

## Anne Rosenzweig 1970 - 1971

### SALINAS AND MONTREAL

During the summer of 1970, I was living in Salinas, California, with the family of a California Rural Legal Assistance community worker, Manuel Olivas, while completing my field placement as a community studies major at the University of California at Santa Cruz. I was working with the Neighborhood Youth Corps, tutoring at-risk youth. When Salinas Valley growers signed sweetheart contracts with the teamsters' union that summer, Cesar Chavez and other UFWOC organizers went to Salinas to discuss having an organizing campaign there.

#### How I Met Cesar

In late July 1970, I was away from Salinas for several days. I returned to the Olivas' home around noon on Tuesday, July 28. I was there, eating lunch by myself, when I heard a knock at the door. I'll quote directly from my journal to convey what happened next: "When I answered [the door knock] the four people outside asked if Manuel was here yet. No he wasn't, but I invited them in because they told me a meeting was going to be held here. More people began to trickle in. I heard some talk about the union, but it was still not clear what kind of a meeting was going to take place. More people arrived and I heard people saying that Cesar would be here soon, so I knew something BIG was happening. I'd planned to go to Hartnell [College] at one, but decided to stick around. Pretty soon in walks Manuel with Cesar Chavez. At first I didn't realize who he was--he's a small, not at all conspicuous man. Someone asked in Spanish if anyone had aspirin. P  p   (a friend of Manuel's) relayed the question to me in English. I went to get my Bufferin. When I returned to the kitchen, the green-shirted man who'd asked for aspirin told me in English that someone had already given him some medicine. It was several moments before I realized that the man who had addressed me was Cesar Chavez!"

#### Organizing and the Salinas Lettuce Strike

The talk about organizing in the Salinas Valley fascinated me. Thirty to 40 people had shown up for that first meeting in the Olivas' home. A few days later I went to a farmworkers' meeting in Watsonville. Cesar Chavez called on Governor Reagan to ask for an election so that farmworkers could decide for themselves whether they wanted to be represented by the teamsters or UFWOC. About a week later, I went with Venustiano Olgu  n to the Soledad home of Odil  n Gracia, where we met with 15 to 20 people from the surrounding area to talk about the union and a possible strike. The people we met with were enthusiastic, and several said they had been waiting a long time for a UFWOC organizing campaign in the Salinas Valley.

Over the course of about two weeks I decided that I would like to work with the union. Fortunately, my faculty advisor, Dr. William Friedland, was amenable to a switch in my

field placement. He was a sociology professor who had studied farm labor issues on the East Coast when he was at Cornell, so he was interested in learning about farm labor organizing in California. I was soon out in the fields of the Salinas Valley urging farmworkers to sign UFWOC authorization cards.

At first, organizers in Salinas met together and were coached by two very able organizers: the legendary Fred Ross Sr., who had “discovered” Cesar in San Jose in the early 1950s and persuaded him to become a community organizer; and Marshall Ganz, a veteran of the civil rights movement in the South and many previous UFWOC campaigns. Later we were divided into two teams. I was on Marshall’s team and assigned to supervise strike activities at Oshita Farms, based in Chualar, which seemed like an awesome responsibility to me at 20 years old.

Supervising strike activities at Oshita soon brought me into contact with UFWOC attorneys, as Oshita workers were among the first to be evicted from company labor camps. I learned to prepare affidavits to help the attorneys with the court cases. There was also violence against picketers on the picket lines next to the fields, and once I was almost run off the road by Mr. Oshita. Prior to working with UFWOC, I had always had a very “Perry Mason” view of attorneys and could never see myself in that role. Through working with the union, I met many able attorneys (both those employed by the union and volunteers) and found them to be good people doing important work. This discovery had a profound impact on my life, as I later became a labor lawyer. In fact my first job after law school was with the Agricultural Labor Relations Board, beginning in August of 1975.

One of the early picketing targets in the Salinas Valley was Freshpict. The company obtained a temporary restraining order (TRO) against picketing on its property. I was one of many Freshpict picketers who received a citation for trespassing next to its fields. In fact, when I graduated from law school in 1975 and applied to take the bar exam, I had to ask Salinas CRLA attorney Denny Powell to obtain a certified copy of the dismissal of the citation to submit to the California Bar to prove that I had no criminal record from this brief brush with the law!

My Spanish was quite limited when the strike began, but I quickly discovered that volunteers who spoke only English stayed in the office doing clerical work, while those who spoke Spanish were out in the field organizing. There was no way I wanted to stay in an office with all the excitement of organizing and strike activities going on outside. Fortunately, my fluency in French and being surrounded by Spanish for up to 20 hours a day helped me increase my fluency quickly.

Dolores Huerta also made a huge and lasting impression on me in the early days of my involvement with UFWOC. I particularly remember attending a meeting she had with farmworkers who worked for Freshpict. Dolores was confident, articulate, and very respectful of the workers, coaxing them to formulate their own demands for negotiations with their employer by inviting them to discuss their working conditions and how things

could be improved. More than 30 years later, Dolores remains a role model for me. I hope I can maintain her energy and activism into my 60s, 70s, and beyond.

### The Lettuce Boycott in Montreal

As the strike wound down, UFWOC launched the lettuce boycott, modeled after the grape boycott. During the grape boycott, the Canadian cities of Toronto and Montreal had become dumping grounds for scab grapes, and boycotters had been sent to those cities to persuade Canadians to boycott grapes. My mother was born and raised in France and I grew up speaking French, so when I volunteered for the boycott it was decided that I would be most useful in Montreal. When I arrived in Montreal I found I could barely understand many Québécois, especially workers, whose accent and vocabulary were very different from the Parisian French my family spoke. It took quite a while for me to feel comfortable communicating in French in Montreal.

Jessica Govea and Joan Banfield had come to Salinas from the Montreal boycott. Jessica stayed in California, but Joan and I and two farmworkers, Juvencio Garza and his wife, San Juana, headed to Montreal by car to join Rex Vargas there. Juvencio was about 30 years old and a Mexican citizen, while San Juana was 19 and a U.S. citizen. Joan was fluent in French, having spent two years in the Peace Corps in West Africa prior to her boycott work. We didn't drive to Montreal by the most direct route, because our itinerary was determined by where the UFWOC or we had contacts. Our first night was spent in the Bakersfield home of Jessica's hospitable family. Other stops included Oklahoma City, where a church group hosted us; Kansas City, where we stayed with Joan's parents; and Buffalo, where my great-aunts lived.

We arrived in Montreal at a time of political turmoil. Separatists were advocating the secession of Quebec from Canada and the establishment of an independent country. The British trade minister had been kidnapped shortly before our October arrival in Quebec. Pierre LaPorte, Quebec's labor minister, was kidnapped a few days after our arrival in Montreal. His body was discovered about a week later. He had been shot in the head. Little did we realize how profoundly the separatist movement would affect our boycott efforts.

Within a couple of weeks of our arrival, Prime Minister Trudeau invoked the War Measures Act, declaring martial law in Quebec. The army moved into Montreal very conspicuously. Michel Chartrand, the head of the central labor council, was detained. Since he was a key labor leader, union members were focused on getting him released. This posed a tremendous challenge to our organizing efforts, as it became increasingly difficult to get Montreal residents to focus on farmworker problems when they were dealing with such a crisis in their own midst.

Soon we too were affected by the imposition of martial law. The boycott office was located in the office of the NDP (New Democratic Party), a well-respected socialist party in Canada. Usually the only NDP person in the office was the secretary Nicole. On the

afternoon of Monday October 19, several French-speaking Montreal policemen came into the NDP office to conduct a search. They had no warrant and did not need one because of the War Measures Act. They began opening drawers and looking through files. Neither Nicole nor anyone else from the NDP was at the office, but our entire boycott staff of five was there. We were all asked for our identification, but the police seemed especially interested in Juvencio Garza, a Mexican national, who had the darkest skin of any of us. (We later learned that it was rumored that the separatists had been trained by Cubans, so anyone looking or sounding Hispanic was apparently suspect.) A couple of policemen took Juvencio into a back room. Joan Banfield, as the senior member of the boycott staff tried to follow them, explaining in French who Juvencio was. The police ordered her back, but not before she had seen that Juvencio had his hands up and was being searched.

The police took Juvencio to the police station. Poor Juvencio, who spoke no French and very limited English, was terrified. His wife was in tears. About an hour and a half later, three detectives came and asked San Juana to accompany them to the police station. We were told there was a discrepancy between the birth date on the immigration slip Juvencio had received at the border and what he had told them. We later discovered that the immigration official at the border had filled in the date of our arrival as Juvencio's birth date, reflecting that he was all of about two weeks old at the time of the search! Within about an hour, Juvencio and San Juana returned, accompanied by the assistant Mexican consul, who advised us to get Juvencio out of Quebec as soon as possible, because he would remain under surveillance if he stayed and might not be released so quickly if he were detained a second time. That same evening, Rex Vargas and I drove Juvencio and San Juana Garza to the Toronto boycott office. They never returned to Montreal.

For the rest of the time I was with the boycott in Montreal, we used the NDP office as a base for making phone calls, designing leaflets, etc., but spent much of our time outside the office speaking to union and church groups. We also made many early morning visits to the Montreal produce market, which became more and more difficult as the weather grew colder and colder. According to the newspaper, the winter of 1970-71 was the snowiest one Montreal had experienced in 50 years. Shoveling snow to dig out the car, driving in blizzard conditions, and adapting to the cold were new experiences for me, as I had lived in the California Bay Area since the age of one. I have a picture from that winter of a Montreal public telephone booth--completely inaccessible because of snow piled up outside, as well as inside, the booth.

When Montreal began to thaw after the long winter, I started thinking about returning to UCSC to finish college. I decided to return for the fall 1971 quarter and think about applying to law school after that. My father met me in Montreal in early May and we drove my car to the Boston boycott office, where he signed over the pink slip to the UFWOC. (I was still under 21 so the car was actually in his name). We then returned to northern California, where I celebrated my 21st birthday in May of 1971.