

## Jack Quigley 1972–1973

### My Two-Year Decade with the UFW

We had boycotted grapes and lettuce faithfully ever since the boycott began, in St. Louis and then in Georgia. But that was the extent of Nancy's and my involvement with or knowledge of the union. Both of our lives were committed to serving and empowering African-Americans in poverty in the city. The lives and needs of Chicano farmworkers didn't have immediate reality for us in the Midwest.

I had developed a nonprofit organization in St. Louis that had packaged and developed several hundred apartments, townhouses and homes for people with low and moderate incomes and had organized a large number of parents to file a lawsuit against the St. Louis Board of Education for its discriminatory practices in allocating federal and state money among black and white schools, as well as for its passive acceptance of de facto segregation. Nancy, a pediatric nurse practitioner, worked in an understaffed city clinic to help look after underserved kids and also worked to keep federal money coming to those clinics. But I felt I was a sham. I didn't really understand people in poverty. My frame of reference was that of the privileged upper-middle class. I knew I had a lot to learn. New, very different experience was needed.

We accepted the invitation of an old friend, Charles Sherrod, leader of the Albany Movement during the civil rights movement, to come to southwest Georgia to help develop a 6000-acre tract of land into a sharecroppers' collective, New Communities, Inc. After six months, it was very clear that almost all of the staff preferred not to have whites involved. Glen and Sue Percy, who had been in Georgia for a while working for Sherrod, made contact with their old friends, Richard and Barbara Cook, who were living and working at La Paz. Richard and Barbara secured an invitation from Cesar for all four of us to visit La Paz to talk about work with the union. We did, and Cesar invited us to join the union staff. We arrived at La Paz to stay in February of 1972—four idealistic Anglos without Spanish or any real knowledge of farmworkers. That was the beginning of the best decade of my life, compressed into the next two years.

My assignment was to work in the accounting office in the basement of the hospital under LeRoy Chatfield, whose office was in the boiler room off in one corner, along with two other people at that time who were keeping check vouchers in orderly groups. Large ledger books for the union, the National Farmworkers Service Center, and the Robert F. Kennedy Farmworkers Medical Plan were in the office, but no accounting entries had been made in the books for about two years, since the two accountant volunteers who had set up the books left. The clinic in Delano had been built and was just getting started, but there were no books of account yet for the National Farmworkers Health Group. LeRoy was clearly the man who managed the financial side of the whole union operation with Cesar, but there didn't seem to be the knowledge, experience, or time available on staff to do accounting. The priorities of a movement organization are, of necessity, elsewhere.

So, in a short time, it became clear that my first task should be bringing all of the accounting up-to-date. That was certainly necessary to be able to meet external reporting requirements, but I believed it was also very important in order to create a body of up-to-date and ongoing financial information that could be the foundation for planning the further development of the union. It could also lead to the development of a broader agenda of services to farmworkers, especially now that contracts with many growers in the Southwest had been won and much bigger money was coming in than ever before. So we immediately began updating and then expanding an accounting system built on the old books and the primary financial documents that were all available in the office.

A couple more people were added to our little group as we got under way and I remember the fun and excitement we had as routine office work was transformed into a little cause of our own: ledgers and subsidiary ledgers for the union and all of its related entities, up-to-date and then ongoing. It was a tight little space in which to work and the boxes were piled high. It wasn't organizing or boycotting, but we all became convinced that it was an important contribution, nevertheless. I could get into our space through a basement door and go straight to my desk and then back out again, though I had to wheel clear around the building to get to the first-floor level of the administration building to meet with Cesar.

Perhaps I should record here that I am a quadriplegic, due to having broken my neck in 1964, and I get around in a motorized wheelchair. I have always been impressed and very grateful that Cesar saw some possibilities in adding me to the staff despite my rather severe limitations. My disability, however, had almost no effect on the work that needed to be done—Cesar and LeRoy had already noted that. It did create one very awkward transition very shortly after we arrived, however, that was necessary but has always bothered me since. Given the equipment I needed to have around me “at home” and my need for a bed of a certain height for transfers, it was not going to be possible for us to live in the hospital behind the administration building for very long. I asked Cesar if we could be moved into a small bungalow as soon as possible. My introduction to Mike Krakow occurred when he let me know quite clearly what his feelings were at being asked to move out of his unit for some brand-new, unproven volunteer with a big problem. I agreed with him and wished I could withdraw the request, but I couldn't. Over the next two years, Mike and I became good friends and we actually wound up living in neighboring bungalows. He helped me keep moving several times with his blowtorch and welding experience. We both had a chuckle every now and then about what strange birds we each were in the La Paz community.

Another introductory experience I've remembered with amusement and joy over the years had to do with granola. On the day after we moved into our bungalow, a woman from the staff came knocking at our door asking us if we wanted granola. (I've forgotten her name, but I can remember her face very clearly.) Sure. We loved granola. “How much does it cost?” She looked at us strangely and said, “Nothing. We're going to make it up and distribute it; I just needed to know how much to make.” I still don't know how the ingredients were purchased—I assume everyone chipped in at the start—but it was soon clear that we were going to be eating breakfast for quite a time to come, a gift of the gracious people in this community we had joined. The same was later true when the

produce from Elizabeth Genslen's garden was spread out in the hallway of the administration building virtually every day of the summer. Perhaps this kind of looking after each other was no big deal for people whose lives were already long experienced in community, but it was a wonderful new experience for us, who had been living in competitive environments too long before that. Evening gatherings in the administration building several times every week brought the entire headquarters staff together for singing, laughing, information, and real community building (much deeper and more real than "community building," now a cliché, has become these days). There was even more merriment and great eating when farmworkers themselves came to La Paz for holidays—outdoor roasts and mariachi music.

I remember one day, as we were nearing the end of bringing the books of account up-to-date and as I was winding my way from the hospital building basement up to talk with Cesar about something. I saw a lot of construction-type work going on in the basement of the administration building. I wheeled up the path and looked in as three or four of the carpentry guys were gutting this unused space for some new kind of office. They told me they thought it was for the business office! I couldn't believe it. But Cesar confirmed it, and in a few more days our little group was liberated from basement and boxes and installed in what became the union's new business office. Very soon after that, the staff was expanded, the safe was moved in, and a group of nine of us began to function as a team that would remain in place for the next several years. We organized ourselves so that one person was in charge of the accounting for each of the union's related organizations. I taught bookkeeping to anyone who had not done it before—it's really pretty simple. Three of us handled the daily flow of bills, budgets, and checks. Shortly after we began this level of operation, Cesar and the board assigned us our first major new task. He/they wanted the entire union operation to be operating under a budget that they could monitor and adjust on a regular basis—field offices, boycott offices, clinics, the medical plan, service centers, and the headquarters operation. That challenge and assignment became our major work focus for the remainder of 1972 and into the spring of 1973. Each of these offices had been supported by a monthly check from the union, which had been a kind of de facto budget. But now we had the "machinery" in place to manage expenses in more detail and to control income centrally. The union and its parts were now big enough that it had simply become necessary to move beyond the leadership's head-knowledge of what was going on to management based on systematically gathered data across the board. I began to imagine that it would also relieve Cesar's wariness about money management at the local office level, which I felt was going to have to be replaced by a much broader, progressive management outlook commensurate with the recent size and success of the whole organization.

I'm sure that, for some, the process that followed felt like a great deal of control was shifting to the union headquarters at La Paz. And it was. But it was necessary because about this time, the union was moving into a period in its institutional life that required accurate, readily accessible and transparent reporting of its financial operation. I remember that we frequently talked in our office, as we did the busywork, about how the union was getting bigger and more prominent and might possibly be open to both government and

grower review—quite possibly as a challenging or even discrediting tactic. Frank Denison, Jerry Cohen, and I were more and more aware of the importance of conventional business management practices, as well as thoroughly documented accounting, as we moved forward. Denison and I teamed up to be sure that all of the necessary information returns required by the federal and state governments were completely up-to-date and were supported by thoroughly documented financial records if audited. Frank provided me with a major education in corporate legal issues along the way, for which I've always been grateful. Frank was key, and much more skillful than I, in presenting the case to Cesar and the board for the necessity of this new level of business management and reporting for the union and its related entities at the level of prominence it had now achieved. I remember we frequently discussed the issues of this transition from a small movement to a national, institutional labor union—how to become a well-structured institution while at the same time retaining the drive and flexibility and spirit of the movement that was the heart of the union. So we treated the budget process and all of these issues surrounding it with care. I remember writing letters very carefully to all of the offices in the union to bring everybody on board with this process of regularizing our financial functioning. I don't remember any resistance or problems. In fact, I was amazed and very pleased, along with Cesar and others, at the ease with which every office fitted into the new routine. My biggest sigh of relief came when we were sure that all of the income the boycott was generating across the country was flowing quickly and easily into centralized bank accounts. For our part at La Paz, I was also very impressed at the flexibility in Cesar's and the board's response to adjusting local office budgets in response to changing needs using the new process.

The summer of 1973! The growers and the Teamsters had signed their sweetheart contracts and we were going to be on STRIKE. *Si, se puede!* We began to expect some strikebreaking violence, but I don't think any of us envisioned flatbed trucks carrying Los Angeles thugs wielding fence posts storming fields where we were working. Glen Pearcy filmed it almost every day, which allowed those of us left behind in the business office to see the footage before he finished the movie.

In addition to all of the issues related to managing the strike, Cesar had been successful at securing the first-ever commitment from the AFL-CIO to support the farmworkers' strike financially! More history in the making. After the national office of the AFL-CIO had solicited its member unions, we learned that the amount of money we would receive for this purpose was \$2.6 million. Our major task in the business office quickly shifted to figuring out how we were going to deliver this money in \$25 checks each week to our striking membership all over California. More than 100,000 checks had to be purchased, made payable to each individual farmworker with Social Security numbers when possible, signed by a secure machine in Cesar's absence, distributed and then fully accounted for during and after the strike. Unfortunately, blocks of money were very slow to come in from the Washington AFL-CIO headquarters, which led to constant telephoning in order to be able to meet the strike benefits payroll each week. There were several points along the way when the officials of the Bank of America in Delano covered us when the AFL-CIO refused to advance badly needed cash. I thought then, and have ever since, that those officials at the bank, with whom we were in daily communication, showed courage of their

own on our behalf during a strike. It all went unsung, not only because it was marginal to the central issues of the strike, but also because covering our overdrafts, when there were also grower accounts at the same bank, was not something that they or we were about to talk about openly. I, myself, got out into the action several times to help with the strike benefits process—on the line as it were—and I even learned what 105 degree heat in Southern California was like in the process. When the strike was over, and all of the accounting and check reconciliation was done, we had managed to account for all but \$50 of the \$2.6 million. And once again, the business office was piled high with boxes!

The only time that Cesar and I ever crossed occurred at the end of the strike, when he returned to La Paz. While very painful for me and my staff, the event is important enough to report only because it illustrated what I believe now was a serious disconnect between Cesar—the way his mind worked—and the new demands of a large organization (becoming an institution?) and the financial management of it. I have written about this event previously and it may appear in print. So, I think it is more appropriate to quote myself here openly rather than to patch those paragraphs in without citation.

“On the second day after Cesar returned to La Paz at the end of the strike, he came striding into the business office on the lower level of the main building (itself highly unusual) and came directly toward me and my administrative assistant, Judy Weisberg (now Ortiz), in what was obviously an angry and accusatory manner. He said, “I hear you have a lot of cash down here. Open the safe.” He had never spoken to me that way before. We opened the safe and pointed his attention to the box that contained approximately \$600 in cash and gasoline receipts in the amount of approximately \$400. He was horrified and asked why we had that amount of money in the office. I quickly and easily explained that it was because he had decided before leaving La Paz earlier in the summer that no one in the union was going to be allowed to purchase gasoline for the union cars using field office or service center credit cards, nor were they going to be allowed to obtain a check for cash (in advance) in order to buy gasoline—both procedures having been the norm up until that time. (Receipts had also been required of each office every month for budget reimbursement, too.) Instead, everyone was to buy gas for the cars—presumably out of their own money—and then was to submit the receipt to our office at La Paz for cash reimbursement. That automatically meant we had to have cash on hand—and a quantity of it—since people often saved up receipts before driving (sometimes hundreds of miles) to be reimbursed when they had business at La Paz. I had talked to him about the implications of that decision as soon as he issued the order, saying that we would need to keep a revolving fund of about \$1000 on hand to keep the staff rolling during this busiest of summers. He said he understood. I don’t think it really registered with him even at the outset, and he certainly had not remembered the reason the cash was there by the end of the summer. All summer long, Judy and I had kept a meticulous accounting of cash and receipts and stored a wad of

receipts as documentation for each new check written to keep that fund revolving. I told him he could review the documentation if he wished. He had no interest. Nor did he own up to having made the decision that caused the cash to be there in the first place. We all thought the order at the time it was made was ridiculous in terms of the demands of the summer and the operation of the union in general. But my way was to inform as clearly as I could, never to argue or fight with him. I believed that the business operation needed to be in the background and supportive of his leadership. His later quoted impression: “he had to do certain things that were wrong and I had to call him on it.” None of the 10 of us in the office who were busily working on another gargantuan task could believe what we had seen that morning.

“Maybe I should explain what that task was, to help explain the general business atmosphere we were working in. The strike that summer was the first United Farm Workers strike ever financially supported by the AFL-CIO. In fact, we received \$2.6 million from the union nationwide through the Washington office. It was to be distributed to each striking farmworker at the end of each week in the form of a check for \$25, Social Security numbers being logged in the accounting records wherever possible. (Remember, these were pre-computer days. Electronic calculators were just beginning to replace mechanical adding machines.) Our staff had to be deployed all over California and Arizona to handle that task in a secure way that would not only support the strike and the farmworkers themselves, but also would meet the accounting requirements of the federal government and the AFL-CIO. All of us were working 18- to 20-hour days to accomplish that task—while at the same time trying to maintain basic financial operations at La Paz (gas receipts and cash, too). That meant handling over 100,000 checks that summer with all of the bank reconciliation that implied. We had legal storage boxes piled up all the walls of our office. It had been an interesting challenge, one that we all enjoyed and felt we had met admirably. The enormity of that task never registered with Cesar. He never thought in financial management terms. It was in that context that we were being accusingly challenged over the presence of \$600 in the safe—itsself carefully and accurately accounted for. It was very upsetting. Cesar understood \$600 in cash and was constantly afraid that distant staff (and maybe we at La Paz) were going to rip the union off, requiring his constant surveillance.”

*-- from a letter to Frank  
Bardacke, historian.  
[clarification added]*

During that summer, I had been working very long hour days along with everybody else. However, I had developed a skin sore in the middle of the summer from sitting so long on

what I soon learned was an inadequate cushion for that amount of sitting time. The sore had become a full-blown decubitus ulcer that, as it turned out, had penetrated deep into my body. Nancy and I had treated it as best we could, knowing that there was no way to get off it until the end of the strike, but during the last week of the strike I was running a very high fever, every day, all day, and was quite sick. Our doctors at the Delano clinic examined me and demanded that I go directly to the hospital in Fresno—"without passing GO, and without collecting \$200." I was there for two months and the treatment did not result in closure, which meant that surgery was going to be required. I say this to report the real basis for the very difficult decision we had to make, namely, whether or not to leave the union at this point. I knew I would be out of it for several more months, even though our personal insurance would cover the cost as it had the hospitalization, but I was also upset over the gas-money event and its implications for the future of the business office, and my role in it, if I were to come back after surgery. Nancy and I decided that leaving after returning from the hospital was the best option all around. I met with Cesar a few days after returning to La Paz. Before I could tell him of our decision, he asked me if we would move to Delano to manage the construction of Agbayani Village, the long-promised retirement housing for the Filipino farmworkers who had been with him from the beginning. I was somewhat reassured that he had thought to give me a new assignment, even though it was clear he was moving me out of the business office and away from La Paz. Nevertheless, we quickly agreed over the gravity of my situation and said goodbye. We left the union a few days before Christmas of 1973.

Working with Cesar and the union had compressed a lot of experience into a very short period of time. I still look back on those years as being two of the best of my life, now 30 years later. The union was a great, effective, and honest organization. It was a daily fact at La Paz that the whole organization was a very diverse, multitalented community of people working passionately for *La Causa*, which had become our own personal cause as well. In many ways, every day, it was a model for the way people of concern could organize and relate to each other instead of being drawn into the capitalist competitive career model. There were clear indications that Cesar and the board were trying to add management/institutional issues to the ongoing agenda of organizing and standing up for the workers with growers. My own belief is, however, that this process was unfortunately limited by Cesar's own limitations and fears when it came to money. Moving beyond his own origins in that regard seemed to be a near impossibility. There was plenty of money in the coffers for the organization to do some significantly supportive work on behalf of the membership—such as building Agbayani Village—but the balance between development planning and spending, on the one hand, or maintaining the earlier union culture and avoiding the appearance in the public eye as "successful," on the other, frequently tipped toward the latter. I thought the former approach would have secured the union's position all around—with the members and the public—and would ultimately have contributed to its growth. However, I was clear about the origin of those ideas in my middle-class, privileged mind and never felt it appropriate to argue my point of view with the leadership. Nevertheless, my opinions must have been transparent and probably contributed to a level of suspicion I always felt. In retrospect, I also clearly understood that Cesar, LeRoy, and others had offered me a great deal of responsibility and the latitude to make a real

contribution to the movement, for which I am very grateful. My United Farm Workers experience—what I learned living at La Paz, living around Cesar, the board, the organizers, and the other volunteers—positively and significantly shaped the rest of my life. *Viva La Causa!* I later learned that it had been generally acknowledged that we had built a good financial foundation for the union's future.

#### Addendum

LeRoy Chatfield asked me to append this story about the Ford Crown Victoria—a story I had previously related to Frank Bardacke in response to one of his questions about the union's finances.

I did not know Manuel Chavez well at all and had very little to do with him. He was very active, and for all I know, was our best organizer out in the fields. How he was paid, if he was paid, from what source of funds he was paid, I have no idea. No, Jerry Cohen's memory is not accurate when it comes to my providing funds to Manuel, but I'll tell you the story of the one moment that linked Manuel and me in everyone's memory and humorous storytelling—the only time we ever met and talked and had anything to do with money.

On one afternoon during the summer of 1973, Manuel came into the business office at La Paz and came straight for my work table, saying along the way that he needed money for a new car right away. There was almost nobody around La Paz, except for the business staff, the telephone operator, Helen Chavez, and one or two others. I told him that I could not give him money for a new car without Cesar's approval. He got very angry very quickly and began pounding on the table. I told him we should get Cesar on the line and if he authorized the purchase, I would certainly make it possible. He grew even more furious at that. I remember asking him what kind of car he wanted to buy. He told me he wanted a Ford Crown Victoria sedan. I gulped and barely refrained from laughing. Nobody in the union drove around in cars like that, let alone a new car of any kind. We bought cars, 10 and 20 at a time, from municipalities selling off their fleets. Furthermore, we only bought Plymouth Valiants so that we could stockpile used parts for repairs in our automotive shop. I called Helen on the phone. She wouldn't touch the matter. I tried to reach Cesar but was unsuccessful. I told Manuel I couldn't authorize it and he'd have to get Cesar to tell me otherwise before I could help him. For years after the event, the people who witnessed it in the office couldn't believe I got away with refusing him and not getting my head knocked off!