

## Margaret Murphy 1971–1977

### Six Years With *La Causa*

#### Beginnings

I grew up in Dubuque, Iowa. My dad worked for the telephone company and was active in his Communications Workers local for many years. I graduated from Marycrest College in Davenport, Iowa, in 1968, where I had majored in social work. I was also a registered nurse.

After graduation, I took a job as director of a migrant project in Muscatine, Iowa, about an hour south of Davenport. The project provided health and social services to farmworkers who picked tomatoes used in Heinz products. Most of the workers were from the Rio Grande Valley in Texas.

I first met Cesar in Davenport in 1970. He was the guest of honor at a fundraiser in someone's house. I had earlier gone to a meeting in the Quad Cities, at which Eliseo Medina, who headed the Chicago boycott, had spoken. I had been impressed by Eliseo, so when I heard that Cesar was going to be in Davenport, I made up my mind to go hear him.

I went to the fundraiser and heard Cesar speak, but I did not get a chance to meet him during the gathering itself. After it had ended and people were leaving, I went out to the kitchen for something. There was Cesar drying dishes. So I introduced myself, and we started talking.

A few months later, I saw Cesar on the Dick Cavett television show. They were talking about the farmworker movement. Cavett asked Cesar where the union was active. Cesar listed some of the areas in California and also mentioned Phoenix, Arizona. I began thinking that this might give me a reason to move to Phoenix. Two of my friends from college, Katie Doyle and Linda Hale, belonged to a convent in Phoenix. They both had nursing jobs. I was ready to move on from the Muscatine project after two-plus years. I realized that, although we had done much good work for the farmworkers in the area, their lives had not changed much.

I moved to Phoenix in May of 1971. I found housing in the convent where Katie and Linda lived. I also found a job as a registered nurse (RN) at Maricopa County Hospital.

#### Joining the Union

A couple of months later, after I had settled into my new surroundings, I looked up the phone number of the nearest UFW office. It was in Tolleson, west of Phoenix. A woman named Avelina Coriell answered my phone call. I asked her what they were doing and what help they could use. When she learned I was a nurse, she immediately told me her husband,

Bob, had a bad back. My lifelong friendship with the Coriells began with that phone conversation and has continued for 33 years. Incidentally, I never did hear about Bob's back again. I think it just gave Avelina something to start a conversation with.

I drove out to Tolleson, where I met the field director, Gustavo Gutierrez. Within a couple of weeks I was working nights at the hospital and picketing in the mornings. I would drive right from the hospital to the picket line. The union was picketing one of the local grape ranches, where most of the Mexicano pickers had walked out. The packers, who were mostly Filipinos, continued to work. The grower had also brought in Navajo Indians as strikebreakers to pick the grapes.

I recruited Linda Hale's 17-year-old sister, Terry, who had just moved to Arizona from Des Moines, Iowa, to join me on the picket line. She quickly became the local contact person who called Hub Segur in La Paz with the license plate numbers of all the trucks leaving the ranch loaded with grapes. I do not know the details of the operation, but local boycotters always knew when to show up to greet the trucks that Terry had reported to Hub when they arrived at their destinations. (Terry later worked for a few months at one of the UFW field offices in the Fresno area.)

Near the end of the summer, I wrote to La Paz about applying to work for the union full time. As I recall, Bob and Avelina Coriell had already moved to La Paz. I got a letter inviting me to come to Delano for the dedication of the Rodrigo Terronez Memorial Clinic, after which I could come up to La Paz for an interview with Cesar.

I drove my Opal from Phoenix to Delano for the dedication. After the dedication I went to La Paz. I was told that Cesar was tied up with some important business and would I please wait. So I waited. And I waited. Finally I told Cesar's assistant, Andy Anzaldúa, that I had a job I needed to get back to. So I went back to Phoenix without meeting Cesar.

Shortly after that I got a call from La Paz telling me I should come back and report to work. I was told nothing about what I would be doing. So I got back in my Opal and arrived in La Paz in late September of 1971. I was given a room on the ground floor of the hospital. My first job was to file membership cards by hand with Ana Flores in an office located in the hospital basement.

When I arrived in La Paz, the folks there were trying their hand at communal living. My earliest memories of La Paz are of doing dishes after the "communal meal," and going out on garbage detail. I may be wrong, but garbage detail seemed to be especially reserved for the newer and single members of the "commune."

One of the first social events after my arrival in La Paz was Richard Ybarra and Anna Chavez's wedding in Delano. After the wedding I went with Maria Salgado to her family's home in Earlimart. That was my first real introduction to the farmworker community around Delano.

After I had spent a few weeks working in membership, LeRoy Chatfield told me Cesar wanted to talk to me. LeRoy said I would be working with the National Farm Worker Health Group, sometimes referred to by its initials: NFWHG. I just called it the Health Group. I still wasn't clear about what I would be doing. My first assignment was to go down to Mexicali to assess the farmworker clinic there. At the time we did not have a clinic on the U.S. side of the border, so workers in the Imperial Valley went to the Mexicali clinic whenever they needed to see a doctor. I'm not sure how much I accomplished, since I spoke almost no Spanish at the time. I was also very green.

### Moving to Delano

When I returned to La Paz after a few weeks, LeRoy told me he needed a new director at the Delano clinic. Carmen Duran, its first director, had recently resigned. I began my new assignment in November or December of 1971.

The farmworkers were the inspiration behind the Delano clinic. Its realization was a collaborative effort between Cesar, the Health Group staff and four young doctors who would be its full-time staff physicians after it opened: Dan Murphy, Peter Rudd, Peter Cummings, and Caleb Foote. All four had just completed one-year internships back east. Dan had done his in New York. I believe the others had all done theirs at Case Western in Cleveland. The four of them had planned the clinic well before it opened and based the model on their own clinical experiences. Cesar was intimately involved in its planning as well. He had input into many aspects of its operation, both before and after it opened.

I moved into an apartment in Delano that faced onto Highway 99. Shortly after that I moved into one of the famous UFW houses on Sixth and Kensington. I lived in the lower flat with our x-ray technician, Connie Holme, from Green Bay, Wisconsin. Cynthia Bell lived upstairs with her young daughter. Joey Rubio lived in a garage apartment in our back yard. One terrible night the house across the alley from ours caught fire. A young couple lived there with their little daughter. Joey was the first one to see it and tried to go in to save the people inside, but the fire was too intense. The husband and wife both died, leaving the little girl an orphan.

The other important part of my life in Delano was Our Lady of Guadalupe Church. It was Delano's *campesino* parish. The pastors were Franciscans, first Father Ignatius and then Father Ed Fromske, with whom I have kept in touch ever since. He has had a mission church on the White River Apache Reservation in eastern Arizona for many years.

Early in 1972, several of the clinic doctors began publicly campaigning in support of George McGovern's candidacy for president. I got a call from La Paz telling me to squelch all such talk until the union took an official position. In fact, at the time Cesar was leaning in favor of Hubert Humphrey.

*Si Se Puede!*

One Sunday night in May of 1972, I got a call from LeRoy telling me that Cesar had started a fast in Phoenix the previous Thursday to protest the recently enacted Arizona Farm Labor Law. LeRoy asked me how soon I could get over to Phoenix. I said I could leave in the morning. I did my laundry and packed. The next morning I got up and drove straight through to Phoenix.

I pulled up to the Santa Rita Center, where Cesar was conducting his fast. It was a ramshackle one-story building with a gravel parking lot—dusty, dry, and hot. I was struck by how poor the surrounding barrio was. As you walked into the building, a food preparation area was on the left. Farther in were two little rooms off to the side. Cesar was in one of them, with his two dogs and some of his security guards. The rest of the building was a big open hall.

I sat at a little desk at the end of the hall, near Cesar's room. I was so naïve. I did not do very much. I was brought there to be Cesar's nurse. I'm not sure how much good I did in that respect, but during the next three weeks, I became transformed by everything I saw happening around me.

I watched the groups coming together for mass each night become larger and larger. The liturgies were very animated, very lively. Cesar always attended. Several priests were available, and they frequently concelebrated.

From the very first, the hall was filled with an incredible animus and a wonderful spirit. People would get up and witness. One was Leo Nieto, a Methodist minister, who was fasting in solidarity with Cesar. There were people in and out all day long, bringing in food, lots of it. Avelina and Bob Coriell organized the food. They had been called back from La Paz and had arrived in Phoenix with only the clothes they were wearing.

While Cesar fasted, organizers and volunteers beat the streets collecting signatures on petitions seeking the recall of Governor Jack Williams, who had signed the Arizona bill into law. That was the *Si Se Puede* campaign. At the beginning of the campaign, some people in Phoenix were saying it was impossible to get Jack Williams recalled—*no se puede!* By the time Cesar finished his fast, everyone was chanting, "*si se puede!*"

Dolores Huerta and Jim Drake coordinated the campaign. Every evening, organizers would announce how many signatures they had obtained that day. The heat in the hall, which had no air conditioning, was stifling, but no one seemed to mind. Everyone was caught up in the *si se puede* spirit, knowing that anything was possible if they all worked together at it and believed.

Several famous people came to Santa Rita to be seen with Cesar, including Coretta Scott King and George McGovern. (After McGovern's visit, Cesar and the union endorsed him,

so the doctors in Delano could resume their public support for his candidacy.) Several Navajos also came to pay him their respects. They were from the same reservation as the Tolleson strikebreakers. Not everyone came in support. One evening a group from Young Americans for Freedom picketed the center.

A couple of weeks after my arrival, Dr. Jerry Lackner came over from San Jose, California, to check on Cesar's condition. Dr. Ortiz from the University of Arizona in Tucson also came up. He had never met Cesar before. After the fast, he continued his connections with the union, visiting La Paz and Delano.

Jerry found some irregularities in Cesar's heart rate and had him admitted to the hospital for observation and tests. Cesar remained in the hospital for a few days, but kept his fast. On the Sunday after his release from the hospital, Cesar broke his fast at a mass with 6000 supporters in attendance. As I recall, Robert Kennedy, Jr. and Joan Baez were with him when he broke it.

Shortly after Cesar ended his fast, several of us went with Cesar and Helen up to Mount Lemon, east of Tucson, for a brief retreat. While we were at Mt. Lemon, we went to mass at a local Catholic church. The priest was distributing communion rather routinely, and we all got in line. I shall never forget the surprised look on the priest's face when he suddenly recognized Cesar, standing right in front of him ready to receive communion. Anyway, I stayed at Mt. Lemon a few more days—long enough for Cesar to teach me how to make salsa and flautas.

In April of 1997, I was visiting Phoenix with my husband, Jeff, and our two kids. I decided to try to find the old Santa Rita Center, so Jeff and I got in the car and started driving around. Although a quarter century had passed and I had no street address, I found some familiar landmarks and "felt my way there." After all those years I was able to find it, though I had very mixed feelings about what I found. The building was still there, but it was now just one of many old buildings in a run-down neighborhood. The parking lot was fenced in and was littered with old appliances. I wondered if anyone living in the neighborhood had any idea what a miracle had occurred at that appliance graveyard 25 years earlier.

#### Clinics for Farmworkers

I returned to the Delano clinic energized and transformed by my experiences in Phoenix. The clinic in those days was extremely busy. It was not unusual to have 100 patients come through in a day. They were Mexicanos, Filipinos, Yemenis, and some Anglos. Some came to see a doctor, some for lab work, some to get prescriptions filled. Every patient who came in saw at least one member of the clinic staff. A staff person was on call at the clinic 24 hours a day. There were two beds in one of the back rooms. One was for the on-call person. The other was for any patient who had to stay overnight.

The assistant director was Nan Galvin. Esther Uranday was the administrator and handled all clinic finances. She was one of the original *huelgistas* and knew many of the *campesinos*. When the clinic opened, Cesar had put Esther in that position because that was where the buck stopped. Whenever patients came in for services, they had to pay Esther.

As I recall, every service was \$2. If a person saw the doctor, had lab work done, and had a prescription filled during the same visit, the total was \$6. However, whether the patient had one or several prescriptions filled, the total cost to the patient for all of them was just \$2. Follow-up checks, such as lab and TB results, were at no charge. The \$2 was the worker's copayment. The clinic was being operated as a prepaid health plan. The RFK Plan, into which growers under union contracts contributed, paid a certain per capita amount into the Health Group for the workers in the Delano area.

Frequently in the evenings I would go out to the camps with the organizers to do a presentation on tuberculosis and give skin tests. I would return two or three days later to check the results. If they were positive we had to schedule them for chest x-rays.

I recall a visit to one camp. I was giving my TB rap in the camp's meal hall. I saw a woman come in and leave with one of the men. A few minutes later, another woman came in and also left with one of the men. This repeated itself a few more times. I later learned that I was competing with hookers for the workers' attention.

At the Tenneco camp in Delano, we always had help from Doug Adair and Rudy Reyes, who were both living there. They did outreach for us in the camp and made sure people came in for their appointments. If we had problems getting one of the workers to return for necessary follow-up, all we had to do was ask Doug or Rudy for help.

On one occasion, a worker in one of the camps tested positive for syphilis. The camp was frequented by prostitutes, who serviced many of the men who lived there. We had to bring the worker in for treatment if we were to have any chance of preventing the syphilis from spreading, but he refused to come. Doug came to the rescue. I'm not sure what he had to do, but he brought the man in kicking and screaming.

The thorough and dedicated care that the doctors and staff at the Delano clinic provided was often not enough to overcome some patients' notions of proper health care. It was a constant challenge. We had patients who were convinced that they should receive an injection every time they came in for a visit. Others would come in with a cold and demand that we give them antibiotics, even though antibiotics have no effects on colds. We were providing a type of medicine quite different from what they had come to expect from other doctors on both sides of the border. One man even came in with IV tubing attached to a bag full of saline solution that he had bought in Mexico. He wanted us to hook him up and give him the *suero* right there in the clinic. Apparently that was a common practice in Mexico. He was quite annoyed when we refused.

One New Year's Day when I was still in Delano, I went with Doug and a group of Yemeni workers from the Tenneco camp to celebrate at a spot outside of town. The workers brought tape recorders with tapes of Eastern music and spent the afternoon dancing with each other, as was their custom. Doug and I sat and watched. For me it was fascinating to see men able to dance so freely with each other.

Within a year after the Delano clinic opened, the union and the Health Group opened another one in Calexico. Cesar had wanted to do this for a long time. In fact, my trip to Mexicali in 1971 had been with a view to opening up a Calexico clinic. Ken Tittle and Graeme Finke were its first doctors. Both of them spent some time receiving orientation at the Delano clinic. They then headed on to Calexico, where they set up the new clinic based on the Delano model. They hired a woman named Juanita (whose last name I cannot remember) as clinic director.

Ken and Graeme did everything at the Calexico clinic—deliveries, preventive care, and comprehensive health care. In contrast to the Delano doctors, who did most of their work, including deliveries, at the Delano clinic, Ken and Graeme performed most deliveries at the local hospital, where they had privileges.

Other doctors who came to work full time at the Calexico clinic were John Cummings, Ken Frisof, and Tom Lambert. Ken Frisof came from Detroit in 1974 to replace Graeme. Chris Williams, an RN, worked with Ken in Calexico and later married him. Katie Doyle, my friend from Phoenix, also spent much of 1974 on the Calexico clinic staff as an RN. When she arrived she knew very little Spanish. She became fluent very quickly and has used her Spanish with her patients in Phoenix ever since. Tom Lambert succeeded Ken Frisof in 1975. He had spent a summer at the union's Sanger clinic, near Fresno, during medical school.

It was an unwritten policy that UFW clinics were not to offer family planning services to patients. Cesar told me once that he considered family planning a form of Anglo racism, imposed on farmworkers to keep their birthrates down. (He was referring to the attitude that farmworkers were poor because they had too many kids, not because of their low pay.) We were told that *campesino* men did not want us to give contraceptives to their wives. However, in places like Calexico, many of the farmworkers were women supporting their families by themselves. They were very insistent that they should decide for themselves whether they would or would not use contraceptives. In the end, the issue was decided in individual consultations between patient and practitioner.

No on 22

One day in September of 1972 I got a call from LeRoy telling me to go to Los Angeles to work on the "No on 22" campaign. I was the only one from the clinic to go. I had no idea what I was going to be doing when I got there. I told LeRoy I really did not know L.A. He said not to worry—by the end of the campaign I would know it very well.

I stayed at the Hobart House. I was supposed to coordinate the campaign in areas south and east of Los Angeles. Each day, I went to Long Beach, then to the Middle Cities area, and then up to San Gabriel. I had to make sure the organizers in those areas were following through on each day's campaign plans, talking to shoppers at malls, knocking on doors, etc.

The last few days before Election Day, the union bused hundreds of campesinos in to help with the L.A. campaign. They took to the streets as human billboards. Huge quantities of burritos were prepared each morning for them to take with them for lunch. One time Cesar joined our group for human billboarding. He was holding a sign that said, "Cesar Chavez says: Vote No on 22." A driver stopped and asked, "Who's Cesar Chavez?" Cesar grinned and said, "I am."

(LeRoy was right. By the time the "No on 22" campaign was over, I knew my way around cities I had never heard of before: Paramount, Downey, Bell Gardens, Azusa, Covina, and West Covina. I did not expect I would ever have to remember any of them again. Little did I know that seven years later, my future husband would be working at a California Conservation Corps (CCC) center in the San Gabriel Canyon north of Azusa, while I was at another one in San Pedro, west of Long Beach. My earlier geography lessons came in very handy then.)

One day during the "No on 22" campaign, I was rear-ended while waiting for a light to change. This totaled my Opal. When I had moved to Delano, I could not find any mechanic who knew the first thing about fixing Opals. After the accident, I bought a Fiat. No one in Delano knew anything about Fiats either. I drove the Fiat into the ground, and then sold it to Ricardo Villalpando for \$1 after I moved to Salinas. He took it and parked it, then left for Calexico, where he worked on an organizing campaign for several months.

A few weeks after Villalpando left, the police came knocking on my door. When I answered, they handed me a ticket for abandoning my car on a public street. Apparently, Villalpando had not done anything to change the title over to his name before he left. The police finally accepted my explanation and took back the ticket. However, I now had to do something about the car. I tried to sell it again, but the only part that anyone was interested in was the horn, which went for \$50.

### Salinas Clinic

In early 1973, Sister Pearl McGivney, the new director of the Health Group, asked me to go to Salinas to see if we could set up a clinic there. When I got to Salinas, Ana Flores was there, working in the field office. Jerry Kay was the field office director when I came. Roberto Garcia was one of the organizers. He took over the field office after Jerry left. For three months, until the new clinic opened, I worked out of the field office. At times I almost felt like part of the field office staff. That may be one of the reasons the Salinas



clinic was much more connected to the operations of the field office than was the case in Delano.

For clinic space, I was able to rent a five-room house on East Alisal, about a mile from the field office. The two bedrooms would become exam rooms, and the kitchen would serve as our lab. Later we built an addition onto the back of the building and added parking spaces.

I'm not sure the owners really knew who we "really were" when we signed the lease. We didn't advertise our connection with the UFW. Instead, we set it up as the offices of Dr. Jerome Lackner, whom I had met during Cesar's fast in Phoenix.

Jerry Lackner was willing to let us administer the clinic as his Salinas office. He came down to see patients at the clinic periodically after we opened it. Attorney Frank Denison drew up all of the documents that we needed to run the clinic as Jerry's office. Frank was a great help to me, always available whenever I called him. The arrangement also meant that we were officially Jerry's employees. Consequently, our income had to be reported. It consisted of our food money, our \$5 a week, and our rent, with Social Security taxes paid on it. Frank made sure quarterly taxes were always paid and all necessary reports filed on time.

The person to whom I was most indebted for the success of the Salinas clinic was Tasha Doner. When I arrived in Salinas, I was given her name as a contact. She had been on the UFW staff for a while, but had left and returned to her parents' home in nearby Carmel. She must have known every UFW supporter in the Monterey Peninsula area.

That Monterey support group was amazing. They turned out whenever the union needed them. One time they would show up at the Monterey County courthouse in Salinas, in support of farmworkers facing trumped-up charges. The next time they might do fundraising. Two of them were Frank Plaisted, a retired member of Migrant Ministry, and his wife, Vicky.

Another member of the Monterey group was a retired internal medicine physician, Russ Williams. He became our first regular clinic doctor one night each week. Between Russ, some faculty and students from Stanford's medical school and some physicians from Kaiser Hospital in Santa Clara, we were able to open the clinic with adequate physician coverage.

We opened the clinic by the seat of our pants in May of 1973, three months after my arrival in Salinas. The only medicines we had on hand the first day of operation were boxes of samples from doctors, which had not yet been sorted. Fortunately, we were able to start ordering medicines in bulk within a couple of weeks.

We were open seven days a week and worked long hours. That was my idea. I also believed we should do our own cleaning. Two or three times each month, I even came back after hours and waxed and wet-mopped all the clinic floors myself.

Initially, everyone else enthusiastically joined in the spirit of commitment that only long and tireless hours could demonstrate. Many of us also got up in the mornings to walk picket lines before coming in to work. We also went to union meetings after work. However, as the novelty wore off, so did the enthusiasm. After a while, I was told the hours were too long. They were right. If I expected them to stay for the long haul, I had to schedule more realistically. We agreed to cut back to five days a week, scheduling clinic hours around the doctors' availability.

These are some of the other doctors who worked at the Salinas clinic, some full time, most of them part time:

Mark Sapir of San Jose was one of the earliest ones. He also stayed the longest. He would come down from San Jose one afternoon each week to see patients at the clinic. Later he took a sabbatical from Salinas to spend a year or so at the Delano clinic. He returned to the Salinas clinic and remained there until the union closed it in late 1978.

Bill Weller was another doctor from San Jose. I had met him through the boycott staff.

Howard Waitzkin was perhaps the closest we had to the Delano model of a regular staff physician. He worked very consistently, coming down from Stanford every Friday evening and staying over to see patients on Saturday.

Isadore Kolman came from Detroit. He had recently been in a practice at Metropolitan Hospital, which served members of the United AutoWorkers. He had heard about the UFW clinics from the Detroit boycott organizers. He retired from Metropolitan to come to Salinas.

Joe Mancini came to Salinas from New York for a while as part of his family practice residency. He was wonderful, very bright, very easy, and very caring. He never felt threatened by other staff and fit right in.

Ben Heller, from Minnesota, retired from a teaching staff in internal medicine and came to Salinas. Ben found the farmworker clinics very different from academia. At the clinics, we had to be flexible with the number of workers who needed to be seen. Ben decided that, at that time in his life, the workload was more than he wanted to handle, so he resigned.

Clearly the Salinas clinic was not the Delano clinic, which had been carefully planned and set up by its four full-time staff doctors before it opened. In Salinas, we did not usually have the luxury of full-time staff physicians. We were always looking for part-timers to fill coverage gaps. We always had a good corps of part-time volunteers who came down on

weekends, when they were not doing their “regular jobs.” Even when we did have full-time doctors, we never gave up our part-timers. They were really the core of our medical practice.

Since we did not have regular full-time doctors, the other clinic staff took on much more responsibility. They were much more vocal and assertive in running the clinic. Because we often had gaps when a doctor was not physically available, the other staff picked up the slack to ensure continuity of service. They also made sure that we continued the preventive care aspect of our services.

In my years as director of the Salinas clinic, I worked with the most committed group of health-care workers I have ever known. Tasha was always a part of the clinic, though she was not always on staff. She helped with everything other than the medical part of the operation. Robin Levin was our lab technician for more than a year. Our first receptionist was Ruth Govea, a farmworker with several small children. She was empathetic with the patients and very professional. After Ruth left, Tasha took over at the reception desk.

At one point we had four sisters on staff. Sister Marty Gallagher was our assistant administrator. Sister Pauline Apodaca, Sister Marlene, and Sister Pat (whose last names I don’t remember) were all nurses. Sister Barbara Jenkins and Patricia Kirol were nurses who came from Connecticut.

Photographer Mary Roberts, a friend of Tasha, came over from Carmel to take pictures at the clinic. She took pictures of both the staff at work and of the campesinos and their families waiting to be seen. We hung some of her pictures in the waiting room.

In spite of the fact that our physicians’ practice was quite varied, we did a lot of preventive care and health maintenance. Just as in Delano, we routinely performed TB tests and VDRLs (syphilis screens). We performed pap smears and provided well-baby care. We were able to fill about 95% of the prescriptions. Very few patients had to go to pharmacies to get their prescriptions filled.

In all of this we used the Delano model. It was the rest of the staff who adopted it, not the doctors. The doctors worked at the clinic only one or two days a week. They came from a variety of established practices, working with mostly middle-class patients who had histories of receiving good health care. They were not used to practicing in the same way as the full-time Health Group doctors.

One staff person in the Salinas clinic was assigned to track all follow-ups and make sure patients returned for their appointments. If a patient did not come in as scheduled, that staff person had to go out and find the patient or get a message to him or her, especially if prompt medical attention was required, such as in the case of a positive TB test. That staff person’s job also included making referrals for the patient for specialists, x-rays, and lab

work and other services that we may not have been set up to do. If clinic staff could not reach a particular farmworker, we could turn to field office staff to help locate him or her.

For a couple of years, I also served as the RFK Plan's representative in Salinas. I helped Salinas workers process their RFK forms even for services they obtained from other providers. To me it was exciting to see workers get their medical bills paid through their own medical plan. It was tangible as well as very uplifting. Over time, I became reasonably proficient in Spanish, at least to the extent that I needed it for RFK claims and medical instructions.

However, as long as the claims were being processed at the clinic, the union was not deriving much organizing benefit from the program. So the decision was finally made to move the RFK office to the field office. It was a tremendous organizing tool to hand RFK checks out to workers at meetings—very public. Tasha took over as the Salinas RFK representative at the field office.

The year 1973 was also when the union proclaimed the second international grape boycott. My sister Connie, back in Dubuque, responded to the call. She started going into the local Eagle's Food Store and putting up "boycott grapes" stickers around the produce display. Our younger brother, Bob, was then a stock boy at the same Eagle's store. The produce manager recognized Connie and demanded that Bob make her stop. Connie heard Bob out and then continued to go in with her stickers. Fortunately, this did not spell the end of Bob's career with Eagle's. He ultimately became a vice president of the company.

#### 1975: The Year of Celebration

Certain experiences during my years with the UFW were transforming ones for me. Cesar's 1972 fast in Phoenix and the "No on 22" campaign were two of them. A third was the march to Modesto in the spring of 1975. As I recall, the march was intended to put the heat on the California legislature to pass the Agricultural Labor Relations Act (ALRA) that would allow farmworkers to elect their own collective bargaining representatives. The march would end in Modesto, the hometown of Gallo Wineries, which we had also been boycotting since 1973.

I was able to take some time off from my clinic duties in the spring of 1975 to participate in the march, at least in a small way. I did so not as a UFW staff person or a clinic nurse but simply as one of the marchers. I got to the rally in San Francisco that launched the march and then walked the first day. I joined up a few days later for another day of marching. I remember the excitement and emotion of walking into a small town to find the street lined with people cheering us as we came in. Their animo and their faith in *La Causa* sustained my conviction that everything we were doing was worthwhile.

In the summer of 1975 everyone in Salinas was in a state of high anticipation. People were getting ready for the elections that would begin later in the summer under the ALRA. The

first elections were going to be in Salinas. Everywhere people were talking about how many authorization cards they had collected.

Cesar was now on another march to observe the new era that the ALRA was bringing to California farm labor relations. He had started in San Ysidro on the Mexican border in July. Several of us from the clinic drove down to King City to meet the marchers when they arrived there and walked with them a bit. In Salinas the excitement grew each day as the marchers came nearer. The people cheered at reports of the marchers' arrival in other towns in the Salinas Valley: "They are in Soledad!" "They are in Gonzales!" "They are in Chualar!" Thousands were gathered in Salinas ready to greet them.

As part of the organizing campaign, Marshall Ganz wanted a triumphant fiesta to celebrate both Cesar's arrival in Salinas and the kickoff for the elections. It was going to be on the school grounds adjacent to the field office. Marshall asked if I would help coordinate the fiesta. I, of course, had no experience in organizing an event of that magnitude. Somehow, I was going to have to find food for thousands of people. I turned to my trusty friend, Tasha. She, in turn, contacted the always-reliable Monterey support group. Not only did they raise the money we needed, but they also hustled up all the meat and the rest of the food. I have no idea how they did it.

The fiesta was a great success. We had drafted a lot of summer volunteers to help get it set up. The field office, legal department, and clinic each took responsibility for different aspects of it. Richard Chavez was in charge of preparing the meat. That was my first experience seeing barbacoa prepared in an underground pit.

I had, however, overlooked one small detail in the planning: trash pickup. When the festivities were over, suddenly everyone was gone. There was only one other person left besides me: Greg Thomas, a premedical student who was doing volunteer work at the clinic that summer. Greg and I stayed up way into the night walking around the field and filling plastic garbage bags with what seemed like tons of trash. When we were finished, every muscle of my body ached, and I was close to tears.

## Changes

In December of 1975, I got a call from La Paz asking me to go to Calexico. I was not told how long I would be down there, just that I was needed in connection with the organizing campaign that had moved from Salinas to the Imperial Valley. I was also asked to stop in Coachella to discuss a certain matter with Eliseo, who was in charge of the field office. Marty Gallagher would be in charge of the Salinas clinic while I was gone.

When I got to Coachella, Eliseo told me he wanted to establish a clinic there and had already found the building for it. As I recall, it was only a couple of doors down from the field office. He had also scheduled a meeting for me with all the Coachella organizers and field office staff, at which we discussed the various steps that would have to be taken to set

up the new clinic. It was clear they had all been discussing this project for some time. By the end of the meeting, it was also clear they wanted me to play a large role in setting it up. More than any other UFW clinic, the one in Coachella was a field office project from day one.

During the next couple of months, I divided my time between Calexico and Coachella. The organizing campaign was in full swing in the Imperial Valley under Marshall's direction. Immediately upon my arrival in Calexico, just after Christmas of 1975, I was introduced to Jeff Sweetland, a new member of the legal staff. I mention this because he turned out to be the person with whom I would spend the rest of my life.

In Calexico, I moved back and forth between the field office and the clinic, coordinating clinic activities with organizing activities. I'm not sure how necessary I was in all of this. The Calexico clinic staff was already well prepared on their own for the extra work that the organizing campaign would require of them.

My work in Calexico led to one important breakthrough for the Coachella clinic. It was during those two months that I got to know Tom Lambert, the doctor at the Calexico clinic. I told him about Eliseo's plans for a clinic in Coachella and about the need for doctors to staff it. Even though he was the only staff physician in Calexico, on call seven days a week, Tom agreed to sign on as the "Jerry Lackner of the Coachella clinic." We would open it as the Coachella office of Tom Lambert, M.D.

The Calexico campaign ended in February of 1976. I was then able to devote all of my time and attention to the Coachella clinic. John Gibson contributed his carpentry skills, putting up all the interior construction. I spent most of my time recruiting doctors and staff, particularly in the L.A. area, and locating supplies and medical equipment. One of my contacts was Davida Taylor, a doctor on the faculty at UCLA medical school. She had been a UFW supporter for many years and agreed to serve as the local contact for volunteers. Tom also had contacts in L.A., from whom we were able to draw additional volunteers.

The Coachella clinic was officially dedicated in April 1976, a time when all of us, including clinic staff, were involved in gathering petition signatures for the ballot initiative that would be Proposition 14. From our contacts in L.A., we were able to assemble a regular pool of volunteer doctors. Tom Lambert also came up to see patients in Coachella on a regular basis. Even when he was in Calexico, if something came up in Coachella that required his attention, we did not hesitate to call him about it.

As in Salinas, the continuity was really provided by the other clinic staff. They set the tone, because they were the ones who were present five days a week. The Coachella clinic staff was a mix of old names and new ones. Beth Gery, an RN, had been working in the mail room at La Paz before joining the staff in Coachella. Kirsten Thompson had, as I recall, started as a boycott organizer in LA in 1975. She moved to the Coachella field office and then to the clinic. Greg Thomas, my compadre from the Salinas fiesta trash detail, came

from medical school to spend the summer of 1976 in Coachella. Bonnie Pietsch was one of our new faces, an RN who arrived from Minnesota in early 1976. Bonnie and Greg would later marry.

Theirs was not the only lifelong match made as a result of our efforts to staff the Coachella clinic. On one of my recruitment trips to L.A. that spring, I met a young RN named Cathy McDonough, who was interested in working in one of our clinics. At the time we actually needed an additional nurse in Calexico, rather than in Coachella. As a result, Cathy was sent to Calexico to work with Tom Lambert. A few years later Tom and Cathy were married.

I stayed in Coachella until June, when I took a vacation to go back to Dubuque for my brother's wedding. When I returned in July, I had a new assignment, this time in La Paz. For the next few months, I would be working with Jessica Govea, who had just been put in charge of the Health Group. When I was in La Paz, I stayed with Bob and Avelina Coriell and their three adopted children, Carol, Jessie, and Lee, in their house trailer. As I recall, that was the summer that Crosby Milne and Sister Florence were introducing "systems" to La Paz. While I found both of them delightful, I was never able to relate to their "systems" at all.

On one occasion during that stint in La Paz, I paid a visit to the Salinas clinic. As I was going in, a tall young man wearing bib overalls and flip flops and no shirt also arrived. I asked him where he was going. He said, "I'm coming to work." I then introduced myself and told him, "You're not working here with what you've got on." Cesar had insisted when the Delano clinic opened that doctors and staff wear lab coats or uniforms. Over the years, we observed Cesar's rule only inconsistently. My experience that day in Salinas reminded me that the rule did have merit.

### My Last Assignment

During the Proposition 14 campaign in the fall of 1976, I helped work phone banks in L.A. When I returned to La Paz after the election, I met with Cesar to discuss my options. He asked me what I was interested in doing. I gave him three suggestions—administering the RFK Plan in Coachella, administering it in Salinas, or administering the Salinas clinic again. He decided to send me back to the Salinas clinic, which Marty Gallagher had recently left. I had a feeling at the time that this was going to be my last move in the union.

In the last few months of 1976, a remarkable group of volunteers joined our full-time clinic staff in Salinas: Randy Alto, Sue Ardisson, Wren Bradley, Jane Brown, Eileen Donnelly, and Bob Saunders. Some of them came from the Prop 14 campaign. Most of the others who had been there when I went south in 1975 were gone. Bob was our assistant administrator, though he later moved to La Paz. Randy and Wren were RNs. Randy, Wren, Jane, Sue, and Eileen would form the solid core of our patient-care staff until the clinic was closed in late 1978. Jane and Wren did most of the prenatal care, under Mark Sapir's

oversight. Jane, who was bilingual, frequently accompanied her patients when they went to Natividad Hospital for their deliveries, so that she could translate for them.

In the summer of 1977, the big organizing campaign was at the Giumarra grape ranch in Arvin-Lamont. I got a call from there asking me to send some Salinas clinic staff to help with the campaign. When I told the staff about the request, every one of them said we were so busy we could not free up anyone for the campaign. They were right. I called Arvin-Lamont and said we could not send anyone. This was the first time I had not been able to respond positively to a request from the union. It was also the first time I had really backed up clinic staff when push came to shove.

Farewell

Late that summer, I sent a letter to La Paz requesting a leave of absence. I received a terse response from someone whom I had never met or even heard of, saying that my request had been denied. No reason was given. I was stung that I would get such an impersonal rejection. On the other hand, I can't say I was entirely surprised by it.

That fall I began hearing reports of a new activity taking place in La Paz—the Synanon Game. In September members of the Salinas field office began making the trek to La Paz to participate in the Saturday morning Games. One of them was Tasha, with whom I was sharing a house. When she and others told me about the Game, I thought the whole thing sounded absurd. I could not see either myself or anyone else on the clinic staff participating in such lunacy. I also knew it was just a matter of time before La Paz would be demanding our presence.

I had already decided it was time for me to leave the union. Any doubts I had about my decision were completely swept away by this new development. I intended to be gone long before anyone asked me to be a part of it.

I left in late October of 1977. The send-off from Salinas was so moving. Early one morning, shortly before my departure, Roberto Garcia brought some of the local *campesinos* to my house on Ramona Drive. They gathered outside my bedroom window and serenaded me with “*Las Mañanitas*.” The celebration finished up with pan dulce and chocolate.

As “severance pay,” I had requested that the union give me enough money to buy a month-long one-way excursion ticket on Greyhound. This request was granted. So along a very roundabout way back to Iowa, I made stops to visit some of the people who had been or become important to me during the preceding six years: Jeff in Los Angeles, Cathy McDonough in San Diego, Katie Doyle in Phoenix, Father Ed Fromske, who was then in Las Vegas, and Pearl McGivney in Florida.

Aftermath



The last time I saw Cesar was in November of 1992 in Davenport, Iowa, where I had first met him 22 years earlier. By then, I was living in Milwaukee, Wisconsin, with Jeff and our two children, Jennifer and Michael. A friend of mine in Milwaukee, whom I had known at Marycrest, told me Cesar was going to be receiving the Davenport Archdiocese's "Pacem in Terris" award. So Jeff and I drove to Davenport with the kids. Before the program we had a chance to talk to Artie Rodriguez, who had accompanied Cesar. Afterward, I went up to Cesar. He recognized me at once. Jennifer shook his hand. Michael, who was five, was hanging back. He shares the same birthday as Cesar, March 31. I asked him if he wanted to meet Cesar. He said no. Cesar laughed. Then we said goodbye.

Five months later, I was driving home from work in Milwaukee one afternoon when I heard the report on the radio that Cesar had died. A few days later, Tasha called me, asking if we would be coming out to California for the funeral. I hadn't thought we'd be able to, but when she asked me, I knew we had to go, even though the funeral was now only a couple of days away. Jeff was out of town that night. When he called, I told him I wanted to go to the funeral, and he agreed we should all go.

I am so glad we were able to go back to Delano to be part of it, even though both Jennifer and Michael groused about "having to walk so far," and we lost Michael in the crowds for nearly an hour. Afterward, we spent a few days in Salinas, staying with Wren and her family and visiting with Tasha, Sue, and Eileen. The drive to Salinas stirred so many memories as we passed the towns along Highway 101: King City, Soledad, Gonzales, and Chualar. I had been to so many camps in the area, and a part of me had never left.

In 1998, Jeff and I, along with Jennifer and Michael, visited La Paz. Dolores Velasco gave us a tour, which included Cesar's office. She told us it had been left exactly as it was the day he died. Among the items on the bookshelf across from his desk was his Pacem in Terris award.

### Reflections

So many memories, and so many folks who were part of it all. As I have been writing this essay, many names and faces have flashed by. At each stop along the way I met so many wonderful people. Some whom I haven't mentioned yet were Jim Rutkowski and his first wife, Tina, whom I met that first summer in the Tolleson field office; Phil and Carol Traynor and Dorothy Johnson, whom I met on my first trip to Calexico in 1971; Fred and Sue Eyster and Oscar Mondragon, whom I met during the No on 22 campaign; Jim and Margaret May, who opened their home to me in Salinas; Nancy Kleiber, who shared an apartment with me in Salinas; and Ruth Shy, whom I met when I was setting up the Coachella clinic. There were so many others. I wish I had the space to name them all.

I'll never forget how proud and surprised the farmworkers were that that this fledgling union of theirs could operate a health-care plan that was both sophisticated and very personal. It was a plan that could produce a complete computer record of the hours that

individual *campesinos* had worked, something no one before had ever bothered doing. It also kept track of all the employer contributions that had been paid into it on their behalf. At the same time, we in the clinics and field offices who were processing their claims knew the person at the other end in La Paz who would actually cut the checks to the farmworkers or their providers.

The clinics were built around physicians because we could not operate without them. But the other clinic staff held them together, because the physicians came and left. Some clinic staff received further training while with the UFW, such as nurses who became nurse practitioners. Others went on to medical school after they left the union, including Nan Smith and Eileen Healey from Salinas and Karen Jacobson from Coachella.

Many young Chicanos volunteered their time at the clinic because they were interested and wanted to be involved. I recall Jeff Solinas, a cousin of Tina Solinas, who came over from his pre-med studies at UC Santa Cruz. Pablo Ramoro was from a *campesino* family in Salinas. He eventually set up a practice in Salinas as a physician.

We always had many enthusiastic volunteers who had limited skills but freely gave of their time. It was ironic that as people learned more and developed skills that could be of even greater benefit to the clinic's patients, there seemed to be less interest in volunteering.

Other than a few college friends, the old friends with whom I still stay in touch are UFW folks: Avelina and Bob Coriell, Ruth "Cuca" Shy, Tom Lambert and Cathy McDonough, Bonnie Pietsch and Greg Thomas, Pearl McGivney and, of course, that wonderful Salinas crew. Eileen Donnelly especially keeps in touch with cards and news. And just a month ago, Jeff and I spent an evening in our favorite local Mexican restaurant, reliving memories with Wren Bradley, who was in Milwaukee for a conference. Wren updated us on many of the farmworkers whom she still sees in Salinas.

The thoughts and experiences I have included here are the best ones. The UFW affected me profoundly, and it still does. It politicized me. It helped me concretize my values. Those are values in which I am still grounded.

My time with the UFW was never a job. It was my life for six years, and most of it I loved. I loved the campaigns, the music, the *teatro*. I loved making connections between the clinics and the movement as a whole. And I probably needed that more than some of the others. I think many of the clinic staff found satisfaction in helping *campesinos* heal. They were content with the knowledge that their skills improved the health and lives of others. For some, like myself, it was important that this be in the context of a bigger movement. For the others, helping poor people was enough, and they just happened to find themselves doing that in UFW clinics.

Early on there were discussions about whether the Delano clinic staff were really "connected" to the union and its wider vision. I've always believed that the quality of care

and the commitment to the farmworkers who came to the clinics to receive that care were enough. The clinics accomplished what the union wanted. Since I left the UFW, I have never met or experienced health care as it was delivered in those clinics. On the other hand, as wonderful as the clinics were, I always wondered whether the union had the energy to sustain them in addition to all of the other challenges it faced.

My own assignments gave me opportunities to interact with other UFW operations besides the Health Group and the RFK Plan. Sometimes when I went to San Jose or the Bay Area to recruit doctors, I would meet with boycott organizers and tell them about the work our clinic was doing. This interaction benefited both of us. It gave the organizers information to share with supporters in their communities about a very tangible benefit that the union was providing to the workers. In turn, the organizers helped me recruit doctors to work in the clinic.

My connection with the UFW was first of all an emotional one. Maybe that is why I have such great memories. Besides working with some of the most dedicated people I ever met, relating to *campesinos* was awesome. I remember a time when I was helping one of the workers prepare his RFK claim in the Salinas clinic. Because my Spanish was very poor, I asked him to wait until I could find an interpreter. He said no, he wanted me to do it. I realized that his willingness to deal with my poor pronunciation was all about trust.

I have said that I loved most of my experiences with the UFW. There were also struggles. I never understood Cesar's visit to the Philippines to visit Marcos. My sharpest conflict was with the Synanon Game. It made no sense to me, given what our mission had always been—to organize farmworkers. I saw the Game as a distraction. I tried to imagine *campesinos* being called to La Paz to play the Game, but I knew that would never happen. It would make no sense to them.

My other disagreement was with the union's attitude toward staff people who left, especially those who stayed on in UFW communities after leaving the union. I heard too many times the *chisme* that former staffers, people whom I knew, trusted, and loved, were "organizing against the union." It reminded me of the mentality of religious communities in the "old Church," which banned all contact with departed members.

Would I do it again? Absolutely. Do I have any regrets? None.

I am so pleased that Jeff, my life partner, was also part of the movement. It has been a great experience to share as part of our marriage, and we still do. I wish our children could appreciate it, but it is not in their experience. I am glad we did not have our children while we were with the movement. I know I was able to do as much as I did because I was single. During those years, the union was my community and, in many ways, my life.

