

Jerry Kay 1969–1975

Farmworker Union Memories

I joined the farmworker movement during the grape boycott at the very end of 1969 and continued with the union until the summer of 1975. I learned and experienced a lot in my boycott years, but I think what makes my experience different from most other volunteers was my two years in Salinas, 1971–1973. I was one of the few white, middle-class, college-educated people who went to work in the fields as a farmworker, then went to work as a UFW contract administrator and eventually became a field office director.

I was born in Philadelphia in 1946. For my first eight years, I lived on the same block where my mother had grown up. We both had the same kindergarten teacher. When I was eight, we moved to Los Angeles, and I was raised a middle-class kid in a suburban neighborhood.

My father grew up in Berlin, Germany, before Hitler came to power. Dad was a privileged child and his father—my grandfather—established himself as a renowned restaurant and nightclub proprietor. But they were Jewish, and after Hitler came to power, my father fled to America. His parents did not. They went to a concentration camp, and my father lost his younger brother and sister and many other family members. His parents survived.

So I grew up in a stable family with the knowledge that people did terrible things to my family because of their religion, or race, as Hitler would have called it. I learned on the schoolyard that people formed cliques to be cool and keep other kids out.

I sympathized with the civil rights movement of the 1960s, went to UCLA, and slowly began to sympathize with the anti-war movement. In 1967 I became very politically active but preferred working with open groups of fellow students rather than joining a club like SDS or a socialist or Communist party that wanted political conformity and spent more time debating theory than acting.

In my last year at UCLA, a remarkable man, Ed Pearl, hired me to work at the Ash Grove, his folk music and blues coffeehouse on the border of Hollywood. Ed brought authentic roots music to the West Coast beginning in 1958 when no one could hear real blues, Appalachian, bluegrass, Cajun, or the many other kinds of music of America's working-class cultures. Ed was very political and featured the music and cultures of the anti-war, civil rights, and farmworker struggles.

At a moment when I was greatly disenchanted with American society and material culture, the Ash Grove presented a very different picture of my country. It was there that I first saw El Teatro Campesino in 1968, and the group floored me. I had gone to school with many Mexican-Americans, but never made close friends or felt a real affinity with the Mexican culture. I aspired toward European city life. I knew about and supported the grape

strike, but it did not grab me like the anti-war or Black Power movements. I thought of Cesar as a Chicano version of Martin Luther King, Jr. on an uphill battle, but I did not think that whatever politics he had was going to influence me particularly. But watching the energy, *actos*, and music of the Teatro and hanging out for a couple of days and nights with Danny Valdez and Augie Lira made me want to visit Delano and learn more about the farmworker union. The music I heard and the people I met at the Ash Grove made me want to travel around America.

I left Los Angeles, with its smog, traffic, and Hollywood egos in October of 1969 to visit my own country, and my first stop was Delano. I found my way to Filipino Hall and said that I wanted to help out for a few days. The Filipino men there fed me potato soup and took me over to Forty Acres, where I volunteered to help fertilize 10 acres of pasture for the new Filipino village being built. The guy working next to me shoveling fertilizer off a flatbed truck was union vice president Philip Vera Cruz. From him, I learned about the history of the farmworker movement, and how Filipinos began the grape strike of 1965.

Two days later I hitched a ride up to San Francisco with Dolores Huerta. I planned to visit friends there, but it took me two weeks to get to them because Dolores organized me on the way up. On the same day we left Delano, she took me to a rally at the University of San Francisco, to visit with Fred Ross, and then to the boycott house on Folsom Street. There I met full-time volunteers Vivian Levine, Jan Peterson, Benny Cadillac, and a guy named Ray who cooked us dynamite chiles rellenos. They were a crazy-quilt collection of *La Causa* family.

I got hooked on the dedicated spirit of the union and the way that Dolores and the organizers allowed anyone to help, regardless of background or politics, as long as you did not press your own agenda. I saw how the farmworker movement was action oriented rather than searching for some elusive political purity I found in other progressive organizations. Slowly I realized how active nonviolence meant that you really had to use your head to develop all kinds of creative tactics to influence people and build a popular following. You had to get the public on your side to not buy grapes or shop where they were being sold. Daily work involved calling volunteers, speaking to any and all groups, and the afternoon and weekend picketing of supermarket chains. Boycott life seemed to be a flurry of picket signs, leaflets, phone calls, house meetings, and speaking engagements for the boycott.

This felt very different than the Black Panthers' call to "Free Huey Newton by any means necessary." Or from many white middle-class radical groups bent on quasi-terrorist adventurer schemes. I watched as many movements preaching violence, like the Black Panthers, got crushed by the government, lost the support of the populace, and often ended up becoming violent within their own ranks.

After several weeks I left San Francisco, following my dream to cross the country. I hitchhiked through the South to New York City. I joined the grape boycott there in January 1970 and worked full time until the contracts were signed.

I learned more in those months about people, organizing, and life than in all of my schooling. We called and made contact with every type of organization: public schools and colleges, churches and synagogues, labor union locals and federations, community service groups, anti-poverty groups, senior groups, and other progressive organizations. We asked them to not buy grapes and not to shop at whatever chain we were pressuring to stop selling grapes and to come help us picket and spread the word and donate money to our cause.

Many of our active supporters were high school kids full of enthusiasm and happy to find a progressive organization that functioned like an extended family and that welcomed their participation without subjecting them to rigorous political catechisms.

Some of the full-time organizers included Manuel Vasquez from Visalia, Ray and Barbara Ortiz and their kids from Oxnard, and Joe Guevara. Mark Silverman directed the boycott until Andy Imutan came. Mary Lou Sanchez was our heart and soul. Volunteers included Julie and Wendy Greenfield, Clive Golden, and Gordon (I forgot his last name, but he was a young, incredible guitar player who later committed suicide).

I recall Marcos Muñoz, a grape striker who went to Boston and headed the boycott there. Marcos spoke little English, could not read English, and I don't remember that he read or wrote much Spanish. He hadn't spent much time in cities and certainly not on the East Coast. But Marcos took Boston by storm and got the grapes out. He was such a strong personality, very different from Cesar, but with a great determination. Things that would have stopped me cold had no effect on Marcos. I remember him driving down from Boston and visiting us in Brooklyn. He had driven alone, probably without a map, and could not read the expressway signs or street signs, but he found his way to our house. He proudly walked in and handed me a leaflet.

"Look at this leaflet; we just got them," he said, "Isn't it great?"

I read it and answered, "Yeah, it's very good." The leaflet explained very efficiently why customers should not shop at the latest supermarket chain that we were boycotting.

"What does it say in this part?" he asked. He had no idea what his leaflet said, but they were "great," and he was confident that they would persuade more people not to shop at those grocery stores. Marcos reminded me of a wily, peasant battlefield commander who would always find a way to keep advancing and slowly defeat the enemy—even in foreign territory. There were quite a few farmworkers who came to the union and did whatever they were asked to do. Marcos and others, like Eliseo Medina, learned how to put together their own army and get them to do what needed to be done. I saw how the union battle

brought out skills and spirit among many workers who otherwise might never have had the chance to develop those skills—or forced them to acquire those skills if they did not have them.

Dolores Huerta had already been to New York and had been very effective in getting many chains to stop selling grapes. Everyone in New York knew about Cesar and the boycott. It had become the “liberal cause” of 1968. I learned that the great body of New York City liberals, anxious to participate in a cause, seemed to pick a new one each year to devote their energies to. The grape boycott was 1968’s cause. By 1970 many had already gravitated to another cause: testing for lead paint in the crowded tenements.

Picketing the many fruit stands throughout New York’s boroughs took a certain fortitude. Most were “owned” by very independent and tough hard-working guys associated with shady figures who did not like us young hippies and militants picketing in front of their displays, handing leaflets to all customers and passersby and creating a nuisance for them.

Some harassed us with threats and by spilling trashcans of water in front of us. Many seemed to be connected with some kind of organized illegal activities, and tougher looking fellows in big cars sometimes showed up to speak to us. We were so innocent and sincere, and the union was so poor and “Catholic,” that they usually just told the fruit stand guys to take off the grapes. And they would, for a few days.

We also got a lot of grudging respect by continuing to picket in the deadest cold and snow of winter and the hottest humid heat of summer. Sometimes I don’t know what possessed us to keep up the challenge in the worst weather. In Queens we picketed a whole block of fruit stands in temperatures so cold that we could stay outside for only half an hour; and then we had to limp into a coffee shop next store in shifts for 20 minutes to thaw out our feet and hands. We kept this up for a week in zero degree weather, until the owners were so exasperated and impressed with our dedication that they removed their grapes.

Andy Imutan, a middle-class Filipino organizer who was extremely dedicated to the union, came to lead the New York boycott when Mark Silverman left. His conservative and serious style immediately clashed with our New Left culture. He ordered us not to wear pins other than those of the farmworkers and not to have any leaflets from other radical organizations. We felt we were part of a big collective movement that included the Black Panthers, the anti-war Movement, the Puerto Rican movement, etc.

At first, I had great difficulty with Andy and his ways, but the more I watched him dedicate himself to the work and build support with the unions and liberal elite, and how he constantly worried about how things were going, the more I grew to respect him. I finally began to really love the man and, while not always agreeing with him, understand his point of view. It was another example of how the union could take so many different people from different walks of life and get them to work together with all the differences and become successful.

Here is one New York boycott story. It is about the “Farmworker Freedom Bell.”

One day Andy Imutan called a staff meeting and said that we had to go pick up a large bell. Cesar had been to some church and remarked to the pastor how their church bell impressed him and how nice it would be to have such a bell hang at Forty Acres. The minister, I think his name was Reverend Sayre, told him that the bell had been made by the Whitechapel Foundry in England, the same foundry that made the Liberty Bell. The minister contacted Whitechapel, and they happily donated a bell to the union and shipped it across the ocean. It now sat by the docks in a New Jersey warehouse and Delano wanted us to pick it up and have it travel across country, from city to city, as publicity for the boycott. Andy asked us to come up with a publicity campaign for the new bell.

Someone suggested that we call it the “Farmworkers’ Freedom Bell.” Another said that it should not ring until farmworkers have won their freedom; that is, until the contracts were signed. We thought, maybe we should put chains around it and a lock to symbolize the absence of justice.

“The chains shall be removed and the bell shall ring only when farmworkers are free,” we announced.

Andy planned a big publicity campaign for the bell, beginning with New York Mayor John Lindsay, a liberal Republican who wanted to become president, at Gracie Mansion. He followed that with a special noon mass at St. Patrick’s Cathedral. First we had to get the bell.

I went with a couple of farmworkers, including Joe Guevara, who had a pickup truck, and a couple of guys from the national maritime union to the New Jersey warehouse by the docks. No one knew how big or heavy this bell was. It was in a wood crate about 3 feet tall and weighed about 300 pounds. It took four of us to pick it up and load it into the truck. The mayor’s office knew us well because Joe’s truck was always getting towed or ticketed for double-parking, and we always had a “designated” person at his office to get his truck released without paying the \$50 fee. We drove the bell back to Manhattan, put chains around it and a new, big, shiny padlock. On the flat face of the lock we attached a farmworker eagle sticker.

Lindsay showed up at the press conference, very dapper and charming, while we struggled to carry the bell inside and set it down without breaking anything, including our backs. A lot of press showed up, TV and papers, and Andy told the story of the bell and how it cannot ring until farmworkers are free.

Mayor Lindsay looked into the cameras and told everyone that he was glad to support the grape boycott. The press conference over, but the cameras still shooting, Lindsay grabbed a corner to help us carry it back outside. His jaw dropped when he realized how heavy it was,

and he let go while we struggled to get it back into Joe's truck while the TV recorded us until we got out the door.

A motorcycle cop was standing by Joe's truck writing up a ticket for it being without current registration and illegally parked at Gracie Mansion. Mary Lou Sanchez pleaded with him, explaining that we just had a press conference with the mayor and had to rush the bell to St. Patrick's for a noon mass.

"I don't care who you are, where you've been, or where you're going," the cop said, "but this truck ain't going nowhere and is being towed away!" He wrote out a ticket, and suddenly the mayor appeared with his entourage and his security chief and he asked the officer, "What's the problem?"

"Mary Lou said, "Oh, we're having problems with Joe's truck again."

Mayor Lindsay looked at the officer seriously. "These people have some very important business to take care of. Is there some problem, officer?"

The cop looked at the mayor, his entourage, and the chief of security, then back at the truck and our ragtag band, and then at his ticket book.

His whole demeanor changed. He turned white and said, "Why no, sir, there's no trouble here, no problem at all." He crumpled up the citation.

"Good," said Mayor Lindsay, who turned to his security chief, a very tall, handsome African-American fellow and said, "Can't we get them an escort or something, or they'll never make it in time for the mass?"

"Certainly," said the chief. He called up on his walkie-talkie and there appeared a police car and two motorcycle policemen.

He ordered them, "Get these folks to St. Patrick's as fast as you can!"

"Sure, follow us," said a motorcycle policeman.

We jumped into Joe's truck and our two cars, behind the police car and motorcycle escort with their lights flashing and a siren blaring. We cruised faster than we've ever gone down Fifth Avenue, straight to St. Patrick's Cathedral in time for the mass.

From Manhattan the bell traveled across the country to Delano, stopping in many cities for events and press conferences. Father John Banks, a dashing priest, later recounted to me how he brought the bell to Cincinnati, and from there on to the next city. His car broke down along the road, trying to carry the heavy bell, and he was anxious that he would miss the event in the next city.

His car stopped near a small airport and he went to the field, talked to someone who agreed to fly the bell in a small plane to the event. The bell was so heavy that the plane could barely get off the ground but made it in time.

The bell arrived in Delano weeks later after a well-publicized tour. The only complaints issued came from the Whitechapel Foundry in England, which had cast and donated the bell. When they heard that we declared that it could not ring until farmworkers were free, they announced that had they known we were going to do that, they never would have given it to us.

The growers finally signed at the beginning of the grape harvest in the summer of 1970. For this union of farmworkers to beat the growers, while the Vietnam War still raged and as the Nixon Administration pursued a campaign to stifle all domestic dissent, was incredible.

But immediately, the lettuce and row crop growers of Salinas signed with the Teamsters union so they could keep us out and say that their workers had a union. Manuel Vasquez, my younger sister, a friend, and I drove back to California from Brooklyn in a small VW bug in 54 hours. By the time we returned, the union was boycotting lettuce. I returned to the Bay Area to work on the boycott.

I have a favorite supermarket boycott story from this time. All of us on the boycott must have stood in front of countless supermarkets and asked thousands of shoppers not to buy grapes or lettuce and to shop someplace else. We converted many, made some think about it, and suffered the disdain of others.

We have heard every possible excuse from those who would not take the trouble to go someplace else: "I'm not buying grapes." "I won't shop here the next time." "I'm in a hurry." "I'm almost out of gas."

But we probably all remember that *one* person we spoke to on the boycott picket line above all others, and this is mine:

I was picketing a Lucky's store in San Francisco on Laguna, which sat atop a gradual hill. We were trying to picket as many Lucky's as possible every afternoon of that week, so I was picketing and leafleting alone. At about 5 p.m., an older, heavyset African-American woman came puffing up the hill pulling a fold-up shopping cart. She inched up the hill very slowly, stopping every few yards to catch her breath and wipe her brow with a white handkerchief.

The closer she came, the more I thought about what I should tell her. I didn't have the heart to ask her not to shop after watching her come up the hill for 10 minutes, seeing every step and all her effort. When she reached me, I handed her a leaflet and asked her if

she could shop at another store the next time she shopped. She took my leaflet, looked it over, turned around and began to walk very slowly down the street again.

I just couldn't bear seeing her go away without any groceries after all her trouble.

I yelled, "No, lady, you can shop here today."

She turned around and looked at me with a scowl and said, "Is you or is you *not* picketing this store?"

"Yes, we are, but I can see you've come a long way and I don't want to make it harder for you."

She came back up a few steps, looking very indignant and said, "Boy, I'm 68 years old, and I never crossed a picket line in my life, and I don't intend to start today!"

I told her that I had my car here and I'd be happy to drive her to the nearest market.

She looked around and asked, "You got someone here with you?"

"No, I'm alone for right now. We're trying to cover as many stores as we can today."

"Well, then, you do your job and I'll do mine. Don't worry about me."

She smiled and hobbled back down the street with her empty cart. Whoever she was, she taught me that no one could have a good excuse not to observe the boycott.

In June of 1971, the lettuce growers agreed to negotiations, and we suspended the boycott. I became restless and decided to move to Salinas to become a farmworker. I did this because I wanted to learn more of the culture and to be able to organize farmworkers, not just city volunteers. I told my parents, who wanted me to become a lawyer, that even if I eventually became an attorney, I first wanted to do the hardest work around, so that no matter what happened I could always earn some money.

I did not have any experience in this "unskilled" labor, nor did I speak any Spanish. I thought of it as a new adventure and also how wonderful it would be to help poor people. I was going to be the white kid going down to Salinas to help the Mexican farmworkers. From the very first day, it was the other way around. My first two days in the fields I was so lost and depressed I was ready to quit. It was a farmworker on the crew, the union crew steward who knew nothing about me, who approached me and slowly taught me the work and introduced me to the rest of the people there. They took me in and helped me.

I learned that not only was farm work tough, but that there was a spirit and cooperation on the crews that made the work bearable, sometimes even fun and gratifying. I realized that

all that we had heard and read about fieldwork and told to others on the boycott was true to a great extent, but what was not related was how the work and conditions were made more human by the cooperation of the workers among themselves.

Several farmworker families whom I knew allowed me to stay with them in their homes, fed me, nurtured me, cured my hangovers with *menudo*, taught me to dance the *cumbia*, invited me to *quinceñeras*, weddings, and baptisms.

I had not been in Salinas for the big strike of 1970, the greatest expression of farmworker unity in the history of the movement, but I heard plenty of stories and saw lots of snapshots. It was a general strike unlike any other, where the major artery of the Salinas Valley, Highway 101, was filled from one end to the other, 50 miles, with strikers carrying Huelga signs.

Though we only got four major contracts from the strike, the spirit continued while I was there. The row crop workers, the *lechugeros* and *apieros* (lettuce and celery harvesters), and the broccoli cutters were like professional sport teams following the *corrida* around California and Arizona, and they didn't take shit from anyone. Salinas, set just off California's Central Coast, with a temperate climate through most of the valley until you arrived about 50 miles south into King City, had a long six-month harvest season, and many workers began to put down roots there.

The four contracts included Interharvest and Freshpict, both subsidiaries of bigger corporations (United Brands and Purex); and D'Arrigo brothers, a large farm operation, family owned and based in Salinas.

We also had a huge strawberry contract with Pic 'n Pac, a subsidiary of S. S. Pierce of Boston. Pic 'n Pac went broke because of disastrous management and then tried to blame it on the union contract. One former executive, Dave Walsh, took over the farming. Pic 'n Pac then sold its large labor camp, La Posada, a mobile home park that housed more than 1000 of its workers in some of the best conditions in the valley. I lived in La Posada at the time with the Lucio family.

The strong UFW families in La Posada—a real community of longtime friends, extended families, and coworkers—refused to leave and break up their neighborhood. They struggled for six months to find funding to buy the camp or to locate another camp to which they could all move as a group. While some officials were sympathetic, any with real power refused to help them, even while acknowledging the shortage of housing. The families who refused to move were finally evicted from the camp. Of the 100 or more original families, 30 families (including myself), camped out on the street until they were given an old, abandoned and broken-down camp out of town, Camp MacCallum. I moved there with them. They fixed it up and it still survives today as a nice fixed-up community, San Gerardo. There would never have been a struggle if it had not been for the experiences these families had with the union, learning to fight for themselves.

After only one season doing farm work, and making a much better living than the \$5 a week I made on the boycott, my knees hurt a lot. The Salinas hiring hall director asked me to work as a contract administrator. I agreed and first helped with dispatching workers, collecting dues and dealing with problems at the front counter. This way I could finally learn to speak Spanish. I saw how the hiring hall—probably the union's toughest thing to win in the contract—actually worked when everyone cooperated. From the stories I heard from the *campesinos*, the elimination of labor contractors, the enforcement of toilets in the fields, a seniority system, and definitely pesticide protections, were all considered valuable.

I dealt with the workers who had been in Salinas during the strike. They possessed great spirit, *animo*, and cooperated with paying dues and any rules we had. I also found some workers who were angry when they found out that they had to pay up dues for the months they had not worked. That was standard union policy, and though \$3.50 a month might not seem a lot, a family of four or six who came in to work after six months off, had to pay over \$50 up front.

I loved talking to everyone who came into the hiring hall and learning where they were from and hearing stories as I had on the crews about their *ranchos*, towns, and villages in Mexico; or of the Texas border towns along the Rio Grande. They came to Salinas because they could make much better money than they could in Mexico or even in Texas and Arizona.

The years 1971 and 1972 in Salinas showed what the union could become if we had the contracts. We raised the pay, bettered the working conditions, and eliminated the labor contractors and some of the worst pesticides. We had a running hiring hall; a farmworker service center run first by Gloria, whose husband was a lettuce packer, and then by Joanne Carder, attorney Bill Carder's wife; and a new farmworker clinic set up by Margaret Murphy. Farmworkers helped to manage every aspect of all of the endeavors. They ran the ranch committees of each farm, had a crew steward on every crew, met with management to discuss any and all matters that came up within the contract, including working conditions and piece rate pay disputes. Meetings at the union hall happened almost nightly, often with kids running around while their parents discussed, deliberated, and decided. With a grievance procedure, any and all disputes between the workers and the growers or supervisors could be worked out talking in the field or at a conference table.

There was nothing more important than getting the growers to the table to talk and hammer out disputes. The greatest struggle was to get these longtime, old ways farmers to talk straight with their workers—brown-skinned, Mexican, black, or whatever. Part of the difficulty was the racist and class attitude among the growers who believed that the field workers were not capable of conducting themselves in negotiations for important matters. This was based clearly on the growers not wanting to lose any power. They did the same with the white Dust Bowl refugees in the 1930s. Yet in the early 1970s, I already saw some Chicano supervisors, clearly on the side of management, running some field operations.

Years later I learned that farming is a hard business and growers are subject to vagaries of international competition, weather, water, prices, and pests. Labor was the one thing that they hoped to be able to control, and they often did it with an iron fist. Our union needed to force the growers into signing the contracts, but then, unlike the Teamsters, we put the workers into administering every step of the contract.

Whenever I went to a grievance meeting or met with any grower or supervisor for any reason, a crew steward or representative of the workers' elected ranch committee from that company was present. Most often the workers did the talking because they knew a hell of a lot more about their business than I did. I saw that the strongest union supporters and leaders were the best and most respected workers. It was not the slackers who most supported the UFW, but the finest and most dedicated workers who knew the real worth of their labor. They understood how the union could guarantee that they would get the value and respect for their work.

The year 1971 was also when the whole Republican Party, Reagan and Nixon, the Teamsters, and the Farm Bureau coalition came together to destroy the union. Because of the success of the strikes in Delano and Salinas, the first contracts in Florida, and our strengthening movement in other states, our enemies worked every possible angle to see us demolished. Cesar and the leadership were always fighting life-and-death crises, the grape workers had a harder time getting organized around the hiring halls, and Salinas, being strong, was pretty much left to its own.

Because the Salinas UFW membership was so spirited, the membership helped on whatever campaign they were needed, wherever it was. They had collections to charter buses and often collected to pay their fellow workers who went to help in Arizona, Delano, Coachella, L.A., or Sacramento. Because of their *animo* and dedication, the Salinas Chavistas became known as the *Division Del Norte* after Pancho Villa's army. And this, too, made our Salinas growers angry. Many times, without good notice, workers or whole crews might disappear for a few days to help the union on an important campaign.

Our hiring hall suffered without more staff help, and after the Proposition 22 campaign only I and one other full-time organizer, Tony Sanchez, remained. Cesar's brother Richard came and told us that one of us should fill in "for only a little while." Neither of us wanted the responsibility, so Richard flipped a coin and I ended up the "winner." That's how I became the Salinas field office director.

Almost immediately our strawberry contract negotiations with the Dave Walsh Company broke down, and he brought in a labor contractor to do the winter pruning work. We struck. I had never really worked a strike in the fields, much less led one. La Paz tried to send help but got bogged down on the grape negotiations. The first week, the spirit of the strikers was very high and many showed up to picket. By the middle of the second week, fewer showed up and some started looking for work elsewhere. A smaller, committed

group of men and women carried the strike through a very wet winter into the spring when the picking began.

Dave Walsh got the usual anti-strike court injunction, limiting the number of picketers and where they could stand. We purposely broke the injunction and got arrested and sent to jail to show the people of Monterey County how the growers used the courts and sheriff department as their own security force, with the taxpayers paying the bill. About 30 workers, including me, spent about 10 days in jail, but the strike continued.

By then the union had struck the grapes, and the grape growers brought in the Teamsters so that they, too, could say, "We have a labor contract with a real union." This was the same tactic that the growers had used in Salinas in 1970. Suddenly Teamster organizers appeared in Salinas to organize "their workers." They set up a new office and started working the crews and having meetings. Then D'Arrigo Brothers, one of our big row crop contracts, ditched us and went with the Teamsters. So now we had two strikes in Salinas and virtually no staff because all good Salinas organizers had been sent to help out with the grapes.

I freaked and at a meeting in La Paz told Dolores that we needed more help in Salinas. She said, "Come on, tell Cesar," and pushed me in front of him. I told him, "Look, the Teamsters sent organizers to Salinas and we can beat them, but I need help."

He asked if I knew of someone who could do it. I said, yes, send me Roberto Garcia. Roberto had come from Salinas and had been one tough sonofabitch foreman. But he joined the big Salinas strike of 1970 and became a very tough organizer. But he was kind of wild and spent a lot of time with Cesar's cousin, Manuel Chavez, Cesar's swashbuckling alter ego. Roberto Garcia was like that, and sometimes, when the stress got too much, he would desert his post to run off someplace, usually south of the border, for a month before returning. He was not Dolores's favorite, and when she heard me tell Cesar that I wanted Roberto, she hit the roof. We needed people who I felt could talk and organize circles around the Teamsters, and I knew Roberto. We got him for a little while until he was sent to another hot spot.

We wanted to win the strawberry strike, to show that it could be done and to give the grape strikers some hope. The strawberry strikers worked every day picketing the fields and the home of the labor contractor, even facing him down when he drew a gun on them.

They were incredibly dedicated, but the grower brought in scab pickers from across the border. So one day I made a call to immigration and was able to make a personal connection with the head guy. He cleared the scabs out, and then did it again. Another grower, Anthony Grcich, who had been with Pic 'n Pac, bought half the strawberry company from Dave Walsh.

After the strawberry strike had begun, I was able to get the former Salinas director, Richard Chavez (not Cesar's brother) to help me with the strike. He came to the picket line every day. One afternoon Richard came back to the office all bubbly and told me that the new owner, Grcich, stopped at the entrance to the field and told him that he wanted to talk.

We entered into negotiations. David Burciaga came; then Cesar came. Finally a new strawberry contract was signed. The strikers were elated and Anthony Grcich allowed them to name the new company. They called it "La Victoria."

In the middle of all this, carloads of Arab workers suddenly began to appear at the hiring hall wanting jobs. They had never been to Salinas before and did not know row crop work. Six guys would arrive in a car looking for dispatches and a place to live. One of them might speak some English. They wanted to earn money to go home to college. The Mexican farmworkers did not want to bring them on to their piece-rate crews because they felt that they would slow everything down. But our contract said that they had a learning period, and we went to the fields with the Arabs and got the workers to give them a chance. They picked it up fast and became efficient workers and good union members. Paraphrasing Jerry Cohen, here was I, a Jew fighting for the rights of Arab workers in a Mexican and Filipino union. After we helped our Arab brothers get jobs and housing, many would come into the office, walk straight back into my office and give me a hug.

As the summer progressed, more Teamster organizers came to Salinas. We were still striking D'Arrigo Brothers, but the major union struggle and effort went into winning the grape contracts. One afternoon a bunch of angry lettuce cutters from a Teamster company, Bruce Church, came to the office. They were furious because their supervisor put them back into the same lettuce field three times, and there was hardly any mature lettuce to cut. Paid piece-rate, they made no money. They had refused that day to go back into that field and the supervisor fired them. They had gone to the new Teamster office and the Teamsters did not help them. So they came to see what "Chavez's people" would do.

We asked them how the other Bruce Church crews felt. They said that they backed them up. We asked them would they be happy if we could just get them rehired? No, they wanted a contract with UFW. We told them that that would require a big strike and they might not win. They did not care; they wanted a strike.

They went back to their camp and talked to the other crews. A couple of our organizers went along. Some of our top Interharvest ranch committee members joined them in the evening. The next morning not one Bruce Church lettuce crew showed up. They went out on strike. The Teamsters sent 30 goons to intimidate the strikers of both Bruce Church and D'Arrigo Brothers. Our attorney, Bill Carder, looked up the rap sheets on these guys and they were not trained in the spirit and tradition of Fred Ross, Sr.

But the Salinas workers were not to be intimidated and, though they never initiated violence, they did not back down when the Teamsters came for them. In one altercation where our strikers had peacefully picketed a field since 5 a.m., the 30 Teamster

provocateurs showed up at about 8 a.m. with baseball bats. These aggressors were sent running and scrambling and a few to the hospital with broken bones. The cops arrested just our strikers.

Both D'Arrigo Brothers and Bruce Church went across the border for replacement workers and got their production back up. We were hit with more injunctions limiting our picketing, and I was scared that things would become more violent.

It got hairy enough that I started sleeping *under* my bed for awhile and sometimes took workers with me as bodyguards. One evening, Ana Flores of Santa Maria, who had come to help us, and I had to flee from a downtown café when some Teamsters discovered us there without protection.

I had a couple of spies working in the Teamster office who alerted me when news came across their teletype machine that their toughs in Coachella had tried to beat up Cesar, "but only got to Marshall Ganz."

After the deaths of our workers in the grape strike, Nagi Daifullah and Juan De La Cruz, the union leadership decided to stop the strike and go to the boycott. Since I did not participate in the grape strike, I don't know how it was, but the impression I got was that even with all the strike fund money and organizers thrown into it, there were still plenty of strikebreakers.

If we in Salinas had had half the support and organizers that the union put into winning back the grape contracts, I believe we might have won over the Salinas Valley and kicked the Teamsters out of the fields. But that was not to be, and it is all speculation on my part. Cesar and the leadership put everything into holding onto the grapes. I don't think those workers were nearly as well organized or as dedicated to the union as those in the row crops. I would have seriously considered putting our efforts first into where the union was the strongest and spread from there. I never discussed this openly or pushed for it. We were always operating in a crisis mode, and I'm certain that the leadership believed that the grapes were like our firstborn child that we couldn't sacrifice.

I was burned out and had hardly any staff to do the work. The tension was very high. In September of 1973, the strikes were called off and the boycott reinstated. I got a call to come to Delano immediately, that the union wanted me to go on the boycott. Never before had I gone where they wanted me to go. I would go where I wanted. I'd just say that I was quitting for the moment and then I'd show up in San Francisco or Salinas and get back to organizing. I really felt that Salinas had become my home and I had grown to love the farmworker community, the east side streets, camps, markets, restaurants, and cantinas. I knew tons of people, had learned to speak Spanish, and had become a part of the community. I learned the countryside and a whole other way of life from how I had grown up.

But feeling exhausted, I did not object when they asked me to leave. I went to Forty Acres and hundreds of us assembled to be sent to different cities across the country. They had worked out an itinerary for each caravan with different unions or churches to put them up each night along the route, combined with an evening rally to raise support for the new grape and lettuce boycott. In only a few days they had done an incredible job of organizing this campaign.

Marshall Ganz told me that I was to go to Cleveland, Ohio. However, they wanted me to lead six cars of farmworker families in a caravan, leaving three families in Dallas and three in Miami. Once I got the families in Miami settled with housing, I was to go to Cleveland. They had not yet worked out our itinerary or places to stay. We were to leave the next morning from Delano and drive to Los Angeles. From Los Angeles I was to call the union and someone would tell us where we would drive and stay for the following night. I was to do that each day: call up La Paz and someone would arrange a church or union hall for us to stay in in the next city 400 miles away, hold a rally, sleep, and then shove off the next morning. I called, wrote down the city and address, wrote copies to give each of the other drivers, and we would meet up in the next city. We did that all the way to Miami. L.A. first, then Phoenix, El Paso, Dallas. Then to Jackson, Mississippi; Atlanta; Jacksonville; and Miami.

It was hot and humid in Miami. One of our families had an 18-year-old daughter, Marta Rodriguez, who was filmed and photographed being beaten, slammed to the ground, and handcuffed in the Giumarra Vineyards along with AFL-CIO organizer Frank Valenzuela. A union booklet and film showing the scene brought her a lot of attention. She would get up before audiences and, in Spanish, tell about her ordeal.

Miami was a big, growing town with farms not too far away and a big Cuban population. I had no idea how the Cubans, with their right-wing reputation, would accept us. But when we spoke in front of stores and at meetings, they were very receptive and supportive. Many of them identified with the Hispanic and Catholic sides of the UFW, and more than that, they seemed to sympathize with the plight of immigrants fighting for economic justice and against discrimination.

Again, throughout Florida, we had a wonderful organization and a couple of big citrus contracts. Mack and Diana Lyons were very popular with the workers and the supporters. Paul Pumphrey did a great job in Apopka, Florida. Father Frank O'Loughlin and ministers Frank Smith and Augie Vanden Bosche worked tirelessly. Juanita Brown, who coordinated the first international grape boycott, got a powerhouse group of women together, led by her indomitable mother, to organize a giant fundraiser we called the Farmworker Fiesta. Cesar and Helen came, met with the governor, toured the state and headlined this great event. Cesar gave the only great speech that I ever heard him give in front of a large crowd.

Florida had a lot of farmland and some of the worst conditions I ever saw. A couple of labor contractors were charged with holding their workers (mostly winos) as slaves a year

before I arrived. Sugar cane workers imported from Jamaica were in worse conditions than the *braceros* in California 15 years earlier. It was unbelievable. A bus filled with workers holding their knives drove into an irrigation canal and many were killed and injured. Augie Vanden Bosche, Frank Smith, and Father O'Loughlin ran to the hospital to help the injured and were ordered out and threatened with arrest if they remained. They came back the next day, and every one of the injured workers had already been sent back to Jamaica. There was not one worker left there to complain or to tell what had happened.

Miami Beach hosted an international wine convention at a big hotel, and some of our strikers and supporters went there to publicize the Gallo boycott. I saw that John Guimarra, Jr., whom I had never met, had a booth and a "hospitality room" to promote the family's brand-new wines.

I went into the room and introduced myself to Guimarra and asked quietly, "Why have you signed with the Teamsters and caused us to go on strike?" A woman assistant heard me and tried to usher me out. He stopped her, harshly, and said that he wanted to talk to me. We went into a small room.

"Look," I said, "you know us. You know that Cesar will never quit until you sign. Why do you want all this trouble again?"

He looked very pained and said that the contracts had just not been working, that the union halls were disorganized and inefficient. I asked how could we get them organized when they had done everything to sabotage them from the beginning, especially with all the anti-farmworker laws being passed, the Nixon-Teamster-Farm Bureau alliance and all the crises they continually threw up at us.

He sighed and said, "Let's just say that we had to do what we had to do." I said that we do as well. Then he shook my hand and we parted.

When Jerry Brown was elected governor of California in 1974, I gave notice to the union that I was going to quit. Governor Reagan had vetoed two organizing bills that we had gotten passed. I knew that Jerry Brown would sign one, and I thought that that would usher in a new era. I could retire believing that we were going to win very shortly all over California.

La Paz asked me for one last thing: to go for a month to the citrus region above Orlando, Florida, and help with the Minute Maid contract. It was up for renegotiations and the company was stalling. Coca-Cola owned them and was terrified of a boycott, but probably knew we were stuck at the moment boycotting non-union grapes, lettuce, and Gallo.

I went around to the crews and made certain that everyone was signed up in the union. Florida was a Right To Work state, meaning that even if a majority of the workers voted for the union, an individual did not have to join. Most every Minute Maid field employee

joined. There, in and around Apopka, Florida, I saw not only what the union did to help the workers, but also what it could have become. I'm guessing that the Minute Maid work force was about 70 percent African-American, 25 percent Mexican and Puerto Rican, and 20 percent white. Now this was the South, where there was still a lot of racism and extremes in poverty and wealth. The entrance to Apopka had a sign from some kind of white citizens' council greeting you as you drove in. It was generally not acceptable still in the South for black and white laborers to work together to solve common problems.

We had meetings where whites, blacks, and Hispanics discussed problems, came up with solutions, and then acted together on them. When a black worker got fired for a bogus reason, all the workers went out in protest.

The Minute Maid ranch committee and workforce were strong and well organized. Cesar was seen as the union president and as a great organizer, but not, primarily, as a charismatic leader. They were strong UFW members because the union worked for them. I saw in the Florida fields the future of what the UFW could have become as a national union of farmworkers from many backgrounds working together, an organization not necessarily dependent upon a charismatic leader once Cesar would not be able to lead. It could have been an incredible model.

I have not written much in these memoirs about Cesar only because so much has been written about him. I will scribble out these short reminiscences:

I first met him face to face on the day that we announced the end of the grape boycott in Chicago before the executive board of the AFL-CIO. Many of us volunteers and boycott coordinators crowded into the hallway outside a small meeting room within a large hotel while the press assembled, the TV cameras set up, and the entire executive board took their seats. Cesar took that moment to quietly and almost humbly come over and introduce himself to me and to thank me for my work.

As the Salinas field office director I had a good working relationship with Cesar. Though I never got the kind of overall support I felt we needed, whenever I told him that I wanted something, he would do his best to provide it. I think that he respected me because I did my best at work and I always gave him the straight up on how I saw things. I liked being a part of the union, but I liked to be in a place away from headquarters, so I never sought to be that near to him. I didn't like the thought of a boss breathing down my neck. I always felt that I had the best of all worlds, whether in San Francisco, Salinas, or Florida.

I left the UFW as a full-time worker in the summer of 1975. I kept in touch and watched as the union rose and faltered. Some of the failures of course were the result of the strong forces of opposition never giving an inch to allow the dreams of Cesar Chavez to come true. Other problems cropped up from what I suppose was Cesar's fear and unwillingness to open up the incredible organization that he created and nurtured to more democracy from within. He feared the kind of internal dissent that often tears organizations apart and

worried that only a tight ship with him as captain could confront the powerful growers and win.

I know very well that whatever conflicts any of us might have had with Cesar, it is only because of his vision, work, and sacrifices that we had this incredible association—a family, really—to which we could add our considerable dreams, labor, and sacrifices. His failures were ever more agonizing because we knew that he had led us to come so close to seeing our impossible dreams come true.

And what was the worst that happened to any of those who defied him? Were they assaulted with violence or brutality? No, at worst, they were banished from the organization. Did they lose a terrific income, a great career? No, they were denied a dream, a family. And so many trudged off to rebuild something new.

This did not happen to me—I saw the best of times and missed the worst of times. I did not have to swallow this bitter pill of broken dreams, but I have had to swallow others, and disillusionment is a tough enemy to overcome. I still owe to Cesar and to Dolores and to Richard Chavez, Gil Padilla, Philip Vera Cruz, Mack and Dianna Lyons, Marshall Ganz, and to all the *campesinos* and my fellow volunteers the most lofty and greatest dreams of my life and the closest I ever came to reaching them.