

Scott R. Templeton 1980-1985

A Brief Personal and Incomplete Organizational History of the Farmworker Movement with a Focus on 1980-1985

My first exposure to the UFW came while I was an undergraduate at Washington University in St. Louis in 1976-1978. The boycott organizer who worked on campus was serious and persistent. Although he would eventually accept 'no' for an answer, he would not let me say 'maybe I'll come' and did not want to hear excuses. In retrospect, one of the distinctive features of UFW organizers was this no-bullshit-allowed approach to their work. Rev. Bernard LaFayette, a civil-rights veteran and close associate of Martin Luther King, also introduced the UFW to me in the course that he taught on nonviolent strategies for social change. I began to realize that the UFW had a track record of non-violent winning, of achieving contract and legislative victories against powerful agri-businesses and their political allies. The winning track record appealed to me. Some people who work for change seem too content to protest and not concerned enough about persevering to victory. Although the UFW and the farmworker movement do not always win, they do not protest for its own sake and usually do not give up.

My decision to work for the farmworker movement was made after intense discussion with my new friend Dan Thomas during my last days in the Philippines in Aug. or Sept. 1979. Dan wholeheartedly encouraged me and supported my decision to work for the union. In turn, I later encouraged him and his wife, Mila Thomas, to work for the union too and they did. I had lived in the Philippines for 15 months, from July. 1978 through Sept. 1979. I had lived for two of those months in a remote, mountain village in southern Leyte where some peasants were committed to changing the semi-feudal nature of their relationship to landlords, re-establishing democracy, and practicing liberation theology. I had promised my host father in Leyte that I would work to help peasants and farmworkers. However, I did not think that there was an organization in the U.S. that was effectively addressing poverty in the Philippines, the corruption of the Marcos dictatorship, and the complicity of the U.S. government and businesses in that country. I returned to Kansas City from the Philippines in late Sept. 1979 and soon gave away half of my clothes to charity over the perplexed objections of my mother. I went to St. Louis to visit a few friends from Washington University and to talk with Rev. Richard Cook about working for the union. During that visit, I believe that I also met Terry Vasquez.

I left Kansas City in Jan. 1980 and drove my rented car to work for the UFW in Los Angeles. I can still remember how impressed and terrified I was when I reached the outer limits of the LA metropolitan area, somewhere near San Bernardino. The highway—Interstate 10, I believe—was 5 or 6 lanes wide and all I could see out my rear-view mirror were cars bearing down on me. I had the feeling that the cars would devour me if I made one driving error. The people in LA and, as I learned, other metropolitan areas of California, were friendly but did not reveal last names.

I worked on the boycott from Jan. 1980 through the last day of February 1981 in various parts of the greater metropolitan area of Los Angeles. Chris Hartmire was my first boss and the director of the LA boycott when I arrived. He also became an advisor and counselor. Sue Miner was Chris's secretary and a motherly friend to me. I worked most often with two other full-time staff people on the LA boycott: David Ronquillo, who proudly drove a Volvo and was an intelligent, good-looking UCLA graduate from East LA, and Esmeralda Perez, who was bright, attractive, and full of 'animo' from Texas, perhaps Brownsville. David enjoyed demonstrating his street smarts to me and demonstrating to others my lack of them. My fondest memory of David is his telling me that I had quite a sense of rhythm for a white guy. A man named Chava was on staff at the time when I arrived or joined us in the spring. Chava was kind.

At the time of my arrival in Jan. until mid March, the boycott staffers were focused on the boycott of Red Coach iceberg lettuce, which was produced by Bruce Church, Inc. BCI had not negotiated in good faith and was one of the most recalcitrant, anti-union lettuce growing companies in California. Although the UFW had called a boycott of Red Coach lettuce and other products of Bruce Church in 1979, the union had decided in Jan. 1980 to also call a secondary boycott of Lucky, Gemco, and other affiliated stores. Lucky was the only southern California chain that sold Red Coach and other Bruce Church lettuce. (Lucky eventually sold its Gemco stores and then was purchased by the owner of Albertson's Stores.) The boycott staffers were organizing people for the secondary boycott with the house-meeting strategy. We made phone calls and personal visits to convince people to hold house meetings, join us on the picket lines at Lucky, or at least donate money. Larry Frank trained me briefly after my arrival and joined our picket line occasionally. Incidentally, he also spoke frankly about the purges that had begun in 1975 or 1976 and Cesar's much criticized meeting with Pres. Marcos. Chris explained Cesar's position on this meeting: Cesar was loyal to Larry Itliong, had received bad advice, and did not want to be second-guessed by white liberals.

In mid-March, the union leaders changed the strategy to pressure Lucky and Gemco stores. We initiated the 'consumer campaign'. I vaguely recall that during this campaign, I met or attended a meeting that was run by Larry Tramatoia. Larry might have been the director of the campaign. We gathered evidence on numerous instances in which Lucky and Gemco stores in LA and Orange counties did not have sale items available or charged more than the advertised sale price. We held one or two press conferences to publicize the evidence. At the stores we also passed out leaflets that informed shoppers about Lucky's unfair treatment of consumers and farmworkers. Store managers or their employees handed out a counter leaflet denying, of course, our accusation. However, this campaign ended sometime in May 1980. Although the campaign had clearly bothered Lucky and Gemco managers, it had not noticeably helped us galvanize support for the secondary boycott. As I vaguely recall, the union lawyers had decided or were told that the Federal Trade Commission would not take action against the chain. The observed over-pricing and lack of availability would have been deemed unintentional.

During the house-meeting and consumer campaigns, I worked primarily in Venice and Santa Monica. I enjoyed coming back to the UFW-NFWM office for staff meetings on Saturday mornings and then having free afternoons and Sundays. One Sat. in late March, I called my father to wish him 'Happy Birthday'. Immediately after I identified myself but before I could give him the greeting, he yelled, "Are you still fighting over that 'Goddamn' lettuce field?" I also recall a rich-looking lady who approached me on the picket line in Santa Monica and, with a condescending pat on my cheek, told me to go back to Russia. However, most people supported our efforts.

My primary residence during these and other campaigns was the Harvard house. Fidel Huerta also lived there and was studying to become a physician. His seriousness about his studies impressed me. The house was near dangerous neighborhoods and was in serious disrepair. Cesar came one night for a dinner or a snack and stuck his foot through a board in the floor. Twice I came home and found that someone had burglarized the house and had stolen valuables of mine, such as my Yamaha guitar, down sleeping bag, and down jacket. Fidel told me whom he suspected but we never caught him. However, because of its location, I came to know Flo and Sam Kushner and a wonderfully kind Filipino family at the end of the block. When I went back to school, Sam gave me the five-volume *History of the Labor Movement in the U.S.*

Sometime during June, we temporarily stopped the boycott organizing to work on Sen. Ted Kennedy's primary campaign. We all worked in East Los Angeles. Numerous staffers from La Paz and field offices also came to help, as I recall. We worked longer hours on the Kennedy campaign than we had worked on the boycott. Fernando Chavez, who impressed me with his good-looking clothes, worked on the primary campaign too. He was not a permanent staff member but rather, as I recall, a lawyer in San Jose.

In mid-May or early June 1980, Frank Ortiz was sent to LA to direct the boycott and implement a well-conceived letter-writing campaign. As far as I know, Frank was either the architect or at least a very persuasive supporter of this new strategy. Frank told us that the old way, the house-meeting approach, was not satisfactory. For various reasons, in spite of our individual efforts, we had not generated the support for enough picket lines to create sufficient economic pressure on Lucky. In the new strategy, we encouraged sympathetic leaders of organizations to write at least one letter to the Lucky Vice President and Southern California Regional Manager, Gayle Paden. In the letters to Mr. Paden, the religious, labor, and community leaders requested that customers be given a choice of lettuce, Red Coach and a union label. Mr. Paden and others in Lucky had claimed that they wanted to be neutral in the dispute between the UFW and Bruce Church. Why not, then, offer customers a choice? We asked the leaders to write the letter on the organization's letterhead, mention the number of members of the organization, and indicate that the members had shopped at Lucky and Gemco stores and were upset that this chain was the only one in southern California that sold Red Coach lettuce. We also asked them to request a response from Mr. Paden to the urgent matter. At the same time, we organized our supporters to participate in roving picket lines around the metropolitan area. At some

point shortly after we began in LA, boycott staff in San Diego also joined the campaign. I believe that Oscar Mondragon directed the work there.

After Paden responded with the company line about not wanting to get involved in the dispute, we asked the same leaders to write a second letter that, by design, had an even more urgent, concerned, and upset tone than the first one. Of course, no one, especially a leader of a prominent organization, likes to be ignored, patronized, or given nonsensical and untenable explanations. Hence, most of the leaders who wrote the first letter were willing to write a second letter that reiterated the request for a choice in stronger language. Their commitment to the campaign deepened when Paden responded. Some of them even agreed to occasionally join our picket line. We checked Lucky stores at least once a week for a change.

On August 25, 1980 Lucky Stores began to offer customers a choice of iceberg lettuce. I was excited about our first tangible success but also sobered. The campaign had lasted approximately ten weeks. Boycott staff in LA and San Diego had generated 270 first letters and 49 second letters. We had worked long hours for six days each week. We had succeeded in pressuring Lucky to reduce its shelf space for Red Coach lettuce and offer an alternative brand. We hadn't yet convinced Lucky to drop Red Coach lettuce. Bruce Church's intransigence at the bargaining table didn't change.

During the letter writing campaign, I worked first in the San Fernando Valley and then later in Orange County. In the Valley I stayed a couple of weeks with Mona and Rita Chacon, who were gracious hosts. In Orange County, I had the pleasure of working with Jeanne Giordano, Marty Schrank, and other stalwarts with the Orange County Interfaith Committee. I occasionally stayed at the Giordano's house. I thoroughly enjoyed their company, Jeanne's delicious dinners, our conversations, and their pool. I also worked with Al Herschman, Mark Sharwood, his girlfriend Jude, Kevin, Louise Anlyan, and many others during the letter-writing campaign.

Frank Ortiz was an excellent manager of whom I grew fond. He pretended not to be as smart as he was. Frank trained me well for the letter-writing campaign and let me know, through Chris, that he liked my work. Frank also improved the productivity of other staffers on the LA boycott. Frank cared about people. He lamented at least once that there were too many Hispanics who were unemployed and who had so much unutilized or under-utilized talent. I think that he saw what could have been his life in their lives. He also taught me and used the word 'poverty pimp', a term that still conveys a powerful criticism of one approach to poverty alleviation. Frank even taught me how to change the oil of the blue and white Valiant in 'Mexican' style. As you drive very slowly along a road with a curb, you use your driveway's entrance or someone else's to get one side of your car along the curb or sidewalk. Then you can get under the car, remove the drain plug, and, with either your fingers or a screw driver as your wrench, also remove the filter. You do not need a car jack.

Frank had the staff participate in what I will call the lite version of the game. Chris joined us in the new and milder game and argued for its usefulness as a method to work out problems among people who work intensely and closely together. Chris and Frank acknowledged problems with the game at La Paz. Although I have also heard bad things from others about the game at La Paz, Frank and Chris did not misuse it or deliberately use it to manipulate us. We were supposed to keep matters focused on work-related issues and we usually did. I remember being gamed about not taking messages accurately. I had a habit of not putting the date and time of the phone call on the message. Although I was caught off guard by this criticism, my bad habit was 'broken' then and there. Although I did not object to the game and do not feel damaged by it, at least two other staffers did not like it. On a couple of occasions, they came to tears because someone said something personally hurtful or they had misconstrued something as a personal criticism. I do not recall if Frank stopped using the game while I was still on staff.

We conducted a voter registration drive from Sept. 16 to Oct. 6, 1980 in certain districts of LA with a large proportion of Democrats, Hispanics, or both. Immediately after the voter registration campaign, we began a Get-Out-The-Vote (GOTV) campaign in targeted areas to re-elect President Carter and elect to the California legislature senators and assembly members who would vote for Howard Berman for Speaker of the House. After the November election, we returned to another letter writing campaign.

I recall a conversation with Chris Hartmire right before I left LA. He told me that the farmworker movement would continue with or without me and would be there if I wanted to return after my formal education. He gave me two books that he had personally signed with messages that still challenge me. I still have those books and treasure them. He told me that he had Jesus, Bonhoeffer, and Cesar. He had an unadulterated devotion in his eyes. I did not say anything to him but was uncomfortable with the remark. I had seen too much uncritical devotion to and hero-worshipping of Cesar during the past 13 months.

I left LA in the first week of March 1981 to enroll as a junior at U.C Santa Cruz and finish my undergraduate education. Dan Thomas had encouraged me to go to UC Santa Cruz, his alma mater and the place where his brother was also studying. I chose to major in economics. One of the main reasons why I chose this major was that Cesar had said at a boycott conference in Cincinnati, Ohio, probably in Feb. or March of 1980, that one economist would be more helpful to the union at that time than five doctors or ten lawyers. I did not need a better reason to choose economics. Support for the UFW became one of my litmus tests for a potential girlfriend. I planned to return to work a long time for the union and she would have to be able to accept my low-wage, low-status job or, better yet, share my passion.

I worked a second time for the farmworker movement in June 1982-Aug. 1982 in the field offices of Watsonville and Salinas. My duties included organizing the filing system in Watsonville, where Rafael Morales was in charge. I also helped Rafael with note taking during a negotiation in Salinas with an apparently hard-working Japanese-American flower

grower and his big-shot attorney, Fred Somebody. Shelly D'Amour also worked in Watsonville and was responsible for the service center. Her approach to her work reminded me of Mother Teresa. I'm not sure that she ever cursed. I also was given the job of developing a methodology that workers could use to cost-out contract proposals for negotiations with lettuce growers in Salinas. I spent a fair amount of time on the phone in the Salinas office requesting wage and hourly information from lettuce growers and developing cost-out forms. The farmworkers who were company reps and frequently came by the field office helped me as they could and were always friendly. On Sept. 24, 1982 the UFW and Sun Harvest reached an agreement. I do not know to what extent, if any, my cost-out forms were used or were helpful.

I worked a third time for the movement in Jan. 1985-May 1985 in Delano, Salinas, and Oakland CA. Similar to what had happened the first time, I had recently returned from the Philippines. I had taught economics at Notre Dame University in Cotabato City for more than one year. I arrived in Delano a few days after the 1st of Jan. and worked three or four weeks with Dan, Mila, and Robert Kasberg at the start of their in-depth study of attitudes of Filipino farmworkers to unions and the UFW. Sometime in early Feb., Cesar re-assigned me from Delano to Salinas to conduct investigations of interlocking and often hidden ownership and management of vineyards in Monterey County. My investigation and report focused on owners of vineyards managed by General Vineyard Services. I presented my report at the beginning of April to Cesar and the other members of the executive board. There were 18 vineyards that were interconnected. My report impressed them. I also remember that, after I had suggested some course of action, Cesar promptly and sternly told me that my job was only to present information to the board and not to give advice. Mary Mecartney later told me that the report was used in a lawsuit that the union filed. I do not know the outcome of the lawsuit.

In mid-April and early May 1985, I worked in Oakland with Fred Eyster on the grape boycott. I also lived in the apartment building where Fred did. I became a friend and later neighbor of Sauni Walton, his secretary. After a week or two-week break during which my fiancée and I got married in a civil ceremony, I went to northwest Ohio in June 1985 to help FLOC organize farmworkers to join its union and prepare for its convention. Fred Ross, Sr. trained us to conduct house meetings and was one of the main reasons why I went. However, I returned from Ohio in Aug. 1985, tired, disillusioned, and deeply concerned about what effect my summer work with FLOC would have on my marriage. I later told Fred that I felt as if I had had an intense, on-and-off-and-on-again romance with the movement for five years. But I finally had come to the painful realization that the relationship was not going to work. I left on good terms with both the UFW and FLOC. However, I did not have the stamina to sacrifice so long for struggles that were so difficult. I did not want to give so much to organizations that used some volunteers so cavalierly and were not very democratic. As much as part of me wanted to do so, I could not make a long-term commitment to these unions that did not or could not treat me as well as I needed. I also wanted to begin my graduate education and have a relatively stable professional life for my sake and the sake of my marriage.

During the three periods that I worked full-time for the farmworker movement, I was on the payroll of the National Farm Worker Ministry, but my services were always on loan to the union. I have three notebooks of the various campaigns in which I was involved, notes from staff meetings, and copies of weekly reports that I wrote. I have an entire shelf of books on the farmworker movement and one filing cabinet of newspaper articles, NFWM newsletters, and other pieces of info that I continue to collect. I have made use of a few of these materials to refresh my memory.

During the three times that I worked for the movement, I had the pleasure of meeting and joking with the Three Musketeers: Compis, Gilberto Rodriguez, and the most flamboyant member of the trio, Lupe Bautista. Gilberto and Lupe called me 'Scotchy' or 'Scotch-on-the-Rocks' con cariño. However, one night at the Harvard house in 1980, Compis and I had a confrontation. I said something that deeply offended him. I do not recall what I said and I did not mean to offend him. Also, Compis might have had a couple of beers. After I said whatever I said, he immediately got out of his chair and stood toe-to-toe with me in the kitchen and angrily looked me straight in the eye. He was mad but also seemed to study me. We just stood there looking at each other for what seemed like a long while. I was not angry with him but did not want him to think he could just scare me with his stare. So I kept looking back with bewilderment because I did not understand what offensive words that I had said. Compis told me later, perhaps at Cesar's funeral, that he had come close to beating me up or doing something worse. I would like to reconcile with Compis if I knew where he was and understood what offended him.

I have so much respect and admiration for Chris Hartmire. He is a bigger hero for me than Cesar. In his writings and personal remarks, he made profound sense of the personal and organizational struggles of which we all were a part and provided accurate information. He was slandered and booted out of the union shortly before I went to the Philippines in Jan. 1990 or while I was there to do field work for my dissertation. I was disgusted with Cesar and anyone who helped him with the purge. In my idle moments in the villages where I worked, I kept thinking about his huge sacrifice and how he was betrayed by those whom he loved and to whom he had given so much of his life. I would get profoundly sad thinking about it. I still do.

I attended Cesar's funeral and was glad that I did. Although she had never worshipped Cesar and had been hurt that I rescheduled our wedding so that I could work with FLOC in Ohio, my wife encouraged me to go to the funeral so that I could get some closure. A death, like a birth, happens only once. To my pleasant surprise, Chris Hartmire told me at the funeral that most of the UFW board members had welcomed him back as a union brother. To my profound amazement, Chris and Pudge acted as if they had already forgiven Cesar and his loyal lieutenants for their slander and purge a few years before his death. Willie Brown might have been enamored with his own financial wealth and political power, but he carried Cesar's casket for awhile and was sweating in his fancy clothes. Chris commented that Cesar had never taken the time to rest or never had the luxury to do so.

Only in death was he finally resting. Cesar clearly had the admiration and respect of thousands.

The funeral became a reunion of ex-staffers. I enjoyed doing the UFW handshake with *compañeros y compañeras en la lucha*. Humberto Gomez did the most memorable thing. He personally thanked me and other 'gabachos' for our help. He said something to the effect that he and other farm workers or people with farmworker backgrounds were profoundly moved and motivated to see us join *la causa*. Humberto's expression of gratitude helped to heal my wounds and honored my minor, yet personally difficult, contribution to the movement. As I recall, Bruce Church did not settle until the mid 1990s, after Cesar died.

My family and I moved from the San Francisco Bay area to Clemson, South Carolina in July 2000. On the afternoon of the first day of our five-day trip, I stopped at La Paz to visit Cesar's grave and take a moment to reflect on the impact that he, Chris Hartmire, Frank Ortiz, Fred Eyster, and others in the farmworker movement had on my life. Although Cesar had his faults, his grave was simple and reflected his unwillingness to financially enrich himself at the expense of farmworkers. I still have two UFW flags, one with Cesar's signature and one from the Orange County Interfaith Committee. I still contribute to the NFWM, FLOC, and CIW. I respond to Jocelyn Sherman's requests on behalf of the UFW for email messages to growers and politicians. What political street smarts and organizing skills that I have were primarily acquired through my involvement with the farmworker movement. Our oldest son's middle name 'Frederick' honors primarily Fred Eyster and secondarily Fred Ross, Sr. Roy and Jeanne Giordano are two of the finest people whom I have ever had the pleasure of befriending. God bless them.

Chris was right. The farmworker movement continues. On Sept. 16th, 2004 Baldemar Velasquez and the Farm Labor Organizing Committee reached an unprecedented agreement with the North Carolina Growers Association and Mt. Olive Pickle Company. The agreement covers approximately 8000 H2A guest workers in North Carolina. In the heart of the Republican South, a farmworker union just had a major victory. *La lucha continua*. ¿Pero como continuará esta lucha? To my knowledge, the UFW has not publicly recognized the invaluable contributions that Chris and Pudge made to the movement. To my knowledge, the UFW has also not adequately recognized the contributions of Eliseo Medina, Marshall Ganz, Gilbert Padilla, Jim Drake, Jessica Govea, Ben Maddox, Frank Ortiz, Ellen Eggers, Oscar Mondragon, Mack Lyons, Lupe Murgia, Jerry Cohen, Richard Chavez, LeRoy Chatfield, Marc Grossman, and scores of other leaders. I believe that before they die, these people should be formally recognized, if they have not. The UFW flag still flies in my heart and, I believe, the hearts of thousands of other ex-staffers. But the flag is worn and stained with tears because of things that should not have happened. May we all remember our successes and learn from our failures.