

Nancy Grimley Carleton 1975–1976

Working for *La Causa*

(I offer this piece in memory of Lynn Campbell, December 19, 1955–April 21, 1984, a full-time volunteer for the UFW from 1974–1976 and the best organizer I have ever had the honor to know.)

I worked as a full-time volunteer on the United Farm Workers boycott staff from August of 1975 through November of 1976, starting in the summer after I graduated from high school. My support of the UFW began long before that, however, and came quite naturally given the kind of family I was from. To give a greater sense of context, I have included information from the time leading up to my decision to join the union as well as some comments on my feelings about the union after I left. I kept extensive journals from the age of 15 on and relied on my writing there for many of the details here.

Background

I come from a middle-class family deeply committed to social justice and grew up in Menlo Park and Palo Alto, California, from the age of four on. My stepfather, Joe Carleton, an engineer, had participated in the civil rights movement as well as marching with Cesar Chavez in the famous march to Sacramento in 1966 that inaugurated the grape boycott. He married my mother, Ruth Carleton, a first-grade teacher, later that same year, and they often took me along with them to antiwar protests and UFW fundraisers as I was growing up. I remember going with them to see *El Teatro Campesino* at someone's hillside estate and purchasing my first two farmworker buttons around 1970. On another occasion, we heard Cesar Chavez address a large crowd at Stanford's Memorial Church and I was impressed by his quiet charisma. At the age of 13, I became very interested in Mahatma Gandhi and began to read widely on the subject of nonviolence. In addition to accompanying my parents on picket lines and to multiple meetings, I was an activist in my own right in junior high school, participating in moratorium events against the Vietnam War, as well as one of the massive antiwar demonstrations in San Francisco, and working hard for George McGovern's campaign in 1972.

When I was 15, I signed up to attend a work camp at the Institute for the Study of Nonviolence in Palo Alto, an organization founded by folksinger Joan Baez and her mentor, Ira Sandperl. The work camp promised to give the dozen of us who signed up a chance to delve deeply into nonviolent theory while also participating directly in some of the nonviolent political causes of the day.

Just as the work camp was getting under way, in August of 1973, the UFW strike in the grape fields of Delano turned violent as Teamster goons and local police began attacking the nonviolent UFW strikers. Our work camp sent car caravans to Delano to join the picket lines in support of the strikers and also to attend the funerals of Nagi Daifullah and

Juan de la Cruz, two strikers who were killed within the space of a couple of days. We all participated in the three-day fast called by Cesar after Nagi's death, but I had to miss the first trip down to the Delano picket lines because my parents were out of town. Given the potential danger, the Institute didn't want to take the two of us who were under 18 without permission. The bright side was that Maguerite and I got to spend the day at Joan Baez's Woodside home. We went up there with Earl Johnson (a convict David Harris had met while imprisoned for draft resistance, who had become a good friend of Joan's as well as the caretaker of the grounds at the Institute for the Study of Nonviolence) to dig up a pipeline that Cesar and another union leader had damaged backing out of Joan's driveway a few days before when they had come to take her down to Delano with them to bear witness against the rapidly escalating violence. After Maguerite and I were done digging the trench, we hung out with Joan for the rest of the day and she made sure we knew all of the words to the farmworker anthem "*De Colores*."

By the next trip to Delano, Maguerite and I had permission to join the work camp in a car caravan down Highway 99, and we witnessed firsthand the intimidating-looking patrols along the roads next to the fields where the strikers were picketing. Nagi Daifullah's funeral was particularly moving, although the appearance of a large poster of the Egyptian leader Gamal Abdel Nasser made some of the work camp members uncomfortable (Nagi was from Yemen, where Nasser was viewed as a particular hero). And Juan de la Cruz's open casket at his Catholic funeral gave me the first view I'd ever had of a dead human body.

After having experienced the fields of Delano directly, I felt even more deeply devoted to the cause of improving the lives of California's farmworkers. I found Cesar's commitment to waging a nonviolent struggle inspiring, and I was impressed with the ability of the United Farm Workers to overcome decades of failure by other unions which had attempted to organize farmworkers in the past. The "secret" weapon employed by the UFW was organizing the support of people in the cities, in the form of the boycott, which allowed the union to exert economic pressure on the growers more effectively than would be possible through striking alone (especially when the growers had become so adept at recruiting seemingly endless supplies of strikebreakers, generally poor immigrants who knew nothing of the unionization efforts but were simply desperate for work).

Back in school, I began helping out with picketing and other actions on a regular basis. Although I was a shy and generally quiet introvert, and going up to strangers on picket lines was especially challenging for me, I felt so committed to the cause, or *La Causa*, as we called it, that I overcame my shyness and soon became a very effective secondary picket (the secondary boycott meant that we not only asked people to boycott the product but also to boycott the whole chain of stores selling the product, such as Safeway or Lucky's, to put pressure on these chains to stop carrying nonunion grapes or lettuce or Gallo wine). In my journal of the time, I would often note how many shoppers I had turned away that day: 21, 25, 31, 38. Anyone who has ever managed to convince Americans on errands to get back in their cars and perhaps drive several more miles to go shopping will understand that those were high numbers!

Decision to Join the Union Staff

At the beginning of my senior year in high school, I made the decision not to apply to college despite my mother's vigorous protests. In spite of having grown up in a small western Pennsylvania town, she had been able to attend Wellesley College in Massachusetts on a scholarship, and she viewed higher education for women as a top priority. But I was tired of years of compulsory attendance in classes that all too often bored me, although I was always an excellent and high-achieving student. In part inspired by Joan Baez, I felt that the most important thing I could do with my life would be to work on nonviolent causes, not learn about history and the people who led movements in a classroom. I just couldn't see myself following the automatic and unconscious path of college right after high school that almost all of my Palo Alto peers were following. As I studied nonviolent movements for justice, it became clear to me that the most important work in the world was organizing people to take back their power and work for positive change.

At first I wasn't sure what form my post-high school activism would take, but during the remainder of the school year, I continued to become more involved with activities supporting the UFW, as well as founding an Amnesty International group at my high school and participating in ongoing anti-war work as the war in Indochina wound slowly to its conclusion with the fall or liberation (depending on one's perspective) of Saigon.

During my last semester, I became enrolled in the alternative school at my high school, which allowed me to design my own course work with the guidance of a sponsoring teacher. I gained government credit by attending city council meetings on a variety of topics and by taking trips to Sacramento with the local UFW organizers to lobby on behalf of legislation favorable to farmworkers (with the new Democratic governor, Jerry Brown, in office, it was finally possible for the UFW to hope for fair legislation to extend to farmworkers legally sanctioned collective bargaining rights, including elections, which other workers had enjoyed for decades). I was there in the chambers when the compromise act finally passed out of committee.

In February of 1975, I had received permission to take a week away from campus and participate in the march to Modesto, where the UFW was organizing workers at the Gallo Winery. It was an incredible and inspiring week, during which we marched over 110 miles, starting from San Francisco, through the East Bay, and over the hills to Modesto. I was deeply moved to meet Cesar up close as he marched alongside us and then served rice to the line of marchers at the end of one of our longest days. The march gained widespread attention in the media, greatly increasing the visibility of the boycott against Gallo's many wines as well as showing the tremendous public support for the rights of farmworkers, which put extra pressure on the legislature to pass fair legislation.

The local organizers of the UFW had noticed my increasing level of participation, and several began talking to me about the possibility of my joining the UFW as a full-time

organizer on the San Jose boycott, which covered Santa Clara County, including my home town of Palo Alto. Just after the march to Modesto, Lynn Campbell was assigned to be the Palo Alto organizer for the UFW. Lynn and I had gotten to be friends two years earlier when she was a Stanford student also on the picket lines. In 1974, she had decided to drop out of Stanford after only a year and work full time for the union. Like me, she longed to make a meaningful difference in the world, and even though she was an incredibly gifted student, she soon found herself impatient with school and eager to serve as an organizer.

I had enjoyed seeing Lynn again during the march to Modesto, and I was delighted when she became the Palo Alto organizer. It seemed we had had a high rate of turnover among Palo Alto organizers over the previous two years, and I looked forward both to renewing my friendship with Lynn and to greater stability in our organizing efforts. After all these years, Lynn remains the most charismatic and effective organizer I have ever known, and she immediately set about whipping the Palo Alto organization into the best shape it had ever been in, using her incredible combination of personal charm, searing intelligence, and good-humored wit. Our steering committee of leading supporters became much more engaged, and many more people joined our picket lines, our delegations to Sacramento, and our meetings with local supermarket managers.

I remember one delegation to a grocery store manager in Redwood City led by Lynn with several of us supporters along. Lynn and the rest of us spoke to the manager about the justice of the farmworkers' cause and asked that he remove the products we were boycotting from the shelf. He began a tirade in which he accused us of being outside agitators. "Not one of you even lives in Redwood City! Why should I listen to you?" he demanded. Very smoothly, Lynn replied that her parents lived right around the corner and even named a local residential street and told him she'd grown up in Redwood City. She said we were neighbors and we wanted to support farmworkers and we'd be back, next time with picket signs

Later, as we drove off in her car, I kidded Lynn about her facility at bullshitting so convincingly. I reminded her of the well-known story about Gandhi in which he's asked by a mother to have a talk with her son and get him to stop eating sugar. Gandhi tells the mother to bring her son back in two weeks, and when she does, he simply tells the son to stop eating sugar. The mother asks why he didn't just say that two weeks before. "Because then I was still eating sugar myself," Gandhi replies. "So you see, Lynn," I teased her, "the father of nonviolence demanded absolute truth to yourself as well as others. That's why he called it 'truth force,' not 'lie force,'" I added, referring to the name Gandhi had given to the key technique of nonviolent resistance, *satyagraha* (truth force). Later, whenever we found out that the union was exaggerating or misleading us, we would wink and say, "There goes that lie force again," Lynn with that familiar delightedly wicked gleam in her eyes.

When Lynn began to hone her laser efforts on recruiting me to join the boycott staff full time, it was like meeting an unstoppable force. Of course it was flattering to be organized

so relentlessly by someone I admired so greatly, and her arguments grew increasingly compelling. It started to make a lot more sense to put myself in a situation where I would be able to work full time for social change, rather than have to get some kind of low-skilled job to pay for an apartment while I engaged in political work in the remaining hours. The thing I believed the world most needed was organizers and a movement devoted to the nonviolent transformation of society. By working for the UFW I would get to be such an organizer. And Lynn was excellent at conveying what in retrospect was the UFW mantra: “This is the most critical time in the history of the union” (whether or not that was really the case, taking the long view).

By the summer, when Lynn was promoted to the position of coordinator of the San Jose staff and Jim Hirsch, a sometimes moody but nevertheless quite charismatic organizer, was assigned to Palo Alto, I was almost on board. I was spending dozens of hours a week on UFW activism in any case. My only concern was wondering whether I truly had what it takes to be a good organizer. I was still struggling with my shyness, and I knew there were parts of the job that wouldn’t be easy for me. I also felt sad that I wouldn’t be able to live with my childhood dog, Tippy, who, at age 12, was beginning to show signs of decline. I finally made the decision at a house meeting Jim was giving, when he talked about the honor of working with the best people in the world on a cause that was so important. Jim drove me to San Jose that very night to hand Lynn a letter stating my willingness to join the staff full time on August 27. In the weeks preceding that date, I continued to work almost full time as a supporter and attended the huge union convention in Fresno.

Serving Full Time

Jim gave me and my duffel bag a ride to the decommissioned Sacred Heart convent that was serving as the San Jose boycott house on August 27, 1975. There were plants left behind by the room’s previous occupant, as well as a sink and a mirror and a plain mattress on the floor with a few well-worn donated blankets. The church had other plans for the building, so I knew we’d only be there a few more months, but for the time being it was reasonably comfortable.

The only truly disconcerting thing for this young Palo Alto woman was the cockroach population. Up until that week, the only cockroach I’d ever seen was a really huge one in a pensione where I’d stayed in Venice during the summer of my junior year in high school. The cockroaches at the convent weren’t as big, but their numbers more than made up for it. During the day, they stayed well hidden, but when you entered the kitchen at night and turned the light on in the darkened room, you would see hundreds, if not thousands, of them quickly scrambling for the nooks and crannies where they presumably spent the day. I can’t even imagine what they managed to live on, since all any of us ate at the house was breakfast.

I soon learned that the “\$5 a week plus room and board” stipend that the union provided for its full-time volunteers often meant that we had to “hustle” our own food (hoping

supporters would feed us during the day as we made our organizing rounds) and at times hustle our own room (asking supporters with spare rooms to put us up whenever the staff expanded for a particular organizing effort). Because of this, I didn't eat very well (too many people offered cookies and iced tea rather than balanced meals), though I have fond memories of some of our staff breakfasts. We had only a small food budget, zealously overseen by Ver Forbes, our volunteer bookkeeper and cheerleader extraordinaire (I still have as mementos a few pieces of paper decorated in multicolor pens by Ver with "Yay, team!" and "¡Viva la causa!" and the brightly colored peel-off dots she would transform into balloons.) At the start of the week, our breakfasts would consist of eggs with sautéed bell peppers and onions and mushrooms, along with cottage cheese and toast and fruit, but by the end of the week, we'd be lucky if there were enough eggs left for even the simplest bite. The one variation was when Dan Spelce, an amiable organizer from Santa Cruz, made a pot of his famous vegetable soup for breakfast. Some of the staff hated this and demanded eggs, but as a vegetarian I craved the brussel sprouts and other assorted cruciferous vegetables Dan managed to hustle together for his savory creations.

Lynn spent some time each day training me and providing me with extensive scripts for doing both personal visits (PVs) and house meetings (the two key organizing techniques of the UFW, which had come to Cesar back when he worked for the Community Service Organization in the 1950s by way of Fred Ross, Sr. and the great radical organizer Saul Alinsky), and I was also learning the UFW organizing methodology by going out with different organizers from the San Jose staff on their daily rounds. I use the word *methodology* quite intentionally, because there was nothing haphazard about the UFW's organizing techniques. We were trained to be incredibly disciplined about our use of time, and daily staff meetings and daily reports helped make certain that we used our time productively. Each day started with a morning meeting from 8 to 8:30 a.m., where we reviewed our progress and set our goals for the coming day and week, as well as receiving inspiring updates on breaking news. Then we made personal visits during the rest of the day and attended house meetings we had arranged through successful PVs. In this way, word about the union spread to increasingly larger circles of people. On evenings when we didn't have house meetings or other supporter meetings lined up, we focused on making dozens of calls to line up more PVs and to get commitments from volunteers for the upcoming weekend's actions. The UFW managed to ensure an impressively high rate of turnout from volunteers by sticking to the discipline of follow-up calls.

Despite the emphasis on using every minute effectively from 8 in the morning until 10 at night, six days a week (house chores and breakfast occupied us from 7 until the meeting at 8, and we often didn't get back from our territories until 10:30 or 11), I particularly enjoyed the days I spent going around with Bonnie Roberts, one of the organizers who managed to have a good time meeting with and coordinating the actions of the supporters in her area, while perhaps taking more breaks (for ice cream or some excellent cannoli at a local bakery, or to browse at Bread and Roses, a radical San Jose bookstore) than were strictly authorized.

The union was in a period of transition as I came on staff. With the Agricultural Labor Relations Act (ALRA) enacted and poised to shift the union's strategy from organizing strikes to signing up workers to set in motion elections, our specific campaigns were in a state of great flux. As part of the compromise under the new legislation, the union had given up the secondary boycott. Soon, instead of asking union supporters to staff secondary picket lines, we were focusing our efforts on delegations (for example, to legislators' offices), billboarding (holding signs at key intersections to increase our visibility and hence public support), and tabling at large stores to get people to write letters to legislators and others as needed to ensure that the ALRA was implemented effectively and fairly.

While the passage of the ALRA represented a huge step forward, the forces represented by California's growers remained formidable. Agribusiness interests donated millions to candidates statewide and had particular clout with legislators from the Central Valley. Even with a reasonably good law, there was plenty of room for bias and abuse. The UFW carefully scrutinized the appointees to the Agricultural Labor Relations Board as well as the policies of its general counsel, since these people could determine the practical outcome for farmworkers, especially in the event of unfair practices during elections or refusal on the part of growers to negotiate contracts after elections were won. While we maintained the tool of the primary boycott, without the added pressure of the secondary boycott, our picketing in the cities felt far less effective.

In addition to the UFW as a whole being at another crossroads, I soon discovered that there was a great deal of conflict going on at the staff level of the Bay Area boycott. From my very earliest staff morning meetings, I could see that Lynn, whom I had always looked up to, was viewed by some staff members as overly authoritarian. A movement such as that of the farmworkers is bound to draw rebels to its cause, so it's no surprise that some of the full-time volunteers chafed under what often seemed to be arbitrary or autocratic decisions and directions. I watched while Lynn struggled to keep people's spirits up while at the same time exercising her leadership and ensuring that we met the union goals, which were determined out of the UFW headquarters in La Paz. I felt my own inner conflict as I observed the dynamics of the staff conflict. On the one hand, I wanted to believe in the union wholeheartedly and I felt personally loyal to Lynn; at the same time, some of the criticisms raised by Brad Heil and Bonnie and others made sense to me.

I learned that any questions were greeted with a metaphor I grew to find increasingly disturbing. We were told by Lynn, who was the San Jose coordinator, and by Martha Diepenbrock, who was now the Bay Area coordinator and attended our staff meetings once a week, as well as by Fred Ross, Jr. and Fred Ross, Sr., who both made appearances at larger Bay Area trainings, that we, the staff, were there to serve as "foot soldiers for the union." We were not there to ask questions, make policy, or set priorities. While I had no desire to make policy or set priorities, I did find it hard to deal with the near-absolute authoritarianism with which such statements were made, and I found it rather self-

defeating for the union to seem so suspicious of even well-intentioned input that might help us reach our goals more effectively.

My own minor conflict with Lynn and Martha, which felt big to me at the time, came when Martha sat me down, with Lynn in the room, to let me know that they wanted to assign me the territory of Burlingame, which would mean I would be serving on the San Francisco boycott staff rather than the San Jose staff. I felt devastated by this possibility, as my understanding had always been that I would be serving out of San Jose, not that far from where I grew up, and working in Santa Clara County, where I had gotten to know most of the organizers. Although San Francisco was not far geographically, I knew none of the organizers there, and it felt like too much to absorb. I had already taken on a large personal challenge in joining the union full time. Because of my shyness, it was stressful for me to contemplate having to get to know yet more new people, without the support of anyone I knew, and in a circumstance where the only things I had heard about the San Francisco coordinator were, justifiably or not, critical rumors from the San Jose staff about his poor leadership skills.

I asked Martha whether she was telling me or asking me to make this change. While she told me that she didn't know why I was putting it that way and that the choice was still mine, she kept repeating that she wanted to let me know in the strongest possible terms that that was where the need was. My voice was shaky as I told her I didn't like the idea of going, but for personal reasons, not union reasons. She kept going back to "That's where the need is. It'll be hard, but it's important." I felt terribly guilty as I realized I just couldn't comply, and I also felt betrayed by Lynn, who hadn't fought for me to stay on the San Jose staff. As I wrote in my journal at the time: "Man, I give them my life 14 hours a day, six days a week—I don't like feeling like a scab [the derogatory union term for a strikebreaker] for wanting to spend that time here." In retrospect, I suspect that they wanted to move me to San Francisco mainly to get me away from the influence of some of the more rebellious San Jose staff members, since we certainly needed organizers in Santa Clara County every bit as much as in San Mateo County.

In the end, Lynn and Martha agreed to keep me on the San Jose staff, and I was assigned to be the organizer for Mountain View, Los Altos, and Los Altos Hills, all in Santa Clara County. I prevailed in this particular circumstance largely because I knew myself well enough to realize I wasn't ready to take on the double challenge of doing something so new and different (learning to be an organizer) in a place that was also totally unfamiliar. But the cost was guilt and a growing sense of inadequacy, feelings I mention because they affected not only me but many of the organizers I know from that time period. There was a tremendous sense among us that we were never doing enough, no matter how hard we worked and no matter how much we sacrificed in terms of our personal lives or our lack of time for doing anything unrelated to our union work. Working six days a week (and sometimes seven days for weeks on end during intense campaigns) left us little or no time for exercise, personal relationships, reading, or other leisure activities. While this could be

doable for a few months, for those of us who wanted to stick with the union for the longer haul, it was an extreme hardship.

Soon after the decision was made for me to remain on the San Jose staff, Lynn became very sick. After a few days with a high temperature and extreme weakness, she ended up in the hospital with what were later diagnosed as infectious hepatitis and mono. All of the staff went to get gamma globulin shots, and Lynn went home to her family in L.A. for what turned out to be a two-month period of recovery.

I came down with a bad virus soon after she left, which ended up being the first in a long line of upper respiratory infections that afflicted me during my time on staff. I went through a familiar cycle in which I would take a couple of days off to get better but then return to work too soon, never completely recovering. Twice (in the spring of 1976, and then again in the fall of that year), I ended up with full-blown pneumonia.

I mention Lynn's sickness and my own not only because they happened but because they were common occurrences in the union. We were all pushing ourselves far too hard, without nearly enough recognition of our own needs. We may have been doing it for the noblest of purposes, but it wasn't healthy. We were all very young (I was 17 when I joined the staff, soon to turn 18, Lynn was not quite two years older, and most of the staff were young people in their late teens or very early 20s), and we were caught up in the zeal of our commitment to the "most important moment in the history of the union." Given that the culture of the union was only to push ourselves harder, there weren't any safeguards to make sure we took care of ourselves.

In Lynn's case, the ill health of her UFW days may have had long-term consequences. When she was diagnosed with melanoma a few years later, the doctor estimated that it had probably started growing the year of her severe case of mono (a compromised immune system may play a part in the genesis of cancer). This wasn't necessarily the only reason, as Lynn was also a very fair blond who'd spent a lot of time in the Southern California sun growing up and had a family history of nonmalignant moles (which can sometimes turn cancerous). Lynn's melanoma recurred aggressively in 1983, and after a courageous 10-month battle, she died in April of 1984 at the age of 28. I find myself wanting to be sure that Lynn, who gave three years of her short life to the farmworkers' cause, finds a place in this history of the union. In addition to her own work for the UFW, she recruited dozens of organizers to the staff. And after leaving the union, she continued working as an organizer, both for Women Against Violence in Pornography and the Media (WAVPAM), the National Urban League, and the Funding Exchange, in addition to other feminist and lesbian/gay causes. As a bright and rising star of the women's movement, she was named one of *Ms.* magazine's "Eighty women to watch in the 80s" on the eve of the new decade.

Lynn was an incredibly gifted organizer, with great personal charisma as well as rigorous attention to detail and clarity of vision. Her mono kept her away from San Jose for almost two months, but even during her illness she kept involved, writing letters by hand to be

signed by UFW supporters at supermarkets in the L.A. area. Meanwhile, while she was away in October and November, the San Jose boycott staff experienced tremendous turnover. Martha was coordinating the staff with the help of Despie Fausch, but we lacked consistency in leadership, and Bonnie and Brad chafed under Martha's attempts to reign in their growing criticism of how the household was run. It's interesting to me as I read the detailed accounts of these conflicts in my journals that the heart of the dilemma resided in a desire for a little more freedom in the day-to-day schedule and a little more respect for the personal needs and creativity of individual organizers and supporters, not really any basic disagreements over the union's campaigns. Martha responded by trying to crack down and assert her authority forcefully. Again and again we heard that we were only "foot soldiers." This only incited further rebellion, most of it arising during our morning meetings, with griping and gossip late at night when we'd get back from our individual organizing territories.

At the end of October, Martha went to La Paz for a meeting of leading union staff. She apparently confided to Cesar that there were problems with the San Jose staff. "Fire them!" she told us he said in reply. While she fired only one staff member that I know of at that time, other staff members started making decisions to cut short the commitment of time they'd pledged to the union. Bonnie ended up leaving in late October and Brad left soon after, followed by Despie in early December. New staff members came on board, and I began to see that there was never likely to be much stability in the staff composition. In fact, I was beginning to wonder if instead of trying to cultivate long-term commitment from volunteers, the union leadership was content with the seemingly endless stream of idealist young people who would stay for three or four months, get burned out, and move on.

Meanwhile, I was beginning the work of organizing my territory. While I managed to set up many PVs and house meetings and raise a substantial amount of money for the union, I found it more difficult to line up a large numbers of volunteers. Jim gave me a hard time about it, saying he had gotten more people to turn out when he was the Mountain View organizer. What he didn't take into account was how many high school and college students came out when he was the organizer because they had big crushes on him. In fact, I don't know how much attention has been given to the reality that often the most charismatic organizers rely on a form of personal seduction in the organizing process (I'm not talking here about anything inappropriately physical, but rather something energetic). Lynn had a similar charismatic ability to inspire volunteers, and I'd guess that there were at least a dozen people in varying stages of being in love with her and with Jim at any given time. In any case, it was not something I could duplicate, and I kept feeling that there was something wrong with me or that somehow I wasn't doing enough.

In addition to organizing in our assigned territories, our staff was frequently on call for larger needs as identified by the union leadership in La Paz. Often we ended up working on behalf of candidates that the union had endorsed. In the election cycle that fall, we spent several days in San Francisco doing precinct work for George Moscone's successful

campaign for mayor. (I didn't realize it at the time, but we were working alongside People's Temple volunteers, some of whom would later go on to die in Guyana.) I still remember hearing Moscone's inspiring acceptance speech and the excitement of the crowd at his victory party over this impressive progressive victory.

As we moved into 1976, we also moved into a new boycott house. Our staff was a bit smaller, and we decided to rent a large old house on San Antonio in San Jose, which we would share with its owners (they needed more money and planned to live together in the largest bedroom upstairs, while we used the other rooms). Overall, it worked out fine, but there was only one bathroom, which made things complicated when our staff expanded. During short-term campaigns, we sometimes had up to 25 people crashing all over the place (by this time, the family we were sharing with had moved out).

For the first six weeks of the new year, I was engaged in putting on a premiere of the movie *Fighting for Our Lives*, which would serve as both a fundraiser and a way to generate more support for the union's efforts. During this time and the previous months of organizing in Mountain View and Los Altos, I met many wonderful supporters, including students, ministers, priests, nuns, and some military personnel based at Moffett Field in Mountain View. And I appreciated the ongoing support of people like Mark Sharwood and Jeff Richman, supporters from the Palo Alto area who helped me keep up my morale even though I was now in Mountain View. Jeff and his band generously provided rousing music at our union picket lines and filled in when a mariachi band fell through for our movie premiere. That March Jeff put together a songbook of union songs and related protest songs. This gave us a large variety to choose from in addition to the standard "*De Colores*," "*Huelga en General*," and "Solidarity Forever." The music and general *animos* (spirit) of our union events remained as inspiring as I remembered it from the march to Modesto back in high school, which by now seemed a long time ago.

Two places in my territory proved crucial in keeping me going on a physical level: the convent in Los Altos where Damien lived, and St. Francis High School, where longtime UFW supporter Brother Frank Robinson lived. I could stop by Damien's anytime and count on being offered some nutritious food; Damien had worked for the union full-time over the summer, and she knew we needed to eat (Damien was a nun at the time, but she disliked being called *Sister* Damien). And if I stopped by St. Francis around lunch, I knew Brother Frank would invite me to the dining hall, where I could eat whatever I needed. Lest it seem that I was overly focused on food, let me remind you that the poem and song "Bread and Roses" puts bread first for a good reason. Although we could have used time for a few more roses, we couldn't organize on empty stomachs, and the people who fed me still hold a special place in my memory.

Brother Frank worked as a mechanic on the school buses at St. Francis, and he volunteered his services to patch together the old cars the union had us using. I was assigned an early-1960s Dodge Dart, which Brother Frank kept running on the cheap. Sometimes our farmworker cars could be very dangerous. One evening the brakes on Lynn's car gave out

as she was going down a freeway off-ramp, and she only narrowly escaped serious injury with some adept driving (heading uphill immediately and downshifting). So I was very grateful for Brother Frank's support with my car; I've stayed in touch with Frank over the years, and he visits when he's back in the States every three years from his current post working as a brother and mechanic at a Catholic school in Brazil.

The wonderful and generous supporters of the union helped keep our spirits up even when things were difficult on the staff. It was deeply moving to see people's generosity in action, and often, as I'd heard Cesar say many times, the poor, or those who seemed to have the least to give, were the most generous of all—although the well-off of Santa Clara County ended up being quite generous, too.

The Good and the Bad

As I'm writing this account with my memory refreshed by my journal entries from the period, I'm finding it important to balance my account with both the positive and the negative. On the downside, I note once again the lack of flexibility of the union in allowing us to deal with basic personal needs. I got the one and only speeding ticket of my life early on in my organizing career (speeding because Jim was pushing me to make up for lost time one morning, but that's another story). It was amazingly difficult for me to get permission from the union to appear before a judge so that my fine could be reduced, and they absolutely refused to allow me to go to traffic school so that the violation would be removed from my record. Because we worked six days a week, 14 hours a day (or more), and because our day off (which was sometimes canceled) shifted according to the union's needs, it was very hard to plan or maintain any kind of social life outside union activism. I was allowed to go to a Holly Near concert, which happened to be on my 18th birthday (in September of 1975), but I wasn't given permission to miss a field trip to attend a very rare reunion that winter of some of my friends from high school. Fortunately, things were rescheduled for other reasons and I ended up being allowed to attend. Perhaps the way I've written these last few sentences will give readers an idea of just how much autonomy we gave up in agreeing to volunteer full time for the union. I had so much been looking forward to leaving the authority of parents and teachers and the heavily scheduled structure of school behind me when I graduated from high school. I hadn't fully realized when I joined the union the degree to which I'd now be expected to submit to another authority, one that was at times far more stringent than my parents had ever been.

Still, my dedication to *La Causa* remained strong, reinforced by trips to the Coachella Valley, Oxnard, Salinas, Delano, and Calexico, where we got to see the working and living conditions of the farmworkers and remember why we were doing what we were doing. Already, the union's presence, even in the absence of many contracts, had made a discernible difference in both the wages paid and the conditions under which the farmworkers labored. Yet it was very clear that much more needed to be done to ensure that the "people who pick the food we eat" received fair compensation and protection from the dangers of the workplace (in our house meetings, we often relayed the

information that farm work was ranked as the third most dangerous occupation, after mining and construction). On many occasions we also traveled to the UFW headquarters in La Paz, where seeing and meeting with Cesar and Dolores Huerta and other union leadership was commonplace.

Priorities changed depending on the union's evolving position with regard to the ALRA and elections. Because the union had gotten significant support from Governor Brown, the leadership decided to back his late entry into the Democratic presidential primaries of 1976. I had mixed feelings about this decision. In terms of messages to staff, the UFW always seemed to be running either hot or cold with regard to Governor Brown, although in retrospect I imagine union leadership generally saw him as a reliable ally. One minute we were told he was our closest, best friend; the next, we urgently needed to get letters signed to keep him from doing something damaging to our cause.

I'd met Jerry Brown on one of our delegations to Sacramento back when I was in high school, and although I'd found him rather brusque, I greatly appreciated his brokering of a compromise that allowed the ALRA to pass out of committee (shepherded by the brilliant attorney Rose Bird, who at the time was Brown's secretary of agriculture, and later went on to serve with distinction as Chief Justice of the California State Supreme Court). As time went by, however, my feelings toward Jerry Brown had become less positive on a larger political level. I'd happened to be listening to the radio in my boycott car one day when I heard him being interviewed. The interviewer asked him why he'd been so supportive of efforts to save the whales but now was acting against legislation to protect dolphins from deaths caused by dangerous methods of fishing tuna. I'd written quite a few letters in support of greater protections for dolphins when I was in high school, so I was very interested to hear the governor's response. "Why whales and not dolphins?" the interviewer pressed. Brown simply answered, "Because whales are big!" and refused to discuss the matter further when questioned about whether large contributions from the tuna industry to various legislators had anything to do with it. I was disgusted with the flippancy of his answer and found myself trusting him less.

Naturally I felt some conflict about going all out to work for Governor Brown in the presidential primary, but those were the marching orders for us "foot soldiers." We were told that Jimmy Carter was "a grower" and needed to be stopped from getting the nomination because he'd be bad for farmworkers—and that Jerry Brown was the only person who could accomplish this. So off to work for Jerry we went. Our biggest and most impressive act was organizing volunteers to drive up to Oregon, where Jerry Brown was waging a write-in campaign. I remember calling volunteers between 4 and 6 p.m. and asking them to join a car caravan that would be leaving at midnight that same day. They would drive all night and then work for the last three days before the election. I couldn't quite believe we'd get anyone to agree to make such a long trip at such late notice, but we managed to round up 16 supporters from our area to join the effort, along with most of the full-time staff. I ended up staying behind in San Jose to staff the office with Louise Music and work on recruitment of summer volunteers. Louise was particularly good at

giving the union recruitment line of the moment, which involved comparing the opportunity to serve on the farmworker staff in the summer of 1976 to the decision to “get on the bus” to go south and participate in Freedom Summer during the civil rights movement.

Regarding Brown’s run for president, if I’d had more time to read newspapers and get my news from a variety of sources, I would have realized that the union’s claim that Carter was stoppable (or even the claim that that he’d be particularly bad for farmworkers) was not in line with reality. In fact, by this time Carter had the momentum to just about guarantee his nomination, and Brown was most likely interested in greater negotiating power at the convention rather than seriously anticipating any chance of “stopping” Carter. Often the arguments used to motivate us staff were made in the starkest and most emotional (or inspiring) terms; looking back after the years have passed, it’s easy to see the exaggeration as well as the dangers of trusting any one source for all of one’s information, especially when that source has its own agenda.

June of 1976 was the first election in which I was legally entitled to vote, although I’d been working on campaigns since I was 13. I was excited to be 18 at last and able to cast a ballot for the first time. But I almost wasn’t allowed to vote when Election Day finally arrived. The UFW was working for Brown and several other candidates on the ballot, and I was assigned to help with get-out-the-vote efforts in San Jose, including driving voters to the polls. But I was registered to vote in Palo Alto, half an hour down the freeway. I just about had to go into conniptions to get permission to take the time to vote. My supervisor for the day kept saying that getting out the vote in general was more important than one individual vote, but when we called people to get them to turn out, our whole argument was how much each vote counted, and we often took over half an hour to help one voter who needed a ride to the polls. In the end, I was given permission to leave at 7:20 p.m., and I made it to my polling place in Palo Alto at 7:55, just five minutes before the polls closed. I cast my first ballot, and, putting misgivings aside out of loyalty to the union, I voted for Jerry Brown in the presidential primary. Since that election, I’ve almost always voted absentee to ensure that I never again risk missing my chance to cast a ballot.

In the spring of 1976, the legislature was balking at adequately funding the Agricultural Labor Relations Board and approving the appointees to the board. The union leadership decided to place an initiative on the ballot that would fully fund the board. In addition, as leverage, the initiative would provide provisions which had not been included in the compromise and which were more favorable to union organizing. The decision was made in favor of an all-out effort to gain all of the signatures needed in the relatively short time frame of six weeks. Suddenly, all of our focus was on collecting signatures. Days off were canceled. We’d be working 14-hour days, seven days a week, for the duration. And we managed to turn in 725,000 signatures, more than enough to qualify Proposition 14 for the November ballot. Farmworkers came up from the fields to help with the signature gathering, and Fred Ross, Sr. had us all taking brewer’s yeast to stay as healthy as possible.

During this period, I was assigned the role of office administrator, arranging logistical support for the rapidly expanding staff. Part of my job was to hustle food and lodging for the many new full-time volunteers, all of whom couldn't possibly fit in our boycott house over the long haul. One of my craziest assignments happened at the start of this process, when Lynn awakened me from a sound sleep at 2:30 a.m. She had just returned from a late-running meeting of the union leadership. She told me there would be 35 people who would need breakfast at 7:30 that morning and instructed me to arrange it. She was too tired herself to give me any inspiration about how to accomplish this feat in the middle of the night, and I no longer had an assigned car (as the staff grew, our small group of union cars had to be stretched even further, and at one point, Dolores Huerta arrived unexpectedly and requisitioned one of our few remaining ones). Lynn handed me \$20 and the keys to the Datsun that Mark Sharwood had loaned her.

I knew my parents had a freezer in the garage where they stocked extra bread and rolls and other items. I figured they'd have extra frozen orange juice too, so I drove through the silent night and went in through the back gate. I was trying to be very quiet so I wouldn't disturb their sleep, but my stepfather, Joe, awoke and was afraid there was a burglar in the house. He crept up on me, scaring the hell out of both of us. He was understandably a little grouchy as I loaded a couple of grocery bags with bread, butter, onions, rolls, and cans of orange juice. I figured that now all I needed to do was find someplace to get a lot of eggs and some milk, tea, and coffee. There wasn't anyplace open 24 hours in those days, but there was a 7-11 that opened at 7 a.m. (I guess that's why they originally took that name). When I got back to the boycott house, I awakened a couple of staff members at 6:30 to get them to prepare what they could while I quickly rounded up the rest of the items and rushed back. It truly seemed like a miracle when we served breakfast for 35 at 7:40. At least there was more advance notice for the rest of the six-week effort, and I successfully lined up food, lodging, and transportation for the staff and volunteers.

As the summer approached, Lynn and Martha were reassigned to the Los Angeles boycott. Louise Music would now be the coordinator of the San Jose boycott house. Many of my earlier friends on staff had long since left the union, including Jim, who had decided to take a leave when his proposal to work part-time (meaning 30 or 40 hours a week) was turned down. It was all or nothing when it came to working for the union, and Jim felt he needed some time to travel, read more, and maybe join a men's group for a while, though he planned to return at some point. At the same time, I had many newer friends on the staff, including a number of supporters I had helped recruit to full-time status. I was looking forward to working with them when Mark Henry and Louise approached me to ask me to consider moving to join the staff in Southern California with Mark Henry, who had agreed to head the San Fernando Valley boycott house. Although this assignment was presented to me as a choice, I soon learned it was anything but—the next morning Louise announced to the staff that Mark and Nancy were joining the L.A. boycott, and everyone gave us a big *Huelga* clap.

My two months in the pit of smog that was the San Fernando Valley were extremely difficult. Our entire boycott house (which was a newly rented, completely unfurnished little stucco home in Canoga Park) had inadvertently been left off the budget. For our staff of eight, only three of us even received the \$5 a week for food. So from the beginning we had to hustle everything. I remember how thrilled I was the first day I was out doing PVs and one of the supporters told me she had an extra shower curtain, some towels, and a few pots and pans she was willing to donate.

My assigned territory was Northridge and Granada Hills, on the opposite side of the valley from our boycott house, but I hadn't been assigned a car. Borrowing cars from supporters turned out to be largely unworkable. Finally I was assigned an old 1956 green Chevy station wagon belonging to Chris Hartmire. Its claim to fame was that Cesar and Dolores had reputedly driven in it to sign the very first contract the UFW ever negotiated. The Dart I'd been driving back in Northern California had been an automatic, and I'd had little experience driving a stick shift, and none at all using a stick shift on the steering column. It was quite a challenge getting around in this big green dinosaur of a vehicle, which broke down at least once every three days. There was a friendly supporter who was also a mechanic who would come rescue me and give the car a temporary fix, but often I'd have to wait for hours stuck in some god-awful corner of the valley. Meanwhile, I'd have to find a pay phone so I could call and reschedule my PVs. This was better than having no car, but still not ideal for L.A. (where everything is a great big freeway, as I'd tell myself as I sang "Do You Know the Way to San Jose?" to myself while driving). I knew my parents had an extra car, so I persuaded them to loan me the old 1962 Ford station wagon in which we'd made many family trips. I caught a flight up north and drove back down a second time in the Ford.

At least I could now get around, but that didn't ease my feelings of loneliness and isolation. I practically never saw Lynn or Martha, who were working in downtown L.A., which might as well have been a world away. Mark Sharwood, who had finally decided to join the union full time after years of being a super supporter, was working in East L.A. out of a different boycott house, so I didn't get to see him much, but I still treasure the memory of the two times we met to get falafels on Fairfax and the one and only time I got to the beach during my time in L.A. The other bright spot was the fact that Mary and Warren Campbell, Lynn's wonderful parents, lived in Northridge near Cal State University at Northridge (CSUN), where Warren was a professor. They were my salvation, and like Damien up north, knew how hungry organizers could get. I knew if I stopped by, Mary would whip me up one of her delicious deluxe vegetarian sandwiches.

I was organizing a territory that hadn't had an organizer since 1972. Many of the contact cards were outdated, but I still managed to set up a full schedule of PVs and organize several house meetings at which I raised a good deal of money. I was concerned, however, that the union hadn't yet decided whether to commit to running a campaign for the initiative we had managed to get on the ballot. The summer was rapidly passing by, but we

were focusing on general boycott tasks rather than beginning to organize for the November election.

I was also feeling homesick. At 18, I really wasn't ready to be this far from home with no end in sight. At least in San Jose I could occasionally get by to see my family, including my brother, Jeff, and my beloved Tippy. Here I was alone most of the long days. Usually I'd take surface streets to get across the valley because the freeways were the equivalent of going two sides of a triangle and often backlogged with intolerable traffic. The San Fernando Valley seemed to me to be one of the starkest places on earth. It was summer, and every day was hot and smoggy. I was feeling very depleted physically (I'd had my first bout of pneumonia in the spring and I still had an occasional rasp in my lungs), and I began to feel increasingly burned out and discouraged. I'd find myself daydreaming of Yosemite or Glacier National Park, places I'd loved visiting as a child, or of London, where I'd traveled in the summer after my junior year in high school. I was beginning to long for more than endless rounds of organizing efforts with no relief, no recreation, and no exercise, ever. Occasionally I'd take short breaks in a local park I'd discovered and write long letters to my friends.

Eventually, I came to realize that the only way I could remain with the union was if I could be reassigned to San Jose. I requested permission of Martha, now the L.A. director, at the earliest opportunity. At first she resisted, but I think Lynn talked to her after we had a visit where my desperation was self-evident, and Martha gave me permission to leave. I was on the freeway north that same weekend, well stocked with a couple of sandwiches from Mary Campbell.

I got back to San Jose to an angry call from Susan Sachen, who was Martha's superior as the director for all of Southern California. She threatened to have me fired for leaving L.A. without permission. I reminded her that lines of authority had been covered thoroughly at our last meeting, and that Martha was the person I was responsible to ask. If she had a problem with Martha's decision, I told her, she should take it up with Martha.

In any case, I was back in San Jose, and there was no way I would go back to Los Angeles. Once again, I felt that familiar sense of guilt and inadequacy that plagued many full-time staff members. Some of the friends I'd helped recruit had already left the San Jose staff because they felt they were being held to higher standards than they could meet. But I was determined to stay with the union at least through the campaign for Proposition 14.

At long last, at the end of August, the union leadership made the decision to go full speed ahead with the initiative campaign. They had apparently been holding off because they hoped that merely having the item on the ballot would prove sufficient to pressure the legislature into doing what they wanted in terms of funding and staffing the ALRB. Now they decided that campaigning for the proposition would also be a good idea.

Once again, days off were canceled and the expanded staff was working seven days a week; morning meetings were moved up to 7:30 a.m. so we'd have more time on the street. My high school friend Ann Harvey had joined the staff full time, as had Susan Welch, a Palo Alto high school supporter from the previous year who had now graduated. Of course we didn't have much time to visit, but it was still comforting having them nearby. Lodging was mostly in the homes of supporters. We were all working under incredible pressure, engaging in the typical elements of an election campaign: identifying voters, walking precincts, lining up volunteers, getting thousands of bumper stickers on cars, raising funds. I was helping administer the office.

By the middle of September, my body failed me, and I was once again diagnosed with a serious upper respiratory infection, which then turned into pneumonia. The head of the San Jose boycott assigned me to Palo Alto so I could stay at my parents' home, although I ended up sleeping on a fold-out couch in the sun room because my own room was already occupied by another UFW organizer my parents had agreed to put up.

I continued to work more than 30 hours a week for the union, doing what I could do by phone. Lynn was now back in the Bay Area, heading up the San Francisco campaign effort. On September 25, with six weeks remaining in the campaign, Larry Tramutt (now Tramutola), who was currently in charge of the Santa Clara County campaign, decided that since I wasn't able to work full time, I should no longer be counted as part of the staff, since it messed up the performance quotas. So without being fired, but without being acknowledged in any real way, I suddenly found myself off the payroll, though still working as hard as I could for the passage of Proposition 14. I guess it was the equivalent of being laid off. It was very painful for me emotionally, though Lynn assured me I would be welcomed back on staff full time as soon as I'd recovered fully. I kept trying to tell myself that I didn't care, but in my angry moments I found myself writing in my journal, "Damn you, Larry Tramutt, aren't I worth a lousy thirty dollars?"—which is what my six weeks of pay would have equaled.

The campaign went on, but from the start the forces were aligned against us. The growers had amassed a huge war chest of millions of dollars and flooded the airwaves with advertisements. Their favorite claim was that if Proposition 14 passed, organizers would be able to enter people's private homes to organize babysitters and house cleaners, none of which had any relation to reality. Despite the union's huge grassroots effort at the end, we had waited too long to counteract the tremendous force of the growers' campaign against the measure.

On November 3, Proposition 14 lost by an almost two-to-one margin. But meanwhile, the legislature had acceded to many of the union's demands, so from the point of view of union leadership, we had achieved a victory. Still, for those of us who'd been on the front lines, it felt like a devastating defeat.

Immediately after the election all of the boycott staff—and here I was at least honored with still being considered staff, even if I'd been off the payroll for six weeks—were summoned down to La Paz for an election debriefing.

Once again we made the long drive down past Bakersfield to the union headquarters near Keene. This time it was particularly bittersweet, as my health was still shaky and it had become clear that even if I was eventually to return to staff full time at some point in the future, for now I needed some months off to recover fully. I knew this might be my last time to see many of my well-loved comrades, most of whom were planning to leave the union and disperse across the country.

We broke into small groups to brainstorm about ways the campaign for Proposition 14 could have been more effective. Understandably, much of the feedback focused on how the delay in beginning the campaign had hampered us. In essence, we had wasted almost all of the summer when we could have been laying groundwork for the fall. A designated person in each small group wrote down notes and we reassembled in the meeting hall. As people shared feedback, some of which called into question decisions made by union leadership about timing and strategy, Cesar Chavez suddenly appeared, climbing in through a back window. He had apparently been listening from outside. He was in a rage, furious that anyone dared to criticize union leadership. He berated all of us and told us we were meant to be servants of the farmworkers, not tell them what to do. But telling the farmworkers what they should do hadn't been the intention of any of us. Indeed, all we were doing was the assignment we'd been given as part of the debriefing, to identify what hadn't worked about the campaign. Cesar continued to rail against us for what seemed like an eternity. It was an ugly moment and a sad end to my full-time work as a UFW organizer.

Life After the Union

I was in a state of shock in the fading months of 1976. In my inner world, working to improve the lives of farmworkers still felt like the most important thing I could be doing. But my body and psyche could no longer cooperate with this mission.

I didn't fully realize it yet, but my heart was broken. Some part of my idealism had died, and I was only just beginning to mourn its passing. I had loved the union and what it stood for, but as the weeks and months went by and I gained a little more distance and perspective, I had to admit that its flaws were significant. I had to recognize that in many ways I had been used, and I had used others. In the service of a good cause, yes, but nevertheless, we were used, and we learned to use others. In doing so, we had ignored one of Gandhi's central tenets of nonviolence: Never treat a person as a means; a person is always an end.

The most painful thing to recognize was that the people who hurt me the most were not the leaders high up in the union with whom I had only occasional contact. Instead, they were the people I was closest to, the people who had become my friends, like Lynn and

Jim and Louise and Martha, who within the system set up by the union sometimes behaved in judgmental and pointlessly authoritarian ways. But we were all so young. We hadn't yet had much opportunity to work consciously on our personal or spiritual growth or on better communication skills. Given the high expectations and stress we were under, it's amazing we were able to love one another as well as we did and accomplish as much as we did.

While most of the staff left after the campaign was over (many had only signed on for the election), some of my friends remained, and I met new staff as they arrived. While I finally recognized that I did not want to rejoin the union full time, I continued to volunteer as a supporter. In 1977, I moved to Sacramento for six months with my dear friend Ann Harvey, who was doing an internship at the capitol. Lynn and Martha had also left the union and were living nearby, and the four of us former UFW staffers got together often. The reports we heard from the Sacramento boycott staff were disturbing.

I will describe one such report to give a sense of the flavor since I recorded it in my journal at the time:

The bad news about the purge in La Paz was far worse than anything I could have imagined even in my more cynical moments. Bob and Holly were, by chance, at the community meeting where it happened and we heard about it directly from them. Cesar had called a community meeting of the La Paz staff. Bob and Holly were in La Paz on an errand and decided to go, thinking it would be the typical "De Colores meeting."

Cesar began by saying that there were agents in La Paz and that he was turning the matter over to the La Paz community. Kent got up saying he had a list of who the agents were and asked Cesar if he should read it. Cesar replied that it was up to the community. Kent said he guessed he should read it and began: "Dave is an agent because of so and so . . ." No concrete evidence was offered, just things like "He's been known to talk," "He said this . . ." Dave got up to defend himself, saying how much he loved the union and wanted to stay. Cesar, contradicting his earlier statement that he'd leave the matter to the community, refused to let Dave say anymore and ordered him to shut up and get out. When Dave continued to talk and sat down, refusing to leave, Cesar had his bodyguards carry him out. Kent continued with his list, which included Judy, Paul Milne's girlfriend. So it went with four people. One was fired for a bad attitude, even though she admitted her attitude needed improving and she asked to be given another chance in a different department of the union. The others present were pretty freaked out. Some people announced they were quitting. One woman said that she'd been watching one of the staff members ever since she'd heard him make a snide remark about Cesar a year ago. He'd been careful since then, she said, but . . .

Toward the end of the meeting, Holly, who was pretty freaked out, got up and asked, "I'd like to know where the rest of us fit in. I don't work at La Paz now, but a year ago I did." Cesar suddenly registered the presence of Holly and Bob and demanded, "What are you two doing here? You're not supposed to be here," and told them he was going to have them investigated. Then he ended the meeting with a final ominous statement along the lines of "We have one more name that we're still investigating until we have more evidence."

Of course, this story sickened all of us, especially because it was so reminiscent of the McCarthy purges of the 1950s, with the lingering question: "Am I next?"

And while there's little doubt that the UFW was at times infiltrated by informants for the FBI and had many enemies, the ironic thing is that the real agents were much more likely to be the ones trying to sow division among staff members. The people I knew personally who were affected by the union purges of the late 1970s were people of great integrity who in no way deserved having their loyalty and commitment questioned. Throughout the rest of the 1970s, reports from the union indicated a growing paranoia on the part of Cesar and other union leaders, and even some staff members who had worked for the union for many, many years were affected. It was painful and deeply disturbing to hear of these events, and I rarely talked about them except with people who were also former staff members. One of the few people with whom I had such a discussion was Laura Lee Wells, a staff member at the Institute for the Study of Nonviolence. She told me Joan Baez had said that the two people she knew who could least take direct criticism were Cesar Chavez and Bob Dylan.

Nevertheless, I continued to be an active supporter of the UFW over the coming year. The breaking point for me came after Cesar's controversial trip to the Philippines. I had helped organize a *sopa* (an event where we'd offer a simple meal of soup and bread and take a donation to raise money for the union) at which Chris Hartmire was scheduled to speak. Chris had to cancel at the last minute, and another National Farm Worker Ministry representative whose name I've forgotten was sent to speak in his place. At the meeting, many of the long-time UFW supporters asked questions about why Cesar would meet with a brutal dictator such as Ferdinand Marcos and lend him his moral authority. The speaker's answers were at best unsatisfactory, but both the speaker and the questioners had a civil exchange. After the meeting, however, as I gave the speaker a ride to the airport, he spoke scathingly of the Palo Alto supporters, whom he damned as "knee-jerk liberals." This infuriated me, and I replied, "Well, you've liked it well enough when those knees were jerking in the union's direction all these years!" I went on to tell him that some of the people in that room had been with the union since the very beginning, participating in the NFWM even before the 1966 march on Sacramento. And many of them had been active in human rights issues for decades and might just know more about the Philippines than Cesar. Maybe it was time to start listening.

Somehow, after that, I no longer had the heart to volunteer long hours for the union. I was moving to Berkeley to begin attending UC the next month in any case, and I didn't get in touch with the East Bay boycott when I arrived.

As the months and years went by after I left the union, I found myself thinking about the difference between being of service and being exploited. I thought about all the times we were told we were "foot soldiers for the union." I thought about all the times people were shut down for asking questions. I thought about what it might look like to build a movement without using people, instead treating them with respect and kindness. I thought about what it might be like to engage in organizing for the long haul rather than burned-out organizing for the immediate externally or internally created crisis of the moment. I still appreciated the incredible spirit of the UFW. I still believed in the rights of the farmworkers for whom we were fighting. And I still admired and respected Cesar Chavez, although I could no longer idealize him as I once had. I remained in awe of the effectiveness and discipline of the union's methods of organizing, though now I wondered whether it would be possible to be as effective, or nearly as effective, and also create space for people's voices to be heard, for greater democracy, for greater personal autonomy and a little more freedom, and for a less authoritarian structure.

Twenty-eight years later, I'm still asking these questions. I've been involved in many different organizing efforts over the decades, but none has ever seemed quite as well organized and effective as the UFW back in the mid-1970s. Few have managed to invoke the *ánimo* of music and song and clapping and *¡Sí se puede!* energy. Many of the techniques I learned while working for the union have served me well as I've organized my neighbors to break up the asphalt and build a park where there was once a parking lot and as I've managed successful election campaigns for progressive candidates and local ballot measures for funding for parks, libraries, and services for people with disabilities. I've never forgotten the importance of reminder calls or the power of consistent follow-through.

I feel proud to have been a part of history, to have done my best to make a difference in the lives of farmworkers. I am still an idealist, though I hope a more mature one than I was at the age of 18. And I will always feel proud to have worked with people like Lynn and Jim, Bonnie and Dan, Jeff and Mark, Susan and Ann, and all of the other wonderful volunteers who cared enough to step off the typical path of American life and work full time for *La Causa*.

Cesar's Death

I was shocked when news came of Cesar's death at the young age of 66. I found myself picking up the phone and speaking with some of the organizer friends I hadn't talked with in years. I felt called upon to journey to Delano for the funeral service, and a friend managed to arrange a ride for me on a Service Employees International Union bus leaving

out of San Jose with an old union acquaintance, Marion Steeg, in charge. As we rode down through the Central Valley, we started singing songs, but I found I was one of the few who knew the words to “Solidarity Forever” in both English and Spanish, even though most of them were active SEIU members (few unions outside of the UFW pay nearly enough attention to making sure their members know all the songs to sing).

When I returned from the services, I read the account of the funeral in the *San Jose Mercury News*, along with an accompanying article that seemed to demand a response. The following letter to the editor was published in full in the *Mercury* on May 6, 1993. I’m closing with this letter because it still conveys the essence of what I learned about organizing while working for the union.

Editor:

I am writing in response to the article on Sal Si Puedes [Get Out If You Can], the East San Jose neighborhood where Cesar Chavez lived and organized for many years (*San Jose Mercury News*, April 30, 1993).

While I appreciate the attempt to look at Chavez’s impact on the local community, the article seems founded on a fundamental misunderstanding. It raises questions about Chavez’s lasting impact since the neighborhood where he worked as part of the Community Service Organization from 1952 to 1962 still faces so many problems.

What was missing was a deeper perspective on how lasting social change comes about. Such change depends on an ongoing commitment from the community to fight to maintain gains and move forward. No one leader, however hard he or she works or however inspiring he or she may be, can ensure that thirty years down the line life will be better. The forces of entropy, prejudice, and greed are too great.

I attended the funeral of Cesar Chavez last week in Delano. I took some time to walk across the compound at Forty Acres to Agbayani Village, a housing cooperative built by the UFW in the mid-1970s. Nearly twenty years ago, as a teenager, I had caravanned to Delano to help plant seedlings around Agbayani Village, and I wanted to check up on them. I was pleased to see they had developed into beautiful, mature trees.

It was gratifying to know that my labors in the hot sun years before had borne fruit. The point of my story, however, is this: In the arid Central Valley climate, those seedlings would never have matured into full-grown trees if other people hadn’t been watering them and fertilizing them and caring for them in all the intervening years.

As we honor our leaders for the inspiration and direction they bring to us, let us remember that each us must take responsibility for creating change and for tending to the seedlings of social justice. Cesar Chavez was a great leader who planted many seedlings both in the community of San Jose and among farmworkers. But the fate of those seedlings,

particularly now that he is no longer among us, depends on all of us participating directly in the communities where we live.

I hope that those who live in Sal Si Puedes, particularly the younger people, will learn from Chavez's example the power of coming together to create change, and that they will take up the challenge to fight to improve their community.

Nancy Carleton