

Andres Gonzalez 1970–1972

I consider myself fortunate to have been recruited by Dolores Huerta and Ray Huerta during the Chicano movement in East Los Angeles. At the time I was participating with an organization called LUCHA (League of United Chicanos to Help Addicts). Dolores Huerta (vice president) and Ray Huerta (organizer) came to LUCHA to give us a spiel as to what was happening with the farmworkers in the fields, and with the boycotts called by Cesar Chavez countrywide. Because everything they stated made sense to me, I decided to volunteer with United Farmworkers Organizing Committee (UFWOC).

The first assignment I participated in as volunteer was in East Los Angeles at the progressive Euclid Center, a Lutheran church located at Whittier Boulevard and Euclid Ave. Here I got my feet wet boycotting stores. The organizer was Ray Huerta, and he taught me how to approach the markets and ask them not to accept scab lettuce. This movement was aimed at all the mom-and-pop stores in East L.A. first.

The *compañero* in charge was a former priest from Guatemala whose last name was Warren (I think). He was in charge of the Los Angeles County boycott. He had his office in a building on West Olympic Boulevard west of Figueroa Street. Ray Huerta and I would go there for instructions on what to do next. We boycotted many markets in East L.A. such as Safeway on Fourth and Soto streets and at Rowan Avenue and Cesar E. Chavez (formerly Brooklyn Avenue). I also remember the AAA Foods on Rosecrans Boulevard at Pico Rivera that had lock-down (no customers) for days. By then, Ray Huerta and I had made contacts with people from the Chicano movement, real good human beings who assisted us on the boycott and picket lines that we established at different locations of East Los Angeles. Ray Huerta was pulled back to Delano, California, and I continued working for justice for the farmworkers. By then, I had already been to Delano, where I had met my general, Cesar E. Chavez, at the Filipino Hall. We had brought a caravan from East Los Angeles—trucks loaded with food, clothes, and everything you can think of that people donated to *La Causa* of the farmworkers.

By April of 1971, Ray Huerta had been sent to Coachella Valley to take over the local. I was called to Delano and was told by that giant of a man, Cesar, to leave the Los Angeles area and go to Coachella Valley to assist Ray Huerta in running the local. At that time, I had to ask permission from my parole officer to leave the Los Angeles area. He gave his OK. The state was glad to see me leave the area, I guess, because of our association with the Brown Berets, who were always assisting us on the picket lines and who held some of their meetings at the Euclid Center.

David Sanchez from the Brown Berets was a great help to the farmworker cause. Many of his members participated with us picking up donations for the farmworkers that were delivered to Filipino Hall. I'd also like to recognize Lucy Perez Vazquez, Patricia Cordova Vellanoweth, Maria Elena Giatan, Rosalinda Sanchez, Corky Rodriguez, Oscar Valleriano from La Vida Nueva of East Los Angeles College, and many other students from Cal State

Los Angeles, whom we recruited to shut down the Los Angeles produce markets at Seventh St. and Central Ave. and at Ninth St. and San Pedro St. No scab lettuce could be unloaded by the Teamsters, who were being fined for not unloading the scab lettuce. We had real unity at both produce markets for a period of several weeks. We did this work from 10 p.m. to 6 a.m. I really give a lot of credit to the East Los Angeles area team named above—and to many others whose names I have forgotten.

I arrived at Coachella sometime in April 1971. Ray Huerta was the director and he had brought down his family. My address was the local. I lived in because of what had happened at Porterville, California. Ray Huerta believed that if the ranchers knew that someone was staying in the office day and night, they would think twice before creating another incident. From Coachella Valley, Cesar sent word that as soon as the harvesting of the grapes was over in Coachella, I was to go and follow up with the crews that left the area of Coachella for Lamont/Arvin in the Bakersfield area.

After several weeks there, and the harvesting of the table grapes over, Cesar suggested that I continue to follow the same crews that moved up to the Delano area. I was more or less enforcing the contracts of UFWOC with the ranchers, especially Giumarra. The Brown Berets of Delano area assisted me in many occasions. Carlos Fierro and CAT were always with me. I met a lot of beautiful people at Filipino Hall, volunteers as well as farmworkers, diehard strikers like myself. I developed a wonderful relationship with my Filipino brothers, especially Willie Barrientos and Philip Vera Cruz (vice president), and many others who professed Cesar as our leader. During this time, UFWOC was in the transition of moving from Delano to La Paz. But I remained at the Filipino Hall at the Forty Acres, working out of the hiring hall, enforcing the contracts and membership.

It was around this period of time that Cesar called a meeting with all of us organizers at Nuestra Señora de la Paz. Here I was introduced to that great human being, Fred Ross. During this meeting, which lasted several days and nights, the discussions centered around the welfare of the farmworkers in the field, especially something called the “Robert F. Kennedy Health Plan.” In this plan, workers would pay \$2 for medicine and \$2 for x-rays. HEW consultants suggested another health plan. We the organizers returned to the fields of California for a democratic vote by the farmworkers. The Robert F. Kennedy Health Plan won the elections by a wide margin. During this meeting I met a lot of good organizers, such as Alfredo Figueroa from Blythe, Mr. Moon (Manuel Luna), Jesus Villegas from the Calexico Local, and the great man from Colorado, Chano Avila Rose. I also met others, like Marcos Muñoz, who had been back East on the boycott, and others whose names I don’t remember. Time gone by and the memories go bye-bye.

Sometime around October of 1971, Cesar directed me to return to the Coachella Valley because many of the crews were returning from the Fresno area back to Southern California. I returned to enforce the table grape contracts and the membership of UFWOC, as well as to check out the ranches that had citrus fruits, for the purpose of organizing them in the future. During the months of November, December, January, and

February, it was dead. The director, Ray Huerta, was always meeting with the ranch committees that were under contract with the union to keep up spirits, for information on grievances that they may have had, and for the local to provide assistance to them during the spring harvest of the table grapes. During that period the accident at Palo Verde Ranch in the Blythe area occurred: 22 farmworkers from Mexicali died when the bus that hauled them went into a channel. The director of the Blythe local, Alfredo Figueroa, called for the assistance of the Coachella local through Cesar E. Chavez, who had been notified of the accident. Although most of those young farmworkers were not union members, Cesar sent word that the Blythe, Coachella, and Calexico locals were to assist the families of the farmworkers who had died, and also prepare for their wake and funerals from Calexico to Mexicali. Cesar came to Calexico and led the procession from the hall of the wake to the graveyard where the young farmworkers (girls and boys) were buried. A real sad *época*.

Right after the incident, Alfredo Figueroa came to Coachella and suggested that we go to San Bernardino area to assist the campaign of Democrat Ruben Ayala against Jerry Lewis, the monied Republican. We worked day and night on Ruben Ayala's campaign. We worked the Fontana and Colton areas with a grassroots campaign. The end result was that we beat the big money behind the Republicans. Ruben Ayala was elected to the assembly and later became a state senator.

There are lots of things that I am leaving out of these notes that I do not wish to expand on. In many of the crews that were organized, most of the workers were undocumented. I always did identify with the undocumented farmworkers because they believed in Cesar Chavez as their true leader, as did I. To this day he is my inspiration because all of the good he did for the farmworkers of America. *Somos uno porque América es una!* He was a great humanitarian who was seeking social justice for all mankind.

Regards to the familia of Cesar Chavez, to fellow *camaradas* Marshall Ganz, Jessica Govea, Jerry Cohen, and many others who participated as volunteers *por La Causa* and did more than their share for the farmworkers of America.