

Gloria Serda Rodriguez 1968 – 1972

My name is Gloria Serda Rodriguez. I was born in the Sierra Vista Labor Camp, in February of 1945. To those that don't know, the camp is located right by the Tulare and Kern county line road, about a mile east of Delano, California.

My parents both came from families that migrated up and down California and to different states, following and harvesting the crops. I also had a lot of experience harvesting crops. I often worked side by side with my mom and know firsthand how important we the farmworkers are to this nation.

In about the summer of 1968 or 1969 I became bored with being a "housewife." I wanted to do more, and the farmworker movement had been going on for a while, and I had this itch to get involved with a movement that came close to my heart. At that time, my mom was working under LeRoy Chatfield's leadership for the Kennedy Plan, the farmworker insurance plan, and she would now and then tell me how they needed volunteers. Finally, one day I decided to become a volunteer, and she spoke with LeRoy Chatfield and told him about me, and so there I was volunteering for the UFW.

I was sort of shy and timid at the time, since I had not done much after graduating high school, so I was not too savvy about how to handle being talked down to. (I learned later on how to overcome this.) One of the jobs I also did besides working with the Kennedy Plan was to process the donations coming in from all over. I would count money and checks, make out the deposit slip, and make my deposit and deliver it in a brown sack to the bank every day. One day the teller, who had seen me constantly every day, decided to get mean and nasty with me. In front of everyone, she decided to humiliate me by refusing to take the deposit because, in her words, I did not have the proper I.D. I didn't know how to speak up, and all I said to her was, "But you have seen me here every day and taken care of my deposit and you have never asked me for an I.D." She did not budge, and so I had to go back to the office feeling humiliated and helpless. I was very close to tears, in fact I think I did cry. I talked to my boss, LeRoy Chatfield, and told him what had transpired. He very calmly told me to pick up the phone and call the bank president and tell him exactly what I had told him. I, being to unsure of myself, could not do it. I thought, what bank president is going to listen to me! I'm just a former farmworker, female, Mexican. He, the bank president, is not going to listen to me! So LeRoy told me this is how you do it. We, the UFW, have too much money in their bank and they cannot treat us like that! LeRoy was furious too, but he kept his cool and proceeded to show me how to take care of the problem by calling the bank president, and he took care of it. I do not remember the conversation, as it was too long ago, but he took care of matters. Soon, that same day, the bank president came over to the 40 Acres and walked in wearing a suit and a big smile and apologized to me about the humiliating treatment I had received from one of his tellers, and reassured me that it would not happen again! I believe he also brought flowers or something of that nature. The next day, when I went to the bank again to make my deposit, the same teller was there waiting for me with a big fake smile, and I also had a big smile, but mine was real, for she had to treat me like everyone else, very polite and courteous, and I knew that I had triumphed! I felt 10 feet high, and from then on she never bothered me again! That was my first lesson on how to stand up and speak for yourself and fight for any injustices committed by others.

Over the years, I have been fortunate to have worked for people who have taught me a lot about working with honor and standing up for your rights and not being afraid to speak up. Most of my learning experiences were while working with the UFW. After I left the union in November of 1972, I did a lot of volunteering with the UFW and worked for many years with Tino Vasquez at the fundraising dances at the 40 Acres. I also did a lot of volunteer work with the American Friends Farm Labor Project in Visalia, with their yearly Mother's Day dances held in Porterville, under the leadership of Pablo Espinoza. I did that for about 12 years or more. While working under the leadership of Pablo Espinoza, I also learned how to be more responsible and take action when needed and be more self-reliant. Over the years, I am proud to say that I had obstacles stand in my way at one time or another, and I did what I had to do to correct the problems. I am no longer afraid of making changes for the better for myself and my family, and if it wasn't for the farmworker movement, I'd probably still be a shy girl living in little rural Delano, not knowing what is going on all over the world, not knowing that life is more than 6 inches from my face.

Life is what is happening all over the world, and there is so much to learn and so much to teach and so much to change! I now try to teach my grandchildren that the world is constantly changing and they too have to change or make changes! I owe a lot of what I am now to a lot of people, but of course, I am also a lot like my mom. She did not have too much schooling, but what she learned were the lessons life teaches you that you cannot learn in school. She grew up as a poor farmworker, and therefore learned how to survive! Survival, using what little you have, is only learned by actually living that life and learning as you go along. My mom always stood up for herself and for us. My mom is gone now, but she left us with survival skills that we all know came from her and we are better off for it.

There is so much that I could write about, but that would then become a novel. I hope this information is helpful.

Una companera del movimiento campesino
Gloria Serda Rodriguez