

Maria Fuentes 1970

My Great Experience with the UFW

My story of working with the UFW illustrates the integration of the UFW and its larger impact in improving our society while focusing the UFW's effect on the people who came into the movement and the influence of the experience on their lives.

In the summer of 1970, after completing my first year of community college, I worked on the UFW boycott, an experience that matured and empowered me like nothing else. It changed and redefined my identity and shaped what I do to this day, while healing the pain and humiliation I had endured growing up.

The Movement

For many Chicanos, especially those from California, the tight connection between Cesar Chavez, the United Farmworkers, and *el movimiento* makes them inseparable. The UFW exists because of Cesar's vision, strength, and determination; the Chicano movement was empowered by Cesar's work in founding the UFW; and Cesar embodied the UFW and the movement.

El movimiento was not only the UFW in the 1970s and during Cesar's lifetime. It encompasses the entire effort of changing the social, economic, and political conditions for Chicanos in the U.S., as well as other oppressed people in this county, Mexico, and the world. The movement continues today and will continue and evolve beyond our imagination, carried by Chicanos and our many allies in coalition with other movements.

The Organizers

To tell the story of my experience as a boycott organizer in the L.A. area during the summer of 1970 means understanding what led me to embrace the farmworker movement, recalling my experience as a boycott organizer, sharing how working for the union changed me, and reflecting on my political work since 1970. I integrate all of this to illustrate the impact of working as a UFW organizer, even for a relatively short period.

My story is about asking shoppers in Orange County not to shop at Alpha-Beta and Ralph's, because they sold non-union grapes and Chiquita Bananas, with conviction and influence. It is also about the rewarding and enriching boycott experience and the many smart and dedicated people I met and what I learned from them. My experience illustrates that working with the UFW was powerful and long-lasting for thousands of full-time volunteers who evolved from the experience and then continued to sacrifice of themselves for others.

My Story

I was born in Bakersfield, California, just 30 miles from Delano, the heart and birthplace of the UFW. In 1968, when thousands of Mexican farmworkers led by Cesar Chavez were protesting outside a courthouse several miles from my high school, I was a junior in high school drawn to the civil rights movement in the South because it was addressing the racism and injustice I knew Mexicans also experienced. I did not know that in my community the world was changing for many farmworkers and for all Mexicanos. I had my own leader and movement!

During my first year at Bakersfield Community College, I learned about *el movimiento* and about the farmworkers' union. In recent years, I had heard Cesar Chavez was a communist, and as a Catholic, I believed communism was wrong because it prohibited a belief in God. Nevertheless, other life experiences, my values, and my own desire for fairness and justice allowed me to be open and learn about the movement, given the opportunity and a friend who would share his knowledge and passion for the movement with me.

My Life Experience and Values

My parents met in Soledad, California, where they worked as farmworkers. My father was from Monterrey, Nuevo Leon, and after receiving an honorable discharge from the U.S. Army settled in Soledad where he was welcomed into the family of a fellow Mexican soldier, the family of Don Guillermo and Doña Lupe. Don Guillermo, the father of a large family, was a *contratista* (labor contractor) who employed my dad and many other farmworkers. My mother was born in El Mulato, Chihuahua. She had left Mexico with her family as a result of economic hardship. Otilia Ramos and Armando Fuentes met in Soledad, working side by side in the same fields that later sparked strikes, marches, and UFW contracts.

My mother's family settled in Bakersfield as a result of a near fatal car accident on the icy Highway 99 between Los Angeles and Kern County. Her family was searching for a place to finally call home after years of following California's seasons and crops. Their car had gotten a flat tire. As my grandfather and uncles repaired it, another car traveling the slippery highway skidded, hitting their car and badly injuring my grandmother, who was taken to Bakersfield in an ambulance with my mother at her side. She was in the hospital for several months, giving enough time for my grandfather and his children to find their new home, in Bakersfield. In 1950 my parents married.

I was born in 1951. As the first granddaughter, I spoke only Spanish when I started kindergarten at Our Lady of Perpetual Help Elementary School (OLPH), where my grandfather worked as the janitor. My school was located next to the parish church where my grandmother attended daily mass. At first, I struggled to communicate with my teachers and the other children, though I was fascinated by the art supplies, the fun activities, and playing outdoors. I was embarrassed in the first grade to have lunches that looked different

from the lunches of the other students. I did not have the same white bread. My lunch was made from tortillas and my grandmother's homemade bread. I tried to hide our economic condition and whatever else I imagined would make me "less than." Throughout my education, I only had one teacher, my fifth-grade teacher, who was able to communicate in Spanish with my parents.

Though my father and, later, my mother always worked, my parents sacrificed to send their children to Catholic school. My family was poor and we did not live in the same neighborhood as my classmates. I felt inferior, yet I had many close friends and felt comfortable with their parents and in their homes, and I felt completely integrated into the school. For the most part another boy and I were the only Mexicans in my class.

As a child, my social world was my school, my extended family, and our life as active parishioners of San Clemente Mission. OLPH was to the west, San Clemente to the east, and we lived in the middle, facing my grandparents' house, which to my extended family was our home, too. My mother, aunts, uncles, cousins all gathered there on a daily basis. At OLPH I felt inferior deep inside. At San Clemente, an all-Mexican parish, where all parishioners knew each other and treated each other respectfully, I always felt at home, among many familiar family friends.

One of my role models, and that of my cousins, was our Tia Velia, who owned the Bakersfield Flower Shop with my uncle. She was a smart, warm, kind, professional businesswoman who was involved in the social and business community outside the Mexican community. Like other successful Mexicans in business in Bakersfield, she "crossed over" before the term was invented. Her English and her presence were perfect. I learned from her as I navigated myself through my elementary school years and first two years high school at Garces High School, where I was among even more wealthy families. My aunt, along with my parents and other adults in my family, stressed education, reading, writing, and our faith.

My father always worked hard. He was an independent thinker and carried a lot of self-respect and intelligence when dealing with his employers. He was very skilled as a painter, a mason, and general repairman. He often worked for himself. I saw him sharing what was discarded by others—numerous baseball gloves, balls, and bats—with other children playing at the neighborhood park. He liked to show sports and comedy movies in our living room to family friends as we drank ice-cream floats.

My mother started working when we were in grade school. She worked in the laundry and later as a cook for the public school district. She attended Bakersfield Community College in order to become a manager and to earn more money. However, she forfeited the opportunity to be a manager in order to be at home to give my brothers constant guidance. We lived communally with my grandparents across the street. My mother helped my grandmother in her weekly shopping, and my grandmother was always there to take care of

us and share coffee and cookies over memorable and beautiful conversations. Annually, they made jams from my grandparents' fruit trees and gave each other home permanents.

I watched my parents and grandparents as they were involved in our church and community. My grandmother would always lead the novenas, the rosaries, and hymns at a chapel where we prayed regularly. She would always fix the altar at the mission, after first washing, starching, and ironing the altar "mantles." She took the flowers from her garden for the church altars and arranged for my aunt to bring floral arrangements on special holy days. She made cupcakes to sell after Sunday masses and cooked at the church *jamaicas*. I grew up as the dutiful granddaughter quietly next to my grandmother as she fulfilled what she felt was a privilege and a responsibility, always done quietly, consistently, perfectly, and with calmness and ease. My mother often helped my grandmother take care of the church. Today, my mother continues to dedicate her time to the same church.

My grandfather also had his responsibilities with the mission men's club, as usher at the masses, and other male duties he assumed. Like my grandfather, my father was active in community and church organization, the Knights of Columbus, CSO, and MAPA. My dad worked for a number of years as a janitor at St. Francis Church. Later he would work at Our Lady of Guadalupe, St. Joseph, and OLPH schools and churches. This and some of his friends exposed him to the Knights. From my observations, I think he joined CSO and MAPA because he truly believed that they would accomplish their goals of improving the lives of Mexicanos. My grandfather also belonged to CSO, the *Comisión Honorífica*. I observed that both my grandfather and dad took their membership in these community organizations very seriously. My grandfather in particular was a reserved and respected leader. My father carried a strong sense of pride and honor in his involvement.

When I was in grade school, my mother had the idea that in the summer we would work in the fields. It was not uncommon for Mexican families to take their children to work in the summer. I hated it. We would get up when it was still dark, after my mother had made our lunch of tacos made with fresh homemade tortillas filled with eggs and potatoes, beans and cheese, beans and meat, and other combinations. We would take Kool-Aid to drink with ice in a container that would keep it cold. It would be dark outside when my mother would wake the older of my younger brothers and me to go to work. My brothers and I would be sleepy and tired. We just wanted to stay in bed. We'd get into the car and again fall asleep.

Getting up was nothing compared to the hard work. I remember the heat, the smell of the hot sulphur dirt beneath my shoes that only weeks before had been the shoes I wore to school. We would top onions, which meant we would go into the field to pick the onion after the tractors had loosened the dirt. We would grab an onion or, preferably, two or more, shake off the dirt and then cut the roots and the top and place them in a large bottomless can that rested on top of an open burlap sack. We would move the can with the sack alongside the row of onions dragging it along as it got heavier with onions. In any weather it was hard work, but in the 100 degree-plus summer heat of Kern County, it was exhausting.

Though the working conditions were bad, my mother did her best. She made sure my brothers and I were protected from the sun by having us wear hats and clothing that covered us well, and she made sure we had plenty to drink. We cut the onion plants with bulky scissors with dull blades. We wore rubber gloves that made our hands sweat. We were covered with dirt and breathed it, even if our faces were covered. The cruel, harsh, merciless sun followed us relentlessly throughout the day. Although my brothers and I would sometimes sit in the car, our mother would work most of the day, alone in the sun.

After a long drive home, we would return home tired, hot, and dusty, and smelling like the onions we'd just picked. We had to wait just to wash our hands because my mother feared that after using our hands so much in the hot sun, we would get cramps and later develop arthritis.

Why did we work like this? How could my mother, who had demonstrated such amazing love for us make us, work this hard? Because my family needed the money. When my mother and her family came from Mexico, they worked the same way, as a family. Together they shaped their future and strove to change the destiny for themselves and the generations that would follow. My father, despite having served this country in the service, was at first relegated to this harsh work.

By working in the fields my brothers and I learned many valuable lessons. What it feels like to work in 100 degree weather. What it takes to put food on our table. My mother taught us there is nothing shameful about work; no matter where one works, it is honorable and of equal worth. She reinforced how to work hard. Each of these lessons would later make me a natural and effective boycott organizer.

Before starting community college I had one more experience that would prepare me to work for the UFW. Since starting high school I attended summer school at Bakersfield High School, a public school. By my junior year, I was tired of not really fitting in at my Catholic high school. I begged to attend public school. My parents approved. For the first time I had a chance to meet a cross-section of Bakersfield, including poor whites —some called themselves Okies—African Americans, and Japanese-American students, and people of all economic backgrounds and religions. I was also exposed to the world of hippies and the other young people who were against the Vietnam War. I embraced and enjoyed this real and interesting diversity. For the first time, I had a good friend who was Mexican and spoke Spanish like my family, whom I felt comfortable inviting to our house, and whom my parents treated like a daughter.

The Beginning of My Experience in the Movement

In September of 1969, I started attending Bakersfield Community College. Prior to starting I decided that I would reach out to and befriend other Mexican students, even though I felt I might not be accepted. I was not as “cool” as other Mexicans and I had spent so much of

my life in the “white world.” I talked, dressed, looked, and behaved differently than the other Chicano students. I did not feel that I belonged, but with all these limitations, I knew for certain where my heart had sent me, where I had wanted to be for a very long time.

I joined the Mexican student club—Lambda Alpha, which stood for “Latin American.” At my first meeting in the beginning of my second semester, I met Marco Lopez. With Marco, I felt at home. We had both attended Garces, and he befriended me. He was also even cuter than I had remembered. His understanding and participation in organizations reminded me so much of my grandfather and father’s involvement in community organizations. Marco was a respected leader of a Mexicano organization.

Right from my first meeting, the members of Lambda Alpha were in the process of establishing a new organization that would be involved with the goals of *el movimiento*. I immediately saw that we were part of a political movement fighting for civil rights! Other members included students who had been politicized by the farmworker movement in the surrounding Kern County towns like Delano, Arvin, and Lamont. We named the organization United Mexican Students or UMS. (Two years later the members changed the name to MECHA.) I was encouraged by other members to run for correspondence secretary. We held our first events. First, a conference where we brought in Mexican professionals to share with us their career experience. We later held a Cinco de Mayo celebration where we shared tamales made at La Bonita Tortilleria. At the event I wore a traditional Mexican dress I made on my grandmother’s sewing machine. She braided my hair with ribbons and I wore the earrings she had given me of Mexican gold coins.

In this process, I was very fortunate to learn from my friend, who changed the course of my life. Marco first asked me what I thought of Cesar Chavez. Trying to not seem too uninformed or totally un-cool, I recall saying there were good and bad things about him. In truth, I had heard Cesar was a communist, which at the time I believed was something bad. However, by this time I knew we had our own movement and expected that Cesar Chavez and the union were a part of something very important. I remember telling my friend that the U.S. was the best country because here ALL MEN WERE EQUAL. He said no, this was not true, and proceeded to tell me why.

I began to understand that the inequality I saw in our community was not our fault and that it was really society that was unfair and unjust. We were not inferior in any way, unlike what I had previously internalized. My passion began to shape. Marco also told me about the farmworker movement and that it represented justice and fairness for farmworkers. Coming from a farmworker tradition, I was immediately happy that this effort would change the unfairness many farmworkers and I had experienced. His passion inspired me to dedicate my life to changing the conditions in my community. His encouragement made me believe that I could actually change our conditions. He was so insistent that it must be done that I embraced and internalized the movement. I was walking into the movement prepared to dedicate myself to it and to work in community. I had the faith to believe it could happen and I carried the discipline to all and any type of work necessary.

My Great Experience with the L.A. Boycott

Marco also shared with me that one could join the union to work as a full-time volunteer. In the spring of 1970, I left home and moved into a rented house with two other students. That summer I was working at a poverty agency, KCEOC, which I expected would help the community. Due to the lack of structure and poor planning at the agency, I felt my work there had no purpose. I was anxious to be part of the movement and therefore decided to join the boycott.

I drove to Delano to sign up for the boycott. I remember going to the union office housed in a newly constructed building. I went up to a counter in the front office. I told the people there I wanted to work for the union. I was given a form to complete. I was asked to wait and told that Cesar Chavez would talk to me. I remember going into a room where he sat, I believe, in a rocking chair. I remember facing him and being asked questions in a pleasant yet direct manner, almost like a test. I remember the questions about my family, who they were, their names and what they did. I was accepted to join the boycott and was assigned to go to L.A. in a few days.

I returned to Bakersfield ready to go, alone. I told my parents. I had left home without their permission and saw my dad for the first time in several months. He was happy to see me and to know I was going to help Cesar Chavez. Then I went across the street and saw my grandparents. I remember feeling especially proud to be telling my grandfather about what I was about to do. I packed my green Samsonite suitcase given to me as a graduation present by my Tia Velia and drove to Delano in my '62 T-bird I had recently bought on credit. When I arrived I was completely surprised to find out I would be driving to my assigned destination with Marco and Louie, another Chicano friend from our student organization who would also be part of the L.A. boycott. In addition, Joyce Davis, who had arrived from New York, would be joining us.

Joyce and I were assigned to the Orange County boycott, where we lived with a family in Fullerton. Marco and Louie were assigned to the East L.A. boycott. I remember going to an orientation where we were told what we would do. We then went to the home of our boycott family, a very middle-class family that lived in a quiet suburb in Fullerton. I remember Joyce felt very strange there. The family had a fairly large house, two school-age daughters, and a young son. One of the daughters gave up her bedroom so that Joyce and I would have a room to share.

The next day Joyce and I were in front of a grocery store—either Ralph's or Alpha-Beta—organizing. We would ask shoppers to help the farmworkers' efforts to have a union represent them by supporting the boycott of this store that carried non-union grapes. We would explain the plight of farmworkers: hard working conditions under the hot sun, very low wages, no health or retirement benefits, and exposure to dangerous pesticides. We would ask them to go to another grocery store down the street. We carried small leaflets

that described the injustices farmworkers endured, with a picture of a farmworker. I remember the two of us in the parking lot of the store, carrying our leaflets and deciding who would approach each shopper. We did not wait for the shoppers to get to us, we would go to them. I felt comfortable engaging with shoppers. I was polite, matter of fact, and direct when asking them to support the boycott and the farmworkers' union.

I recall much of what I did and am amazed that I was able to be effective. I had never done this type of advocacy and wonder if the training and instructions we received and the qualities and commitment I brought to the process made it possible. I can say that I was learning from our leaders on the boycott, from other organizers, but that I had the required compassion and dedication to fulfill my responsibilities.

At a certain point, I realized I had developed my approach in talking to shoppers. I would first ask shoppers if they were familiar with the farmworker union. From there, I would "give them a rap" that was tailored to them. I would immediately respond to their previous understanding. I'm certain I would mentally recall my own lack of understanding. I remember all sorts of responses from "I hate unions, they ruined my life" and telling me that I was a communist like Cesar Chavez to people who really cared and were concerned about the conditions and were willing to get into their cars and shop elsewhere, having been convinced by these two 19-year-old college students—one from a middle-class family in New York City and one from a poor Mexican family in Bakersfield.

Joyce and I often worked as a team, talking and convincing the same customer if time allowed, but most often we each approached a different customer. I remember a conversation I had with a man who told me that farmworkers ate very cheap meals like beans and tortillas and therefore did not need a higher salary like people who had a diet of meat. My innocent response was that he was wrong, that our diet included other dishes that included meat, and I went on to tell him about the various dishes I could think of that required meat, chicken mole, fried steak, liver and onions, chile con carne.

I would often be challenged about being informed: people would refuse to believe I was a farmworker. I would say that I was, that I had worked in the fields. Finally I resorted to telling them that my father had also been a farmworker, though it had been years since he worked in the fields. But then I could elaborate more concretely and tell them the pain it caused, because in fact I knew too well the hardship that many farmworkers endure.

I remember the long hours of standing in front of a store, asking people over and over to support the farmworkers by boycotting the stores that sold non-union grapes. We would often talk to the store manager, asking them not to carry non-union grapes. Sometimes managers would try to trick us and their shoppers buy putting non-union grapes in wooden boxes with the beautiful union label depicting the union name and the union flag. When we finally achieved a victory at Alpha-Beta, we were able to ask shoppers to shop at the store that did not carry non-union grapes.

Baldwin Keenan was in charge of the Orange County boycott. Baldwin was energetic, enthusiastic, and pleasant to all. He would come by the store to see how we were doing. We were expected to be in front of the store the whole day. Sometimes volunteers would bring us lunch. I was always amazed that strangers would listen to us, be persuaded to support the farmworkers, and then return to their car and do their shopping at another store. I now believe that these people, between 10 and 15 per day, were already union members or supporters, religious persons who supported the morality of our cause, people who were politically progressive and supported other causes, or individuals who were truly kind and compassionate.

Occasionally, we had to get up very early, at about 4 a.m., to visit the produce terminals and attempt to keep the non-union grapes from being taken off the train. I particularly remember a very young priest who drove an old car. One morning after we had gone to the produce terminal, we were pulled over by the police. This was one morning when we had to go to the produce terminal very early to stop the non-union grapes from being delivered, and I was very tired. At first they did not believe he was a priest and believed I was on drugs because I was falling asleep in the back seat.

The whole time I was on the boycott I believed that each person who supported the boycott was a step closer to justice and fairness that the farmworkers were fighting for. Each step was significant, important, and essential. The days were the same and sometimes I would count the hours, but I never considered doing anything else. I worked in a well-organized, disciplined organization and I worked to be equally disciplined, as I had always been taught to be.

Each week started with a meeting at Loyola University, where all the boycott organizers of the L.A. area would meet in a small auditorium. The agenda was handled effectively and at a fast clip by LeRoy Chatfield, the director for our area. LeRoy Chatfield was a former Christian Brother who had taught at Garces High School before joining the UFW. Though he was not one of my teachers, he was there while I attended that school. I am sure he was like some of my own teachers who linked fighting poverty with theology. He was joined by Chris Hartmire, who was with the Migrant Ministry and was a Presbyterian minister.

LeRoy Chatfield and Chris Hartmire would give us an update on the latest union activities and issues, the progress we were making both in the form of our achievements and its impact on the grocers we were boycotting. LeRoy also talked about other business, such as making sure we were not making unnecessary long distance calls to each other. He reminded us that the distance between East L.A. and Long Beach was the same as between Bakersfield and Delano. More than anything, the meetings seemed to be a way to reinforce the importance of the work—to remind us that we were part of a large effort of organizers in L.A., and most important, of a bigger national effort. They would report to us about how many people we had turned away and let us know of the general campaign. The meetings made our daily work important. We talked about what was going on in Delano.

One of the most exciting events of the boycott was the signing of the grape contract with Giumarra Vineyards and other table grape growers. We all went to Forty Acres for the big moment. I recall being at the back of the hall and Cesar shaking hands with the growers and pledging for some reason that the same effort used to boycott grapes would now be turned to selling them ... a true peace gesture. I remember talking with Marco and him telling me, to my surprise, that now other farmworkers would need to be unionized. I hadn't considered the great news that all farmworkers could have a union, including the dignity, rights, and many benefits that came with it. Later we went to the farms to register farmworkers into the union. I remember how many of the Filipinos did not have family members whom they could list as beneficiaries, since many had been victims of the laws that made it illegal for Filipinos to marry non-Filipinos.

I recall a celebration on the campus of USC that included boycott organizers, community supporters, and volunteers. In the room were clergy and, I believe, politicians. The signing of the contracts and this celebration marked a significant milestone for the UFW and it was so exciting for other boycott organizers and me to be part of it. We were all very, very happy!

It seemed that simultaneous to the victory of the grape boycott, we started a whole new fight. At our meeting, LeRoy explained that we would have to support the critical activities in the lettuce fields of Salinas. The Teamsters had been brought in by the Salinas valley lettuce growers to represent the farmworkers. As LeRoy Chatfield explained to us, the Teamsters had an agreement with the UFW that they would stay away from representing farmworkers, and the UFW would not organize in the packing sheds. Our group was required to participate in two simultaneous efforts. Some of us would be sent to Salinas to work in the fight for the UFW survival in the lettuce fields, and others would continue the work in the boycott effort in the L.A. area.

As LeRoy started naming the individuals who would go to Salinas, some of the women started realizing there were no women included. One of the women, a student at Kent State who had been involved in the student strike as a result of her fellow students being killed protesting the Vietnam War, spoke up. She asked why no women had been chosen to go. LeRoy explained the dangers involved. There was great potential for violence because the Teamsters had "goons" who were threatening the lives of farmworkers. She argued back that women were just as capable as men to work under these circumstances. LeRoy responded that he had not considered this and expressed a willingness to change his plans. She accepted his response and said that it was not necessary to change his plans and things should just move forward.

For me this was a lesson in the importance of equality for men and women. I did not notice what other women, who I think were all white, had noticed. But I agreed with their opinion once I heard it. I was impressed by the courage to stand up to our director and his willingness to listen and to change his course in response to this valid concern. It was clear

that initially he was looking out for the safest way to take the necessary the support to Salinas.

When the group of organizers left for Salinas, those who remained began the campaign against United Fruit. LeRoy invited some of the organizers to participate in the research of the big conglomerate that owned one of the largest lettuce farmers in the Salinas Valley, which also owned Chiquita Banana. Since it would be very difficult to boycott lettuce, it had been decided to threaten a boycott of Chiquita Bananas. I was receiving a good lesson in macroeconomics. One tactic that was used was to go to college campuses and other supportive locations to ask people to sign postcards to be sent to United Fruit from supporters pledging to boycott their products if they continued their sweetheart deal with the Teamsters. We flooded the United Fruit office with postcards in support of the boycott! In the campaign, we stressed the dangers of the backbreaking short-handled hoe used at that time to harvest lettuce. The campaign was in progress when I left the boycott at the end of the summer.

The student from Kent State was one of the many people I met from throughout the country. I remember two organizers by the name of David, both from New York and Jewish. One was always reading and was the son of a vacuum cleaner salesman. His blue mystical eyes reminded me of a prophet who always talked and listened softly to what others had to say. He gave me a book he had checked out of the library on the teachings of Gandhi. He shared that he always preferred to read what people had written, rather what others wrote about them. I remember Paul and Mike Johnston, two brothers from San Jose. Paul was an intellectual and Mike was a smart high-school student who could give us directions from memory that made sense of the L.A. freeway maze.

Paul and Mike and some of the other organizers saw this work as an issue of workers having a right to have their own union. I had very little exposure to any other union, though by now my mother, a public school employee, was already a member of CSEA. I recall her talking about being a member of a union in a positive and happy way, because she had good benefits at work including health and vision insurance, paid sick leave, which she rarely used, and retirement benefits. These were the reasons she was happy to have been hired with permanent status as a cafeteria cook for the school district. However, at the time I did not associate her positive experience with her union with my work to help farmworkers have their own union. I saw my participation addressing the goals of justice, dignity, fairness, and equality for my people, who had experienced racism and discrimination as farmworkers.

I remember two Chicanos from Kansas who would talk about the lack of Chicanos and a movement in Kansas and had decided to come to California to be part of the movement. During the course of the boycott, I met many Chicanos from the L.A. area who supported the boycott in their community and their college campus. I left the boycott believing that the Chicano movement was so large, powerful, and united that I was certain wherever I would arrive in California, I would have place to eat and sleep.

I remember Billy, who was just a regular white guy from Bakersfield. He was more working class than the more middle-class college students on the boycott. I recall that I lived on the small stipend we received each week. Some organizers had credit cards and allowances they received from their parents and often shared with others.

My most endearing person I met on the boycott was Mike Piñeda, an older Mexicano farmworker who was passionate and enthusiastic about the union. He was short in height, with straight black hair, sort of a crew-cut flat-top, and he usually wore a flannel shirt and had a constant friendly smile behind his black-frame glasses. Years later I again saw Mike at mass at San Clemente Mission, my church in La Loma, the area in Bakersfield where Mike was living. He was much older, with graying hair. He was a faithful member of the parish, always sitting in front of the church and praying devoutly. I went right up to him and greeted him, telling him I remembered him from the L.A. boycott. He remembered me, too, and talked with happiness and enthusiasm about the union, Cesar, Dolores, and others with whom he worked. He eventually started to use a cane as he walked slowly to and from church, and later his vision was impaired. The parishioners at San Clemente respectfully called him Don Mike. He passed a couple of years ago. His funeral was attended by his family, including his son, and friends like my mother. To me, Mike was one of the thousands of farmworkers who left the comforts of their home and community to join the boycott, sacrificing their own precious earning power to a higher calling—seeking justice and dignity for their bothers and sisters.

By August, I had moved to the boycott apartment in Orange County, located in Santa Ana. Some of the organizers were leaving. On August 29, some of us attended a historic event, the Chicano Moratorium in East L.A. This protest against the Vietnam War was months in the making. I remember first hearing about it in the spring when the disproportionately high number of Chicanos drafted and being killed in the war was publicized. To attend the moratorium, we took a boycott van that we parked next to the park where the rally was to be held. Mike Johnston and I joined the march. I witnessed police guarding and challenging the marchers. I remember as we crossed each intersection, the police in a line directly beside us and some of the marchers taunting the police and telling them to retreat. I recall the police retreating in some instances. When we arrived at the park for the rally, Mike and I decided to approach all persons carrying UFW flags to tell them about the boycott and encouraging them to volunteer in the activities. Fortunately, we met George Bumanglough, a Chicano-Filipino student activist from Earlimart in Kern County who was living in Pomona. The participants of the rally were mostly Chicanos and included the old and young, even children.

I recall being away from my group when the riot at the rally started. I think I had gone to the van for something—probably more leaflets. Suddenly there were people screaming and bottles being thrown at the police as they entered from one corner of the park to clear us out. I remember the police with riot helmets running toward the crowd, then people throwing bottles at them, the police's retreat, and finally the tear gas shot at the participants

by the police. I was trying to run toward the crowd that was leaving the park to find my friends, but I couldn't find any of them. I remember having to run away from the park up toward one of the side streets into a residential neighborhood. Having been "gassed" by tear gas, I had difficulty breathing and keeping my burning eyes open. The neighbors were offering help, letting us use their water hoses to wash off our faces. In this process I ran into George. He offered his help and I stayed with him as we were in the middle of this riot. Police sirens could be heard from all directions. People were crying and scared. People were yelling. We soon had to leave the area because he had to pick up someone from the airport. As we drove away from East L.A. toward LAX we could see police cars from other areas painted in different colors coming to the scene of the march and rally turned to riot by police actions.

We were not able to go to Santa Ana where I was living and I did not have the wherewithal to know what to do at that point. I was sort of in shock. George invited me to stay at the home in Pomona where he was renting a room from an activist Chicano family. I can still remember the family and the couch I slept in that scary night. The following day I found out that my disappearance had cause a problem because I was missing and no one knew what had happened to me. I understand they did not know if I was taken to jail or in the hospital. I left the boycott for several days because I felt very strange. I remember going to visit George's family and going to Solvang, trying to understand what had happened during the riot.

When I returned to Santa Ana, Baldwin took me aside and told me he was very concerned that I seemed different—quiet and withdrawn. I told him that I had been disturbed by what another boycott organizer had told me about a conspiracy against John F. Kennedy: that his assassination was really part of a larger conspiracy. I expressed to Baldwin I was shocked and upset to hear this. I still continued trying to work on the boycott as before. However, I knew that I had to leave the boycott for many reasons, the most important of which was to return to college, for my parents. However, I recall my last attempt in front of a store. I was asking a man not to shop there and he resisted. Instead of arguing as I had in the past, I said ok and walked away.

When I returned to school in the fall, I initially had a hard time. I had trouble concentrating and felt "something" had happened to me. I began to feel the hard work of the boycott was too much for me. I now know that what I was experiencing was a form of post-traumatic stress syndrome (PTSD) which was in essence a delayed reaction to the trauma of the Chicano Moratorium riot.

I left the boycott as quietly as I started. I recall saying goodbye to Baldwin, giving each other a big hug and both crying as I left. I knew I would forever miss the opportunity to completely dedicate myself to a cause that would truly change the lives and defend the rights of farmworkers. For this, I was very, very sad. However, at the time, I felt that I had no other choice. I was exhausted. My parents, particularly my mother, would be very disappointed if I stopped going to college. At the same time, I knew that although I was

leaving the boycott and the many fellow activists I had met, I would continue my political involvement—which I wanted to be as radical as possible. I was right!