

Hub Segur 1969–1973, 1987–1989

Snapshots From a Two-Timer

I fall into stuff and, as Marshall used to say, “Watch this.”

Spring break and a couple of schoolteachers agree to meet in Delano and find out what this farmworker thing is all about. I was coming down from Carmel Valley and a weekend at Joan Baez’s Institute for the Study of Nonviolence. Les Larsen, who knew Jim Drake, was driving east from Ventura County. We met in Delano but it took a half a dozen sets of directions to find the Gray House, a small one-family stucco in a residential area that had been converted into the union’s headquarters.

A receptionist behind a makeshift counter facing the front door greeted us. Les introduced himself and said we were here to see Jim Drake. “He’s on the phone right now, but if you want to go down the hall to the right, you can catch him when he’s off.” The house/office conversion appeared to be nearing the halfway mark, with tattered furniture, boxes filled with leaflets, papers scattered over counters and tables, people scurrying in and out of doors, phones continually ringing—organized confusion. Through the partially open office door we could hear Jim’s half of the telephone conversation. A voice called to us from the office across the hall. Cesar Chavez was beckoning us to come in.

Cesar was a very good likeness of himself. Our general inquiries led Cesar into describing the current efforts of the union. Although at times he seemed strained to sustain the conversation, he projected all those characteristics so frequently noted by the press—he was soft-spoken, knowledgeable, modest, and self-assured. If questions were at all extended, Cesar seemed to slump in his chair while struggling to keep from resting his eyes for a minute. But he became immediately alert when Les mentioned that we were located in western Ventura County and if there was something we could do ...

“Farmworkers aren’t very interested in politics, but they do respond to an individual, a candidate.” Our first organizing lesson. If Les and I could start a voter registration drive, perhaps in Santa Paula, using the Kennedy magnetism to get them on the rolls, “well, once we get them registered, then we can educate them to vote on issues crucial to their own welfare.”

We talked with Jim Drake and liked his warm, up-front manner. He encouraged the voter registration idea and talked about the obvious physical strain Cesar was under. “It’s only his second day back in the office.” Nine days ago Cesar had broken his 24-day fast, with Robert Kennedy by his side. I drive out of Delano thinking maybe I can help.

Ten months later, I am in the Chavez living room. Business is conducted in Cesar's bedroom, where he has a special braced bed. A cinder-brick-and-pine-board bookcase features mostly sociology books and, on the top shelf sits a stone Buddha staring straight ahead. No rugs, as the kids have to skid across the floor on their way out the door. A Huelga flag covered with maybe 100 buttons hangs on the wall above the couch. Helen's collection was the standard against which all others were judged. One guard was sitting by the front door and another by Cesar's bedroom door.

Patti Averbuck comes out with a notepad. "What bills do you have?" "None." "Don't owe any money?" "Right." She goes back in, then comes back out. "Okay, you're going to L.A." I pick up boycott literature from Jane (transitioning to Juanita), the boycott coordinator, at the Gray House, where it appears confusion has moved closer to chaos.

My first Friday night meeting includes a reporter from the *Washington Post*, a writer and her editor from New York, six students from Pomona, a man walking from somewhere to Sacramento in protest, and two Third World Liberation Front members from Berkeley requesting a union endorsement of their strike. Cesar: "All in favor shout 'Viva!' All opposed shout 'scab.'" After the meeting, we head down to Peoples for beer. Juanita Brown ends my orientation: "Work as hard as you can while you are with us and go when you have to."

I walked down Kensington Street in Delano knowing I was where I was because Cesar had 20 minutes to talk to two strangers while still recovering from his fast and because Robert Kennedy had been gunned down two months later. Saying quietly to myself, "Oh, I'm with the farmworkers. What do you do?"

The Serda family walked out of the fields one by one. First Helen, the oldest daughter, then Carmine, her mother, and finally Joe, her father and a DiGiorgio foreman. Joe was the director of the L.A. boycott, which included five of the Filipino brothers, Julian Baladoy, Catilino Tachlibon, George Cargo, and Leo and Mariano. Pat Bonner, a Jesuit, handled the office finances. Carmine ran the kitchen and Helen worked on the boycott.

This was not only an opportunity to learn the mechanics of the grape boycott—cold calling supporters, distributing leaflets, pitching the union to labor locals and civic groups, soliciting signatures on a Safeway petition—but also to witness the strength and conviction of a striking farmworker family, its sacrifices, its trust in Cesar and the union, its faith. Accompanying Joe to meetings, I saw the honesty of the movement and, when faced with a challenge or a critical comment, the agility to forge a response that explains rather than argues. With Helen, I heard the passion of a young woman who led her family out of the vineyards and onto the picket line by the power of her conviction. If it's a panel with a number of speakers, Helen is the first if not the only speaker to receive an outburst of applause.

Joe says I am ready. He assigns me to speak at Blackie Leavitt's bartenders' union meeting. He tells me to kneel. I kneel. He taps me on the shoulder with a ruler; I am knighted. He hands me a boycott button. I am certified. "Why didn't I get one of the big buttons?" I ask. "They cost a dollar," replies Joe.

I trade Helen a ride to Delano for a tour of the union's landmarks. We went by the old soup kitchen and past the small white meeting hall on Garces Avenue that was first used by the union for meetings. At the east end of the Forty Acres service station was a room collecting old office equipment. Cesar stayed here while fasting in the spring of 1968. The cross made of telephone pole stock that Richard Chavez had erected during his brother's fast had been set afire and finally sawed through. The remnants were lying on the ground, visible from Garces. We found the plain board fence with the now fading white message, "Juarez Zapata Chavez." I had seen this image in a number of books on the union and its power had stayed with me. We stopped at one of the DiGiorgio's old labor camps, Sierra Vista Ranch. The door was open to the 10- by 30-foot one-room cabin that the Serda family had occupied. Helen found her sister Peggy's name scratched into the door frame. Helen's mother, Carmine, cut through the walls to make the windows. The outside water tap was shut off.

Maybe the visit triggered the memories of how hard it was for the strikers' kids. Ostracized by their peers. No money. Fights broke out at the dances, Huelga kids just stuck together. They would have their own dances. Some got into trouble. It was hard for the 18 to 22 set, as well. Helen's boyfriend was serving nine months for burglary, other were worse off. Tony Mendes left the boycott the week I arrived. Joe liked him and worried. Tony showed up a couple of years later with a rival union. By mid-spring, Helen was talking about going to CSU Northridge. Irene and Amalia, two key staff members during the Coachella march, would return to school in the fall. As I slowly learned how to work a potentially supportive audience, I would call on Helen's stories to personalize some of the issues.

If Cesar provided the inspiration and Joe and Helen were the soul, then the Coachella march completed the triangle around me. It provided the commitment. Jim O'Keefe and I sort of snuck out of the L.A. boycott office and headed to Coachella. We found a march to join just below Niland, 60 farmworkers, some union staff, and less than a handful of Anglos. Men, women, and children with a flag or a sign, 80 degrees and rising. At breaks, a group forms around Alfredo Vasquez and his MAPA guitar. Augie Lira comes over, Father Mark Day is pulled in, and off they go, harmonizing as best they can on "*De Colores*," "*Nosotros Venceremos*," and "*Solidaridad*." Paul Espinoza, assigned down here from L.A., updated us. The captain of the march, Pete Velasco, says "Good to have you, brothers." Elsie Downs attended to blisters and handed out salt pills; a Coachella farmworker family of eight in a station wagon kept jumping ahead of the march line to hand out cups of water

to the marchers. Local families prepared food for lunch and dinner. And the temperature climbed over 100 degrees.

This agricultural area was the last vestige of the Old West where vigilante rule had been the law. It was a common speculation within the union that if ever a farmworker was to be killed in attempting to build the union, it would happen in the Imperial Valley, and we were marching to its northern border.

It was 110 degrees when we hit the outskirts of Calipatria around 4 p.m. People came out on the sidewalks and watched or joined in the procession, raising the spirits and increasing the volume of the songs and shouts. Dinner in the park. Afterward, Jim and I start a stick game for the kids, using a pole from a Huelga flag and an old tennis ball. The kids were eager to play and so was everyone else, guys over-swinging to the point of wrenching their backs. The family providing the water breaks on the march was there, but eight-year-old Gloria was too shy to ask about playing. We convinced her that she was needed for the good of the team and in her first try at bat, she dribbled a ball back to the pitcher that could only be labeled as “too hot to handle.” Standing proudly on first base, she turned and gave the world the biggest smile she had. She was a little confused about defense, however, and decided her best bet was to come out to right field and hold my hand. It was that kind of a game.

Something changed with that stickball game. The next morning the marchers were more comfortable with us and made us feel like we were really part of the group. But the hourly march singing lost a little quality when a couple more out-of-tune voices figured it was okay to join in.

The union’s legal department sent David Averbuck to monitor the march. Dave has a big upper body but has suffered from polio and uses metal hand crutches to support his walking. At first he was on the side of the road, encouraging marchers and joining the shouts and singing, occasionally slipping into the line for short periods. As if inspired by the march, Dave began extending his participation until he was able to hold his place in line for nearly a mile. As he half walked, half dragged his legs along, people around him stood a little more erect because of his presence. A couple of weeks later, Dave was back at the Coachella field office reflecting on the march and the strike that followed. “Bill Kircher told me the fun was really in the battle. Bullshit! I dreamt I was driving up to Delano and we had signed contracts. I started to cry I was so happy. I woke up and found these goddamn tears streaming down my face.” He paused for a second. “I have a stake in this now. Jerry (Cohen) has been with the strike for two years; I’ve been with it for one. I want victory so bad I can taste it!”

A dented and faded red MG Midget, top down, passed the march, spun around and came back. A guy in a well-worn army field jacket with cameras around his neck jumped out and joined the march. Union veterans recognized George Ballis immediately. He had been photographing the union since its inception. George went quickly to work recording the

march. As we approached Brawley, George was three-quarters up a telephone pole, filming. Jim Drake spotted him and let go with “Arriba, Ballis!” Everyone around Jim looked up, smiled and echoed, “Arriba!” The next day George made a concession to the heat by donning a straw hat. Someone called out, “George, it was 110 degrees today. What will it take to get your coat off?” George never broke stride: “I’m like an Arab; the hotter it gets, the more clothes I put on.”

The atmosphere changed during the weekend as folks from San Diego, L.A., and the Bay Area came to join the march. I had promised to take a picture of our stickballer Gloria and her dad but I could not locate them again.

Pat and I came back down to Coachella once the strike started for a brief meeting and maybe to catch some picket duty. The various styles devised to talk workers out of the fields were fascinating. Elaine Elinson talked one-on-one with the nearest worker, following him from row to row, refusing to use the bullhorn. Paul Espinosa issued the call of brotherhood and sympathy. Felix Ytom talked for 30 minutes, most of which sounded like a political science lecture in Tagalog.

That evening I was organized into doing some hammer and nail repair work on a number of picket signs. I laid them out in the office and then proceeded to nail two of them to the floor. Paul came bounding in, grabbed a handful of eggs, and went off to the stove. Claiming all kinds of dietary ills, Paul busied himself with what he called the only edible meal he had seen all day, blaming the cook for the bad food he had previously eaten. The cook, one of the older Filipino brothers, was sitting on his bed 20 feet away and Paul made sure that his continuing tirade was overheard. The brother grabbed one of my picket signs, cocked it over his shoulder, and stalked behind the counter toward the stove. Paul fled in terror to the far corner, arms raised over his head. “I was saying, ‘Viva la Cook! Viva la Cook!’” I flinched, and both of them broke out laughing.

Joe Serda and Chris Hartmire started their fast in support of the grape boycott. The staff pledged to join them for the first 24 hours. I lasted 24 hours and five minutes. And I didn’t cheat.

The Filipino brothers on the L.A. boycott were part of the group that opened the New York boycott under Dolores Huerta. They were told they would be sent back to Delano in a month. After 30 days, they packed up and lived the next two months out of their suitcases until replacements showed up.

When I arrived in L.A., Joe asked the brothers if I could sleep in their apartment. They had an extra floor mattress and agreed. The brothers’ activities varied little. Work around the office in the morning, folding leaflets, cleaning up the office, stuffing envelopes, and in the

afternoon, soliciting folks on the street corners to sign the Safeway petition. In their quiet way, they were good at it. I would join them on the street corners as often as possible and appreciated both their style and success.

The brothers' biggest concern was that they could not convince Carmine to put enough spice in the rice. A routine developed. They would eat very small portions of the meals served by Carmine in the office, politely excuse themselves, and then go back to the apartment and cook rice and fish the way they liked it. They pooled their \$5 a week and bought food supplies for the apartment. The refrigerator was never more than a third full and held only their foodstuffs. I brought a clock radio into the apartment and they would listen to that and smoke their crook cigars after eating. When I got back to the apartment anywhere between 9 and 11 p.m., I would check the stove and count the burners that were lit. If two or more going, it was going to be a chilly evening in L.A.

Helen Serda boycotted in New York during those early days. She and Ruby would picket the Teamsters every morning. The same guy would challenge them every day, making comments about communist influences, why the Huelga flag was red, and finally threatening them, "If you two are back here tomorrow morning, I am going to do something." They were and he did. Took the Huelga flag, ripped it up and burned it. Helen knew how to remain nonviolent when being pushed, stepped upon, shoved around, but this was worse. The two young women stood and cried. It was Helen's hardest test of nonviolence.

In August of 1969, I spent a week in Delano before heading off to my new assignment in Toronto. Chuck and Betsy Farnsworth put me up for a few nights. Chuck had just joined the legal department and Betsy was verbally reconciling a balance between a middle-class lifestyle and a commitment to a poor people's movement. A number of volunteers wrestled with the same issues, and many came to the same conclusion: It was never what you had to offer but how sincere the offer was. Ezra Pound, the Farnsworth's part-setter-part-lab, seemed to understand that relationship immediately, always welcoming me like a family member. But Ezra Pound was a little special in any event, a setter who would only point butterflies.

The Delano grape strike had been renewed and all staff were at the picket lines from 6 to 9 a.m. Differences between the Coachella lines and those in Delano were noticeable. Perhaps in part from the march, which called for worker solidarity, Coachella was successful in coaxing workers out of the fields. The hardcore scabs in Delano were unresponsive, and the picket line pitch would lapse into vindictive streams of family history and interpretation of their sexual fantasies. Whenever the speakers took a break, the volume on the bullhorn was turned up, sending irritating, piercing shrieks over the vineyard. I did a five-minute

stint over the speaker system and surprised myself; it wasn't too bad. Cesar would make brief appearances and his presence would clean up the act.

More than once I was told the story of Señora Zapata issuing vicious verbal abuse on the picket line while Cesar was standing behind her. Cesar would say, "Señora Zapata, don't say those things." Señora Zapata looked straight at him, "I wasn't saying anything." Then Cesar said, "I heard you. I was standing right here." Señora Zapata, without a moment's hesitation, said, "It must have been this bullhorn."

Twenty-five organizers working with ranch committees or small town communities met with Cesar at the Schenley Camp. Some brought their families. Cesar had been increasingly besieged for help and advice with their local problems, which needed to be resolved at the local level. "Organizing results from your enthusiasm, not union initiative. The movement is carried forward by you ... the job in Delano is to win this fight with the growers. Only after that can we provide help in your town. The responsibility of the union is to protect its organizers. You must allow Delano to focus on the overall struggle and will have to settle your small problems as best you can." And later, "There is no change in the structure without power, and our power is with the people. Rich people's power is through money. It is an example of the 'dicho.' 'Know how to use the strength of the shoulder.' The poor don't complain when they are angry with an organization, they just don't come. That is their way of showing disagreement." The organizers were listening intently, some making notes.

Gilbert Padilla asked the organizers to introduce themselves and raise the problems they were facing. As the organizers spoke, other heads were nodding and mumbles of agreement were heard from around the room. Many were facing the same issues—strapped for money, can't pay the gasoline or phone bills, getting people out to activities, no meeting hall, general lack of interest, need someone from Delano to help get things rolling, can't reach the Filipino workers because of the language. The organizers began to share tactics and suggestions. Cesar acted as a moderator, obviously pleased with the communication building within the group. After two hours, the meeting broke up on a positive and optimistic tone.

I have been using many of these ideas for more than 30 years.

I met the Haineses at Larry Itliong's party for the christening of his baby girl. Dolores had organized them in New York. They were out "to see the strike firsthand" and had arranged a meeting with grape grower Bruno Dispoto. The only comment on the Dispoto meeting they considered worth mentioning was that Dispoto's greatest emotional peak was reached when he repeated a remark Cesar once made to him. "You're worried about a pay raise? You're lucky we don't want the land back."

Willing to splurge on a final American haircut before heading off to Canada, I find a small Filipino barbershop on Glenwood Avenue, not far from Filipino Hall and the Pagoda, a fine Chinese restaurant Cesar favors. The small, meticulously groomed barber set to work rapidly. After five minutes he paused. “Are you one of Cesar’s pickets?” In downtown Delano, one is a bit cautious with such questions, not here. “Sure am.” His pace immediately slowed down, as if each hair was individually combed and trimmed. It was clearly the most exquisite haircut I had ever received. I looked a little more Filipino middle-aged than American modern, but it was exquisite.

“Two dollars for one of Cesar’s pickets,” he said pleasantly, pleased that I was admiring his work. That was a quarter knocked off the price posted on the edge of the mirror. It all seemed to make a fitting appearance for my arrival in Toronto.

Labor Day weekend is a great time to arrive in Toronto. I joined Jessica and a crew of volunteers in the Spadina Avenue office making signs for the up coming Labor Day parade. Good group, high spirits—it was nearly 1 a.m. before people drifted off. Saturday we set up a Food City picket and leaflet. People would actually stop and read the leaflet. Welcome to Toronto.

On Labor Day, about 60 farmworker supporters wearing red shawls with black Huelga birds marched behind a float depicting a vineyard. Second place, a plaque, and cash. Marshall was due back from California shortly, but Jessica had organized this project and the volunteers that made it such a success. It was easy even for a newcomer to appreciate the work put in by longtime volunteers Linda Hunter and Patti Proctor and so many others. They were there when I came and they were there when I left. I was anxious to meet Marshall, as his name came up often whenever I was in Delano but our paths had never crossed. Within a week of Marshall’s arrival, Jim Brophy joined us fulltime. “The main reason is Ganz. I want to work with the poor and figure Ganz can teach me what I want to know.”

A boycott office in L.A. or in Toronto works pretty much from the same model, but Marshall plays the politics better than most. Two of Toronto’s major chains were feeling the pressure of the farmworker campaign. Through sources, Marshall knew of a communication gap between the two companies, played one against the other, and the result was they both cleaned out the grapes. Marshall said: “It was beautiful. Everything happening at once. Being in control of the situation, knowing who to call to pressure the chain, when to do it. Having all the strings there. Cesar is a genius at it. He has had a lot of good training from Fred Ross, but there is also the intuitive genius.”

Two weeks before Cesar’s arrival, one of the chains, Loblaw’s, starts up selling grapes again.

Cesar is in Toronto for three days and we have organized eight events for him. Cesar and five or six others arrive in a couple of station wagons late in the afternoon, and within a few hours it starts snowing. At the labor/church breakfast the next day, Cesar sounds a bit flat but is well received. The biggest audience reaction came on the issue about the military increasing its shipments of grapes to Vietnam. “We are willing to take on the growers, but it is difficult to fight the Army, Navy, Marines, and U. S. Air Force.” Jim Brophy, hearing Cesar for the first time, thought he was great.

Aside: Publishing in academia is cherished. To this date I have never had a publication run larger than the number of bumper strips printed for the design I came up with for Cesar’s visit to Toronto, “Do The Grape Thing-Boycott” We didn’t sell many of those, either.

It took the farmworker group 15 minutes to leave the breakfast building and get the car caravan under way. The 5 or 6 inches of snow on the ground were too great a temptation. Witnesses claim Mack Lyons started the snowball fight, but Juanita Brown prolonged it, and even Cesar threw in his two cents worth.

Our roving picket line stopped at a Food City, where police were quick to charge petty trespassing. They took everyone’s name but also allowed the picket line to continue. Two or three would come out of the picket line, give their names, and return. One of the labor officers acted as picket captain and made it sound like a lottery sign-up: “Has everyone had their name taken, now?” Spirits rose—imagine being arrested with Cesar Chavez in Toronto!

Cesar reported to have his name recorded then returned to the picket line where he was being taped for the TV show “Concern” with a background of a 45-picket chant. Al McNeil, 11 years old and nearly 4 feet high, insisted that his name be taken too. June Callwood Frayne, TV and writing personality in Toronto, asked a cop, “Don’t you have any concern for these people?” The cop turns to leave. June mentions to Marshall that tomorrow she will be named B’nai Brit Woman of the Year. As the cop walks away, she says to his back, “Prick.” She then turns to Marshall and says, “Would a Woman of the Year say that?”

At the Catholic information center, a member of the farm bureau rises to challenge the legitimacy of the pesticide concern Cesar has raised. Cesar responds and then a student stands and addresses a remark to the farm bureau representative. “I think I speak for everyone here when I say that what you’ve said here tonight has done more for the farmworker cause than anything Mr. Chavez could possibly say.” Sustained applause.

Cesar wanted a retreat with staff after the Saturday picketing at the Mt. Carmel Seminary in Niagara, 75 miles down the road. Folks were really tired after a hectic two weeks, but we

go. We lighten up a bit when we arrive, get something to eat, and then watch Cesar play pool with Mack and Ray Olivas, both of whom are very aggressive players. The smack of the pool balls echoes around the big room. Cesar's game reflects his commitment to nonviolence: a gentle touch, balls taking their time en route to the pockets, none jumping the table. He is quietly sinking ball after ball. I think he has played before.

The retreat is some business but also social. Marion Moses is explaining a detailed and rather dull pesticide issue to Mack Lyons. Mack finally interrupts, "Marion, why don't you write a book about it, maybe they'll make a movie, and maybe I'll go to see it."

Marshall then tosses out the true story of the Huelga bird symbol: Manuel Chavez was driving back from Bakersfield and passes Thunderbird Liquors with a stylized eagle in neon out in front. Immediately upon returning to Delano, he found Cesar and said, "I've got our emblem."

The Cesar visit was a high, but it was not long before staff morale slipped. Jim was particularly discouraged by the menial nature of the work he was assigned and by not participating in decision-making discussions. It boiled down to "I've gotten to see myself simply as a logical extension of the Gestetner." As I had seen in L.A. and Toronto and was later to confirm on a wider basis, boycott offices are always understaffed and morale is exceptionally volatile. The staff want to talk about it and the directors don't or they simply can't hear what is being said.

After a couple of non-contentious sessions, Marshall heard us. Jim got time to organize on the University of Toronto campus and I was asked to handle office budget and finances. Everyone was assigned to organize one of the activities surrounding our Christmas vigil.

Loblaws was the target. Twenty-four hours of picketing for four days with a religious service in front of the store Christmas Eve. I wasn't sure folks would spend Christmas Eve in a labor demonstration in freezing weather, but I didn't know Toronto that well, either. My job: organize the picketing. Supporters readily signed up for two-hour shifts. Enough public figures committed to generate some press. At least one staff member was there at all times. All we had to do was get through below-zero-degree winter nights. I did not have the heart to ask anyone to take the midnight to 6 a.m. shift, so I guess it was mine.

Everyone pitched in, spirits soared, and we pulled it off. The midnight shift worked for me. The Loblaws we picked was on Bloor Street and there was consistently a brisk wind whipping down Bloor that only further lowered the temperature. Bill Montgomery from the steelworkers' union came out a couple of times during my shift. Walking with Bill in front of that store made a couple of hours seem like 20 minutes. We talked about his family's involvement with the IRA and his work with Canadian labor. We got Cesar to send Bill a "thank you" note for his support of Cesar's visit, and Bill was deeply touched. Before I left Canada, Bill was elected president of his local.

Around 3 a.m. on the first of my four midnight shifts, a camper rig pulled up in front of the store. There were five or six of us there. A rather elderly lady got out and signaled us to join her at the back of the camper. She pulled out about a gallon of freshly brewed piping-hot tea that was generously laced with brandy. “I heard about the vigil and thought you could use something to warm you all up.” Three times she showed up with her spirited fresh hot tea. The vigil created a momentum of its own.

George Longley was a Toronto labor legend and a large one at that. Many people just knew him as the Bear, a local Teamster who had been a staunch farmworker supporter. He had contacts and resources and was involved at the grassroots level with every trade union struggle in Toronto. This imposing physical specimen housed an ingenious creativity and a union perspective that allowed him to totally accept the farmworkers’ pledge of nonviolence.

The Bear came up with the “balloon in” just when the Dominion campaign was dragging and a new spark was needed. Helium-filled balloons were printed with “Boycott Grapes” and released at various locations inside Dominion stores. Of course, every child going into the store with parents also received a balloon. When boycotters checked back after an hour, they saw store managers using a stick with a nail on the end trying to puncture the balloons. When they returned with the same trick the next week, the balloons were also filled with confetti. The Toronto boycott lived by the Barry Radburn dictum: “The grocery store is an anarchist’s dream.”

The Bear notified us that the Hanes Hosiery strikers had called for a mass picket at the Hanes plant in an attempt to bolster a long drawn-out nasty dispute. He knew we would want to be represented. The Hanes strikers were mostly women who verbally assaulted every car going through the picket line. The Bear was wearing the bulky white sweater with the brown bear on the back so familiar to all of us. The police kept the picket moving and the Bear shuttled back and forth across the entrance, hands deep in his pockets, muttering to himself, “I hate these fucking scabs. I really hate them.” A lasting image.

Somewhere around the 10- to 14-month mark, staff boycotters pondered their futures a bit. Some stayed because they liked the work and the lifestyle; some stayed but decided to see what other options in activist work are available; some just pulled out with nothing special planned—because “it’s time”; and some stay and almost induce a burn-out syndrome that can ease self-imposed guilt. During the spring I played with the law school idea, thinking I could elevate my contribution to the union from that position. Took the LSAT in Toronto, received a reasonable score under boycott conditions, made the waiting list at the King School, UC Davis. I would go through a similar process three years later with the same motivation and end up as an economist.

Pat Cowsill, a Toronto volunteer and a high school friend of Marshall and Jessica, and I are in Coachella to check on Marshall. He is surprised to see us for about 30 seconds, then gives us some table grape shipment information to work on and is back on the phone. Marshall is loving it—the first table grape contracts have been signed in Coachella and Cesar has put him in charge of implementation. The next day we are off to a ratification meeting at Heggblade-Marguleus. Marshall is explaining the contract to workers: “Maternity benefits are available once a year, not three times.” Everyone laughs. Another worker asks about the name calling by the picketers. Tony Lopez says, “We have to forget all that. Look, I was beat up myself. We just have to put that in back of us.” The atmosphere is cordial and questions from the workers are handled well. I work with Irene Reyes on signing up the workers, maybe 75 in the crew. After each worker signs, Irene hands out a “Victoria Coachella” button, which inevitably brings out a smile.

Every boycotter should have the chance to sit in on meetings like this. This is good stuff, what it’s all about. Don’t bother to ask. Yeah, I still have my Victoria Coachella button.

Somehow Pat and I are now part of Marshall’s field operation and working out of the Pottery House, just west of the Forty Acres service station in Delano. Marshall seems to be running the field office, the hiring hall, the national boycott, etc. Outside the Pottery House front window, Cesar is helping rake up some trash.

A phone call comes into the Pottery in mid-afternoon. Everyone heads to the Forty Acres hiring hall. Father Duran is in mass robes. Cesar keeps asking if so and so is here yet. Two people are sent for a guitar. Father Duran goes through the service in Spanish. Cesar comes forward and reads a statement: “Table grape growers listed below have authorized Philip J. Feick, Jr., Western Employers Council, Bakersfield, California, to negotiate on their behalf with the United Farm Workers Organizing Committee for the purpose of effecting a labor agreement between the parties. Jasmine Vineyards, Frank A. Lucich, Giumarra Vineyards Corporation ...”

There was no response to the reading of “Jasmine Vineyards.” After “Frank A. Lucich,” Marshall, off to one side, says quietly, “Viva!” After “Giumarra Vineyards Corporation” is read, the place breaks up in applause and shouts, followed by Huelga clapping, and by now everyone knows this is the Delano bunch. Cesar reads the rest of the grower names. Some of the girls are crying, everyone smiling. Everyone links arms and sways left and right to “*Nosotros Venceremos.*” Father Duran leaves the pulpit, people turn toward each other and embrace in twos and threes.

Cesar had promised to call the boycotters personally if there was any news. With the WATS line located in the Pottery House, we are all part of this festive calling group. The responses ranged from screams to “out of sight,” “beautiful,” and “you guys trying to fuck up the boycott?” Cesar would read the list of growers and conclude, “How do you like

them apples?” When Cesar takes a break, Larry Itliong continues the phoning, “How about that, brother?”

With the actual contract signings comes news of the Teamsters signing agreements with the Salinas lettuce growers and the workers themselves going out on strike in protest. The big party Cesar had talked about is put on hold, and Marshall and Tony are on their way to Salinas to open up an office and coordinate the strike activity. Marshall makes the Pottery House his last stop before leaving, mumbling something about “expecting a letter.” He hesitates, looks around. “Too bad the boycott didn’t last another couple of weeks. We’ve got a good operation here.” And he’s gone.

Richard Chavez recruits a bunch of us to sign up Giumarra workers in Edison. Celia Salgado wouldn’t miss it. At the Giumarra headquarters, she walks up to John Jr. with her hand outstretched. Before she can say anything, he greets her, “I’m John Giumarra. What’s your name?” “Celia.” “Glad to meet you,” he says, then he turns to shake hands with others. Celia comes back to our group. “He really likes me.” “I did not hear him say anything.” “Oh, he didn’t have to. You could tell by the way he looked at me. We’ve got a date for Saturday night.”

Incidents of violence broke out in Salinas. A number of boycotters from around the country were called in to bring their nonviolence techniques to the lettuce fields. They were assigned to the crews at the different companies. I was the picket captain for R.T. Englund. We would leave for the Englund fields in Greenfield around 4 a.m. No one is really awake yet, the rides are quiet. We were about halfway to Greenfield one morning and I had this thought: Last year at this time, I was driving to unknown territory in Canada to stop the grapes. Who would have thought then that a year later I would be in a car with six guys who can’t speak English at four o’clock in the morning getting ready to stand and look at a lettuce field for the next six hours?

And who could foresee I would be teamed with Marshall and Jessica as national coordinators of the lettuce boycott for two years, help open La Paz as the union headquarters, go undercover in Santa Maria for months to spy on grower pesticide use, get involved in wage and hour studies, decide to be an economist, and return to the union for another two more years working on damage suits and wage impact studies for arbitration.

I collaborate with Lucia Vazquez on the brief musical comedy “The Boycott’s Back,” and rose from janitor to sound system manager during Cesar’s Fast for Life in 1988, but I am still working on my pinto bean recipe:

Clean first and then wash in cold water

Match volume of beans with equal additional level of water

Cook over medium heat for two-and-a-half hours

Watch that water is replenished
Add salt

Gracias, Señora Flores, Santa Maria.

Postscript: Boycotters in LA were spending 8, 10 hours a day in Safeway parking lots turning away customers. Tough work. Morale slipping. LeRoy, now the L.A. boycott director, called a meeting. He would rarely personalize his remarks in these meetings, but this time he referred to two staff members as representative of everyone in the room. Fred Schumacher and Leah Rogue had left the L.A. staff to open up Winnipeg.

He said, "Someday when the history of the union is being written, and it will be written 100 times, they'll never mention Fred and Leah." The staff understood the message and went back into the parking lots with a bit more spring in their steps. Now, Fred and Leah and hundreds of others are finally going to be mentioned.

AFTERWARD

As the listserv wound down to its final days, my reading of a variety of essays along with a close monitoring of the listserv postings awakened me to the subtle but critical role that stories played in building and sustaining the union. I have rarely experienced a time, location or setting where some union officer, board or staff member did not come up with a story that complemented a point or reminded us all of our heritage, for better or worse. The stories spoke to veterans of past glories, embarrassments and tight squeezes. At the same time, the stories educated the new arrivals to the union's history, its players and its culture. The Documentation Project has confirmed the importance of both telling and hearing these stories. And now they are part of the record.

Fingerprints on the Union

The union gave birth to more stories than any organization I have known. They came from everywhere and from everyone. Some were inspirational, some challenging, some disturbing, some sad, some horrendous, some we celebrated and some were tributes. Many made us laugh. Some helped us hold on. In a sense, they were our entertainment, better appreciated by our colleagues where one story might spin off a half dozen more. If we had not met the characters in these stories, at least we knew about them. We knew the situations and could sense the dynamics. You might be new staff on the Boston boycott but in a short time the names of Jim Drake, Marion Moses, Hijinio Rangel or Jessica Govea now had mental images attached, based on the stories. How often has some stranger approached you at a union gathering or conference with "I've heard about you and am really glad to meet you." The stories kept us tied to the union and to each other. The stories are the fingerprints we have left on the union.

1970 - Toronto: During the winter we developed ten to fifteen volunteers to speak to groups on evenings and picket stores on Saturday morning for a non-grape policy, come the spring harvest. We would all meet back at the Spadina Avenue office to debrief. This Saturday, a bunch of us went into downtown Toronto for an anti-war march. The usual inspirational speeches were given to a sizeable gathering. The march began with the crowd splitting into two groups, each with a different route to the final demonstration site. I hesitated and asked Patti Proctor, who reads crowds as well as she reads people, what was going on. Patti gave me her "you-will-never-be-a-Canadian" look, "Well, who do you want to march with, the Trots or the Maoists?"

1970 - Delano Grape Contracts: With the ink on the grape contracts still not dry and spirits high and with Cesar in Salinas, Larry Itliong lead the Friday Night Meeting at Filipino Hall. Larry allotted himself fifteen minutes and spoke directly and passionately to the strikers with occasional references to industry giant, Giumarra Vineyards. He told them they must throw off the mantle of self pity and their acceptance of being different because they were farm workers. With these contracts, they must take their place in the front line of America's working class. They must hold up their heads with pride for the work they do. The contracts and all that they mean brings to an end this status as second class working people. Larry spoke extraneously but without hesitation. He had thought out his message and only occasionally paused for the wording he wanted. Larry concluded, "Before, we had to say, 'Yes, Boss', 'Si, Patron', 'Yes, Sir' because we always feared for our jobs. Now when the boss comes to us, we can say, "Yes, John, what's your problem?" Applause and shouts thundered around the hall. No one missed Larry's reference to John Giumarra.

These Friday night meetings always had an entertaining flow of reports, introductions, irreverent comments and updates. That same Friday evening, Marion Moses gave a clinic report that was difficult to follow. Her words seemed mumbled or garbled. When asked if she could speak more clearly, Marion's eyes widened as she put her hand to her mouth. Then, distinctly said, "Sorry, I forgot I had my contact lenses in my mouth."

1970 - Salinas Lettuce Strike: I was the picket captain for R.T. Englund Company. Mike Rosenthal was a recently arrived boycotter and started working with our Englund strikers. Mike and I got on well but I thought he most wanted me to introduce him to some of the young women strikers from Pic 'n Pak strawberries, as the likes of Lupe Ortiz, Consuela Cabrillo and others had caught the eyes of male boycotters gathered from around the country. A 4 pm picket was to hit the Hardin labor camp, but when we arrived, the camp was deserted. Seventy of us, lead by a priest, went back to the main road when the incident began. A Hardin vehicle either hit, or attempted to hit, a picketer while entering the camp road. A stone ricocheted off the car. The driver stepped out of his car, shouted something, eventually got back in and continued down the camp road. By the time he had gone another twenty feet, more stones had bounced off the car. He jumped out this time, grabbed a rifle off the back seat and was searching his jacket for shells, never taking his eyes off the pickets. Finally set, he stepped out from behind the car with his rifle at the ready. Some five or six pickets were advancing and within fifteen feet of the vehicle,

stones in both hands. Mike and I jumped into that fifteen foot gap, our hands in the air, facing the pickets and shouting at them. The pickets hesitated and we went from shouting to talking. "You're right, that guy's a son of a bitch. But he's just looking for a chance to shoot someone. Your friend's pissed off now, but do you want him dead?" The guys grumbled but slowly backed up to the main road. When we got back to our truck, Mike said, "That was a bit tense." I looked over at him and realized both of us were still on a bit of an adrenalin rush. "Well", I said, "with all those eye witnesses, I figured if he shot you in the back, the growers would be in a real mess." Mike, "Thanks, bro."

Never saw Mike again after Salinas.

1971 - Historical Labor Land Marks: On the advice of Fred Ross to see it before it was all torn down, Alan Sebastian, Sandy Cate and I drove from La Paz to the Arvin-Lamont area to pay homage to the National Farm Labor Union. Alan was always energetic and inquisitive. He once described himself as "going from a Weatherman trip to a Gandhi." Sandy was intrigued by farm labor history. Driving east on Sunset, we reached a four corner intersection and a deserted small building with "NFLU, Local 218, AFL-CIO" above the door. The union was the outgrowth of the Southern Tenants Farmers Union and then headed by H.L. Mitchell and Hank Hasiwar. It ran a two and a half year strike against DiGiorgio Fruit Company from 1947 to 1950 and in its last years, Ernesto Galarza focused its diminishing resources on fighting the bracero program. The office was a flat-roofed match box building with one room. It sat well back on a huge dirt field, angled to face the intersection. All the windows had been smashed but the double front door was still locked. Rubbish from the deteriorating ceiling covered the collapsed chairs which had a country school room look about them. Two carved benches remained upright at the far end of the room. Alan dusted off the benches and shouted, "Look, here's an ass-print from Joe Hill. And here's one from Woody Guthrie!" The only thing we knew for sure about Alan Sebastian was that his real name wasn't Alan Sebastian.

1971 - Gilbert Always the Organizer: During the summer a national boycott conference was held at La Paz. All the California boycotters were summoned as well as many from other key cities nationwide. Chester Ruiz headed the Denver boycott and he attended with Mary Ann Alonzo. Along with head-turning good looks, Mary Ann had a subtly flirtatious manner that could only enhance her strength as an organizer. Gilbert Padilla was representing the Fresno Field Office and was spending most of his time in the back of the meeting room, giving half an ear to the proceedings and the rest to whom ever was standing next to him. Such was the setting when Gilbert first laid eyes on Mary Ann. "WHO is that?" Gilbert asked no one in particular as Mary Ann passed by him on the way to her seat. "Oh, that's Mary Ann. She's with Chester." Gilbert hesitated just momentarily, then commented quietly but confidently, "That can be taken care of."

1972 - Summer Volunteers: Some of them work out better than others. Jane Mankiewicz had another year to go at the University of Wisconsin but was also considering an internship in Washington DC where her uncle, Frank Mankiewicz, was well connected to

the Democratic Party. In fact, Frank was a member of McGovern's party when the Senator visited La Paz to solicit Cesar's endorsement for his presidential campaign. Her grandfather was Joseph Mankiewicz who, among numerous credits, co-authored "Citizen Kane". Jane always had a sparkle in her eyes, was very well read, a budding poetess and an avid film critic. She, Lucy Vazquez and I hung out together. One of the entertainments for low wage staff at La Paz was to take advantage of the occasional "Car Load for Two Bucks" offer at the Bakersfield Drive-In. We would squeeze seven, eight people in a car and head for the movies. On this occasion, we had no sooner untangled the people-mess in the car than Jane took her shoes off. It had been hot all day. "Jane, what if you have to go to the bathroom?" She didn't blink, "I have got better aim than that." We traded wiseacre postcards for a couple years after she left.

1972 - White River Farms Strike, Part 1: The strike was intense and its escalation partly reflected the workers' determination to retain what was left of the original Schenley contract and its role in the union's history. "Incidents" occurred, rocks, cars set a fire, mass arrests. Dolores, Richard and Al Rojas had been sent out. Just prior to the strike, Cesar had lectured the La Paz community, once again, on "phone abuse" and then left La Paz to work on Proposition 22. In his absence, the community agreed that no charges to 822-5571 would be accepted. I drew switchboard duty Tuesday night when an operator from area code 209 called. "Richard Chavez wants to place charges of a call on this number. Will you accept the charges?" I was dutiful, "I am sorry, operator, we can no longer accept charges to this number." "Thank you," she said and disconnected. Two minutes later, the same operator: "This is in reference to the call placed by Mr. Chavez. He says he is in jail and has no money and asks if an exception can be made in this case." What choice did I have? "Okay, operator, under the circumstances, we will accept the charges."

1972 - White River Farms Strike, Part 2: Four or five of us accompanied Jerry Cohen on a visit to a labor camp of White River Farms strikers, all of whom were Arabs, mostly from Yemen. They were very courteous and gracious. Jerry explained the legal aspects of the picketing injunction under which 140 strikers had been brought to trial with 125 winning dismissal while fifteen, all Arabs, were convicted. Later at a meeting, Jerry captured it all in one sentence: "Here was a Jew defending fifteen Arabs against the terms of an injunction read to them in Spanish by an Okie cop."

1972 - White River Farms Strike, Part 3: A letter on union stationery, dated October 6, 1972, circulated the La Paz offices surreptitiously. Addressed to a Mr. P.F. Gioldini, it stated, "Please be advised that, because of the conflict at White River Farms, a major member of your operations, the enclosed letter has been sent to distributors of Guild Wine products on this date." A second and concluding paragraph stated, "May the crap of the great black eagle crest your brow! Splotch!" signed "Cesar Chavez". There was a suspicion that the second paragraph might have been added by one of the official "Cesar signers", and folks in the Boycott Office were eyeing Virginia Jones.

1972 - The Human Billboards of Proposition 22: This part of the campaign was creative and fun, as much as standing curbside in heavy traffic can be. Peter Cohen, while billboarding a busy intersection in the San Fernando Valley, wrote a new chapter in non-violent resistance. A pickup truck drove by, "You can take Propositions 22 through 50 and shove them up your ass. I'm voting Yes on 22!" Within fifteen minutes the truck had circled the block and this time the irate driver parked, and walked over to Peter to expound on his views. What ensued included the standard tirade from "Commie, faggot, trouble making bastards" to down right insulting affronts. Peter stood silently till the driver took a breath. Peter spoke very calmly: "Hi diddle diddle, the cat and the fiddle, the cow jumped over the moon. The little dog laughed to see such sport and the dish ran away with spoon." The driver took a number of quickly retreating steps, glancing eerily from side to side. Jumped into his truck, threw it into reverse, backed into a pole, then sped off in a fury. Never saying another word.

1972 - The Safeway Walk: Cesar spoke often about the power of walking, citing Gandhi, the civil rights marches and the union's marches to Sacramento and Calexico. The idea he threw out to a number of us in his office was aimed at jump starting the Safeway campaign: Cesar would walk to every Safeway store in California. When he expanded on the idea, Al Rojas asked, rather incredulously, "You are serious about this?" Cesar indicated he was and that the walk would get him out of the office and away from those administrative tasks that never go away and seem unsolvable. "I have no great talent for that kind of work. I'll get out from here. We'll leave a dummy in this chair to stare at the desk and phone. Then, Dolores can come in every day and yell at it."

1973 - Los Angeles Operation: Sent to LA as a researcher in support of the boycott, I joined the boycotters on their annual winter trip to the Imperial Valley. They stop at the Calexico Field Office and then head to the InterHarvest fields to meet the lettuce workers and spend a day learning the various jobs in the lettuce harvesting process. Ellen Eggers, Sandy Nathan and I rode down together. Sandy had recently joined the union after being in a Venice legal collective and was a welcome addition to the LA staff. He had an easy, unpretentious manner, a trace of Howard Cosell in his speech patterns and wore a dark blue rain hat. Like, all the time. As we passed by the Salton Sea, I began relating some of its early history, the flooding of the Colorado River, the submerged salt harvesting operation along with its Southern Pacific shipping terminal. Nowhere near the end of my recitation, Ellen and Sandy were laughing so hard, I knew this was really boring stuff or that the joint had kicked. This occurrence established a little routine that Sandy and I would improvise whenever someone wandered off point - the comment, a rejoinder followed by the chorus. Example: I mentioned one afternoon that "High Plains Drifter" had replaced "Cries and Whispers" at the Westwood Theater. Sandy's response was immediate: "The last time I heard of anything like that was when 'Jam Up, Jelly Tight' replaced 'Honky Tonk Woman' as Number 1 on the Hit Parade." I started our Lou Reed chorus, "And the colored girls go - Doo da doo da doo, Doo da doo," and Sandy is right there for the "doo da's".

1987 - Negotiations Team: Ben Maddock and Dolores were doing most of the contract negotiating when I returned to the union as a staff economist. Ben's approach to negotiations was to simply obtain an initial contract. Once the relationship is formalized, then work for contract improvement. Dolores's approach was to get everything in that first contract. This led to her having a reputation for 12th hour additions to a proposed contract which is a tactic not well regarded by most negotiators. Ben figured his best approach was simply to do end runs around Dolores rather than to debate the merits of her strategy. During the Metzler talks, Dolores asked Dennis Metzler and his lawyer, Jordon Bloom, whether they had lost money in the recent stock market crash. When they hesitantly confessed to slight losses, Dolores turned to the workers on the negotiating committee and asked if they had lost money in the crash. The workers broke out laughing. Ben later remarked, "Sometimes I think what Dolores says is the obvious or overstated. Then, I look around and see how it has affected people. She is able so often to cut to the heart of an issue, bring the focus back to the essential goal." I asked, "Ben, how did you handle the new language Dolores wanted in the contract?" Ben shrugged, "I just ignored it, never mentioned it. I didn't want it in my contract."

Barbara Macri-Ortiz had Dolores's clear vision on priorities, perhaps from the years she worked directly with her. Starting with the Grape Boycott in 1967 and twenty years later being admitted to the bar through the union's apprenticeship program, she never lost focus but retained her quiet sense of humor. The legal department celebrated her birthday in January 1988 with a surprise birthday cake. Barbara's opening remark was, "This cake is more feminine than I am."

1987 - The Changing of the Legal Guard: The union's attorneys during the 1960's and 1970's were multifaceted. They were solid in their legal background but too aggressive to be content with that aspect. The best were aggressive across the board - as organizers, strategists, negotiators, recruiters, spokespersons and cheerleaders. When I returned, I was assigned to the Legal Department which was now mostly graduates of the union's apprenticeship program. The one attorney who stood out in the 1970's mold was Diana Lyons, based in Sacramento and her union roots were deep. She built up a reputation for more than holding her own in debate or in testimony before legislative bodies. Assemblyman Dan Boatright was so thoroughly brought to his knees in a confrontation with Diana that he became angry to the point of being irrational. On another occasion, Diana began a counter argument to Assemblyman Wyman which was cut off when the assemblyman said he simply would not debate the point with Diana as he knew he would lose but she could not get him to change his mind and there was no point continuing the discussion. Karl Lawsen with the Oxnard Field Office was another impressed with Diana's ability in the heat of legal/negotiation battle. "Her instincts are on the mark. She makes every decision the way I would make it, if I had five more years of experience."

1988 - Reinitiation at La Paz: At the first community meeting of the new year, some twenty new La Paz residents were initiated. As I had originally arrived in La Paz in 1971, I tried to beg off but Chris Hartmire would have none of it. The routine was self-introductions and

what you were doing before arrival at La Paz. While Chris MC'd the session, Cesar did the translations into Spanish, or vice versa. I decided to strike a blow for nonconformity. "Prior to coming to La Paz, I was a roadie for the Grateful Dead." That got a laugh. Cesar struggled with the translation, finally emerging with something like "los muertos de la graciones". Which got a roar. Encouraged, I went on how I learned the rock business through contact with Bill Graham who produced some Dead shows. Graham liked Los Lobos and told Cesar there was money in this music. Bill got me assigned to La Paz and we have started rehearsals for a little group called Cesar and the Home Boys. Chris shut me down at that point.

1988 - Road Trip With Cesar: I joined Cesar, Ben Maddock and Cesar's aide-de-camp, Cecilia Ruiz, in a trip to a press conference in Bakersfield and then to Avenal and a meeting with the La Cuesta Verde workers. Cecilia tends to be a bit shy but did a good job in opening the press conference and introducing Cesar. But in the car with three guys, she gets teased a bit. It was past midnight on our return to La Paz when we stopped at a 24-hour donut shop. Cesar had dozed off some time ago. Ben went off for coffee and cigarettes and, before I ducked into Von's, I asked Cecilia, "Do you want a coffee?" "No, thanks," she said. I asked, "Do you drink coffee?", she responded, "No." "Do you eat meat?" Again, "No." Then, I tried, "Do you kiss boys?" Giggle.

1988 - Photo Op at La Paz: Everyone gathered in the community kitchen for food, drinks, and music after the christening of three La Paz children. A good crowd had collected. Compis saw Frank Curiel and Richard Chavez talking and asked if they would step outside for a moment so he could take a picture. Paul Chavez and I were leaning up against the counter with an after-supper beer. The small yard had been partially dug up for the expansion of the kitchen and the dormant backhoe was being used as a backdrop for the shot. Paul smiled and shook his head, "Isn't that just like Mexicans? Gotta have their picture taken next to heavy equipment."

Conclusion: The stories you told or heard from others become the glue that binds. One event clearly defines for me the inspirational spirit of the union. It occurred shortly after Cesar's fast in Arizona and the resulting recall campaign in 1972. A statewide conference of field office and boycott personnel convened at La Paz to extend that energy from Arizona to the California actions. Before the Saturday dinner break, LeRoy went over a few "rules" explaining that many offices will still be working, that there is to be no drinking or drugs, and that there will be a Mass at 8 am on Sunday. The conference's evening session wrapped up around 10 pm and in a very short time, three parties broke out. Bob and Avelina's trailer was headquarters for the Lamont and Salinas field office crews and the beer was flowing. Around 11:30, the beer supply ran out and a decision to get more in Tehachapi before the 12 o'clock closing had to be made. The mood was high spirited but when someone mentioned LeRoy's "no drinking" rule, enthusiasm sagged. The silence was broken by a shout from the back couch, "Si, se puede!" and the delegation returned in twenty minutes with two full cases.

Addendum

Aside: To this day, people are anxious to share their first impressions of Cesar, often not varying much from mine. I reported on this documentation project to the board members of the California Institute for Rural Studies and within a week received from board vice-president Louis Campos his recollection of meeting Cesar Chavez.

Louis Campos

Cesar Chavez Thought About the People

“The food was on the table getting cold ...”

He sat in this small, crowded office, pencil in hand, waiting on the people. Cesar Chavez was a field representative for the Community Service Organization, his small office more fitting of a cottage, was situated on Vine Street, in the heart of the barrio, in Visalia, California. His dutiful assistant was Gilbert Padilla, a fast-talking in-your-face rabble-rouser. By all appearances Cesar was doing all the hands-on-work while Gilbert was out in the community “organizing.”

The year was 1961 and it was the beginning of a hot summer. The summers of the San Joaquin Valley can get very hot! I had just been discharged from the military, and Cesar’s office was across from my home. One day I dropped by his office, it was a slow hot day and not many people were coming by, so we had some time to talk about what he was doing and his thoughts about the future. He had a passion and fierce drive for discussing and promoting societal changes. He was unrelenting in his talk that change had to come from the bottom up, that to have power you had to take power. “ Rarely will those in power hand over power,” he said. His method and personal way of conveyance was neither threatening nor confrontational but, in a subtle way, his message ran deep. He left an impressionable imprint in our community.

A few years later and after his rise as leader of the National Farm Workers Association, Cesar was back in town and he quickly found his way to North Visalia—the barrio. He came to our house, my mother answered the door, and he said hello and was about to introduce himself when my mother interrupted him and said: “ Yes, I know who you are and you have been causing a lot of trouble ... however, probably good trouble.” she said. Cesar let go with a big sigh of relief. “At least she is a friend,” he probably thought. Cesar began to explain to my mother if she would be willing to invite neighbors over to our home for an evening meeting so that he could share his thoughts about the farmworker movement and to seek help from the community. My mother agreed, but only if she and other women of the community could make a meal for the occasion. Without having much of an option, Cesar agreed to the condition.

The meeting was set for the next evening. Chickens were sacrificed and cooked delicately in the red mole sauce. The pinto beans and tomato-colored rice were cooked with the same loving care. This was Mexican food like no other. About 25 neighbors were invited to eat and hear Cesar Chavez tell them about his social movement and the urgency involved. The women had worked hard all day in the hot kitchen preparing the meal.

The meeting hour came and neighbors started arriving. Shortly thereafter, Cesar arrived with several of his associates, including (and this is to the best of my recollection) El Flaco, the pencil-thin mustached Gilbert Padilla. The tables and chairs had been arranged so that Cesar would sit at the head table. The food came out and the rich aroma of the mole wafted throughout the house—a delicious meal was at hand. The people lined up to be served and Cesar was served while at the head table. Grace was said and it was time to eat. Cesar stood and he said, “ My friends, I cannot eat this meal knowing that many of our fellow farmworkers are out there tonight with nothing to eat.” A freezing silence captured the moment. My mother, the cooks, and the rest riveted their eyes on Cesar. My mother, with both hands on her waist and a chillingly stern look, told Cesar, “Eat!” With a half grin he politely sat down, picked up his tortilla, and ate his mole.

Understanding the timing of when to comply allowed him to be the great leader that he later became. Without this understanding he probably would have become mole himself. He understood the power of the Mexican woman. The meeting was a success.