

Patty Teufel 1974–1976

I began working for the UFW in 1974, the year I took a leave of absence from my religious community, the Sisters of Charity of Nazareth, Kentucky, known as the SCNs. I was 34 years old and ready to continue doing work that I felt was meaningful and healing. This I surely found with the UFW—in Dayton, Ohio, where I lived with my sister and worked out of the office there with David Hernandez and Dave Koehler. It was a wonderful way to continue on with a healing ministry. I worked for two years with this great group, working in Akron and Columbus, Ohio, until 1976. I was privileged to go to California and experience one of the joys of my life—meeting and having a private interview with Cesar Chavez. He was truly a charismatic man. Meeting some of the older farmworkers were pivotal moments in my life as they told me stories of their experiences. I was privileged to be in Sacramento when the California Labor Relations Act was passed to include the farmworkers. I was standing on the steps of the capitol building when an old farmworker came up to me and shook my hand and said, “Thank you for helping us!” I will never forget how that made me feel. It has stayed with me always. When we think we are small, we can suddenly feel like giants among giants. And that is what the movement meant to me—greatness. Remember the play *The Mouse That Roared*? Giants can dwell in the hearts of anyone with an open heart.

I have left my religious community, but not the meaning it held for me—service and compassion for others.

If I were to describe the work I did for the UFW, I would be so proud to say I was part of a great historical movement, which still is with us and not yet completed. It goes on as long as there are those suffering injustices and indignities at the hands and power of less compassionate people. I told my former religious community that “we may take the vow of poverty, but these migrant farmworkers live and know and experience it.” Would that all the nuns could have had the experience I had, so they may know real poverty firsthand.

I worked for the ministry and truly admired Chris Hartmire. He had a true heart for this ministry and taught me a lot I needed to learn. I am a better person for having known him.

Working with this movement was one of the high points—pivotal points—in my life, and I am truly grateful to have been a part of such greatness.

I have been married for 26 years now. Ross and I give financially to the movement whenever we can. I had a bachelor’s of science degree in education when I joined and continued on until I got my master’s in religious education administration.