

Ken Leap 1966–1972

Sun Star Article

On March 17, 1999, I talked to my son, Jim Leap, on the phone. We were discussing an article I had sent him from the *Sun Star* of February 28, 1999. It was written by Bill Hatch, a news writer for the paper. It described some of my experiences with the farmworkers' union 30-some years ago. Jim has always been aware of the farmworkers, and he attended a number of functions when he was young. He was just not sure exactly what had happened, and how I became involved. He suggested that I write what I could remember, so I started making notes in a journal during slack time I had when I was substitute teaching.

Meeting LeRoy, Introduction to Farmworkers

In the early fall or late summer of 1966, I drove from Fresno to Delano on a Saturday morning for an appointment with LeRoy Chatfield, the executive director of the National Farm Workers Service Center, to discuss property and casualty insurance. I was meeting a prospective new customer who was the executive director of a national organization that was on the television, radio, and print news daily all over the country. I expected to find LeRoy in a business office; instead, the address he had given me was in the wrong part of town on the wrong side of the tracks. The address was 105 Asti. It was a small, dingy two-bedroom house that had been poorly maintained since the time it was built, probably 20 years earlier. There was no yard, only dust and a few weeds. LeRoy was the only one present, as I remember. He was dressed in jeans, a work shirt, and work boots. He probably had not shaved in a few days, and he appeared fatigued, as if he had not had much rest recently.

LeRoy was very pleasant and businesslike, though he didn't smile much. He first told me that the building we were in housed the farmworker service center, including the farmworkers' credit union. Workers and their families came to this building to get help with immigration problems, problems with government agencies, legal problems, medical aid, auto registration, auto insurance, or if they had problems with the community and needed help or advice. There was an identical house next door, but a different color, I think pink. That house was the legal office and also Cesar's office. These houses on Asti were on the southwest corner of Delano at that time. On the next street to the west on the corner was an abandoned auto service station or repair shop. It was used by the union and called the hiring hall. After that orientation, LeRoy gave me a pretty detailed description of the history of farmworkers in California from the Native Americans to the present, and the plan to form a farmworkers' union.

Most of what LeRoy told me, I had learned from personal experience working on farms while I was in school, from California history classes at Fresno State, and from

remembering the Okies in the 1930s. I asked LeRoy about the Filipinos because I had strange feelings about them from when I was a teenager. I had worked at a service station on Highway 99 when it ran through Merced. I was in high school, and worked at the station at nights. Late at night, big, black Cadillacs would come into the station. Flashily dressed men, five or six of them, would be in the car with one woman, white or Mexican. They looked pretty sinister to me, not up to any good. I'm sure they scared me. These were what I knew of Filipinos. LeRoy explained to me that the Filipinos had been recruited to come to work in the United States in the 1920s and 1930s. They were brought here as single young men, and told that Filipinas would come later. The women did not come. These young men grew old in this country. By the end of the 1960s there were many, many elderly Filipinos. They had never been able to marry because of the miscegenation laws of California. The law allowed no interracial marriages until after the laws were rescinded after World War II. My opinion of Filipinos changed immediately.

LeRoy explained the formation of the present union, the joining of the Filipinos, led by Larry Itliong, and the mostly Mexican workers, led by Cesar Chavez. They had joined together to form the United Farm Workers Organizing Committee, AFL-CIO, with Cesar as the president and Larry as the vice president. The formation of this union caused great anger among the farmers of the valley, especially in Delano, where the union started and where the headquarters was located. The growers controlled most of the business in the community, and because of townspeople's sympathy for the growers and their loyalty to the growers, the organizers and workers who belonged to the union were not well treated. There were very strong anti-union feelings among much of Delano. LeRoy explained to me that at one time the service center needed cement for a project. It was near impossible to deal with local merchants on the cement, so they were actually forced to go out of town to purchase such a simple product. The union owned and operated vehicles used in recruiting members and developing the union. They had a difficult time getting the proper service for these vehicles, so they bought a service station. They had had insurance with a broker or company in Los Angeles, but their coverage had been terminated. It had not been possible for them to obtain insurance for their vehicles or for their other operations, so LeRoy asked me what I could do for them. He said no one in Delano would do business with them.

We talked for about two hours, and of course I knew I was there to talk about insurance. I told LeRoy quite frankly that I had little hope that I could secure insurance for the union or any of its operations. I said I would be glad to look at everything, and would submit it to the company. Insurance companies look for good, average risks. Too much attention brought by too much news coverage removes the prospective insured from the average category. The media attention announcing public confrontations, public disagreements, lots of people and cars in motion, scares an insurance company. The negative press made it appear as if there was always imminent danger of injury to people or damage to property. True or not, it didn't look like a good subject for liability, auto, or fire insurance. That most of the personnel involved were either Mexican or Filipino made it an even harder sell. There was, and to my thinking, there still is great racial intolerance in this valley.

LeRoy told me of his concerns of racial discrimination by insurance companies. I assured him that would not be a concern for Aetna. They might decline the risk for the reasons I had given him, but racial or ethnic discrimination was out of the question. Before I accepted their offer to go into business, I had been assured that there would be no discrimination in considering applications for insurance. At the conclusion of our interview, LeRoy sent me to see the farmworker clinic, the Texaco service station they had just purchased, and to Filipino Hall to meet Julio Hernandez, Andy Imutan, Tony and Rachel Orendain, Larry Itliong, and Al and Marge Keiffer. Filipino Hall was where the union volunteers had lunch every day and where union meetings were held.

I started out by locating the farmworker clinic. It was a mobile home in a very unattractive location, on the bad side of town, in the middle of nowhere. Patti Heinrich was in charge. She was a cute, young, fairly well-educated, hippie kind of girl from the East. She was fun to talk to and gave me all the information I asked for about the clinic and its operations. They had no doctor, but one was coming to volunteer or work part-time. There may have been a nurse. I met Mary Murphy, and Marion Moses was going to be there. I told Patti I would be applying for medical malpractice and general liability insurance for the premises and operations of the clinic. So I filled out applications with the sketchy information I had. I felt obligated because of the time I had taken and the time I had been given. I was certain that completing the applications was an exercise in futility. From the clinic I went to the service station. It was an old, run-down Texaco station close to the center of town. It was not a bright, shiny station, but I went through the motions. I don't know if I got the information for insurance from someone at the station or from someone at Filipino Hall. When I got to the Filipino Hall, there was a large group of people in the parking lot. They were a rough-looking lot, roughly dressed Mexicans and Filipinos standing around not doing or saying much. I parked my car, swallowed whatever anxiety I had, and just walked into and through the middle of the group. When I entered the crowd I found them to be friendly, gentle, and accepting. There was no antagonism or hostility. That was my first encounter with the people of the Huelga.

In the Filipino Hall I met all the people I had gone to see. Perhaps I had lunch there that day, and perhaps that was what the crowd outside was waiting for. I am sure it was at the Filipino Hall that day that I met Mrs. Keiffer. She and her husband were a very proper New England couple. They had been retired for a few years. They had seen an ad in *The New York Times* for volunteers for the farmworker union in Delano. So here they were in California doing whatever they could to help the union. Mrs. Keiffer was sort of a secretary for LeRoy, and Mr. Keiffer did other office work.

Insurance Applications

That day I completed applications for medical malpractice, general liability, and workers' compensation for all but the organizing committee. Those were the union strikers and organizers. I explained my concerns to LeRoy about the organizing committee, and he said

they were more than likely covered by the AFL-CIO anyway. I made applications for the farmworker service center, which included the service station, the clinic, the credit union, and the vehicles used in these operations. The organizing committee was not excluded, it was just not mentioned. The vehicles used by the organizers were owned by the service center.

It had been a very interesting day for me in many ways, probably a life-changing day, more so than I realized at the time. I had no hope for securing insurance for any of it, but I was duty-bound to try. The prospects of me providing service for the account seemed really tough. LeRoy wanted me to be in Delano one day each week to discuss insurance, make changes, make additions, and he wanted me to make myself available to union members for their personal auto insurance. It would be impossible to do those things and attend to the day-to-day work of my young insurance business. How was I to explain to my secretary, my family, and my friends that I was spending one day a week in Delano doing business with Mexican and Filipino farmworkers and looking after the business of the farmworker union? It didn't make any sense. I was not going to worry about the company rejecting the business.

Referral to the Farmworkers Union/Dale Doig and Bill Richert

My wife, two children, and I moved from Merced to Fresno in 1963. I had been a partner (vice president) of Leap Insurance Agency, a business my brother, Ed Leap, had started in 1946 after returning from the army at the end of World War II.

After graduation from Fresno State College and a year in the insurance business in Fresno, I returned to Merced to go into business with my brother. Six years in a family business in a small town, close to a lot of family was enough. I worked for Allstate Insurance Company for a little less than a year, when the Aetna Casualty and Surety Company offered to loan me money and provide me with an office to start my own business. I couldn't pass up the opportunity. With my past experience and training, it was not difficult to establish a business. It was hard work, but I knew what to do.

When I moved to Fresno, my interests were my family, my business, the Air National Guard, and Democratic politics. I was a new Democrat—interested in learning how the party worked and interested in taking part in the organization. I was the group administrative services officer for the 144th Fighter Group of the Air National Guard in Fresno. A young man, Dale Doig, had worked in the orderly room when I was a squadron adjutant. From talking to him I learned that he was active in the Young Democrats, an active club in Fresno at that time. Senator Robert Kennedy was coming to be part of a rally in Fresno, and I wanted to see him, so I asked Dale how I could do it. Dale recruited me into the Young Democrats and got me a job working at the rally. From that point, I became very active in the Young Democrats and in Democratic politics in Fresno. In the

Young Democrats, I met Bill Richert. He was active in Democratic politics in Fresno. We became friends, and we did some business together.

Bill was a very well trained and experienced lawyer for his age. He was a partner in the firm, Fullerton, Richert, and Lang. One Friday night in 1966, Bill called me at home. He asked me if I would like to insure 2000 Mexicans. I had no idea what he was talking about, so I said sure, if I had a company, or if there was a company, that would provide auto insurance for that many Mexicans. Aetna was the only company I represented at that time, and they were a pretty progressive organization. I was certain that if I put the question to them as Richert had put it to me, they would have told me to get lost. I had no idea what he was talking about, so I just listened. Bill had graduated from UC Berkeley and Boalt Hall, the law school at Berkeley. Bill had met LeRoy Chatfield at some function in Berkeley. LeRoy had been a Christian Brother and a vice principal of a high school in Bakersfield. He had resigned from the order and was now working full-time as an administrator for Cesar Chavez of the farmworkers. Bill told me that LeRoy was having some problems with insurance. He asked me if I would go to Delano and talk to him. I told Bill there was probably not much I could do, but that I would be glad to go talk to Chatfield. When I hung up the phone, it rang again right away. It was LeRoy. He made an appointment for the next morning in Delano. I learned then that LeRoy meant business. That was how I was introduced to LeRoy Chatfield and the farmworker union.

The farmworker movement was one of the biggest things going on in the United States at that time. There was an anti-war movement, the civil rights movement with Martin Luther King, Jr., and the farmworker movement with Cesar Chavez. Because of where I lived, my personal experiences, and what I had learned in school, I was sure that history was about to be made with the formation of a farmworker union. If there was a possibility that I could see this important event in history close up, and participate, or perhaps be of some help, then I was willing to take a risk and give it a try. That is why I was willing to travel to Delano, talk to LeRoy, and advise them if it would help.

Probably less than a year before the meeting with Chatfield, I had attended a Fresno County Democratic Club meeting with my friend, Henry Tafoya. The meeting was at the Hotel Californian in downtown Fresno. When we got to the meeting, Henry learned that there was a CSO meeting in another room on another floor, and that Cesar Chavez was speaking. I was new in Fresno, starting a new insurance business. I didn't want to be seen at that meeting. It was widely rumored by people and in the press that Cesar was leading a social movement with very radical ideas. The CSO (Community Service Organization) was headed by Saul Alinsky from Chicago. It was said that he was at least a Socialist, and possibly a Communist. And it was widely rumored that there were Communist Party members helping in the farmworkers union. So I didn't go see Cesar speak. (I found out later, and met, some communists who were helping the union.)

Presentation of Insurance Applications to Aetna and Unexpected Acceptance

The Monday after I met with LeRoy and completed the applications for insurance, I went to the Aetna Casualty and Surety office in the Del Web Building in Fresno. I went to see Harold Kelleher, who was the commercial lines underwriting supervisor. Harold was a very cautious underwriter. Underwriters get facts about potential insures that are submitted on applications by agents. They look at the facts presented and often send inspectors or engineers to look at the property, interview the people, and check any public records. The idea of underwriting is to try to determine if the company can make money after issuing an insurance contract.

I presented the applications for the farmworkers' account directly to Harold. I suggested that he send an inspector to look things over before making a decision. I all but told him I didn't think he would or should consider taking the account. Harold had said no to me on many occasions both in Merced and in Fresno on accounts that appeared much more acceptable than that of the farmworkers. To put it mildly, I was shocked by his response. He said Aetna insured AFL-CIO unions all over the country. He said he could see no reason to make an exception in the case of the farmworkers' union. Medical malpractice insurance was a very sensitive class of insurance at that time because of many and large losses. Aetna was one of the very few companies in the malpractice field. They wrote the insurance, but not without a lot of scrutiny. So I asked Kelleher about the malpractice for the farmworker clinic, just so there would be no misunderstanding. Again, to my disbelief, he said no problem. I honestly found it difficult to believe what Harold had told me, even after my less-than-positive presentation of the account. I returned to my office after the meeting with Kelleher. I called Chatfield to tell him that the company had accepted the account with no reservations, and that all the insurance we had discussed was in effect, and policies would be issued. He was pleased, and I agreed to meet him the next week as we had discussed. I went to Delano on Wednesday and met Helen Chavez, Susan Drake, and Pete Velasco, and took an application or two for auto insurance from individual members or volunteers, had lunch at Filipino Hall, and returned to Fresno.

Rejection of Farmworkers Insurance Account

Chuck Longfield was the manager of Aetna's Fresno office. I believe he must have been out of town when the transaction took place. More than a week after the insurance coverage for the farmworkers had been placed, but before any policies had been issued, I got a letter from Longfield stating that the coverage for the farmworkers was rejected and would be terminated in 20 or 30 days. The reason Longfield gave was that the farmworker service center did not meet Aetna's underwriting requirements. The letter must have arrived on a Friday, because I took it home to show my wife. My parents-in-law were visiting, and my father-in-law saw and read the letter. He told me not to let Aetna get away with that kind of business. My father-in-law was retired. He had been a very successful physician and businessman in Merced for more than 40 years. I did not agree with him on many things, but I did respect his business judgment and his ethics.

Time for a Decision

At this point I had a decision to make. It would have been easy to accept the rejection, notify LeRoy that I had tried my best, but had failed to produce the insurance the union needed and wanted. Then I could have returned to my business, followed the pattern I had started, and I would have become a very successful insurance agent. If it had not been such a very important period in the life of the union, I would certainly have done exactly that—reported to LeRoy that the deal was off, and there was not anything I could do. He would have understood, because things like that were a common occurrence in the life of an organizer who is trying to get something done in a struggling, emerging union comprising mainly Filipinos and Mexicans.

In the insurance business, as I suppose in most other businesses, when the company you represent does something where the legality or ethics might be questioned, you must keep quiet in order to continue doing business with that company. When an agent or employee makes something public that he feels is done wrong, he is finished with the company and possibly with other companies in the business. This is certainly unwritten and would be denied by anyone in business, but it is the way business is done. Under normal circumstances, I would go along, because I believe loyalty to the persons or businesses you are dealing with is important. In this case, I made a quick decision to support the farmworker union, knowing full well that it would eventually cost me my business.

The commercial lines underwriting supervisor had made a commitment to me about the account, without sending an investigator as I had suggested and recommended. I had been in almost daily contact with LeRoy, and so I knew for certain that no one from the company had been to Delano to look at the account. The farmworker union had been rejected for other than legitimate reasons. There was never any question in my mind.

I went to Kelleher at the first opportunity. I asked what had happened. He could not tell me that an investigation had shown the account to be inadequate, because he was well aware of our first discussion, and he and I both knew that no one had been to look at the risk. He told me that he had had nothing to do with the decision to reject. Longfield had made the decision to reject without consulting Kelleher. When I asked Kelleher for a reason, he said he did not know. When I pressed him for an explanation, he got silent, then he told me that an agent from Delano (I can't remember the name) had been in the office to see Longfield about the farmworker account. Kelleher said the agent made it clear to Longfield that Aetna was not to place the insurance for the farmworkers. Now I don't know, and have never pursued it, but the reason was either from grower pressure on the agent, or the agent didn't want an out-of-town agent for Aetna doing business in Delano. Kelleher swore me to secrecy so I never told anyone of our conversation.

After talking to Kelleher, I confronted Longfield. I honored my pledge to Kelleher and didn't tell Longfield about my conversation with Kelleher. I told Longfield I had presented the risk to Kelleher, had suggested an inspection, but that Kelleher had waived the inspection and told me that the company would issue policies for the account. Then I

asked Longfield to rescind the rejection. He said he would not, the rejection would stand. Then he said if I really had strong feelings about the account, I should do some research, and present what I learned to him.

Research of Union Activities

Between the time of my conversation with Longfield and the communication with the AFL-CIO, I did the research on the union that Longfield had recommended. I did the work in a couple of days because that was all the time I had, and because there was little research material. There were magazine articles and newspaper clippings. There was no book on Chavez. The union had started in 1965 so, although there were a lot of articles, they actually covered a short period of time. So there wasn't much to report on. My main concern was violence that would cause injury to people or damage to property.

Most of the union members and activists were Mexican and Filipino, and so most were Catholic. I had been in the Air National Guard in Fresno since 1955. We had a Catholic chaplain whose name was Seamus McMullen. Over the years we had become friends. He was a parish priest in a small town south of Fresno. I figured he might have some information I wanted, so I called. He was not anxious to talk to me about the farmworker union. He said that his parish, like most in the valley, was deeply and seriously divided. The growers were members of the church and provided financial support, vital to the church. The growers were extremely anti-union. He said he could not take a stand one way or another. I wasn't asking him to take a stand, only asking for information. Father McMullen said he couldn't discuss it. But he said there was a priest in the diocese who could probably help me. He said his name was Monsignor Roger Mahony. He said Monsignor Mahony would have the information I wanted. He also said that if there was to be an American Pope, Monsignor Mahony would be the first American Pope.

I knew Monsignor Mahony because when I had an office in the Crocker Bank building, he was a young priest in charge of Catholic Charities. They had an office on a floor above, and I saw Father Mahony frequently on the elevator. He was a tall, gangly, very serious young priest, who seemed somewhat awkward. I don't know if he remembered me when I called, but he was very friendly. He told me that there was great division in the church throughout the valley. The growers were mostly Catholic, the farmworkers just about entirely Catholic. It was causing great problems in the church, and he could not take a stand one way or the other. I told him I was working on securing insurance for the union, and my main concern was the potential for violence that would result in damage to property or injury to people. He said the growers he knew were all good men who would not be responsible for or tolerate violence. He said the farmworkers were not violent people, and under the leadership of Chavez, there should be no concern about violence.

The television, newspapers, and magazines had made it appear that there were constant, explosive confrontations between the growers and the farmworker union that could erupt into violence at any time. Law-enforcement personnel were appearing to side with the

growers, and seemed to be tough on the union. With all that in mind I went to see the Delano chief of police who had been in the middle since the strike began. When I told him I was looking to secure insurance for the farmworker union, I expected less than a friendly welcome. I was pleasantly surprised with his friendly, cooperative greeting. I told him my concerns for the potential for violence during the union/labor conflict. The chief of police said without hesitation that he knew all the growers and all the strikers involved. He said, again without hesitation, that there was no reason for anyone to believe that anyone on either side of the union struggle either wanted or was capable of violence.

The newspaper articles I read from all over and the national magazines all had coverage of the strike, with very dramatic stories and pictures concerning the conflict between growers and strikers, with the growers determined that the workers should not be allowed to bargain for wages and working conditions and the workers equally determined to form a union to do exactly that. Cesar Chavez was pictured as a man bigger than life by the media. Many in the media stressed the connection between Chavez and Alinsky, with the implication of communist influence. In the body of every report, by each paper and magazine, was the careful statement that Cesar was dedicated to nonviolence and would not tolerate violence in any form from any member or from any volunteer.

The report I completed and presented to Longfield was not as well done as I would have liked, but was all I could do with the time and circumstances. To my surprise, Longfield carefully read the whole report and was very complimentary about my work. He said the rejection would stand.

Letter of Rejection to Farmworkers Service Center, Copy to AFL-CIO

Time was running out on the insurance coverage for the farmworkers, so I wrote to LeRoy and told him that the insurance had been rejected by Aetna, and I told him in the letter that I believed that the insurance was rejected for other than underwriting reasons. I sent a copy of my letter to the national headquarters of the AFL-CIO. I showed the letter to Bill Richert before I sent it to make sure it would get the desired results. LeRoy called the AFL-CIO to discuss the letter. I knew Aetna was in an untenable position. Shortly after, I got a phone call from Aetna. It would issue the policies as applied for, and it would accept applications and provide coverage for other farmworker activities and for individual members. Aetna followed through on its commitment, and the people at the company very cordial to me, but I knew they would get me at the first opportunity.

Meeting with Longfield and Chatfield

While the policies were being issued, Longfield asked for a meeting with Chatfield to clear the air. He wanted to make sure that everyone understood what was happening and what was going to happen during the course of business between the farmworkers and Aetna. Longfield is a really pompous guy, full of himself, and wanted us to know for sure that he

was boss. LeRoy was less than impressed. He said he was surprised at what any agent for Aetna had to put up with from Longfield.

Longfield Inspection of the Farmworkers Account in Delano

The next week or so Longfield arranged for me to meet him in Delano so he could go over the property and talk to the people involved. We spent a couple of hours going to each piece of property and talking to the people at the property. He wanted me to know that the account was not an acceptable subject for property and casualty insurance under any circumstances. He wanted me to know that his decision was based solely on underwriting facts (facts he couldn't have had before that day). At the end of the morning before he left Delano, he wanted to talk to me. He had a rather disgusted look on his face, like he had just had a distasteful experience. He asked me point blank if I had any reason to believe that the rejection was for anything other than normal risk appraisal.

The insurance was in effect. The union had a good company that couldn't wiggle out of the deal.

There was no reason for me to argue with Longfield, so I said no. I still didn't want to betray Kelleher's confidence, so I just kept quiet.

FSC English Professor

Several years later a professor at Fresno State put together a group that met one evening a week for six weeks. The professor, or maybe there were two, said we, the members of the group, were change agents in the community, and he wanted to discuss with the group what our involvement in the community had been and what we thought about changes that were happening. One was a bank vice president, one was George Ballis, a well-known photographer and writer, one was Les Kimber, publisher of the *California Advocate*, one was Sal Gonzalez, a community organizer, and one was Don Thuesen. Don was a partner in a very prestigious law firm in Fresno. His father had been a well-respected attorney in Fresno for many years. When it came my turn to talk, and I told my story about my involvement with the farmworker union, Don said I should talk to an attorney, implying that he was available, and he thought I had a good case against Aetna. I don't have the stomach for litigation. I didn't discuss it any further.

Modesto Insurance Agent

After business with the farmworkers had settled into a pattern, Longfield invited me to his office for a talk. He told me about an agent in Modesto who had started his own insurance agency. He was doing well, and then he started doing business with some Mexicans. Then he started doing business with more and more Mexicans. Soon companies and agents lost respect for him. Then he became a substandard agent. A substandard agent does business with only difficult risks, using only companies that accept substandard risks. The message to me was that I could still make a decision to reject the union, and I could work my way

into the good graces of Aetna and companies of equal stature in the industry. I listened carefully. I just then realized that I was probably in the wrong business. I had had a similar experience with Allstate. That wasn't the main reason I left Allstate, but it sure made it easier to make the decision to leave.

The Union Meetings.

"Que vive? Quien vive?" was asked aloud at the conclusion of each union meeting. *Viva la Huelga! Viva la Revolucion! Viva la Raza! Viva la Causal! Viva Cesar Chavez!*

I heard much and saw much concerning union organization, and the opposition to union organization. Each week when I was in Delano, I attended a farmworker meeting. LeRoy had originally asked me to do that to meet union members and be available to them for insurance. Cesar conducted almost all of the meetings that I attended. I kept no journal, took no notes, took no pictures. I remember very little about the content of the meetings. There was always community singing during each meeting. The songs I remember, and always will remember, were *De Colores*, *Nosotros Venceremos*, and I think *Solidarity Para Siempre*. There were others, but I can't remember the names. During election campaigns, politicians from all over would come to see Cesar, some would attend union meetings. When I was in the office, I was introduced to them.

Humphrey Campaign

In 1968, after Bobby Kennedy was assassinated, Vice President Hubert Humphrey was nominated at the Democratic convention. The farmworkers' union took an active roll in the Humphrey campaign in Los Angeles. My wife, Barbara Moyle Leap, and I were asked to go to Los Angeles to walk precincts with the farmworkers. It was an enjoyable weekend of hard work. It was exciting to see how efficiently the farmworkers were organized, and how well they got the job done. They were the best precinct workers in the business at that time. During the primary when Kennedy was the candidate, some of the precincts in East Los Angeles got out 100% of the vote. The voter registration was a very high percentage of Mexicans, so if Richard Chavez was asking you and your neighbors and friends to vote for Bobby Kennedy, you voted, and helped get your neighbors, friends, and relatives to vote, even if they were in the hospital.

Grape Boycott

During the grape boycott, the union had organizers in all the major cities in the United States and Canada. Most of the organizers had cars that were furnished to them by the union. I had all cars used in the boycott insured. LeRoy kept me informed about all the changes, either additions of cars, deletions of cars, and the same with drivers. This involved phone calls day and night during the boycott. Some of the drivers I knew, and they would call me directly for information about car insurance. It was not unusual for me to get phone calls from Chicago or Montreal, or other cities at any time of the day or night. I was

always worried, but there was nothing I could do. Surprisingly, there were only a few minor incidents involving car insurance during the whole boycott.

Cesar Learns Insurance

Cesar had a bad back, which caused him a great deal of pain. At one time he was told to stay in bed for a long period of time to try to ease the pain. This was very difficult for him, because there was much for him to do, and he was anxious to be working. He did work from his bed all day and into the nights. LeRoy thought this would be a good opportunity for Cesar to learn about insurance. He asked me to spend one evening a week for an hour or so to explain the union's insurance to Cesar. The largest and most comprehensive policy was the comprehensive general and auto liability insurance policy. I started with the insuring clause, and went right through to the limitations and exclusions. There is no way in the world to make any of that interesting, except to another agent or adjuster. Cesar had enough after one evening. I was not invited back.

MAPA Endorsement of the Grape Boycott

The union was asking for endorsements of the boycott from any organization. Organizations represented several or many people, so they were more desirable than individual endorsements. The media would usually give coverage for an organization's endorsement. My friend Henry Tafoya had been active and was well respected by the membership of the Fresno MAPA. I asked him to take me to a luncheon meeting to secure their endorsement. These were nice people who individually supported the union, but they really didn't want to be associated with farmworkers. They all knew that I did business with the union, and some said sort of jokingly that the union was here when I walked in. The meeting was about over, the business about concluded, and there had been no mention of the grape boycott, so I told Henry that now was the time to move for endorsement of the boycott. Henry made the motion and there was complete silence. Finally, there was a second. There was no discussion. No one wanted to speak publicly in favor of the boycott. But no one wanted to speak publicly against the boycott. So there was no discussion. The motion passed, and the meeting was adjourned.

Fresno Labor Leaders

At a California Democratic Council Convention in Fresno, I was volunteered to work in the copy room. This was a state convention of liberal Democrats. There were no copy machines like we have now. All the copying for the convention had to be done using mimeograph machines. It was a long process, and it took several of us all night to get the work done for the next day's meetings. The copy room was run by top labor leaders in Fresno, so I thought I would find some friends of the farmworkers. I was wrong. To a man, they were deathly opposed to Chavez and the farmworkers. They said Chavez was not a labor leader. They said he was a civil rights troublemaker and that the farmworkers had no business in organized labor. These men were all paid staff of AFL-CIO unions. The

AFL-CIO was supporting Chavez and the farmworkers. I can't remember if Chavez was receiving \$50,000 a month or \$50,000 a year from the AFL-CIO. Most of the unions in the valley were opposed to his efforts.

Moon Landing

The day of the first moon landing was a day I went to Delano. I had been up early to watch or listen to all the activity. I'm sure it was all on TV. I hadn't had a chance to talk to anyone about the event, so I was anxious to get to Delano to talk to someone. I believe LeRoy was not there, so I went to the credit union to discuss the landing with Helen Chavez. This was about the biggest thing that had happened in my life. Helen is one of the friendliest people there is, and always willing to talk about anything. She is really fun to be with and to talk to. So I asked her what she thought of the moon landing. She didn't know what I was talking about. I asked if she had not seen it on TV. She said they did not own a TV. Someone had given them one quite a while ago, but Cesar gave it to a member who did not have one and didn't have any money. There were obviously bigger things than watching TV or seeing a moon landing. There was a family of 10: eight children, and a mother and father living in a two-bedroom house.

Luis Valdez

One morning in Delano, after we had been doing business for a few weeks or months, Mrs. Keiffer, LeRoy's secretary, asked me to talk to her about an auto insurance policy for Luis Valdez. Luis had been a picket captain and had formed a theater and singing group to entertain and to help organize farmworkers for the union. They were presently on the East Coast. They had just performed in a jazz festival of national importance and were now returning to Delano. They had a van and they needed insurance. I had never seen Luis, and I had never seen the van. They were part of the union, and Mrs. Keiffer wanted me to provide them with auto insurance for their trip home. In answer to my question, the very prim and proper Mrs. Keiffer assured me that none of these fine young people would use drugs or alcohol. I wasn't worried about them being turned down, I just didn't want to do anything stupid. I wrote the insurance, and I agreed to see Luis when he returned.

Luis had found an old bank building in Parlier to use as a theater, and an old two-story farmhouse in Del Rey where the theater group could live. Luis had left the union, but continued the one-act plays (*actos*) to promote the union. When I met the group at the farmhouse in Del Rey, I was there to discuss insurance with Luis. I met Luis' brother, Daniel, Augustin Lira, and six or more others. They were a ragtag-appearing group in a not very attractive setting. Luis and I met privately for at least an hour. He was warm, friendly, dignified, and had an absolutely beautiful voice. The group was called E1 Teatro Campesino Cultural. Luis explained to me what they had been doing and what he planned to do. He was going to be a playwright, producer, and director. He was presently working on "The Shrunken Head of Pancho Villa." He explained it all to me, but I didn't quite get it. He told me of his trip to Cuba after he graduated from San Jose State University. He had

visited with Fidel Castro. He discussed that conversation, and I still remember what he said. Luis was very easy to listen to, but I was skeptical about his getting accomplished what he had planned.

Richard Chavez, Executive Director, Farmworkers Service Center

At the height of the boycott, LeRoy was sent to Los Angeles to be in charge of the boycott there. Richard Chavez, Cesar's brother, was named director of the farmworker service center. So instead of LeRoy, I met with Richard each week to transact the union's insurance business. Richard is a carpenter and had neither the training nor the experience that Chatfield had. When the union's policies with Aetna had been in effect two years, Aetna canceled my contract. Maybe if LeRoy had been in Delano, he would have convinced the AFL-CIO to get Aetna to continue my contract. The company's reason for canceling my contract was excessive losses. I was in no position to dispute the fact, so I accepted the termination without doing anything. I knew they didn't want me as an agent.

Aetna Termination of Ken Leap Contract

Aetna probably gave me about 30 days' notice of my contract cancellation. I got a contract with another company to replace my other business, but the problem was trying to find a place for the farmworkers. I talked to a few agents I knew in Fresno. They couldn't do anything. I talked to my brother, Ed Leap, who had a large agency in Merced. He checked, and said there was nothing he could do. He suggested that I talk to his friend, Leonard Winegar, who had a large agency in Fresno. I talked to Len, and he took all the information and made an application to Hartford. In the process of placing the insurance, the Hartford underwriter talked to an underwriter from the previous carrier, Aetna. The people at Aetna didn't say anything about losses, but just told Hartford that they had to cancel the agent to get rid of the account. So that was that.

CAARP, Father David Duran, Jim Owen

I ran out of places to look for insurance for the union, so as a last resort, I suggested the California Automobile Assigned Risk Plan. Richard said to go ahead, and I wanted to get something going before the insurance expired. When the policy was issued, I delivered it to Richard, and was preparing to apply for supplemental insurance to increase the limits of liability. At that time, a new priest came to work for the union. He was not a new priest, but he was new to the union. He had been a certified public accountant before he became a priest, so his business experience gave him a certain amount of knowledge of insurance. Father Duran did not mince words. He was outraged when he learned I was putting the union in the assigned risk plan. He directed me to cancel the policy. He would find coverage in L.A., which is either where he was from or where he had been in business. I was pleased that he could do it, but, of course, he could do nothing.

He didn't apologize, but he was very nice to me after that. He showed me a lot of respect. We became good friends. I picked up his car for him from a repair shop in Fresno one time, and held it for him for several days until he could get to Fresno. He was to be in Fresno for the elevation of Monsignor Mahony to bishop. Father Duran insisted that I go to the ordination. I thought about it and I did. I will always be grateful to Father Duran for insisting that I go.

For two years I had been doing a lot of business in Delano, I had a chance to meet another agent, Jim Owens. He owned the Swan Agency, maybe one of the larger insurance agencies in that area. I brokered some auto insurance with him, and I also placed a fire insurance policy with him on one of the new buildings at the Forty Acres. I had been reluctant to talk to Jim about the liability and auto insurance, and other types of coverage for the union because I knew Jim did a lot of business with growers. But finally I did ask him. He said he would be glad to write the business. Money was all green to him. He didn't care if it came from growers or farmworkers. I wished that I had run into Jim Owens earlier, but he may not have felt the same way when things were so bitter earlier in the union's life.

Finally, I placed just about all the union's business with the Swan Agency. When things were all settled in 1971 or 1972, Cesar decided he wanted the union to be self-insured. The greatest expense in liability insurance is attorney fees. The union had one of the top legal teams anyplace, so I didn't think it a bad idea. For some reason Owens and I quit doing business together, so I was through with the farmworkers' insurance business in 1972.

Resignation from the Air National Guard

In the Air National Guard I had an additional duty: commander of a riot control squadron. We organized and trained 300 officers and airmen to respond in the event of civil disorder in Fresno or anyplace in the state. One day when I was in Delano, there was a demonstration that maybe was going to get out of order. LeRoy was concerned and asked me to call the National Guard. Reluctantly, I called the adjutant general's office in Sacramento and talked to a friend of mine. Of course there was nothing to be done. I really did not think it was the right thing to do. At the same time I was receiving intelligence reports on people who could possibly be involved in civil unrest. They were supposed to be real radical activists. One name on a list was Jack Ortega. He was a boyfriend of Maria Rodriguez. Maria's sister had been a secretary to Cesar. She was from a large, wonderful family of farmworker members and supporters. I was very busy with my work, my family, politics, and the Air National Guard took a lot of time. One of the reasons (though not the only reason) I resigned was the possible conflict between the farmworkers and the Air Guard.

State Arbitrator

My wife and my two boys were involved in many of the union's activities. We went to weddings, fiestas, and demonstrations during those years. One time my wife was taking an evening class at Fresno State. One night in her class there was a guest speaker. He was the head arbitrator for the state, and he was involved in a labor dispute between the farmworker union and some Delano growers. He let the class know that the growers were going to win. The union was weak, and didn't have a chance. When my wife returned from the class, she was very discouraged for the union, and told me exactly what the speaker had said. I can't remember his name. I immediately called one of the union attorneys. They were meeting with the growers in the morning for arbitration. The arbitrator had been completely out of line discussing the confidential proceedings, and by taking sides in the case. The growers lost whatever the contest was. The union won.

The Chavez Family

The incident about the moon landing was a really clear message about the Chavez family. Cesar and his colleagues were on the TV continuously. Cesar was mentioned in the news just about every day for some event someplace in the country. He had become a real international figure. The Chavez family did not have a TV in their home. Talking to Helen Chavez was, and is, just like talking to the lady next door. The children were all attractive, friendly, bright, wonderful, and interesting kids. They just didn't seem to know of their father's great position in the world. Or, if they were aware of his stature, they didn't let it affect their lives or their way of presenting themselves to others. It would be possible to assume that they were not interested or that they were unconcerned. But the opposite is true. When the pesticide issue came up in the last couple of years, Cesar's oldest son, Fernando, was in court in Fresno representing the underdog. He looked and talked exactly like his father. Paul Chavez, one of the younger children, is the director of the farmworker service center. As a young girl, Linda Chavez was fiery in her determination to advance the union and bring justice to the workers. Linda married Arturo Rodriguez. He is currently president of the United Farm Workers. Linda died after a brief illness recently.

Cesar was a humble man. He took his life work seriously. He was not in awe of his importance or his achievements. He probably did not achieve as much as he would have liked. He continued to work very hard at organizing until his death. About a year after Cesar's death, I called and talked to Helen Chavez. She sounded the same as she had 25 years earlier. I had expected to see her and the family at Cesar's funeral. I knew there would be a great number of people at the funeral, but I didn't expect to see 40,000 people in Delano. During our phone conversation, Helen told me she thought that Cesar had just worn himself out. She believes he just worked himself to death.

In 1986 Cesar was in Stockton and that is the last time I saw him. The newspaper said he was in town to discuss a new benefit plan (LUPE) with farmworkers or anyone else who was interested. I was working and living in Stockton at the time, so I went to see and hear him. It was a small crowd in a poorer section of the city. He made a presentation much like

an insurance representative would present a group insurance plan to employees. He appeared tired and lacked the animation I had seen so many times.

Today, under Arturo's steady, well-organized leadership, the union is gaining respect and is gaining in numbers. During the last presidential campaign, Dolores Huerta resigned as vice president of the union to head Al Gore's presidential campaign in California.

Ballet Folklórico

Probably in 1968, a dance company from Mexico scheduled a Ballet Folklórico at the Selland Arena in Fresno. Cesar was a great fan of Folklórico, and he wanted to take his family to see it. This was not a simple procedure. They had to schedule the time, arrange transportation for the 10 family members, and raise money for the tickets. I knew of the plans because I was enlisted by Helen or one of the kids to take the money to Fresno and to get the tickets for the family. Cesar didn't want anyone to know about the event, because he didn't want any publicity. I told a friend of mine at the *Fresno Bee*, because I knew that would probably be the last time the family would all be together. Some were going to college and some were getting married. When they got to the arena, a photographer from the *Fresno Bee* met them. Their picture was in the paper the next day. They wouldn't have known I had told the paper, but I had told Susan Drake and she told Helen. I still hope I didn't make anyone too unhappy, but I thought the event should be recorded for the public and for the family.