

Angie Fa 1976-1979

Over the past four decades, political activists who have gotten their training in the farmworker movement have gone on to influence the development of today's labor movement, electoral organizing, and cultural and social movements throughout the country. In the words of one of the earliest United Farm Worker (UFW) volunteers, the late Reverend Jim Drake, "No good organizing is ever lost."

Former UFW staff learned valuable lessons from Cesar Chavez and his mentor, Fred Ross. They received training that helped them go on to influence key American institutions. They helped rebuild the American labor movement, integrated New York's Broadway, and even shaped the 2004 New Hampshire Democratic presidential primary election.

While social movements no longer command front-page news stories, the alumni trained in these movements continue their work in important but less visible ways. The UFW had an incredible impact in inspiring the Latino and Asian-Pacific movements. Activists trained in the UFW went on to make valuable contributions to the women's movement, lesbian and gay rights movement, immigrants' rights movement, the anti-nuclear movement and the Central-American peace movement. One important example is the late Lynn Campbell, who dropped out of Stanford to join the UFW. By age 20, Lynn directed the Santa Clara County boycott staff in the middle of the 1970s. Before her early death from cancer, Lynn was named one of *Ms.* magazine's 80 Women for the 1980s. According to the magazine, after leaving the farmworkers, Lynn used her amazing organizing talents in the women's movement, helping to organize the first "Take Back the Night" march. After seeing Lynn's organizing skills, leaders in the women's movement asked Campbell to move to New York City, where she founded and coordinated Women Against Pornography. Later, Lynn also worked with the New York City effort to unionize domestic workers.

Many of us who had the privilege of serving on UFW boycott staff were so young that we didn't yet have families or financial commitments, which would probably have prevented us from making a commitment that provided only room, board, and \$5 a week (later doubled to \$10). We were trained by the UFW in our teens, 20s, and 30s, and after we left farmworker staff we had an entire lifetime ahead of us to apply the organizing lessons from the UFW to new arenas.

I was among five high school students from Palo Alto who joined full-time UFW staff in June 1976. Three of us graduated a year early to work for the union. But at age 15, 16, and 17, we were still older than John Brown, who had been conducting boycott house meetings on his own even at 14.

My nine-year-old son was amazed to learn that we cut high school on Election Day to help in the UFW's effort to elect George Moscone mayor of San Francisco in the 1975 run-off election. Some of us also missed a few days of high school classes to help out in Jerry

Brown's 1976 presidential write-in campaign in Oregon. The local paper wrote up our high school UFW support efforts in an article "For Some It's Picket Lines, Not Pep Rallies." I remember some of the students would spend their class periods handwriting letters to Governor Jerry Brown, urging him to change staff at the Agricultural Labor Relations Board. Later, we would go out to the co-op grocery parking lots and ask customers to sign these handwritten letters.

Like many of the organizers who didn't have driver's licenses, when I joined the full-time staff, the UFW assigned me to San Francisco. I grew to love the city, and after being sworn in as an elected member of the San Francisco School Board in 1993, I acknowledged in my earliest speech that I had first been sent to San Francisco as a 16-year-old UFW organizer. Within days of Cesar's death, the board made a commitment to rename a public school in his honor.

Some of us grew up doing UFW support work. Many of my friends in both high school in California and college on the East Coast were people I met as a result of the farmworker movement. After California passed the Agricultural Labor Relations Act, there were restrictions on the secondary boycott, and a lot of the boycott work turned to persuading stores to remove specific brands of produce. In some of our first days as full-time staff members in 1976, we dropped in on grocery stores, pretending to be students in a high school home economics class who wanted to see the produce coolers, so that we could look at the produce cartons and learn which growers supplied certain grocery store chains.

Over the years, the UFW boycotted more than lettuce, grapes, and Gallo wines. I remember being on staff for at least two banana boycotts. I remember getting large independent stores to boycott Dole bananas in the summer of 1976 in support of mushroom workers owned by the same parent company. Eventually, the boycott operations in the cities were taken down—in 1978, I believe it was. Before the UFW staff returned to build the union in California, organizers spent time giving back to the community, helping to build the Coors beer boycott in the West and the J.P. Stevens textile products boycott in the East. After Rufino Contreras was killed in the 1979 lettuce strike, the boycott staffs returned to the cities again. I think we first focused a boycott against Chiquita bananas, then against Red Coach lettuce, and eventually Andy Boy broccoli.

Being on UFW was a total life and work commitment. You lived and worked with the same staff in a boycott house. After the breakfast dishes were cleared out, everyone sat around the table for the morning staff meeting. The boycott houses were all very different. Sometimes they were rented, like the one in San Francisco's Western Addition neighborhood, which was then very much the ghetto and is now a much more gentrified neighborhood. Or the Boston boycott, where the original house was in Dorchester and the later house was in a working-class neighborhood in Watertown. My favorite boycott house was in the Upper West Side neighborhood of New York City, where apparently a supporter had passed away and left the UFW her incredible old brownstone on West 84th Street.

I used organizing lessons from the UFW to help create the first Minority Activist Apprentice Program at the Center for Third World Organizing, a training program for young organizers of color that still continues nearly 20 years later. We placed the very first organizing apprentices with the Farm Labor Organizing Committee in Toledo, Ohio.

It was a natural step to take the UFW boycott support model and some of the wonderful UFW supporters, like the late Father Bill O'Donnell of Berkeley's Saint Joseph the Worker Church, and develop the first community support programs for the Hotel Employees and Restaurant Employees Union in San Francisco and Oakland. Even today, as I help to recruit organizers and labor representatives for the California Nurses Association (CNA), the training, the experience, the contacts, and the organizing model from the UFW remain key. Today, CNA and other unions have established apprentice organizing programs to train activists to become union organizers. But back in the days when the UFW boycott staffs were large, no union had apprentice programs for training organizers or had problems finding skilled staff. Established unions let the UFW train activists and then hired former farmworker staff.

One early Latino labor leader said, "Without the UFW, the labor movement would be dead." Dead because it would be without the model of a modern organizing union, the skilled organizers to get the job done, and the public sympathy crucial to success. By 1993, the farmworker movement had produced so many valuable staff members for other unions that the AFL-CIO speaker acknowledged this contribution in the eulogy at Cesar Chavez's funeral.

An entire generation of very young people is growing up knowing Cesar Chavez and the farmworkers only through their school textbooks. One night, my fourth grader's writing textbook featured the examples of Susan B. Anthony, Martin Luther King, and Cesar Chavez. Young people, who have grown up in the years since the last grape boycott was called off, need to know that the core lessons from the farmworker movement continue to live on and improve our world in new ways. It is important for the 17 million Americans who supported the grape boycott to realize that the movement that set out to improve the lives of farmworkers and transform California agriculture has also helped to improve the lives of many other working people in other industries throughout this country and in many other movements for social justice.