to Chicago, where we went to someone’s house, took showers, and got the car fixed. Then I was dropped in Detroit and Ida, Sal, and Bob headed east. Sal and Bob took buses from Cleveland to Boston and Philadelphia, respectively. Bob stayed with my parents in Philadelphia.

I lived with Eizu Nishiura, a Japanese-American art teacher and painter who had a loft just off the John C. Lodge Expressway near Wayne State University. I contacted unions, student organizations, church groups—whoever would listen. The autoworkers were the key players in Detroit and provided the most assistance. Eventually we were picketing liquor stores and markets that carried Schenley products. Ida used to drive in and visit me every couple of weeks and twice I went to Cleveland. My first romance. Sam Pollock’s meat cutters and butcher workmen took Miz Ida under their powerful wing. A friend of Eizu’s had lent me an old Rambler. I drove to Cleveland once to see Ida in the middle of a snowstorm. We went to a civil rights benefit where a then-very-fat Dick Gregory, with a cigarette and a drink in his hand, told dirty jokes and bantered back and forth about race to a loud and responsive crowd. Someone lent Ida and me an apartment in the all-black Hough district. When Ida and I returned east in several months for the DiGiorgio boycott, we were in the Hough District again when the riots broke out. Fires, sirens, helicopters overhead, gunshots, and shattered glass. We were in the middle of the 10 o’clock CBS News. Fred told us to stay inside and that he and the neighbors would keep an eye on us. Not to worry; we’d be ok.

When the boycott finished and Schenley signed, Jim Drake sent us plane tickets home. Ida drove her car to Detroit, left it there, and we flew back together to Sacramento, for the final day of the big march at the capitol. We were so high, so elated, we could have flown back without the plane. I can’t think of too many times when I felt happier, more complete, or more fulfilled—proud, somehow, to be part of something bigger and more important than myself. Two weeks or so later we were back east again on the DiGiorgio boycott.

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In the early 1980s, Ida and I were living in Venice, California. We were walking down Strong’s Drive, the alley next to the one of the canals. A pile of books was stacked next to a trash can and we looked through them. Ida picked up a big official-looking hardback book, *The State of California House Un-American Activities Committee Report*. She found her name in the index. We read her short profile. It was spooky, unsettling, but it didn’t surprise me. When Ida left the UFW, she had her gallbladder removed and recuperated at Sam and Flo Kushner’s house. Sam was the editor, of *The People’s World*, a Communist newspaper. I was a little surprised my name wasn’t in there as well.



I'm not sure I have the story exactly straight, but I believe it was Sam Kushner who first broke the news of the strike in 1965 by giving the story to the *L.A. Times* after reporting it in *The People's World*, his very small-time, low-circulation newspaper. Sam was in Delano a lot during the early days of the strike, carelessly dressed, smoking his pipe, interviewing people and taking notes in his little reporter's pad. A lot of the early volunteers came with left-wing affiliations.

I wasn't exactly a red diaper baby, but unionism and left-wing politics were in the air in my family. My parents leaned toward a gentle kind of socialism, pink rather than red, but they were never politically active or involved. My grandfather, however, used to march in the Mayday parades in the 1930s. My German Trotskyite uncle, Gumpy, had been in the camps. Before I was 16 I had read Jack London, not just *The Sea Wolf* and his adventure stories, but *The Iron Heel*. Howard Fast's *Spartacus* and *Freedom Road* were on my grandfather's bookshelf. When I lived briefly with Gumpy as a teenager he put me on a crash-course reading regime—Upton Sinclair, Bertolt Brecht, George Orwell's *Down and Out in Paris and London* and *Homage to Catalonia*, and E.L. Voynich's *The Gadfly*.

I knew adults who had fought in the Spanish Civil War with the Lincoln Brigade. When I was little, my father used to sing me songs from *The People's Song Book* like “Casey Jones” and “Darling Clementine,” but also “*Los Cuatro Generales*” and “The Peat-Bog Soldiers.” I had a Weavers' album on which Pete Seeger, Ronnie Gilbert, Lee Hayes, and Fred Hellerman sang the Spanish Civil War songs “*Venga Jaleo*” and “*Si Me Quieres Escribir*.” I remember my grandmother flushing her old CIO and socialist party pins down the toilet during the 1950s when the HUAC trials were raging and McCarthy was on the rampage. When I came to L.A., I not only hung around with folks from CORE and SNCC but also SDS and the left-wing Dubois Club.

As the strike began to grow, Cesar began to distance himself more and more from any connection to left-wing supporters, more for pragmatic reasons—the need for significant support from mainstream unions—than for lack of appreciation for their help. Sam Kushner was no longer welcome in Delano. I remember debates about whether to join the AFL-CIO or not, whether that meant selling out, compromising ideals. A lot of volunteers engaged in this debate. Some left as Cesar moved more toward affiliation with the AFL-CIO. I was working outside of Delano at the time. But Ida told me Cesar gave folks the option to leave or join in and accept the union's liberal but not radical politics. Ida, Eli Risco, and other volunteers left. I had decided that this was a Chicano and Filipino movement, and I was there to help. I was not going to participate in policy unless asked, and when my help was no longer essential I was going to leave.

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My mother read that Cesar was going to speak in Philadelphia at a church downtown. It was the middle of winter, maybe 1967. My father was working nights driving a cab. It was a very cold night. She puts on a little makeup and lipstick, then a heavy dress, long overcoat, headscarf, and gloves. She's old-fashioned and hasn't yet begun to wear pants. She takes the number 59 bus to Frankfort, then the subway downtown, and walks the six blocks down Broad Street. After Cesar's speech, when the crowd begins to thin out and Cesar is getting ready to leave, she makes her way up to him. She's a small, shy woman. She touches Cesar's arm and he turns to her. She introduces herself.

“You know, Mr. Chavez, I lost my son to you.”  
Cesar takes her hand. “But I gained a son, Mrs. Frankel.”

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Fred Ross had put me in charge of a group of Filipino and Chicano strikers. Perhaps it was the fall of 1967. We were staying in an African-American church in the heart of south central L.A. I remember only a few names: the sisters Maria and Antonia Saludado, who always sang “*De Colores*” in perfect harmony and led the singing on the picket lines, Tavo, Julian Balidoy, Eliseo Medina (Antonia Saludado was sweet on him and called him *mi capirucho*, my captain), John Shroyer, Johnny Rodriguez. I remember the cook was Señor Agundez. He was a big man, and although he was probably only in his early 40s, everyone, everyone called him Señor Agundez. We were picketing Mayfair Markets in East L.A. and Echo Park. Following good Saul Alinsky/Fred Ross/Cesar Chavez community-organizing strategy, we were going door to door in the neighborhoods directly around the markets asking the residents to support the secondary boycott and not buy grapes (or maybe not even shop) at the markets. I used to get sick with worry trying to keep track of everyone when we first got down there. The old Filipino guys had some of the best cars, and they kept them immaculate and in perfect condition, so they brought them to L.A. They used to get lost on the freeways, so I began sending a young Filipino or Mexican striker with them as navigator; folks would get stuck in traffic; folks would disappear for hours.

Initially I didn’t know how we would be received in the black community. It was just three years after the Watts riots. But everyone in the neighborhood seemed to know who we were and we were treated with respect and consideration. We slept on cots and in the gym after the local teenagers finished with their evening basketball games. Once Cesar came to L.A. for a couple of days to speak, and he stayed with us. After dinner I watched him slip into the kitchen and begin doing the dishes. After someone took over for him I said, “You lead by example, don’t you, Cesar?” He just smiled.

I remember another time when he wasn’t smiling. When we started the first organizing campaign against the teamsters in 1966 he said, “When you have to go down the sewer in the struggle, you are going to get dirty.”

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I didn’t have very thick skin or a tough disposition, although I used to wish otherwise. My knees used to shake when things got rough at civil rights demonstrations. I used to get sick to my stomach when the Rangers would stop us on some dirt road down by the Rio Grande, throw us up against the car, and threaten us. Ranger Captain Allee once stuck a shotgun under my chin: “What are we gonna do with this here Jewish boy and what’s he doing, ya suppose, hanging around with all these Mexicans?” I swear to this day, I left my body and went someplace else. Emergency astral traveling. Maybe it was all catching up with me. I wish I could have been tougher, had more endurance, more sticking power, but I guess I didn’t. In 1968, I was living by myself in the back of the union office in Livingston, a dusty little town about the size of a truck stop, a diner, and one block of Main Street. I was the union representative for the Gallo, Novitiate, and Franzia

ranches—running the hiring hall, going out to the fields to settle grievances, Listening to Portuguese music on the AM radio. A lot of the workers on the Gallo ranch had been brought in from the Canary Islands years ago. Every once in a while I would visit John H., a Berkeley-educated Japanese-American farmer with a small almond and grape ranch who supported the strike. His wife would do my laundry and cook me a meal. When I first got there, I had him teach me all the skills of grape growing—picking, pruning, irrigating. I needed to know what the work was really like. It was interesting, but my heart wasn't in it.

If my stomach hadn't hurt all the time, I probably would have been drinking. I was running on empty, tired and lonely. There were two sweet VISTA girls (Volunteer In Service to America) living and working nearby, but I was sliding into such a hole, I couldn't find much to say to them. I was cooking on a hot plate, then going next door to the greasy spoon diner for apple pie. I was sleeping on a cot in the dark back room, smoking my Pall-Malls and reading mystery books from the dinky Merced public library to get to sleep. On top of it all, Jim Drake had informed me that I was supposed to get involved with local Democratic political groups to marshal support for Bobby Kennedy's presidential campaign. I knew that Kennedy's election would be good for the union, but I also knew that even if I could put a Democratic smile on my face, I wouldn't be able to make it stick. I would never be able to talk the talk or crank up the energy for that kind of project. I was too embarrassed to talk to anyone in the union about any of this, and it never occurred to me to ask for a rest or some time off. I hadn't seen my parents for two years. Ida and I had split up a while ago and she was living in Big Sur or San Francisco somewhere. We would eventually get back together and marry. I called somebody, maybe Jim Drake, told him where I was leaving the keys and the car, and my old friend from the early days in Delano, Bob Coffman, came down from Point Reyes and picked me up and took me away.

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The histories still vex my sleep.  
 Recurring headlights in my rearview mirror  
 break me into a sweat,  
 and I lose my voice to a stutter,  
 when police pull me over for a routine vehicle check.  
 How to flush out the old crow, the ragged familiar,  
 that nests and settles in the back of my throat,  
 How long can a fear stretch?  
 where is Our Lady, skin like polished madrone,  
 necklace of marigolds, tiny apples and sugar skulls,  
 where is Our Lady,  
 splinters from the true cross holding up her hair,  
 where is our lady when we need her?  
 Our Chocolate Lady graces breakfast cereal boxes,  
 the backs of milk containers, video games,  
 playing cards, and bumper stickers.  
 Where is our Lady  
 when we need her?

Rangers still stalk my orchards,  
 in Sam Brown belts of tooled leather,  
 mirrored sunglasses, with high-powered rifles  
 slung casually over their shoulders.  
 Unmarked cars with blind-darkened windows still  
 circle the house, cruise by, roll to a stop.  
 Electric windows drop and mirrored eyes peer over.  
 “Let’s see some ID, assume the position.”

Friends scatter like dry leaves,  
 shrouded crows cast flatiron shadows.  
 Bruised scarecrows on fence posts and barbed wire  
 clutch and embrace, backpedaling into beauty.  
 Magdaleno, squinting in the headlights  
 holds his arms out to ward off the blows  
 in a child’s useless gesture.  
 like the executed prisoner in the Goya painting,

Lie on your sides, children, cross your legs,  
 Take off your glasses and jewelry.  
 shield your head with you trembling palms,  
 a broken hand instead of a concussion.  
 Cover your nose and mouth with the inside of your forearm  
 the back of your head and ear with the other arm—yes,  
 Choose your own impossible beatings.

I remember little Andre, outside the jail in Tupalo—  
 1964, blood still on his overalls,  
 his glasses fogged with tears when he kissed me on the mouth—  
 “See you in the promised land.”  
 people just don’t talk that way anymore,  
 and folks don’t sing,  
 and folks don’t dance.  
 and Little Andre is doing hardtime.  
 Eldridge Cleaver is selling books on prizewinning barbecue,  
 and friends are talking about mutual funds,  
 and pictures of our Lady appear on playing cards,  
 candy bars, T-shirts, and alcoholic beverages.

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In her apartment in Silver Lake, Rosa lays a path of *campasuchiles*—bright orange marigolds—from her apartment door to the altar. There will be no cold wind from the north in Los Angeles to bring in the spirits of the children tomorrow or the adults the day after, for the Day of the Dead, *Dia De*

*Los Muertos*, If she were in Oaxaca, she would scatter breadcrumbs and flower seeds, which are the souls of children, and go to the cemetery and sweep the graves clean, but *ni modo*, the altar is perfect. The stalks of corn, bamboo, and sugarcane tied to the legs of the table arch across time and the cycles of the souls' resurrections. She puts out their favorite foods, mementos, and pictures, and leaves a glass of water because the souls, having journeyed far, are thirsty. Candles, yes, lots of candles to light their way. She arranges their favorite foods, the seven moles, homemade mescal and fresh *elotes*, candied pumpkin, fresh-baked "bread of the dead," the sugar skulls, with maraschino eyes. Nothing must be touched by anyone. Rosa cooks the food with extra flavor. The dead cannot eat but will kiss the food, and extract the aromas and moisture of the preparations. When they are satisfied they will look for Rosa to leave behind their goodwill and their blessings.

My friends, living and dead—I keep their mementos and memories in a cardboard box in my closet and in the trunk at the foot of my bed that is covered with blankets from Oaxaca that Rosa gave me. We are nomads and borrowers who come by it honestly, first-world scavengers who hunt and gather our belongings in a world that is not our own.

Sometimes my memories of Delano are like the *calaveras* drawn by the Mexican artist J. G. Posada. The people are all skeletons: skeleton growers and foreman in their air-conditioned pickup trucks and Ford Rancheros; skeleton *contratistas*, contractors and purveyors of other men and the labor of other men; skeleton farmworkers handpicking table grapes under the dust-covered vines in Delano and Earlimart, or thinning sugar beets with short-handled hoes; farmworker children skeletons, helping their parents pick peaches on the DiGiorgio Ranch in Marysville and Yuba City or playing in the mud in the Woodlake labor camps. There are calaveras of old Filipino men in army fatigues picketing the Dispoto ranch in the fog and telling me stories from World War II; calaveras of Texas Rangers driving their white unmarked cruisers with blinds covering the side windows, slowly circling the union office in Rio Grande, Texas; a long line of skeletons marching up Highway 99 to Sacramento. I am there too, the skeleton of a 20-year-old boy with thick-framed glasses and a serious look. All the scenes freeze in the stillness of a black-and-white tableau. One of the skeleton strikers turns to me: "*Hemos llegados, somos iguales.*" (Having arrived, we are all equal).

The Angel of History closes her eyes and flesh returns to all the bodies. The tableau shifts from black and white to color. She opens her eye and the skeletons reappear again and fade into the black-and-white tableau. The Angel of History turns into Mnemosyne, the queen of the muses. Mnemosyne turns into the Virgin of Guadalupe and I hear my old friends the Saludado sisters singing "*De Colores,*" "*Y por esos los grandes amores/ de muchos colores, me gustan a mi.*"

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A number of years ago, Ida and I were invited by Cesar and Helen to the wedding of one of their daughters. I remember Cesar, excited and smiling; his face had a certain way of lighting up, a kind of glow from the inside. He was taking pictures with a cheap camera as the bride and groom came out of the church. We met people we hadn't seen for almost 20 years, children who were now grown men and women, in a city that we could barely recognize. The principal of Delano High School was a Chicano. A *Chicano*. The children of farmworkers were doctors and lawyers. We went

to Petra (Cesar's sister-in-law) and Fish's house near the Starlight bowling alley. Ida and I used to stay there sometimes. Petra's hair was graying but still up in her signature beehive, and she was feisty as ever. She used to take care of Dolores Huerta's daughter "Peanuts." Fish was a foreman at the Perrelli-Minetti Winery. We ate menudo, drank some of Perrelli-Minetti's private stock, talked about old friends, and reminisced. Petra imitated little Mochi, from People's Bar and Grille, the way she used to tease her girlfriend Ann. "She lies like a dog, doesn't she, Miz Ida? She lies like a dog."

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I'm not optimistic when I look out at the state of the world today, and the state of our country's collective soul, if there is such a thing. The music of hope and change is not resonating in Ed's ears now the way it did in the ears of young Eddie. Remarkably, I still remember the words to "*El Corrido de Delano*," "*De Colores*," and "Union Maid, but I don't sing much at all these days. I pick my battles and guard my energy carefully. But when I returned to Delano for Cesar's daughter's wedding, or when Ida and I went to the celebration to honor Fred Ross at the CSO in L.A. and met Luis Valdez's son, and Dolores's daughter, Laurie, and the second and third generations of Delano, I am reminded that quantum social changes are possible. I am reminded how quickly class lines can be blurred, social borders erased and moved. I am reminded what can happen when one person doesn't move to the back of the bus, when one young man stands up on the roof of a car outside of Sproul Hall in Berkeley, when four children walk a gauntlet of hate into a school in Little Rock, Arkansas. I am reminded how a ragtag collection of people who constellated around Cesar Chavez and the NFWA at the perfect historical moment could court and then spark significant cultural change.

In the late 1960s, the rules of engagement no longer held, all bets were off, and the conventions that had kept many of America's staid social contracts in place were up for grabs. The tent of the "anesthetized '50s" had blown off the circus. In Delano, farmworkers would marry middle-class white women. Middle-class white men would have Mexican wives and girlfriends. Farmworkers would become serious social movers. The children of farmworkers would become politicians, educators, doctors, and lawyers. Cruz Bustamante is the lieutenant governor of California. Dolores Huerta was recently appointed a U.C. regent.

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Sometimes I have my students read *Letters From Birmingham Jail*, or Gloria Anzaldua's *Borderlands*, Jack London's *Iron Heel*, Michael Ondaatje's *In The Skin of a Lion*, about immigrant workers in Canada. Sometimes we watch Luis Valdez's *Zoot Suit* and contrast it with Tupac Shakur's poetry or early hip hop. Sometimes we read about the early immigrants of the 1900s, the Jewish, Italian, and Eastern Europeans, some of them younger than my students, who worked piecework 60 hours a week on the Lower East Side of Manhattan. We read the young women garment workers' memoirs, written in their own words. We look at the grainy black-and-white pictures, women in white shirtwaists and funny-looking hats, marching arm and arm, their fists in the air, looking the camera right in the eye and smiling. We read about the Triangle Factory fire in New York, in which 156 of these young women died, and we read about the strikes in the garment factories.

Sometimes I ask the students, whether they are Chicanos, African-Americans, Filipinos, whites, or Vietnamese, to talk to their grandparents or great aunts and uncles and interview them, to seek out the stories of where they came from, and how they wound up in America. The students return with tales about a Mexican-American uncle who was slapped for speaking Spanish in school in the 1950s, stories about the pineapple strikes in Hawaii, segregation and discrimination in Chinatown or in the armed forces, stories about the Tuskegee airmen in the highly decorated black fighter squadron, and the 442 Brigade of Japanese-American soldiers during World War II. I tell my students that in some ways these memories, blurred and frayed around the edges, sometimes shined up and embellished, “stand on firmer ground than history, a history based on documents, on secondhand impressions.”

To this day, I am reminded of Delano when I get a young Mexican-American girl in my class who is articulate and dark-skinned with Indian features. She may be pre-med or pre-law, and she has already read Sandra Cisneros’s *House on Mango Street*, Gloria Anzaldua’s *Borderlands*, Richard Rodriguez’s *Hunger for Memory*, and Gabriel Garcia Marquez’s *One Hundred Years of Solitude*, as well as *The Scarlet Letter*, *The Great Gatsby*, and *The Odyssey*. She tells me she comes from Coachella, or Visalia, or some small town “you’ve probably never heard of” in the San Joaquin Valley, like Livingston or Earlimart. And she tells me her parents or grandparents were farmworkers. Sometimes I begin talking to her in Spanish and her eyes get big, and I tell her I know Visalia, Coachella, and Earlimart. And I struggle some more in my rusty Spanish.