

Paul Carrillo 1973–1976

Experience in the UFW

This story begins in a place called the “California Camp,” about six miles northeast of Delano, California. My first recollection of existence was living at the California Camp, which was a labor camp privately owned by a labor contractor and completely surrounded by vineyards. The labor contractor rented two-bedroom shacks to families, and single men could rent space in army barracks–style dwellings. In a two-bedroom shack, I lived with my grandparents, who raised me, and two uncles and three aunts. Living conditions were crowded, but as a child, those were the conditions I knew and thought everyone else lived the same way. One of my uncles, two aunts, and I went to school in the small farm town of Richgrove, which is about 2 to 3 miles east of the California Camp. My oldest uncle and aunt dropped out of school to work in the fields in order to help pay the bills and feed the family. Other times, depending on the type of fruits or vegetables being harvested, those of us in school would be taken out of school to do our part to earn money for the family and would miss days and sometimes weeks of school. In 1951, my grandfather moved the family to Richgrove, where he bought a parcel of land and a one-room shack with no power or running water. Over time and with the family’s help, he built a three-bedroom house, which became our base of operation. During the next few years our family migrated around the state on an annual basis as we followed the crops. In the hot months of July and August, we would go to a labor camp near Fresno to pick grapes and spread them out on large sheets of brown paper so the sun could turn them into raisins. By the middle of August we would arrive in San Jose at another camp ready to pick plums and pears. In San Jose we thought ourselves fortunate, because we were one of two families that were selected to live in a barn with a concrete floor and electricity. By early October, we would return to Richgrove, and my grandfather and older aunt and uncle would find work picking various varieties of grapes until the season ended sometime in November. Upon our return to Richgrove, my grandmother would enroll the children in school. The older and able members of the family could usually find work pruning vines or tying vines during the months of December, January, and part of February. Work was hard to find during the late winter months and early spring, especially in rainy years. I remember on more than one occasion accompanying my grandparents to a finance company to refinance our house in order to pay the bills and have enough to eat while there was no work.

I graduated from Richgrove Elementary School in 1960 and from Delano High School in 1964. I was married in 1965 and was a father of two children before I turned 21 years old. All through elementary school and high school, I worked in the fields on weekends and school breaks, picking peas, cotton, potatoes, tomatoes, oranges, grapes, or whatever work was available to youngsters. In those years no one ever enforced child labor laws in the fields, so I was able to earn money to help pay for my school expenses. After high school I worked loading trucks, driving trucks, working in cold storage, operating farm equipment, and picking grapes and oranges. As a truck driver hauling and loading oranges, my day started at 5 a.m. and concluded about 8 p.m. seven days a week for the duration of the

harvest. I was not paid any overtime and there were no benefits of any kind that went with this job. On one occasion, while working with a crew for the Radovich Company near Richgrove, the over-spray from a rig spraying pesticides near us drifted in our direction and we felt the mist. We asked about the spray and were told not to worry—that it wasn't harmful. The next day, two of us got sick and missed some days of work due to nausea and skin rash. I went to the doctor but was never compensated for my doctor visit or my loss of work time. Another time I was working for B. M. McDonald Company, east of McFarland, driving a spray rig. The company had three or four such spray rigs that required a driver and two men to operate manual spray hoses. Some of the men who rode on the rigs operating the manual sprayers were hired by a labor contractor. The two men working with me were hired by the labor contractor and since they did not have transportation, I gave them a ride to work everyday. One Friday while we were working, the border patrol showed up and took the two men working with me. Apparently they were undocumented workers. Payday was to have been the next day. Interestingly enough, the labor contractor had two more men for me the next day, so work was not interrupted. The labor contractor was unaffected and didn't have to pay wages to the two men who were deported. He most likely was pocketing their wages for himself. In the years of working in the fields, I saw my aunts have to go behind bushes, trees, grapevines, or cars to relieve themselves because facilities were not provided. I had to drink water from irrigation ditches because the ranchers or labor contractors didn't provide drinking water. Workers, including myself, were fired for asking to be paid 10 cents per hour more. All these images stayed in the back of my mind until many years later.

My opportunity to leave the fields came in 1969 when I was picking grapes for the Radovich Company near Richgrove—I was drafted! At the time, I was separated from my wife and was providing child support and didn't believe the Selective Service Board was drafting married men with children. I was wrong. I was inducted into the army at Ford Ord, California, and after completing basic training and advance infantry training, I was sent to Germany, where I completed my two years of service. I achieved the rank of Sargent E5 and won international recognition for marksmanship competitions. Upon returning home, I found it difficult to find a non-agriculture job in Delano, so I went back to working in the field for a while. But with the advice and help of friends, I enrolled at Cal State Bakersfield utilizing the G.I. Bill. I had reconciled with my wife during my time in the army, and the G.I. Bill, plus living in subsidized government housing, made it possible to go to school and support my family. While in college I concentrated on history and also enrolled in political science classes, which helped me become more politically aware. It was during this time that my stepfather, Pete Zavala, and I would engage in many conversations about what was happening with farmworkers in Delano and their struggle to improve their wages and working conditions. My stepfather had been a member of the United Farm Workers (UFW) since 1966 and worked under the first contract negotiated by the UFW (Schenley). He had also participated in the first UFW boycott and was sent to Madison, Wisconsin, in 1968, where he said he nearly froze to death. During the summers I would take a break from school and work in the fields to support the family. In my second summer break from college I was working at the Mid-State Ranch along with my

stepfather. The Mid-State Ranch was located on Old Highway 65 about one mile south of Richgrove. My stepfather was working as an irrigator and I was picking grapes. We had been hearing that negotiations between the UFW and grape growers were not going well, and then it happened ... the strike was called.

Walking out on strike in 1973, as a member of the UFW, forever changed my life. I didn't realize it at the time, but I was about to be part of history and be associated with one of the greatest human beings of the 20th century. As I mentioned earlier, I had been studying history and political science, but now I was actually going to live it. Little did I know at the time that it would turn out to be the best learning experience of my life. I gave two-and-a-half years of my life to the UFW's cause, but I got much more in return.

"Huelga! Huelga! Huelga!" This was the rallying cry of the farmworkers, followed by *"Viva Cesar Chavez!"* The first day of the strike seemed unbelievable, as Pete, my stepfather, and I drove out to our rendezvous that morning in July. Cars and pickups loaded with farmworkers seemed to be caravanning in predetermined directions. Red flags with the imprint of an Aztec eagle, the UFW symbol, were being waved from car windows, and car horn sounds seemed to be coming from every direction. I recall a sense of excitement and the air itself seemed electrified as if it was witnessing history in the making. Never before in the history of this country had so many farmworkers decided it was time to take a stand and demand basic things like decent wages, benefits, and working conditions. But one simple and humble man, Cesar Chavez, had dared to speak out for farmworkers and dared to take on one of the most powerful forces in California—agribusiness.

Within two or three weeks the strike had grown so effective the growers had resorted to hiring scab labor, but even with hiring the farmworkers' brethren, it was not enough to accomplish their harvest, so it wasn't long before the hired "goon squads" showed up. The job of the goon squads was to intimidate the farmworkers who were on strike. There were incidents where the goon squads went beyond bluffing and used their billy clubs or baseball bats to injure the farmworkers with intent of malice and intimidation. My stepfather and I, and as many as 100 other farmworkers, were picketing the Mid-State Ranch where we worked. One of our objectives was to convince any remaining farmworkers picking grapes to leave the fields and join the strike. The Mid-State Ranch chose to hire off-duty county sheriffs to confront our picket lines and limit our communication with the scabs. We as strikers were determined to find ways to talk to the strikebreakers to convince them they would be better off in the long run if they joined the strike. But the growers became equally aggressive in their attempts to kill the strike. It was almost inevitable that someone would get hurt. Twice that August, tragedy struck the strike effort: one farmworker was killed by a deputy sheriff and another farmworker was shot in the heart by a scab. Although the strike had been very effective and gaining momentum, Cesar knew that if the strike continued, more lives would be lost and many more would be injured. In early September, Cesar called for an end to the strike and launched the grape boycott!

Shortly after the announcement that ended the strike, Cesar put out a plea for volunteers to join the grape boycott. Those interested in joining the boycott were asked to come to the UFW field office (Forty Acres) in Delano and sign up immediately. I knew that my stepfather had been on the first boycott in 1968, so I asked him what it was like in Madison, Wisconsin. He didn't say much about it except that it was cold the winter he was there, and his task was to ask liquor stores to boycott Schenley's whiskey. I decided to go to Forty Acres and see for myself what this boycott business was about. When I arrived at Forty Acres the place looked like a beehive, people coming and going in all directions. I went to the main office asked to speak to someone about the boycott and they handed me off to Dolores Huerta, vice president of the UFW. By the time she finished with me I realized I had just been through a tough interview and that they weren't accepting just anybody. The good news was that she said I was conditionally accepted and that I would have to go to an orientation at La Paz (the UFW headquarters) in a few days. As I left Ms. Huerta's office, I felt an excitement within my chest that I have only felt a handful of times in my life. There's no doubt I must have been grinning from ear to ear as if I had just won the lottery. Even in that early state of my involvement with the UFW, I sensed I was going to be part of something important, unique, and a once-in-a-lifetime experience.

A few days later I arrived in La Paz for my orientation. La Paz was an old tuberculosis sanitarium that Cesar had turned into the headquarters for the UFW, located on Highway 58 halfway between Bakersfield and Tehachapi. I asked for directions and found my way to the building where the orientation was to take place and I began walking in that direction. As I was walking, I suddenly became cognizant of the diversity in the people who were all around me headed in the same direction. Some of the people were clearly Hispanic and farmworkers. Others were young, old, men, women, and the dress was also very diverse. Some of the younger Caucasians had a "hippie" look about them, but we were all walking in the same direction as if pulled by a magnet. The second day of orientation was set aside for assigning each person to a specific city/destination. When they asked for volunteers to New York, Miami, and Seattle, I raised my hand, but those destinations filled up quickly with volunteers. After a while, I just kept raising my hand each time they named a city and asked for volunteers. But each time, the quota of volunteers was filled before they reached me. In retrospect, it was probably a mistake on my part for sitting in the back of the hall. As people were being selected, they would be matched with their team leader and they would leave the hall to go meet in separate locations. By now the group was down to about 50 to 60 people. "Toronto" was the next place shouted for the next group to be selected. Again I raised my hand, this time an almost automatic response. "What's your name," a woman said, pointing her finger at me. "Paul Carrillo," I replied, kind of surprised that someone had even noticed I was there. "Would you like to go to Toronto?" came the question from the woman, and I almost yelled out "yes!" Then the woman who had just been speaking said, "All of you going to Toronto, follow me." I got up and followed the woman and the group, and it suddenly occurred to me that I didn't know exactly where Toronto was. So, when we were gathered, I asked, "Where's Toronto?" The woman turned, gave me a quizzical look, and said, "It's in Ontario, Canada." "Canada!" I said to myself. "Oh well, New York, Miami, what's the difference?" A few days later we gathered

for a rally at Forty Acres, received Cesar's encouragement and blessing, and departed in a caravan of about 100 cars. I had three other passengers who were going to Canada: Julio, Eduardo, and Juan. Our route would take us to Phoenix, Albuquerque, Denver, Kansas City, Chicago, Detroit, and finally to Toronto. The trip to Toronto occurred in September of 1973 and we were able to witness the beginning of fall, which is quite different than fall in Southern California. Our directions took us to a Catholic church hall in Toronto where food was waiting for us, as were about 50 Toronto residents who made us feel welcome. This would be the beginning of a tremendous boycott campaign!

The first year in Toronto went by unbelievably fast. Right after we arrived in Toronto, we were trained in community organizing and immediately were assigned to our areas of responsibility. My area, or borough as they called them, was in the east side of Toronto in a borough called Scarborough. I was given the leadership assignment of area coordinator. Juan and Eduardo were assigned to me as organizers. Julio had some ethics issues, so he washed out in the first few weeks and was given a bus ticket back to California. Once we began our boycott campaign, it was "pedal to the metal" until the day we left Canada and returned to California two years later. Our primary objective was to stop the import of California grapes into Toronto, and after one year of boycotting grapes, we were successful in reducing the import of grapes into Canada by 41%!

To accomplish this tremendous feat we went to all religious, labor, and political organizations, told our story of the social injustice in the fields of California, and we received widespread support. We turned this support for our cause into endorsements for our fight, for financial support of our boycott operations, and action on the picket lines in front of any grocery store that refused to remove the non-union grapes from their shelves. The days, nights, and weekends were long, and time seemed to lose its meaning for me. Each morning when I awoke and made it out the door, my goal for the week was to shut down another store selling scab grapes. That meant I had to recruit and organize as many picketers as I could to stand in front of stores and persuade shoppers to turn around and go shop at another store. Some weekends we were so successful that the parking lot of the supermarket we were picketing was nearly empty on a Saturday afternoon. I remember the time I had three Jesuit priests on my picket line. I had deliberately chosen a supermarket in a predominately Catholic area to picket. After two hours and an empty parking lot, the store manager came out and asked who was in charge. My picketers pointed to me. As the store manager approached me, I could see that he was nearly in tears as he shouted, "You are hurting my business; if you don't leave, I'll call the police!" I looked the store manager straight in the eye and responded, "You see those men over there," as I pointed to the priests who were wearing their clerical collars, "you go ahead and call the police on me, but they will be back here every Saturday to picket your store. But if you take the grapes off your shelf, we'll leave your store alone." The store manager turned then disappeared into his store. A few minutes later he came out and told me the grapes had been removed. I told him I would have to inspect the store before we left and he agreed. I invited one of the Jesuits to come with me to see the store manager's offering, and behold! The grapes were gone! I thanked the store manager but also warned him that I would be checking his

store and if the grapes reappeared, so would we. Outside the store I gathered the nine or 10 picketers and reported our success. We had a mini-rally and moved onto the next store. Another time we decided to use the tactic of having two picketers go into the supermarkets and stand in front of the grape display and hand out leaflets to the shoppers and ask them not to buy the grapes. This worked best when we selected older ladies for this task. One time after a big snow, we targeted a supermarket with a huge parking lot. The snowplows piled the snow in large mounds around the parking lot and near the entrances. I stationed the picketers at the entrances to the parking lot and the snow mounds shielded them from view from the market. Most of the picketers that day were members of the United Autoworkers and SteelWorkers unions and were wearing coats designating their respective union. They had big picket signs and leaflets and were stopping every car that entered the parking lot and asking them not to shop at that particular store because of the grape boycott. The parking lot was virtually empty all day. The store manager didn't know what hit him until I went into the store later that day to tell him of our success. The grapes quickly disappeared from his store.

The pace of the boycott was horrendous! This wasn't one of those organizing efforts where you have a few years to make an impact. If we, the UFW, were to have an impact on the California grape industry, it would have to be in one or two years. This kind of life, if you want to call it that, is not for couples with children. A few months after I had arrived in Canada, my wife and I reconciled and she and Ramsey and Suzie (our children) came to live with me in Toronto. Barbara tried her hand at organizing but instead chose to be the boycott office manager. Because we were not Canadian citizens, Ramsey and Suzie could not attend public school. So we went to the Catholic bishop and soon Ramsey and Suzie were enrolled in private school, courtesy of the archdiocese. Our boycott supporters provided for our housing, food, and clothing. The UFW provided for fuel and transportation where supporters could not pick up the living expenses. It seemed that all was OK except for one thing: there was not much time to spend with your spouse or children. As I reflect on those fast and furious days, it seems I saw my kids more often at picket lines, union meetings, and rallies than any other times. Most nights when I came home after a day or night of organizing support, I would find Ramsey and Suzie asleep or getting ready to go to sleep. Barbara was there for them during these very challenging times and many of our boycott supporters seemed to kind of adopt them wherever they went. I remember the time I had finished giving a presentation at a meeting at a supporter's house, I looked around and couldn't find Suzie. I asked my friends who owned the house if perhaps she was in another room. They looked but did not find her. So we all began looking throughout the house in every nook and cranny and found her sleeping behind the living room couch. They were both wonderful kids and they never complained.

After a year of organizing in Scarborough, I was asked to move to Hamilton, Ontario, and organize a boycott campaign there—just me, Barbara, Ramsey, and Suzie. We packed everything we owned in our 1965 Barracuda and off to Hamilton we went. With the experience I had gained, it didn't take me long to get things rolling, especially with the help of the organized labor unions in Hamilton (Hamilton was equivalent to Pittsburgh in terms

of steel manufacturing). Shortly after I arrived in Hamilton, Cesar Chavez came to Canada and made stops in Montreal, Toronto, and Hamilton. Organizing a march, rally, and reception for Cesar in Hamilton is something I will never forget! Cesar also made major stops in all major cities across the Lower 48 states, which seemed to give the boycott campaign a major boost.

Two years after I arrived in Canada, I finally received the phone call I had been waiting and praying for—"We've won the boycott, we're going home!" It was just after Labor Day when the news came from Marshall Ganz, the director of the Canadian boycott. He told me the news over the phone and asked me to come to Toronto, which was about 60 miles away, for a meeting to discuss how we would wind down the boycott. The next day I was in Toronto and I must admit, it was one of the most efficient meetings we had ever had. Everyone was on time for the meeting, there was no fooling around, and the meeting was short and to the point. We decided to leave one organizer in Canada, Lupe Gamboa, and announce that we were "scaling down," not shutting down the boycott, in case the growers changed their minds. The other major thing we needed to do was thank all of our boycott supporters. So, Barbara, Ramsey, Suzie, and I drove back to Hamilton to notify our supporters and called them all to a meeting and potluck to announce some "good news." We met at the United SteelWorkers' hall that had become like a second home to me, but after I told everybody the good news, you could have sworn I had just told them somebody had died. They were happy about the UFW winning the boycott, but it was clear we had made many good and dear friends and they would miss us. It's like that strange bittersweet feeling you get when you leave home to start on your own, glad to be on your own, but sad to be leaving your home. It took us two or three days to tie up all the loose ends, pack our belongings, and load up the Barracuda. We departed from Hamilton, Ontario, early one morning and I didn't stop driving, except for gas and toilet stops, until 3 a.m. the next morning, when I pulled off to the side of the road to get some sleep. I got two or three hours of sleep, started the engine, and we were "on the road again." Barbara shared the driving chores and we seemed to draw strength and energy from the thought of, once again, being home in sunny California. The trip from Hamilton to Delano took us four days!

Barbara and I were allotted one week to visit with family and then were to report to Salinas, California. The boycott pressure on the grape and lettuce growers had been very successful from 1973 to 1975 and the growers agreed to have the Agriculture Labor Relations Act (ALRA) signed by Governor Jerry Brown. The ALRA established the Agriculture Labor Relations Board (ALRB) which was immediately put into place. The purpose of the ALRB was to oversee farmworker representation elections and resolve election disputes between management and labor. It was expected that as many as 100 elections could take place over the next few months throughout the state. This situation would be made more difficult because the Teamsters union would also be competing to win farm labor contracts. Barbara and I knew the election campaign would be very taxing on our time, so we made a painful decision to leave Ramsey and Suzie in Delano with her parents for the time being. It was sometime in November of 1975 and our stay in Salinas

only lasted about two weeks because the lettuce season was drawing to a close. Election organizing would have to move down to the Imperial Valley where the lettuce and broccoli harvesting was getting under way. When we got there, Barbara and I were placed in a three-bedroom home along with Marshall Ganz and Jessica Govea, and Arturo and Linda Rodriguez in the small town of Imperial, which was 12 miles north of Calexico. The UFW office and election campaign headquarters were in Calexico, California, just two blocks from the Mexico border. The next few months would see more election organizing than you could imagine. Barbara was assigned to work as the assistant office manager in the UFW office in Calexico and I was assigned to organize elections on three different ranches.

Election organizers had to be at El Hoyo, (which means the hole) by 5 a.m. every day during the harvest. Every morning at 5 a.m., hundreds of farmworkers who live in Mexicali cross the border to work on the U.S. side. The organizers would wait at El Hoyo by the growers' buses, where the workers congregated each morning, to talk to the workers about the upcoming elections and the benefits of working under a UFW union contract. The goal for each organizer was to sign up 80 percent of the workers at each company before filing for an election with the ALRB. After signing up workers at El Hoyo, the buses would leave loaded with workers to their respective fields. At about 6:30 a.m., organizers would head back to the UFW office where someone would arrive with tortillas and pots of homemade Mexican food. After a meal and short break, the organizers would then get in their cars and go out to the ranches assigned to them and try and find the work crews. The idea was to speak to the crew members during their break times, lunch, and the end of the workday and continue to have workers sign election pledge cards. This task became particularly difficult at the Sam Andrews Company, where the company had invited the Teamster representatives to speak to their workers but made it extremely difficult for me to do the same. The company supervisor would block my entrance to the field with his pickup or threaten to call the county sheriff and have me arrested for trespassing. These actions by the company intimidated the workers, and they became hesitant about speaking to me. I changed my tactics and began to visit the workers in their homes after the workday. This was also very challenging because I had to first get their addresses without their boss seeing them give it to me, and second, finding an address in Mexicali proved to be very interesting because many streets and homes were not properly marked, and most workers did not have telephones. Finding an address in Mexicali after dark was practically impossible. But like the rest of the organizers in Calexico, I stayed with my mission and collected signature cards from 80 percent of the employees of Sam Andrews Company, and we filed for an election. The day after we filed I went to El Hoyo to tell the workers the good news. I boarded one of the Sam Andrews Company buses to speak to the workers and the driver-foreman shoved me off the bus and threatened to have me arrested. I informed him I would be filing an unfair labor practice complaint against his company, which we did. It was clear to me Sam Andrews was trying to intimidate their workers and to show them the UFW was not going to protect them. Election day came and we won the election, but in order to do this, I continued to visit the workers in their homes right up to the day before the election. We also filed an unfair labor practice complaint against Sam Andrews, but unfortunately, it took about a year and a half for it to be resolved in favor of the workers.

I was assigned to organize elections at two other companies, which we also won. By the end of my third election it was early March of 1976 and the ALRB had run out of operating funds, due to the incredible number of elections being conducted around the state. At the UFW office in Calexico, it was time to take a pause, and we were actually given two days off before we regrouped to assess our next course of action. It was during this pause that Barbara and I decided it was time to rejoin Ramsey and Suzie in Delano and begin thinking about where the road would lead us next. After our two days of rest, Barbara and I announced to Marshall Ganz, director of the UFW election campaign in Calexico, that we would be ending our time with the UFW as organizers and returning to Delano. The two and a half years I gave to the UFW have been the most rewarding, educational, and inspirational of my life.

Boycott Training - 101

In January of 1974, I was working on the United Farm Worker's grape boycott organizing effort in Toronto along with about 15 other farmworkers who had survived the first four months of the boycott. By then, about another 15 farmworkers, including adults and children, had called it quits and returned to sunny California. For the first three to four months, Marshall Ganz and Jessica Govea would arrange for us to show up at a rally, picketing event, union meeting, or media event. Marshall knew that for the Canadian boycott to be more effective he would have to multiply himself in the form of many organizers in both Toronto and Montreal. To provide a needed boost to our boycott efforts, he arranged for Fred Ross, Sr. to come to Toronto and train us on how to conduct a "house meeting" campaign.

We met in the basement of St. Basil's Seminary in one of the meeting rooms. We were asked to clear our calendars for three days and be prepared for some long days of training. The seminary provided lunch and dinner. The meeting room was plain, with folding chairs, and there was an easel with flip chart paper and markers. Each organizer brought a writing tablet and pens or pencils.

Marshall began the meeting by introducing Fred Ross, Sr. and providing us with background information on how Fred and Cesar met for the first time. Fred shared how Cesar had used "house meetings" in building a grassroots organization when Cesar worked for the Community Service Organization (CSO) and how house meetings had also been used in the first boycott in 1968. Right from the beginning, we all liked Fred. He was very personable, direct, and animated. He was also a good storyteller. Fred said, "You have to be able to tell the story of what's happening in the grape fields of California and why you're here in Canada," and "Your story has to be compelling and make an emotional connection" in order for these people in Canada to support the boycott. And so, with Fred orchestrating the discussion and Jessica handling the writing chore, collectively we began to tell our story. We described the history of farm labor in California, the lack of laws to protect farmworkers, union-busting efforts by the growers and Teamsters, the lack of

worker benefits, the low wages, pathetic working conditions, and the recent deaths of two of our brethren strikers. The story was told and captured in chronological format. The pages of the flip chart covered most of the wall space in the room. We were then instructed to write this story down in our tablets. This process took the better part of a day to complete. Over the remaining two days, this story would be told over and over until it became embedded in our minds—it was already in our hearts. At the end of the first day, Fred told us that our homework would be to study our story notes and to be ready to retell the story in front of the group. We ended the day with supper at St. Basil's and with Fred providing a UFW update from California.

The next morning we regrouped in the same meeting room. The kitchen at St. Basil's still had a pot of hot coffee, and several in the group took advantage of this opportunity before taking our seats. Once everybody quieted down, Fred reviewed the day's agenda with us. He said that he would start out by conducting a mock house meeting using the information we had gathered the day before from our story telling session. He asked us if we were ready to start and we all said "yes." He began his role-playing at the point where he was calling a prospective supporter to set up the house meeting. He then delivered his prepared spiel to Maria Quintana, who stood in for the prospective supporter, and he secured the date for the house meeting. Next, he proceeded to role-play the house meeting. For this part, he told us that we would role-play the part of Maria's guests who had been invited to the house meeting. He set the stage where we had all just arrived at Maria's house. Fred went about the room introducing himself, making sure he had the opportunity to meet all the guests. Fred then gave Maria the signal to ask her guests to take a seat so the meeting could get started. Fred had briefed Maria on the sequence of events, so once everyone was seated, Maria introduced Fred as a farmworker from California. At the same time Maria had begun the introduction, Fred began circulating a clipboard so that everyone in attendance could write down his or her name and phone number. As the clipboard started circulating around, Fred thanked Maria for hosting the meeting, reintroduced himself, and began to tell the story which we had captured on flip chart paper the day before. For the next 25 minutes, we were all captivated by Fred and his passion for telling the story of the farmworkers' plight in California. When he finished, there was dead silence. He was telling our story, and yet we were the ones who had lived through it. But before we could catch our breath, he began to explain how people in Toronto could help the boycott and make a difference. Fred said that house meetings were one important method for getting the word out in a way that people could hear firsthand what was going in the grape fields of California. He then turned his eyes to Juan Rodrigues and asked, "Juan, would you be willing to have a house meeting at your house to get the word out about this very important cause?" At this point, with everyone looking at Juan, what else could he say, but "yes." Fred proceeded to go around the room and obtained commitments from everyone to host a house meeting. When we thought he was finished, he went around the room again and got everyone to sign up to picket a store that weekend. He made sure all this information was noted on his clipboard and then thanked everyone for coming to the meeting. He made it seem so easy. Including the greeting of the guests, Fred's compelling

presentation and obtaining signups for the house meetings and picketing took only 45 minutes from beginning to end.

We came back from a long break and there was still a big buzz about Fred's powerful performance. There was also a nervous excitement within the group because we all knew that each of us would have to take our turn performing a mock house meeting in front of Fred and the group. Fred called the session to order and asked who wanted to come to the front of the room and give their presentation first. "I'll go first," I heard myself say, as I stood up and walked to the front of the group. To say I was nervous is an understatement. The feeling of having my performance reviewed and judged by Fred Ross, Sr. and my peers left a ringing in my ears from the tension in my shoulders. I knew if I waited to go later I would just get more nervous, so I just wanted to get it over and be done with it. My recollection of the beginning of my presentation is very fuzzy —probably because I was very nervous. But I do remember that a few minutes into my presentation, I found myself telling the farmworkers' story as Fred had done earlier. The story telling became easier as pictures of events in California began to form in my mind and tying facts to those events became natural. I finished my presentation and went around the room getting everyone to sign up for picketing and hosting a house meeting. When I finished my presentation, I felt extremely relieved to be off the "hot seat."

Fred asked for the group's feedback after I completed my role-play of the house meeting. I was pleasantly surprised by the positive remarks that everyone offered. We then watched a video recording of my presentation, and once again, the group was asked to give input on my performance. More positive comments from the group and a few constructive remarks helped to bolster my confidence in my ability to conduct a house meeting. For the next day and a half, each member of the group would take their turn as I had done, and each would receive feedback from the group. We spent the last half-day of our gathering at St. Basil's developing our plan for conducting a house meeting campaign in Toronto. Our house meeting campaign began within a few days of our training. How effective was our house meeting campaign? After one year under the leadership of Marshall Ganz, we were able to reduce the import of California grapes to Toronto by 41 percent! After two years, we received that long-awaited call from UFW headquarters in California that said, "Come home, we won the boycott!"

The skills I gained from Fred Ross's training, the experience of the house meeting campaign, along with the other on-the-job community organizer training I received, have proven to be crucial to my 26-year career with the California Conservation Corps. While working in political campaigns and in other countless activities and events, I found myself relying on these very same skills and experiences. I'm sure I will continue to do so throughout my active life.