

Daneen Montoya 1968–1973

To the best of my recollection, we were working on RFK's presidential campaign in 1968. After Bobby's assassination (he was shot on June 4 and died June 6), Cesar sent Kathy and Lupe Murguia and Susan Drake to Dr. Jerry Lackner in San Jose, to see if the former Kennedy workers (by then we called ourselves Kennedy Action Corps) would be interested in channeling our efforts toward the boycott.

The first year, 1969, there wasn't a Huelga office in San Jose. Rather, Reuben, Barbara and Joe Massa, and another young couple (whose names escape me) would take turns making picket signs in their garages and then go out and picket Safeways all by themselves. After about a year, we heard that Frankie Rodriguez had opened a Huelga office in San Jose and we eventually stopped by. Frankie's mom, Elizabeth, was running the office for him and I asked if I could volunteer my office skills. Reuben volunteered his artistic skills.

I began working full-time at the Huelga office and Reuben started silk screening little red felt pennant-type flags on sticks, T-shirts, and chambray work shirts to raise money for the boycott and the union. He got the idea to create pins to sell and contacted Bob Rush in Berkeley to create them from Reuben's designs. We worked rallies, with volunteers, picketed grocery stores, held meetings to form strategy, etc. Eventually, I guess Cesar heard we were doing really well at the fund raising and asked us to visit him in Delano. He had the idea that if Reuben was in the graphics business, he was the one to research and develop the print shop Cesar so much wanted as a voice for the union.

At first, we started taking a caravan to Delano for the Friday night meetings at Forty Acres, where people came in food and clothing caravans from all over the United States and even other countries. I have so many fond memories of the people we met there—the famous and not so famous. Augustin Lira and Luis Valdez began El Teatro Campesino. This now well-known theatrical group, who presented "*actos*" on flatbed trucks in the fields to entice people to lay down their tools and join the strike, also performed at the Friday night meetings. They were so funny and so on target.

In May 1970 we joined the march to Calexico. I marched 20 miles in 100 degree-plus heat. For a while Leonard Nimoy (Dr. Spock) marched with me. At the rest stop under the overhang at the school in Calexico, I was joined sitting on the ground by Walter Mondale. Later on in the day, I had my feet massaged under the "poo-poo" truck, along with Texas Senator Ralph Yarborough. (John F. Kennedy was in Dallas on November 22, 1963 to heal the rift between Yarborough and Lyndon Johnson.) I remember the senator sitting on the ground, leaning against the wheel of the truck. He lifted his Stetson and asked, "How many miles did you all say you marched?" When I replied "20," he threw his Stetson back over his eyes, collapsed back against the wheel, and moaned, "Jesus H. Christ! Ah only marched two miles and Ah think Ah'm gonna die!" Later, after the port-a-potties were removed from the flatbed, the truck was decorated with bunting and we were regaled by celebrities,

El Teatro Campesino, union officials, clergy, and politicians. The main speaker was Senator Edward M. Kennedy.

I have many more memories of moving to La Paz—and of life there as the retreat developed. I recall rallies, Cesar going to jail in Salinas, and personal interactions. I will always remember the love from the Filipino brothers, especially Pete Velasco, Larry Itliong, and Philip Vera Cruz. I remember Cesar's devilish sense of humor, his patience when explaining a point we needed to understand, and the wonderful twinkle in his eyes as he held out his arms for a hug and whispered to me as he came out of Our Lady of Guadalupe's sacristy at his beloved mother's funeral, "I knew you'd come, sister, I knew you'd come." I feel so privileged to have been a small part of the birth of the UFW and to have known, loved, and been loved by these wonderful people.

The first time I met Dolores Huerta was at Ernie Abeytia's campaign headquarters on about 16th and E. Santa Clara Street. He was having a rally and she was supposed to appear. I was working in the office when a little mousy woman came in, greeted us, spoke with Ernie for a minute, and stood in the corner with her arms folded across her chest and didn't say another word. I wondered who she was. Then the rally started and I found out when they introduced her. She got up there and gave an impassioned speech. From then on, in my secret heart, I called her "The Mouse That Roared."

Update: Scott and Richie Montoya (from Sacramento) who met at the Friday night Filipino Hall meetings and food caravans when they were nine years old, declared themselves brothers. Richie is now one-third of the comedy troupe Culture Clash. Scott spent 10 years working with Paul Rodriguez and is now a comedy and film producer. He and his wife, Maria, and their daughter, Giovanna, live in Los Angeles.

My younger son, Mark (Jon Jon) and his wife, Karen, were sponsorship directors of the San Jose Jazz Festival for 10 years and produced shows and events for the city of San Jose. Scott, Emilio Huerta, and Anthony and Paul Chavez still consider themselves brothers and best friends. Growing up with the UFW changed the direction of all our lives and blessed us in ways we could have never anticipated. We are truly blessed to be a part of this brother and sisterhood.