

Barbara G. Cook 1972–1983

It was a hard sell for me. Richard came home to our basement apartment in New Jersey one day and said, “I just met Chris Hartmire and he told me about the farmworker organizing movement in California. I think we should go.” Matt, our oldest son, was two years old and Sarah, our daughter, was not quite one. It took Chris’ incredible powers of persuasion to move me to “yes.”

We relocated to La Paz into two rooms in the former TB hospital. The “kitchen” was a former bedpan cleaning closet—it took a while to get it clean enough to do our hotplate cooking. Community life was great from the start and before long, the Anglo Type A mothers were casting about to see how we could contribute to *La Causa* in our spare time. We organized a nursery cooperative. This enabled us to work in one of the administrative offices while our children were playing with one another. In order to take advantage of the co-op, we were required to work our fair share with the children. I thought it was a great thing for the union, the moms, and the children.

Then Dolores Huerta moved in. Word had it that she wanted to leave her children in the co-op but had no time to work her shifts. We consulted with one another and asked her to reconsider. Then the word came that Dolores needed to move her family into the nursery co-op space. A small group of us (the more politically astute moms steered clear of *this* bad idea) went to see Cesar to ask that Dolores be assigned a different section in the hospital. He was attentive and said that he would consider our request. The next thing we knew, a large tent was deployed to the field behind the hospital. Word was, the Anglo moms refuse to vacate the nursery so Dolores and her children must live in a tent.

I learned a valuable lesson that day and not the lesson I probably should have learned: if you choose to stay with the union, you had better watch your back. I was never the same. I could celebrate the wonderful work that the union was doing; I could be enriched by the wonderful diverse group of people who had committed themselves to *La Causa*; and I could appreciate Cesar’s unique charismatic gifts. But from that day forward, I had one foot out the door.

The experience prompted me to move forward and explore what unique contributions I might be able to make on my own apart from *La Causa*. That pilgrimage resulted in medical school, residency in family practice, and a brief attempt at working in one of the union’s clinics. The restrictions on medical practice that Cesar imposed were incongruent with my duties to patients— no birth control or patient education around family planning, for example. Instead, we moved to West Virginia so that I could work with coal miners and Appalachian folk.

The union was a crucible for our family. It was formative for our children. It took many years for Richard to finish his grieving about leaving—the work was important and good and it is hard to replicate today. He still won’t eat a grape, buy iceberg lettuce, or even sniff

Gallo wine. It was painful to watch the exodus or dismissal of talented, committed people—Jim Drake, Chris Hartmire, LeRoy Chatfield, Eliseo Medina, Gilbert Padilla, Esther Padilla, Nick and Virginia Jones, Judy Kahn, Paul Milne, Marshall Ganz, Jessica Govea, Jack and Nancy Quigley, Jerry Cohen, Glen and Susan Percy—to name a few. There was so much more good work to be done.

The memories and stories from those years that our family spent with the union are vivid: picket lines in Coachella, recalling the governor in Arizona, sleeping on gymnasium floors, countless supermarket picket lines, traveling across the Coachella desert in the middle of the night with Kathy Olguin, our three tiny children and an overheating radiator, “the Game,” “Boycott” and “Huelga,” *missa* at La Paz. I treasure the reminiscences of living a life boiled down to basics where relationships and kingdom work were all that mattered.