

## Thomas Nagle 1974–1977

I got involved in this project pretty late in the game and just want to share a few thoughts.

I met Richard and Barbara Cook in St. Louis in the fall of 1973. Getting involved with the UFW was a little like getting caught in a wringer washer. First my little finger got caught in the wringer, then my hand, my whole arm ... and on it went. I went to a meeting. I helped a fundraiser. I joined a picket line. Then I became a picket captain. Then I was recruiting other supporters. Richard and Barbara encouraged me to go to Los Angeles and work as an organizer for the summer of 1974. I went to Los Angeles, thinking I would work for the summer ... I stayed with the union for three years. I met my first wife, Tessa Aguilar, the mother of my children. My daughter was born in the union. Los Angeles, St. Louis, Oxnard, Visalia, and Santa Maria. Thank you, Richard and Barbara, for offering me such a great experience.

Working for the union had an important impact on my life. It changed me. It shaped the way I view the world and the way I understand politics. Some of the finest people I've known in my life I met and worked with during those three years with the UFW.

I had really good organizing teachers: Richard Cook, Jim Drake, Terry Carruthers (Vasquez Scott), Eliseo Medina, Larry Tramutola, Scott Washburn, Gilbert Padilla (sort of in that order). I learned about how to listen to people and how to talk to people that you want to work with you. I learned about planning and reporting and being accountable. I learned about being creative.

From union members themselves I learned about courage and perseverance.

I had great people working on my small staffs: Sister Betty O'Donnell, Mike Jongerius, Paulino Pacheco. And I worked with inspiring people like John Gardner, Julie Kerksick, Michael Savage, and Bill Monning.

It was the best job I ever had. Organizing election campaigns in 1975 through 1977 was a tremendous experience. I worked with farmworkers who had never voted for anything in their entire lives. Now they were organizing crew committees, voting in secret ballot elections, and beating the Teamsters, almost all the time.

I recall the Gallo boycott in Los Angeles in the spring of 1975. The liquor salesmen would come out and set up counter pickets and try to harass us. They would give out a phone number to area liquor stores who were to call them if we showed up to picket. We'd look in a store when we arrived and see these guys making a phone call, then 20 minutes later a carload of salesmen would show up to set up their picket line. One Saturday Jan Peterson called five liquor stores that we were targeting on Slauson Boulevard She told them that she was with the Gallo salesmen and that they were not to call the regular number because

they had found out that the UFW was eavesdropping on that line. She told them to call a different number (where she was sitting in some church basement), and that she would dispatch the counter pickets when they called. So these liquor storeowners would call Jan saying, "The UFW is here and they're making a lot of noise and I don't like this." Jan would say, "You know, we're really sorry we can't send you any pickets today. They're all busy." The guy would call back in a while and Jan would ask, "Are the pickets turning customers away?" The guy would scream "YES!" Then Jan suggested, "Well, you can't be expected to have your business hurt. Maybe you should take off the Gallo wine." We cleaned out five stores that day.

I recall going to a union convention in Fresno, probably during the summer of 1976. When the convention was over, a few thousand of us marched with Cesar—I think to Selma. We were walking down this old blacktop road, past orchards and vineyards, singing and chanting. We passed a small house with a sign out in front that read "Free Puppies." Richard Cook started a chant "Free the Puppies! Free the Puppies!" The man made me laugh hard.

I was in Santa Maria in early 1977, when the Teamsters local with Bart Curto was filing election petitions right and left because he didn't like the jurisdictional pact that was being negotiated between the western conference of Teamsters and the UFW. Pete Cohen was working hard to stop the elections, and I was working hard to win them. Pete and I would meet late each night and review the day and plan for the next day. Pete would say, "I think we can stop that election," and I would say, "Interesting. I think we can win it." Working in Santa Maria was like that. Both of us working as hard as we could toward different results, with different goals, but we were working together.

Paulino Pacheco and I did a radio show on Sunday mornings in Santa Maria called "*El Voz del Valle*." One Sunday Paulino would interview me as a special guest. The next week I would interview him as a special guest.

The last year I worked with the union, I worked in Visalia and Santa Maria. Both offices were small and not the focus of much attention. I never played the Game and rarely visited La Paz. I was uninvolved in the politics and left in June of 1977 for personal reasons unrelated to the internal struggles in the union.

I know that I worked hard. I also know that I had a tremendously rewarding experience. I am honored to have worked with the UFW.

*Gracias a todos.*