

Hugh “Hawkeye” Tague 1971–1976

Philadelphia Boycott

In 1971 I graduated from Germantown High School in Philadelphia. This was Bill Cosby’s alma mater. He was one of the first blacks to go there. I was one of the last whites to go there. It was a short school day because after the third student was killed at lunchtime (with a sharpened umbrella point), they eliminated all but the classes. I had a full-time job all through high school and worked 60 to 70 hours a week in the summers. I worked in the kitchens of an exclusive country club. This is where I started to learn Spanish from my Puerto Rican coworkers.

A radical priest ran Togetherness House. It was a community center near school where we all got along. We even had dances there without anyone going to the hospital or morgue. Richie Ross of the Philly boycott came to speak after showing *Grapes of Wrath*. I signed up to picket supermarkets. It was great! Most people were either union members or liberals/radicals who wouldn’t cross the picket line. I agreed to work on the boycott “for the summer.” We picketed the South Philly produce terminal. It was a different experience for me because the cops (under orders from Mayor Tate) were protecting us from the fruit-throwing produce dealers. The cops had never been on my side before. The boycott office was in the Kensington section of North Philly. My parents didn’t like the idea because it was well known as the place where white people bought their heroin.

My First Political Arrest

We had a march and sit-in at Heublein’s office in Upper Darby. I was arrested with some Quakers. My cousin was a cop at this station. His fellow officers gave him a hard time about it because I was a hippie with an Afro. He still brings it up at family weddings and funerals. About this time, we heard about the Atlanta boycott people getting their car shot up. Of course, I asked to be sent to Atlanta. My parents wanted me to go to college. I would have been the first Tague to do so. I hitchhiked to the Atlanta boycott office. There weren’t many liberals in Atlanta. The core of support was from the small, closely knit labor movement that included the Teamsters. Tony Zivlich, the head of the Southern Conference of Teamsters, set up an “informational picket line” at the Kroger Supermarkets warehouse. It had the effect of a half-day work stoppage because the drivers all stopped their trucks and the loading dock guys dropped Arizona grapes into the parking lot. Joe Mariano did a good job of leading the boycott in a difficult place. Dave Sink, a sailor who looked and walked like a pirate, was a colorful member of the staff. Things were pretty quiet in January of 1972, so I asked to go down to Florida.

In early 1972, Coca Cola’s Minute Maid division signed the first UFW contract east of the Mississippi. Manuel Chavez, Cesar’s legendary cousin, led the organizing effort. There were a great group of organizers. The ones I remember were Ramon Rodriguez, Ramon Romero (a different one), Orrin Baird—a delightful guy from a wealthy Chicago

family who had worked in community organizing in the Rio Grande Valley. He was a big guy and a great polka (I mean cumbia) dancer. He looked like Brer Bar when he danced and was nicknamed "Oso." Rick Kulp from the Mennonite Voluntary Service, who was a great dancer despite his sect's ban on dancing, Richard and Susan Gagan, the legendary Joe Moon (much more on him later), and his faithful companion, Frankie Bottle. However, we all know that we got the contract because of the coordinated campaign (which was international in scope) that put Coke up against the wall so that they would agree to elections.

The night of the contract signing, the Ku Klux Klan burned crosses throughout Florida from the Alabama line to Homestead (south of Miami). Why? Not just because they have always been anti-union Zaninoviches but because it meant that there would be more "race mixing." It turns out that they had good reason to worry.

Coke had land throughout Central Florida. The majority of the harvesters were African-Americans, but there were quite a few whites, Jamaicans, and Chicanos. The majority of the permanent workers (tractor drivers, mechanics, and land maintenance guys) were white. The Chicanos were mostly Tejanos, and both the blacks and whites were former sharecroppers from other Southern states who had been tractored out in the 1950s and early 1960s.

One day shortly after the contract signing, I went with a couple of the organizers and newly elected committee members to the Mascotte, Florida, town hall to ask the mayor if we could use their big meeting room to go over the contract provisions with the area workers. He turned us down at first. "We never had no meetins here before that was integrated. Come to think of it, we never had no nigras in the town hall at all, I believe. I think that I would get into trouble if I let you all have your meetin here." A couple of the white guys (who admitted later to being former Klansmen) looked the mayor in the eye and told him that he would be in trouble if he didn't let us use the hall. They went on to say that he might not be mayor much longer, either.

Well, we had our first meeting. It was very well attended, but self-segregated. Toward the end of the meeting, one of the black members suggested that we do more translating into Spanish "so's everybody know what's they rights is." Somebody else suggested that people bring food the next time. I wasn't at the second meeting. The third meeting had people all sitting together. Tejanos were eating hog maws and peas and white guys were eating arroz y frijoles. It was the Klan's worst nightmare!

Solidarity Pays Off

It's mid-February in 1974. Eliseo Medina and I are standing in the Arctic cold on a picket line in front of a metal-working factory. The workers had wildcatted the day before when a guy got killed. Their union had been trying to correct a safety problem for months. The company said it was too expensive.

Most of the men were at the main gate where there was a barricade of logs and railroad ties. This was in the city of Cleveland, where the cops had learned shortly after the war that you don't herd scabs. Our gate was in Lakewood, Ohio, where the cops were working together with the Kuntz Security Service (you can guess what we called them). I overheard one of the Kuntz tell a Lakewood cop that they were going to bring the scabs through our gate and take them into the plant through a tunnel under the street.

Just then, we saw a long line of cars head toward us. A guy jumped out of the lead car waving a revolver. I could smell the whiskey on his breath. Eliseo and I and a very short Puerto Rican guy (with a large paving stone in his hand) stood in front of him. The scab stuck his pistol in my gut and said to get out of the way. We said that we weren't moving. I heard a click (which Eliseo says he didn't hear, but it was my gut). The scab yelled out some obscenities, got back into his car, and the cars turned around and left.

The handful of women said we were very brave. A bunch of the men came over from the main gate and thanked us. Later we heard that the company straightened out the safety problem, so the strike was a victory. Eliseo and I went to the international convention of this union in the spring, down in Cincinnati, where EM gave a speech about the boycott. They voted us a nice donation from their treasury.

What We Ate

My introduction to UFW food was on the Philly boycott, where we ate pinto beans from a 50-pound sack three times a day. If I did this today, my wife would make me sleep in my truck. We also ate large quantities of apple butter (a Pennsylvania Dutch concoction made out of fruit that fell on the ground) that some Quaker gave us. One day we were excited because a supporter came in from Harrisburg with a station wagon full of canned goods. There was a lot of tuna, even the good kind that's packed in water in big pieces. It turns out that there was a "tuna mercury scare" and the rich liberals were afraid to eat it, so they gave it to us.

In Florida we ate some weird stuff! Too many of us were living in a trailer in Harlem (near Clewiston) when we hadn't been paid for a while and were pretty hungry. Roger Mitchell (quite a character who helped organize H.P. Hood, where he was working) said we would have chicken. There were wild chickens (mostly noisy roosters) running around, so we cleaned up a couple of them and threw them in a big pot to stew. We threw wild papaya in there too because it's a natural meat tenderizer.

Eliseo and I were driving one day when he slammed on the brakes and said, "Oh boy, nopalitos!" He said they were the best thing to eat in the world. All I saw was some cactus. I thought it was another one of my eyesight problems. He quickly cut a big pile of the lighter green, smaller leaves. ("Hurry up, Hawkeye, before somebody else gets them.") I ate some great meals doing home visiting. Southern hospitality is not a myth! One evening I had three big meals (hog maws, chitlins, and fish roe) and could barely walk home. I never

knew that there were so many kinds of cornbread, usually served warm, but sometimes served with buttermilk poured over it.

For a while we lived in Bean City on Lake Okeechobee near South Bay. There was a wealth of fruit in our backyard. There were papayas, mangoes, avocados (the big, starchy ones), guavas, and of course, sugarcane. This house was a real shack and shook when you walked. One morning I went into the bathroom to find this strange animal had come up through a big hole in the floor. When I told Roger about it, he said we should have eaten it. In the Florida citrus areas the workers called bad sections of orchards “armadillo sections” because you can’t make enough to buy good food, so you would have to eat an armadillo dinner.

Up in Tampa, some Catholic brothers had gotten a whole wrecked train car full of canned goods that they gave to us. Trouble was that there were only two varieties, spicy tomato juice and green beans. We really had to use our imaginations to come up with ways to enjoy this food.

In Atlanta, the bakery workers’ union gave us cases of Nabisco Chips A’Hoy. We got pretty tired of them, too. We started pouring powdered milk on them, which wasn’t too bad the first 40 times. It took Kellogg’s another 10 years before they came up with the same idea as a nutritious cereal.

In Cleveland I lived in a wino mission for a short time. There was lots of soup, of course, but there was great bread. The Catholic Worker people (I affectionately called them “Commie Catholics”) taught this ex-con how to bake a wide variety of delicious bread. He got the baking down pretty well but wasn’t real good on the sanitation part of it.

I had a girlfriend whose family was first-generation Polish-American. Their food was new to me and very filling. The trouble was that it was fat and boring, like them. I had another girlfriend who worked at Arthur Treacher’s Fish and Chips. She brought lots of leftovers for me and the rest of my household. This situation was neither fat nor boring. Trouble was, she was a Trotskyite, and once I figured out what that was, I didn’t like it.

With about one week’s notice, we were told that 80-some farmworkers (including kids) were coming to Cleveland. Mark Pitt (one of the underrated, unsung UFW heroes) and I were put in charge of hustling enough food to feed them “for the duration.” We were to be housed in a three-story former CYO retreat center with an industrial kitchen. We got a flood of canned goods. These fell into two general categories: tasteless, overcooked vegetables and weird, one-of-a-kind items. I never knew there were so many different kinds of beans. I also had never heard of smoked oysters, calamari, grape leaves, etc. We were hoping for another “tuna scare” so that we would have more protein. The farmworkers didn’t stay in town very long for various “reasons.” It was a pretty crazy idea in the first place.

I had another girlfriend in a mansion in Shaker Heights. I had great food there. She would have the maid get me anything that I wanted, including Guinness, which wasn't readily available then and very expensive. Quite a switch for a chauffeur's kid, huh?

Speaking of beer, Mark and I usually drank P.O.C., or Pilsener on Call (a.k.a. Piss of Cleveland). It wasn't great, but it was only 99 cents for a six-pack

Potluck suppers were a major source of nourishment for many boycotters. This was a new concept for me. I guess it was a Protestant thing. One time, everybody got sick at a ham soup dinner that these revolutionaries threw for us. More than one of them claimed that it was purposely poisoned by the powers-that-be

At Thanksgiving everybody but this old farmworker and I got sick from a donated turkey. The theory was that he and I had food poisoning so many times that we were immune. On a recent trip to Mexico, I ate all of the nopalitos I could get.

1972 Democratic Convention

Eliseo Medina and Dorothy Johnson came to Florida just in time for the Democratic Convention. Roberta Jaffe and I had been working with party officials as to how we would get the word of the boycott out without being "disruptive." They were scared that another "Chicago" would happen. EM assigned groups of field organizers, religious people, farmworkers, and boycott supporters to the various hotels in Dade and Broward counties, where the delegates were staying. The idea was to get them to agree to mention the boycott when they did their voting announcements. Many of them had been lined up to help by their boycotters back home and even on the plane ride to Florida. Dolores Huerta and Richard Chavez were delegates working on the convention floor. EM assigned me to handle the hotline at the garbage workers' hall on North Miami Beach. The groups would report in and I would relay Medina's instructions. On the night of the voting, I got the sanitation workers' president's credentials and got past security by using my worst Germantown High School accent. Delegates were buying buttons and bumper stickers from me left and right! People even wanted to buy my "Boycott Lettuce" shirt off my back.

It seemed to work, because people all over the world saw on their TV screens: "Michigan, the state that boycotts lettuce, casts so many votes," and so on. After the convention, I went out to work in the Lake Okeechobee area to help organize in the vegetable and sugarcane industry. The field cane truck drivers had struck at Talisman Sugar the previous season. Nan Freeman, a student from New College in Sarasota, had been killed on the picket line when she was run over by a scab driver, accidentally. Mark Pitt and I did a lot of documenting of bad living and working conditions of the West Indian braceros who were imported each season. The whole thing was a well-organized racket with the complicity of the U. S. and various West Indian governments.

There was a half-decent minimum wage, but it was never paid because the workers were paid by the row that they cut. Their piecework wages were just divided by the minimum wage and that number became their “hours worked.” I was familiar with this kind of calculation because when I worked during school (in violation of child labor laws), I was paid by the “meal” worked. My hours were calculated by dividing my pay by the minimum wage. This took care of overtime pay, minimum wage, and child labor restrictions all in one. Mark Pitt worked for a while cutting cane to help document the bad food and other violations

Typhoid Fever

There was an outbreak of typhoid fever in Homestead at the “state’s best camp.” Lots of Tejano kids got sick. This brought national attention. What had happened was that the sewage system got into the water system. Eliseo and I were down there working with all of the federal and state government people. Everybody was really upset. It was funny that the bureaucrats stopped working at 5 p.m.

Slave Labor Camp

A labor contractor had a camp in Florida City (south of Miami) where he kept people locked up. He picked up vagrants in Washington, D.C., Virginia, and the Carolinas and gave them minimal food, sufficient wine, and nasty shelter. He even had them all on food stamps that he stole. One of the guys got loose and came up to Belle Glade and was talking about it in the juke joints. We got the word to Miami-Dade police, who busted the camp. There was nationwide publicity about it. A woman from Washington, D.C. spotted her missing father on the front page of the Post and contacted us. Later, the guy who had escaped testified for us against the anti-hiring hall legislation in Tallahassee.

Anti-Union Legislation

In 1972 and 1973, the growers tried to push anti-labor legislation in the Florida legislature. They were really aiming for us, but they had lots of general provisions against hiring halls, picketing, etc. Eliseo coordinated the campaign with lots of help from Mack and Dianna Lyons, who were in charge of the Minute Maid contract and the four field offices. The Farm Worker Ministry helped a lot too, especially Franklin Smith and Augie Vandebosch, veteran farmworker supporters who preceded Manuel Chavez in the state.

EM would assign small groups of us to visit senators in their home areas and report back. After the first go-round, we had a meeting to count votes. It was funny how different visitors would have entirely divergent opinions about where a particular state senator stood on the issue. We called the effort “Operation Get ’Em Seen.”

The legislation was ultimately defeated. One columnist said, “It died of typhoid fever in a slave labor camp.” An important footnote is that after the publicity about the slave camp

and the typhoid fever, the senators offered to exempt farmworkers but keep the other anti-union stuff. Eliseo refused, even though the building trades guys included a lot of racist assholes.

Goonos and Goonas

I was never full time in UFW security, but I was always assigned to this task whenever Cesar came through. My high-school “education” had prepared me well.

Cesar was at a reception put on by a supporter whose husband was a produce distributor in Cleveland. I had met her before, and she seemed interested in me. So did a lot of other people because, to say the least, I didn’t fit into the “categories” that we humans like to put each other in. My security assignment was to put myself between the windows and Cesar at all times. I took this job very seriously. Trouble was that the hostess had too much to drink, and she ignored Cesar and was getting grabby with me. This situation was even more uncomfortable because her husband (who very well may have been mobbed up) was just across the room.

We went to a bunch of other towns and cities in Ohio during that tour. There was a guy we saw at three or four different places. We got nervous about this but discovered that he was simply a “groupie.”

We stayed with Cesar at the home of Richard Celeste, who was a state senator at the time. His wife was really cool. She was from Denmark and her name was Dagmar. She even picketed stores with Anita Meyerson on the West Side. Celeste was keeping Cesar up all night and everybody was tired as hell. I told him to knock it off and go to bed. They laughed about it, but went to bed soon after.

Years later I heard that Governor Richard Celeste pardoned a bunch of women who were doing time for killing their physically abusive husbands or boyfriends. I figured that was really Dagmar’s doing.

Vegans Should Not Be in Charge of the Slaughterhouse

I was working in a factory in Philly when Cesar came to some college and I was asked to be on guard duty. Cesar was in this professor’s room, and three of us were to keep everybody from walking through the area. This big guy came up, and this little Quaker who was a guard asked him to go elsewhere, and he keep going. I grabbed him by the arm and pushed him against the wall. Then he was open to hearing why we asked him to move.

This Quaker gave me a hard time about it—nonviolence is our strength, etc. I said that we had a job to do and the hit man or nut that might be after Cesar didn’t know anything about nonviolence. I told him to go back to the academic retreat center that he came from.

By the way, the Goonas generally made the best guards because they tried harder.

Where We Lived

In Philly the boycott house was an abandoned house that the City gave us in Kensington. This was an area of closed textile mills where white people went to score their heroin. We had a smack house two doors down

The Atlanta boycott house wasn't in a bad neighborhood, but it was pretty inadequate for our needs.

In Tampa we were in Ybor City, the old Cuban section. This was a raggedy house too, but the neighborhood was OK, and it was a good location for the boycott and the citrus organizing in the Haines City area. The house was sitting up on blocks. This rat used to come up into the oven from under the house. We would open the oven door and throw things at it.

In Miami we lived on the edge of Liberty City (the scene of major riots in the 1980s) in another wholly inadequate house. I got mugged in midday trying to catch a bus to the highway so I could hitchhike up to Avon Park. There were huge palmetto bugs and these dry-looking lizards that weren't much bigger than them. You had to make sure that you emptied out your shoes in the morning or you might feel a squish when you put them on. We shared a tiny office with an old lefty from the distributive workers' union, which was inside the Meatcutters Hall.

I've already described our shack in Bean City. We were about one-third the population of Bean City. There were no beans there. It was all sugarcane. This was at the southern edge of Lake Okeechobee on very fertile land that the Army Corps of Engineers reclaimed. The huge sugarcane crop was basically a foreign policy tool to destroy Castro's economy. Thousands of British West Indians came in from Jamaica, Barbados, St. Lucia, St. Vincent, etc. every fall and winter to cut cane by hand.

We lived in a trailer in Harlem, Florida, where most of us were the only non-blacks. The roosters used to walk on top of the trailer and crow all hours of the night when they woke up and saw the one streetlight. Grinding poverty was evident right outside our side door. Most people had outhouses and common showers and just a cold-water spigot out their back doors. In addition to the stray chickens, there were lots of stray dogs, too. U.S. Sugar (owned by General Motors at the time) had a huge mill just upwind from Harlem. The thick, black smoke that smelled sickeningly sweet settled on the little town. Harlem was in an unincorporated part of Hendry County. Chain gangs (without the chains but with all of the other trappings) came through periodically to work on the roads.

Mark Pitt went to work cutting sugarcane in this bizarre effort that Cesar must have come up with that mirrored his early efforts against the bracero program. Mark lived in a huge

barracks in Belle Glade (now the AIDS capital of the South) with a couple of hundred Jamaicans and a handful of white guys sent by unemployment offices. The food there was really bad.

The whole sugarcane industry was an extremely well-run racket funded to a large extent by the federal government. “Farmers” (General Motors, Gulf and Western [now Viacom], etc.) were paid to grow sugar on land that they leased from the federal government for next to nothing. They were also paid not to grow sugar on other lands upon which they raised Brahma cattle fed by sugar mill byproducts. Now when I watch a movie and the Paramount Pictures/Gulf and Western symbol comes on (the one with the mountain and the ring of stars), I think of them having me arrested for “trespassing in town” or “trespassing in a labor camp.”

Dorothy and Eliseo found a cheap apartment in Belle Glade for us. It was the nicest place I ever lived to date, as far as sometimes having my own room, etc.

I mentioned living in a wino mission and a bad East Side neighborhood in Cleveland. I also lived in a house on the West Side that was pretty crowded. Mark Pitt lived under the stairs (literally) with a sheet as a door.

There was another apartment on the West Side that everybody else called the “Roach House” because it had a few roaches in it. I lived in a much more roach-and-flea-infested place with my family for a while as a kid.

The best place that I lived in was with Jared Van Wagenen and Anita Meyerson on the near-West Side near the boycott office. They are great people who put up with me and my crude ways and active “social life.” It was a neighborhood that was slowly gentrifying from a Southern white–Puerto Rican area into a hip place to live. There were some cool people in the area, including a few Catholic Workers who let us use their phones and shared their food with us. A nearby shoemaker “sold” me unclaimed shoes for \$1. One day, an old guy next door asked me to help him lift something heavy out of his basement. He had this sculpture on a table that looked like Leon Trotsky. He told me that he had been a bodyguard for Trotsky in Mexico. I had to bite my tongue, but I was thinking that he hadn’t done a very good job.

We stayed in a former convent on the East Side for a while. There were families and single people there. It was pretty crowded and there was only room to hang one or two nuns’ habits in the closets. I had a helluva toothache and somebody told me that the U. S. Army had a dental clinic on the West Side where they worked on your teeth for free. When I got there it was closed because of a snowstorm. On the way back I was confronted by two guys on the rapid transit platform. I knocked one of them down and started pounding him into the platform. The other one took off. The train startled me when it came, but I got on it. I looked out the window and he was lying there, not moving. I checked the paper the next day, but there were no reports of anybody dead on a transit platform. I didn’t mention

it to anybody else because I didn't want to hear any "nonviolence is our strength" bullshit. That was a first for me, getting jumped by white guys in the city. My father told me that in the war if you had a bad toothache, they sent you to the rear to have it yanked out because they didn't want you to do something crazy when you weren't thinking clearly.

In Coachella we were living in a trailer that was pretty crowded. My place was on the couch, where I hung up sheets to give me a little privacy after waking one morning to the sound of two women outside discussing the bulge in my bed sheets. John Gardener and Julie Kerksick were a couple of the other people who lived there. I would wake some mornings to the sound of John (Jardinero) outside in the sand doing his karate exercises. Julie wanted to make a nice, happy home for us with cleaning and cooking schedules. I wasn't very cooperative, to say the least.

Life in La Paz

A lot has been written about life in La Paz, much of it negative. I didn't particularly like the work that I did in La Paz. However, I liked touring the field offices with Eliseo because I got to meet all of these great people that I had heard of for four years. There were a lot of good people in La Paz who kept the union going. When I first got there, I was assigned to a room with another guy, who left shortly. After a while I was approached by the poor woman who had charge of room assignments, who told me somebody else was moving in. I tried to explain that my social life was such that I needed a room of my own. That didn't work, especially after I asked if she was going to move in with me. I found the smallest, filthiest room in the basement that was unoccupied (and uninhabitable). She said I could have it if I scraped and painted the walls and cleaned it. That's what I did. I wouldn't join a "kitchen" though—that was too domesticated for me. I fixed an old rusty refrigerator that I found out back and just had people buy food for me when they made the run to exotic Bakersfield (the salvage yard and titty-bar capital of the San Joaquin Valley). I helped people with their rooms when asked. If somebody locked herself out, I could always get her back in. This applied to car trunks and doors, too, but my hot wiring skills were pretty rusty by then. I liked to paint and helped out with a hospital wing that was being redone, as well as with individuals' rooms. There was this big plant a short walk behind the hospital that bloomed only at night. What a perfect setup! I needed something like that because I didn't have any etchings to show.

I liked going to Tehachapi to eat peanut butter pies with Barbara Tuttle (another wonderful person), Steve Rivers, Ann Smith, etc.

The best part about living at La Paz was the great group of people who lived there.

Proposition 14

We were all in this former seminary or some big Catholic property that has probably been sold off to settle a molestation lawsuit. I slept on a mattress that, I found out later, had

been found in an alley. I got a bad case of the crabs—something I had successfully avoided up until then. May the scavenger of that mattress suffer a long, lingering sickness!

A group of us were sent to live in Long Beach. This was a “high crime area.” You could tell because they had these strong streetlights and helicopters at night. This place was too crowded and was cramping my social life, so my girlfriend du jour and I moved into Mrs. Idalia P. Chestnut’s house. She was a great, ancient lady who came from South Carolina. She told us of political campaigns where they had to pay people’s poll taxes as part of GOTV (get out the vote).

After Proposition 14, I returned briefly to La Paz and then headed home to Philly. I wasn’t purged, but chances are that I probably would have been. I went to work for a union that was run by the members.

Unsung Heroes and Heroines

- Dorothy Johnson. I worked with a wide variety of people over my years in the UFW. Some of them were great organizers or administrative support people. Dorothy Johnson was both. DJ could be in the midst of bedlam in an office while talking to you in English and typing 100 words a minute in Spanish. She was good at juggling the finances of a boycott operation or field office. She just generally brought order to what anywhere else would be chaos. I’m sure that Eliseo would not have been nearly as effective as he was without her.

She was also a good strategist and organizer. In the Coachella campaign in 1975, she was assigned to Superior (an oil company, really). They had grapes, onions, and citrus. We didn’t have the grape workers because of how the contracts were administered in 1970–1973. DJ timed the election for when there were enough citrus and onion workers (where we were strong) and a minimum number of grape workers, and we won.

She was a steady, solid person that many of us relied on. She always managed to look calm and fresh regardless of the current crisis. She’s also due a Purple Heart for putting up with me for several years.

- Meta Mendel. Meta was a very serious organizer. When I first met her in Oxnard, a few hours after my arrival at the field office and a few minutes after I got out of the Ventura County jail, she was trying to speak Spanish to somebody in a very graphic way. She used all kinds of hand, head, and shoulder movements while having a very concentrated expression on her face. She learned Spanish in no time, like she learned everything else.

Later she had a variety of assignments in the field offices and on Proposition 14, including coordinating the petition drive in Sacramento, where she squeezed out some impressive numbers.

Later still, I heard that she got into trouble for doing the right thing in Coachella.

Despite her best efforts to look plain (scruffy clothes, no makeup, short hair), her beauty was always evident. Whatever she's doing now, I'll bet she's doing well.

- Mark Pitt. Now here's a solid guy! Mark joined the boycott in D.C. and then wound up down in Belle Glade, Florida, where we were working in the sugarcane industry. He went to work cutting cane. It was really hard work that was dirty and dangerous. This is one case where I'll agree with the growers that Americans do not want to cut sugarcane.

In May of '73 we went up to Cleveland with Eliseo's crew. He did a good job there, too. He was particularly good with the union people because he was from a blue-collar background. He had been in the retail clerks' and steelworkers' unions while going to college. He was later put in charge of the Columbus, Ohio, boycott office and eventually the Chicago office.

I remember being with Eliseo when we visited Aggie Rose (another unsung heroine) when she was running the mushroom strike against Dole near Oxnard. EM read the reports from the boycott offices about their informational picketing at Dole operations. Mark's Chicago report was the best! They were turning away delivery trucks at obscure Dole subsidiaries and causing all kinds of commotion.

I worked again with Mark during the Proposition 14 campaign. He was in charge of South L.A. (Long Beach, the Harbor area, etc.) He did a good job there, too, despite the conditions.

Mark wasn't big on theory. He was just a straight union guy who wanted to get the job done. He went on to become a leader in what is now UNITE HERE. The UFW screwed up when they lost him. He would have stayed for many more years if there had been true union-building going on.

- John Gardner (also known as Juan Jardinero). Here was another serious organizer. He belonged to the same organizer's "religion" as Meta. Jardinero was in Oxnard when I got there from Philly. I think that he was disappointed. Eliseo had given everybody this story that this great organizer, Hawkeye, was arriving from the East.

He, Julie Kerksick, several others, and I lived in a trailer in Coachella while we were organizing in the fall of 1975. He is a big guy who seems to be omnipresent. He's a great storyteller and was very proficient in Spanish, too. I learned a lot from John Gardner.

I'm sure that he left the UFW because the organizing stopped. True organizers are like sharks that need to keep feeding.

•Ruth Shy. I worked with Ruth in Philly (when I was a volunteer while working in a factory) and in Coachella. She was a tireless, no-frills organizer. She seemed to be devoid of an ego. She didn't take any shit, though, when it came to getting the job done. She also could throw a helluva fastball. Without people like Ruth, we would never have won so many victories. She did the day-to-day work that is necessary.

The above-named people are just some of the fine people that I worked with.

Radio Talk Show Muggings

In May of 1973, Eliseo Medina moved most of the Florida staff up to Ohio for the renewed grape boycott. I was in Cleveland for 13 months. In that time I lived in seven places: a wino mission, a house, a West Side apartment, an East Side apartment, a convent, a CYO center, and with a wonderful couple named Anita Meyerson and Jared Van Wagenen.

One of the staffers who was trying to freak out her wealthy parents chose an apartment on the East Side that was still burnt out from the 1968 riots. I wasn't driving then, because of my eyes, so I had to run the gauntlet between the rapid transit station and our apartment. One night I got mugged at the station by a group of teenagers. I was on my way to a late-night talk show. They got 50 cents. I broke my rule about fighting all muggers unless they had a gun, because they had the youngest kid (about 12 years old) hold a knife on me. He probably would have stuck me several times just to prove himself.

I think that Eliseo assigned me to the late-night radio show because he figured that I wouldn't screw it up too much, because who would be listening at 2 a.m.?

However, in the next couple of weeks I ran into several people who said that they heard me while they were working as night watchmen or janitors.

Eliseo got mugged on the radio. He was on a popular afternoon radio show with an alleged liberal who kept baiting him. He wanted EM (ee lee see oh mah dinah) to agree that it was OK to cross Teamster picket lines in Cleveland because they were screwing us in California. Eliseo said that he respected all working people's picket lines and he would never scab on a Teamster.

I did a lot of traveling by public transportation after speaking at union meetings in Slovenian halls, VFWs, factories, Polish clubs, etc. I would get a steward to pass the hat and I would carry the money home in my shoes and give it to Dorothy Johnson. She said that it didn't smell so good. I said that it might not smell good, but it spends good, and I bring in more from the small local unions than comes in from the suburban-types.

There were lots of great people on the Ohio boycott, like Nancy Hickey, Dale Lindsey, Coert Bonthius, Gloria Ebratt, the Encinas family, Roger Mitchell, Bobby Acuna, Otis

Johnson, and Becky Hurst. There were also great supporters like Mary Ann Starkowicz, Jodie Pattee, Lowell Wiley, Cindy Mapes (a great singer), and the Corcorans.

Florida Jails

In 1972 and 1973 we were trying to organize the sugarcane and vegetable industries in the Lake Okeechobee region of Florida. The cops were locking us up for such heinous crimes as “trespassing in town after repeated warnings,” “trespassing on company property” (farmworker housing), and “inciting to riot” (distributing leaflets). Treatment differed considerably depending upon whether you were in Palm Beach County or Hendry County. Palm Beach County was somewhat civilized because it included the coastal towns of Palm Beach and West Palm Beach. Hendry County was like Mississippi. The city of Belle Glade had its own crowded jail.

We were on file with all of the police departments because Florida state law required all union organizers (any union) to be mugged and fingerprinted. The cops liked to lock us up on Friday because you didn’t see the judge until Monday morning. I was in jail one weekend when I annoyed the turnkey so much by talking to the farmworkers in the other cells about the union (they were in for public intoxication or something) that he wouldn’t give me any water. Well, it gets pretty hot in Belle Glade in August, and I was drinking out of the toilet by Sunday afternoon. Of course, I cleaned it as best as I could first.

Eliseo figured that things were getting pretty rough and we’d better get some publicity before one of us is found in the bottom of a canal. EM asked me to take a young reporter, John, from the Palm Beach Post on a tour of the cane camps. I wasn’t driving yet, because I hadn’t gotten my eyes straight. We used his car to go to a camp in Hendry County near the town of Harlem. I knew the cops would rough us up and mess up his car. They didn’t disappoint me. John was shocked. He acted like a violated maiden, especially when they wouldn’t give him his phone call. “What phone call, boy?”

He wrote a helluva story! It became quite a series on farmworker conditions in the area. A lot of other papers and even television reporters picked up the story as an attack on the press. Things weren’t so bad after that.

(Note: I was no stranger to jail. I never did time, but I had been getting locked up in my Philly neighborhood for years. The cops locked up us innocent little darlings for hanging on the corner or being in the park. They would hold us until 1 or 2 a.m. and let us make it home through several gang turfs.)

What Did I Get out of It?

I learned an awful lot while working for the UFW. I became a lot more literate and tolerant. I learned about a lot of different religions, philosophies, and ’isms. Most of all, I

met a wide variety of wonderful people who were full-time or part-time volunteers and supporters. I learned an awful lot about the labor movement. This prepared me for several of my future jobs (UE, Congressman Edgar, OPEIU). I traveled to many different parts of the country. I learned to speak Spanish to some extent, and I have 12 college equivalency credits after taking a three-hour test.

Despite all of these good things, I also learned what a union should not be. The reason I left the UFW after Proposition 14 was because I saw it as Cesar's private operation that wasn't developing any local leadership from among the members. I really did not mind the lack of democracy for staff volunteers and the rough conditions (mentally, physically, etc.) as long as I thought that we were helping to build a democratic union that the workers would run through their own leaders. That was the situation in Minute Maid, and it's what Eliseo built in Imperial Valley, but they were the exceptions. Many of the most "backward" racist unions were more democratic than the UFW, sad to say.

Well, thanks for reading. Viva La Causa!