

Richard Ybarra 1970–1975, 1980–1982

A Young Man and His Family's Path to a Man Named Cesar

Those who came before us

Growing up in San Diego was something I enjoyed. How I moved from my hometown onto a regional, state, national, and world scene is something which at times still defies explanation. To this day, I still tell my two daughters and two sons that getting to Delano and becoming their dad was an impossible and highly unlikely occurrence.

Born into a fairly typical Logan Heights lower middle-class Latino family in the baby boom year of 1948, coupled with a Catholic education by Franciscan nuns and Augustinian priests, I was to learn and understand life from a beautiful family point of view.

My mom, who is my workaholic role model, was a bakery worker and manager, PTA president, and volleyball coach. While in high school, she doubled as a World War II Rosie the Riveter and tripled as a grocery store clerk. My father was a WWII Marine Raider, who worked as a fisherman and later as a carpenter, while scout-mastering the first and best Logan Heights Boy Scout troop. When we were in high school, mom usually worked two or three jobs to keep her sons in private Catholic schools.

As the oldest of four brothers, one of my roles always was to find the way in terms of direction and life adventures for my brothers and me. In the late 1960s, I was headed toward becoming a coach and counselor. I also was curious enough about life to listen to my maternal grandparents and aunts and uncles tell their stories of life in the 1930s, 40s, and 50s. They and their stories have guided me throughout my life.

Three grandfather stories always stood out to me... My grandfather, Juan de Dios Gonzalez, from Jerez, Zacatecas, joined Pancho Villa as a teenage military school student. His grandfather was a general in the Mexican army. He later became a bugler and aide to Villa before becoming a young field officer. He shared very little with me about the Mexican Revolutionary War itself, though a year before his death he taught me to play a few Mexican bugle calls he made during the Revolucion. To this day, "*Marcha de Zacatecas*" remains a favorite mariachi song of mine.

The other two stories were as compelling and thrilling to me as a young man as they are today. He and my grandmother met and married in Nogales, Arizona. He had crossed the border after being wounded several times in battle. They made their way across Arizona and arrived in Lemon Grove, originally a rural town in San Diego.

Over the years, he became a union and community organizer. Circumstances of race and injustice compelled him to become the first president of San Diego's *obreros y campesinos* union. He led walkouts and strikes in San Diego and Orange counties. He told us one of

the times he led a strike in Orange County he was beaten up and thrown in jail because his driver's license did not have his current address. (Funny, but at this time I cannot help but smile remembering he never became a U.S. citizen, had walked across the official border in Nogales, where he was on a first-name basis with the immigration officer, and yet had a valid California drivers license—so much for race-based controversy renewal!)

In addition, my grandfather was the lead organizer of the “Lemon Grove incident,” which was a community walkout in Lemon Grove over school officials' attempt to place all Mexican students in a barn instead of in the regular school facility. He organized a school boycott and found a lawyer who would make the “Lemon Grove Incident” the first ever successful school desegregation lawsuit in 1934—*Alvarez v. Lemon Grove School Board*.

My loving, friendly, and courageous grandfather died of tuberculosis in 1963, seven years before I would have the choice of following in his footsteps

The 1960s: College Years

As a college student in the late 1960s, I became vaguely aware of the farmworker movement led by Cesar Chavez. Interestingly, I did not immediately warm up to the farmworker movement, though at one point it reminded me of my grandfather. I later realized, like so many others of that era, I was worried about transcending from Mexican to Chicano and therefore lived in “fear” of stepping out of line or calling attention to myself as a Mexican-American. During the next several years, I would confront this fear as it collided with my life course.

The Vietnam War was changing the world. Beginning with the assassination of President John F. Kennedy in 1963, and breaking wide open in 1968 with demonstrations, the assassinations of Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr., and Bobby Kennedy, and the riots that followed, society, the world as we knew and understood it, was evolving. Everything was topsy-turvy in our lives. Friends going to a war they did not understand, others protesting because they understood it was wrong; love-ins, then parties went from dressy and dancing to Levi's and sitting on the floor. Drugs as we know them today came onto the scene and something called the grape boycott had become a national and international phenomenon. I still remember a friend saying he had heard this guy named Chavez speak at a community college and he “called us brothers and sisters. Why did he do that? I am not his brother!”

I remained an uninvolved party-going, sports-loving college student transferring from Southwestern College to Chapman College in Orange County (the institution that arrested my grandfather in the 30s). Just before I left for Chapman College in the fall of 1969, my brother Alberto (Abby) became involved with the grape boycott. He invited me to join a Safeway picket line in National City. I declined his invitation. I recall saying doing that stuff was “embarrassing.” Really, I know it was because I was “afraid” to demonstrate, especially in such a loud and public way.

The world was moving and changing at an ever-rapid rate in 1969 for all of us. There were more friends and family returning from Vietnam in body bags, with ever-changing answers and reasons to justify our involvement in the war. Protesters and peaceniks were active even on small campuses like Chapman in the City of Orange, which was a small Church of Christ-based conservative college. I enjoyed my time at Chapman and attended some “convocations,” which were required for campus credit. As a resident assistant, I sort of felt a responsibility to attend.

I remember attending a convocation billed as “The Grape Boycott” featuring the director of the California Migrant Ministry, Reverend Chris Hartmire. He seemed to make sense to me and in the back of my mind was the memory of my grandfather and my brother’s appeal to join him on the picket line. I remember wanting to go up and get more information from Chris after his talk and not knowing what to say or ask him. I told a friend with me I was interested in what Chris had to say and he quickly admonished me, “You don’t want to do stuff like that; you are a smart, good Mexican.” Going up and taking literature from Reverend Hartmire afterward was a bold step for me. I read it over and over, still wondering if the propaganda was communist-inspired (whatever that was).

While at Chapman, I hung out with a diverse crowd, but mostly with black students, with whom I played basketball and listened and sang Temptations music. My friends John Sanders and Jim Bruce, black leather jacket-wearing leaders of the Black Students Union, pushed me on the farmworker issue. They would ask, “What are you doing to help Cesar Chavez and the farmworkers?” I answered, “Nothing, I don’t work in no fields and never have or will!” “Well you should, they are your people, and he is a great leader!” After these talks, I contemplated the movement callings from my brother and friends, and the image of my grandfather, who did similar work as Cesar, would come to mind.

Sanders and Bruce did not take too long to persuade me there was a reason I was one of only approximately 25 Mexican-Americans on campus and half of the others did not want anyone to know they were part of our community. Therefore, after attending several conferences at University of California, Irvine, and Claremont College (where I first befriended a slick-suited advisor named Richard Alatorre, who became a great California political leader), I decided to organize the first MEChA chapter at Chapman. It was another guy and I. Between us, we knew everything about organizing parties and sports teams, but nothing about organizing a campus organization. We got more negative comments from our Anglo friends than we got attendees at our inaugural meeting. Nonetheless, the three of us who showed up had a good conversation.

Return to San Diego: the Making of an Activist (whatever that is)

During the late fall of 1969 I made my decision. I transferred to San Diego State University because I knew there was something happening with Chicano students. In January of 1970, I returned home to San Diego and the Don Coryell school of football, which I had closely followed for 10 years. I crashed psychology classes to get my degree in one year and added

a few Chicano Studies classes to learn what I did not know and demonstrate to myself that I did not want to live in fear. I also joined MEChA and spent much time observing and attending student anti-war demonstrations, a Chicano legislative campaign, and MEChA-led protests. I had also found a movement home as a writer and all-around helper with *La Verdad*, a Chicano student/community newspaper. During this phase of my life, my hopes and dreams of being a basketball and football coach and a school counselor or perhaps a lawyer began to fade.

The one thing that caught my attention and was easier to understand was the grape boycott. In the first week back home, I asked my brother to invite me to the next grape boycott picket line. Like a football game before kickoff or a basketball game before tip-off, before my first picket line, I did then and always have felt that moment of truth. Hundreds of picket lines later, I still get the same feeling of wonderment and always honk in support of strikers and never cross anyone's picket lines.

We were regular picketers with the San Diegans for La Huelga led by Carlos and Linda LeGerrette. We met many lifelong friends, including the saintly Father Victor Salandini (whom I eulogized 24 years later), the great picket line singer Chunky Sanchez and his Los Alacranes group, Luis Natividad, Herman Baca, and others.

My First Encounter with Greatness

In mid-February, we made our first food caravan trip to Delano. I was so curious to see and perhaps meet the man named Cesar Chavez. I had wondered many times about him. Was he like my grandfather? Was he Gandhi or Pancho Villa-like? Will I be impressed or thrilled when I meet him? Our caravan went up on a Friday evening. Our vanload included my brothers Alberto and Sammy, along with friends Ronnie Baza, Gregory Marshall, Marco Al Renteria, and cousin Daniel Gomez. We met and ate dinner with strikers and attended a rally at the Filipino Hall. I remember listening to Jerry Cohen, Chuck Farnsworth, Marion Moses, and Philip Vera Cruz (one of the Filipino strikers who began the original grape strike and along with Larry Itliong and Pete Velasquez was a high-ranking Filipino in the UFW), who gave updates on the strike, boycott, and farmworkers' conditions. Cesar Chavez was not there that night.

The next morning with the cool Delano winds blowing more than normal, we pulled into the Forty Acres parking lot, walked into the hiring hall, and stood around drinking coffee and eating pan dulce. In the hiring hall window, we could see a group of men. The one named Cesar is clearly in the center of the group. The others are union organizers and bodyguards.

I will never forget observing him that day. He was small in stature, but at once looked peaceful and powerful (a description shared with me in late 1993 by Father Bill O'Donnell, whose death this week in late 2003 inspired me to write this piece for LeRoy's project).

I knew right then and there I had seen and found the “someone” I thought he might be. Though over the years I came to know him extremely well, I never really lost that first impression of who he was to me. The aura and peace surrounding him, a leader in a brutal struggle against injustice, whose need for bodyguards suggested the reality of violence and life-threatening situations, were as clear as the memory of the light-green jacket he was wearing that day. I remember snapping a picture of my brother Alberto with Cesar in the background within seconds of seeing him in the hiring hall window. A while later, we took pictures with him outside the building. Later in 1970 and 1971, I would come to know this man as a leader, friend, and grandfather to my children. Again, to me he was always the most intelligent, peaceful, powerful, toughest son of a gun I ever will encounter.

Twenty-three years later, I would see him in almost exactly the same spot as his coffin closed for the last time. My youngest daughter, Cynthia Chavez Ybarra, placed an ear of corn in his arm, which on the day he died Native Americans had left as “food for his journey,” at the Forty Acres with long-time striker and UFW staff member Esther Uranday.

A Life-Changing Student Adventure in Coachella, California

For the first part of 1970, I had enough classes to get by in school and a heavy diet of meetings, student rallies, and events. I was active, never as a leader, but as a cautious observer and willing participant. Then came June of 1970. Life was moving even faster toward some uncertain goal. Friends were disappearing to war and death, hippy life, marriage or combinations of all of these situations. Considering available life paths, the grape boycott and the farmworkers’ issues made the most sense to me. I clearly knew it was my grandfather’s influence at work. He made a grand impression on me, and I always felt and sensed him by my side as I entered and engaged in farmworker movement nonviolent combat, fighting for things he and others had battled for so many years before my time. Even though he passed in 1963, I always summoned him when I needed more courage.

On April 23, 1970, I was back in my neighborhood with the movement. I got the word that residents of my native barrio, Logan Heights or La Logan, had taken over land from the highway patrol. I remember those warm spring afternoons sweating with others as we took whatever tools available and began working and taking over the land to create Chicano Park. I wrote a poem for that occasion that has been published many times without my name on it. (For reasons unknown, there was an unwritten movement policy at that time where you did not write things for attribution, but boy did I want people to attribute it properly over the years.)

Soon thereafter, there was an announcement about a big student rally to be held in Indio, California (near Palm Springs in the Coachella Valley). All the big-cheese Chicano leaders were going to be there with Chicano students (who were poised to save the day and help

farmworkers win the strike). Flyers announced the June 6, 1970 rally: “Cesar, Bert Corona, and Corky Gonzalez Together In Struggle.”

I was not certain about a lot of things at that time. However, I was content to follow my gut instincts and emotions. Because there was a sense of adventure and potential danger, I remember speaking with my mom just before my brother Abby and I drove the 100 or so miles to the conference and picket lines to follow. I told her I needed to “dedicate the rest of my life to helping poor people.” She nodded approvingly and gave me great satisfaction and support, which I needed and welcomed at that time.

As young Chicanos of our time tended to do, Abby and I took over the family’s Dodge van. For the occasion, we outfitted it with colorful Indian-like curtains. We took a group of friends, including Ron Baza, Robert Gutierrez, and Cesar Lopez. The dice of a lifetime were being cast, though I had no idea how or to what degree. I recall all of us expressing great determination and a willingness to face whatever realities awaited us. The adventure was something new to us, yet there was the feeling of attending some type of happening, somewhat like a big-stakes ballgame. There was an overwhelming feeling of anxiety and pending excitement.

We arrived at the “Taj Mahal” in Indio, which was a regional fairground. There were already dozens of Chicano students as well as Anglo students. Not having been a leader or coordinator of any type, I remember it being almost blurry to try, catch, or clearly see what the action was or where things were going to go. There were some local students who knew a lot about the Huelga and all the pseudo-political goings-on of that day. I was not one of them. People like the Uribe family seemed to understand it all. They were completely bilingual, which added a dimension to their knowledge and understanding, or so it seemed to me at the time. (One fallout of the “Lemon Grove Incident” was that all over the Southwest it became almost a given for Mexican families to learn and speak English well for fear of being slapped by teachers, as was often the case for speaking Spanish during the 1920s through the 1950s.)

The rally was very spirited. People were consistently chanting: “Viva Cesar!” “Viva Corky!” “Viva Bert!” and “Viva La Raza!” Each time the choruses and refrains would follow. I don’t remember any of the speeches because the action seemed too fast-paced to follow, especially for someone who was transitioning from interested observer to motivated participant. There were almost 3000 students in Coachella that day.

Following the rally, there was a dance. Now that was something I knew all about and could partake in even in my sleep. We danced and drank to some great live music. Later we were given directions to drive to the Salton Sea where “everyone was going to crash.” The morning after was fascinating. It felt like any camping trip I had ever been on as a Boy Scout, but there was something missing. The several thousand students of yesterday were not in evidence. I figured they must have made other housing or sleeping arrangements. Our van and the ground had been adequate for our San Diego team.

I later learned the student storm troops had whittled by half that Sunday. There was no evident leadership or “heavy leaders” to be found. We were on our own.

The farmworkers’ picket lines were to begin the next morning at dawn.

We arrived at the Coachella union office on Monday morning as instructed. Our caravan arrived at one of Mike Bosick’s fields around 5:30 a.m. and we picketed until noon. These spirited picket lines went on all week. I remember watching in awe as Pancho Botello spoke to strikebreakers over the megaphone. He was truly an impressive man and resembled my grandfather Juan.

I was equally struck by the fact there were almost 400 students on the first day and about 20 percent were white hippie types (from Berkeley, I imagined). By Friday, there were 100 of us left. Perhaps 10 were Chicano students. I learned a valuable lesson about “activists and self-proclaimed leaders” that week.

While enjoying a sense of pride and camaraderie with the strikers and their families, there also was a sense of sadness and disappointment with the low number of student picketers. We were teased in friendly ways by strikers who would ask us, “Where are all your students? When are they coming back?” Suddenly, *we* were the students and student leaders, and we did not have the answers. “We thought you were going to come and help us win this strike.” Again, we had no answers, but a feeling of guilt, even by association. “Shorty” Alvarado, who was around 6 foot 2, dubbed us the “college kids.” We spent the week at the striker labor camp just outside Coachella on one of the streets named after an American president.

We made lifetime friends. There was Joey Rubio, who was our age and from Richgrove, which is a small farmworker community just outside Delano. Joey knew a lot compared to us. He knew Cesar Chavez, his family, and was a good childhood and school friend of Cesar’s son Fernando. Joey could handle the bullhorn with the best of them and knew all the strike language (in English, Spanish, and some Tagalog) and even the names of the grapes. He would be a lifetime friend and union colleague. Joey wore a brown beret and drove a cool late-model yellow Dodge Challenger. His father was a striker and had worked at Schenley, where the first wine grape union contract had been signed in the late 1960s.

Later that summer we visited Joey’s home in Richgrove and met his family. After his younger sister called him “Yoey,” we took to calling him that for the rest of our lives. He died in the late 1990s in Los Angeles where he worked as an investigator.

Richard Cobos was a young Chicano from Watsonville. His family had been involved with Cesar since around 1964. He held house meetings in their home in his early organizing years. Later in the year I would visit with his mom and dad at their place in Watsonville. He represented them well. (Whenever you found a UFW demonstration led by Cesar you

would most likely find Sr. y Sra. Cobos there as well.) I got to see him once again in 2002 at his mother's funeral in Watsonville.

Other interesting striking farmworker characters whom we met and lived with those first few weeks included Roy Valdez, a hulking (sometimes broad-smiling, other times brooding), dark-skinned, very Indian-looking man, who asked us to bring him donated shoes and teach him to read. Sometime in the 1980s, he was murdered in Los Angeles by someone who robbed him of his watch. There was "Indio," (Benjamin Yahtzee), a real Apache from Arizona who taught us phrases in his native language and about some of the their cultural ways as well. "El Cowboy" was a cowboy-hat-and boot-wearing thin, white-skinned striker from somewhere in Mexico (he left the picket lines a little more than a month after we met, after an uncle of his just happened to drive by and see him on a picket line in front of Giumarra's vineyard near Bakersfield). Shorty and Juanon (who was a very bilingual sort of wino-type guy with lots of highway and farmworker town stories) were the elders in the labor camp. There were also the three Filipino brothers from Delano: Benson, Willie Barrientos, and Catarino, who strongly resembled Mao. They would work the Filipino labor camps each night after the picket lines. There were others, but these were the ones who stood out most. I almost forgot to mention Roy Rocha, who seemed to be from Delano but was on the Coachella strike and was very good on the bullhorn at picket lines. He also was a sun-darkened, usually red-scarf-on-the-head-wearing guy, who fancied himself as a ladies' man. The only women on our night and day picket lines were a few older ladies, along with Cynthia Belle, whom we called "Campana," Beatrice "Cha Cha" Sanchez, and her cousin.

As the weeks progressed, we began to understand the organizational structure and pecking order of the Coachella picket lines. We occasionally would see Manuel Chavez, and Marshall Ganz seemed to be tending to important local negotiations with local grape growers. Manuel was the leader of our picket group, but he took our marching orders from his two key organizers, Jose Luna and Pancho Botello.

I don't know where Jose lived, but he was at the camp each day before we went to the picket lines to let us know where we were picketing. I don't ever remember hearing him speak a word of English, but he always seemed to know what he was doing. This stout, somewhat mumbling light-skinned Mexican organizer was responsible for our daily assignments. Pancho Botello seemed to be Jose's key lieutenant and our story-telling leader, who lived with us in the labor camp. I liked and admired them both. Pancho was fun to drink with at night and his personality reminded me of my grandfather.

Whatever the other labor camp strikers we met did not give us in good-spirited guilt-tripping, Jose and Pancho more than supplemented as they messed with our minds. They both seemed to like my brother Abby, Joey, Richard Cobos, and me. However, I will always either credit or blame Jose Luna for his cunning way of entrapping us to stay with the strike that summer. After several weeks of returning home to San Diego for weekends and coming back for weekday picketing work, Jose made me a picket captain. I had fallen for one of the oldest and best organizer tricks in the world. He had given me ongoing

responsibility. I, of course, appreciated and was proud of this mini-accomplishment in a movement I was growing to value more and more each day. I also felt closer than ever to my grandfather and hoped my mom, dad, and maternal family would be proud of me too. (Note: A year or two later, Jose and Pancho would go to Florida with Manuel Chavez and return within a year with a contract covering 5000 Minute Maid (Coca Cola) union members, most of whom were black.)

Decision of a Lifetime

The month of June was pretty much spent picketing and going home on weekends. During that month, Abby and I were not even \$5-a-week volunteers. We were “for real” volunteers with our parents subsidizing our gas and other expenses. This was how I was going to spend a few weeks in June since I had a cool tutoring job lined up for the rest of the summer at San Diego State University. Famous last words. I remember talking with Linda LeGerrette on one of those San Diego visiting weekends. I was debating whether or not to return to SDSU and the hometown I loved and never wanted to leave, or stay with the Huelga work. She helped me decide when she said, “Well you know you can always go to school because it will still be here.” (I think I got her back later, in early 1972, when I invited them to visit and tour La Paz with Cesar—a few weeks later she, Carlos, their daughter Tonantzin, Linda’s brother Speedy, Ralph Magana, Juan “Johnny” and Berlinda Lopez, along with Mel and Pete Trejo, moved to La Paz.)

A lot happened in June of 1970. The first contracts were signed with grape grower Lionel Steinberg. (Richard or Manuel Chavez got Abby to work for a few days stamping the union label on the side of grape boxes.) We were learning a lot about grape fields and long hot days picketing. We had also met union attorney Frank Denison. My first recollection of him was doing this cool combination of what looked like a cross between cumbia and horah dancing in the camp kitchen. It was he or some other union attorney, who at one time had me giving subpoenas to angry growers. The best of subpoena-giving was catching “Mr. Grape” ranch owner, Mike Bosick, in a Thermal or Mecca restaurant. It may have been the place of one of the scenes from *Easy Rider*.

In addition to picketing fields, our job became picketing packing sheds day and night. We mostly talked to truck drivers to find out where they were taking the grapes they were transporting. This information was phoned into a union boycott tracking office in Delano and then used to put the squeeze on the grapes as they arrived at their destinations. While this assignment was mostly picketing in up to 120 degree sun, we sometimes had to battle with truck drivers, who would occasionally veer in our direction to move us out of their way. We were really learning to “stand our ground” with a purpose. Abby was bolder than most of us, so he had more close calls with truck drivers.

I was so full of the Huelga fever that I was again “honored” when Jose Luna asked us to move with his team to Kern County just after the Fourth of July. First, he wanted Roy Rocha, Joey Rubio, and me to take a trip to Calexico to deliver a stateside truckload of

clothing to union members. How happily naïve I was. The trip was one of those “trips from hell” that all UFW volunteers have experienced more than once. We did not have enough gas money and ran out of gas in El Centro. It was almost 90 degrees at midnight and we slept under the truck in a parking lot. The next day was not much better—the truck broke down. While waiting for it to get fixed by a union friend, we slept on the grass in a Mexicali park in 118 degree weather.

Upon returning to Coachella, Joey and I drove the truck to La Paz, when only the Murguia family and Mike Kratcow lived there. We caught up to the traveling picket line team. Our next assignment varied between picketing around the clock and reporting on grape shipments from Giumarra to picketing Sam Somebody and Sons melons in Mettler. There were more than a few scrapes between violence and nonviolence on those lines. One humorous time was the morning a security guard brought out his Doberman pinscher to intimidate us on the picket line. It wasn't long before we were howling with laughter as the security cop was trying to drag the dog toward us, but the dog refused to budge as he had his little tail between his legs and was peeing all over the guard's shoes.

Life was interesting. We worked hard and our huelgista team enjoyed cold beer in the evenings (somehow we always managed to scrape together pennies in a team *coperacha* to buy enough beer). We had enough enjoyment that there were complaints it was all our team did every day. For a few weeks some of Abby's San Diego friends joined us in Kern County. Johnny Velez and Sylviano Curiel were two of them. (In October 2003 I attended Johnny's funeral, and his daughters told me how proud he was at having gone with us and how he had begged his mom to let him go on that trip.) Sometime in mid-July, during one of Cesar's ever-increasing visits to La Paz, Abby had the courage to ask Cesar if we could get on the union payroll so we could get the \$5-a-week strike pay. I remember how excited we both were when Cesar said yes to his request. Talk about cheap thrills!

Grape Strike and Boycott Victory

On July 29 or 31, I was instructed to drive to Delano for the signing of the Delano and Kern County growers. I remember that very sissy-like John Giumarra, Jr. kissing ass at the press conference where Cesar let them save face and celebrate as if they really wanted contracts all along. (I grew to dislike this silver-spooned, very un-Sicilian son of a Sicilian, who would later lead the sweetheart contract deal with the Teamsters. Upon Cesar's death, he was quoted as saying “he never did anything good” and other callous remarks along those lines.) Nevertheless, he sang “praise to Cesar” tunes that hot afternoon at the Forty Acres. I did not know who was who that day, but I clearly recall sharing in the thrills of the day. Cesar looked real sharp in his Filipino shirt (*barong tagalog*). I can also recall Bishop Donahoe and Monsignors Higgins and Mahony there as well. The hall was filled with strikers and supporters who had come from all over California to celebrate the biggest victory in farmworker history. Cesar was always very conscious of his role in winning for those who had gone before him without tasting success.

For the next month, we worked for Richard Chavez signing up workers, most gladly, but others very reluctantly as new members now under union contract. We went from one labor camp or packing shed to another. It seemed as if we got dozens of union cards signed each day. Growers and their foremen were dazed and uncomfortable as they assisted in the process. We wanted to be in Salinas where the big new lettuce strike was but did whatever the union asked of us in Delano.

Two funny stories I recall from that time involved Barry Radovich and Lola Mendoza. Barry was a very heavysset son of one of the prominent "...vich" grower families. While walking with him and workers from the ranch to a packing shed to meet, one farmworker did something that surely would have gotten him fired before this time. In asking Barry a question, the farmworker casually called him "Gordo." Barry answered the question and answered in perfectly incorrect Spanish, "*Me llamo no es Gordo.*"

Lola Mendoza was another story. She was a famed anti-union, anti-Chavez leader, whom the growers had unsuccessfully used to counter the strike and boycott. Nevertheless, she was a very tough lady in her own right. The day I signed her up, she was not going to do so without getting in her kicks and screams—at least the screams! She was ranting and raving as to how wrong and coercive it was for us to force her to sign the union card. At the same time, two ladies from our side were chiding her and wanting her not to sign. They made their feelings known to everyone within earshot as well. Their names were Helen Fabela Chavez and her sister, Petra Fabela Ovalle. Richard Chavez calmed them while I enjoyed the personal privilege of informing Lola she did not have to sign if she did not want to, but starting right now would not be able to work at this ranch if she chose not to sign. She signed the card and almost was never heard from since that day.

Endless Summer Ends and the Journey of a Lifetime Only Begins

The summer of 1970 was full of interesting Huelga happenings. We moved from one union apartment to another. Nevertheless, it was still Abby, Joey Rubio, Richard Cobos, and me. We ate our meals at the Filipino Hall with other union strikers and volunteers.

Later that summer, Abby and I decided one of us should return to San Diego. We did not flip for it, but it was a sad time when he left and we were no longer the "college kids" riding the Huelga trail together. I always will remember that summer of bonding, closeness, and friendship with him, which was extra special. I had the same feelings about those times that I do today in my close relationships and adventures with my sons and daughters. Cobos left to head back to Watsonville around the same time.

Sometime later that summer, Ben Maddock and I became friends. He recruited me away from organizing to help with the writing, layout, and distribution of the union newspaper, *El Malcriado*. Things also moved quickly in those days. Just after my 22nd birthday in September, I had become the editor of this movement newspaper. The highlight of my writing career was the interview with Cesar the morning he was released from a 25-day stay

in the Salinas jail for the high crime of using the word “boycott” after a judge ordered him not to say it. He detailed his regimen, the reasons behind his civil disobedience, and how the farmworkers’ vigil outside the jail and Coretta Scott King and Ethel Kennedy’s visits inspired and strengthened his spirit, resolve, and commitment to nonviolence. This interview was later printed in a book without attribution. Cipriano “Sipe” Ferrel and I had spent a few cold nights at the vigil with a number of spirited women strikers, including Robert Garcia’s mother, who was a great cook and a tough cookie. In late 1970 I also had the pleasure and honor of working with a number of the “Filipino brothers,” as they were fondly referred to in the movement. Some I recall with great affection were Sebastian Sahagun, Julian Balidoy, Fred Abad, Mariano, Willie Barrientos, Benson, Catarino, and of course Larry “Whatcha you gonna do brother” Itliong and the affable Peter “Mr. Money” Velasco. They taught us very special lessons.

In early 1971, I was on my way to a Chicago boycott assignment to work with Eliseo Medina. After a farewell weekend at home in San Diego and purchasing winter clothing, I was told by Andy Anzaldua, Cesar’s then-lieutenant, that my personal budget—about \$300 to repair my car for the trip—was too high, and the union could not afford me. I was pretty shocked and in disbelief, though I was far less naïve after my half-year of seasoning. After conversations with Cesar’s daughters, I surmised that union staff, whom I respected and whose names I will not print here, reported to Cesar I may have been the volunteer who brought pot onto the Forty Acres. That was the real reason for my being “laid off” from my volunteer job. Nothing could have been further from the truth. I was so damned dedicated and committed to the union I was actually deterring others from bringing pot onto the Forty Acres. As time passed, I felt the truth would surface, but it would take some time.

One year later, after his daughter, Anna, and I were married, Cesar personally recruited me during the Christmas holidays to work with him as his assistant and as one of his bodyguards. In 1974, he and I talked about the “lay off” incident during a drive back to La Paz. We had left Dennis McDermott (then Canadian United Auto Workers vice president and later Canadian Labour Congress head) at the Bakersfield airport. Though he did not acknowledge I was right, the tears in his eyes said all I needed to know.

The life changes that my time with the union and Cesar caused helped to shape anything and everything I have done and become in my life. I went on to become his assistant and after a personal situation caused me to leave his side in late 1975, I went on to enjoy a healthy, though somewhat episodic, career as assistant to the governor, California Conservation Corps deputy director, California Border Commission executive director, and an organizational and public affairs consultant. Along the way, I got an MPA from Harvard’s JFK School of Government. Much of my post-UFW experiences were the result of a great friendship with LeRoy Chatfield, who inspired me by his example and gave me great confidence in my own abilities.

Those were great experiences, but having the opportunity to work and learn from Cesar (not to mention our family relationship) was the greatest path I could have ever walked. The lessons are lifelong, as is the lifetime of obligation. Cesar's personal fortitude, dogged determination, and ability to recruit the best people ever assembled to wage and carry on a struggle and fight for justice were key to his success and the development of hundreds of farmworker and non-farmworker leaders, who came together and somehow learned to enjoy and thrive on a \$5-a-week salary.

Along with the great experiences, I met and recruited dozens of friends and family members to the union. While there were many, family who stand out today include Minnie Gonzalez Ybarra, Danny and Sammy Ybarra, Mike Ybarra, cousins David Villarino, Anita and Paul Hernandez, Mary Patricia "Bebe" Gonzales, and Manuel Gonzalez. Others friends and colleagues I was reminded of while writing this story, especially those I had a hand in recruiting to the farmworker movement, were Johnny "Boogie" Gonzalez, Cipriano "Sipe" Ferrel, Ephraim Camacho and the whole Camacho family, Frank Archuleta, Tony Bustamante, Carlos Fierros, Ronnie Otani, Daniel Valles, Ralph and Octavio Yescas, Mike and Jerry Rangel, Jose Castro Castorena Valles, Big Joe Ruiz and of course, brother Abby, who recruited me in the first place.

A special place always will be reserved for the honor of a December 1971 conversation with Cesar, which a handful of years later led to our recruiting Ken Seaton-Msemaji, Fahari Jeffers, and others to found the United Domestic Workers of America. Cesar had told me that December night in La Paz that "had I failed to organize farmworkers, I would have organized domestic workers because they are the other large group of forgotten and forsaken workers." Ken and Fahari and others more than followed his lead and made his second dream come true.

There were other families who gave themselves to the farmworkers' cause, but I don't know if any gave as totally or gave up as much or as deeply as my own (but that's another story). I mention this mainly because it was so very unexpected when I was growing up in San Diego. Minnie at first sold hundreds of *El Malcriados* in San Diego and later was recruited by Cesar to run his San Ysidro Service Center, direct medical programs in Tijuana and Mexicali, and organize workers in Central Valley elections. Mike was a security guard for Cesar and worked in the RFK Medical Plan for many years. Brother Danny, who was the last in the family to join us in the cause, spent years as a boycotter, security guard, and accountant before leaving to attend Harvard Law School. Abby and Sammy Y always lent their exceptional musical and singing abilities to Cesar and the union.

While life's various paths are paved with successes and wounds, the positives of life in my case came from finding a path that was critical and taking it to the hilt. Somehow, this path led to the four wonderful children Anna and I were blessed to parent. Today, Barbara and Richard "J.R." are my partners in our consulting company, Ybarra Company (Ycom) Public Affairs. Barbara, our own M.B.A., leads like her grandfather, and J.R. counts and accounts for the dollars in the same tightfisted manner of his Tata Cesar. Michael is an

ever-observant 20-year-old budding accountant like his brother. Cynthia has just begun her career as an organizer with the United Domestic Workers. At times, I am not sure whether she is following the path of her grandfather or mine. She knows which, but I will always be grateful to my own Tata, Juan Gonzalez, who inspired me to follow in his footsteps.