

(Note from LeRoy Chatfield: The Farmworker Movement Documentation Project owes a special debt of gratitude to Tom Dalzell for prompting this essay from Fred Abad - and carefully preserving it for twenty-seven years. People like Tom make documentation projects possible. 01/02/09)

## LETTER TO TOM DALZELL FROM FRED ABAD

1/21/82

Dear Tom,

Yesterday Sidro was buried and plenty came for their last respects. Cesar came and delivered some talk. It took Sidro 3 months to decide for heart surgery. He never recovered and stayed in the Delano convalescent home and also at the hospital for 3 months. He had been smoking a lot.

Tom, I'm sending more papers, some from Clara, and Nancie sent me an article — Exiled in Cal. But if you think it does not fit in the story forget it. Nancie is now in San Jose, still looking for work. She left Coachella not very long after the convention.

David Burciaga came to see me one evening and told me how he'll leave at the end of next month. The American Friends Service Committee, Cesar and David met in La Paz and Cesar told them the union does not need him any more. Cesar also said that they are not able to pay him much more and one of the two committees said David's pay is not the question.

David will open a service center in Bakersfield if his bosses will permit him to. He may go to Florida to organize farm workers — another farm union.

Tom have you seen Mary? I gave her more papers when she came one weekend. I like to ask you also if it's okay to ask some friends who came to help in the union? If so you'll know how to write yours and Mary's and friends.

How did the bad weather treat you? Damages in the storm was high.

I wish you are always well and in good spirits.

I started to read one of the books you sent me — Ireland. It is really a good book. Ken, in the office saw me reading it and he said it is a good book. Thank you again.

Tom, Take care.

Mabuhay,

Fred

## BIOS OF PAULO AGBAYANI, GEORGE CATALAN, AND CELEDONIO LACUESTA

by Fred Abad

In April of 1966 Paulo Agbayani dropped and died of a heart attack at the Pirelli-Minetti picket line. After his death the winery was picketed day and night. Not very long after the night and day picketing Minetti met with the union and recognized it at the VFW hall. Negotiations for a contract agreement was signed in June of that year.

The retiree village was named after the death of the dead brother. The village was inaugurated in 1975 (1974, Ed.) with the presence of many AFL-CIO dignitaries from many states and Washington D.C.

We Filipinos were settled in front of the village and (Jack) Henning the chairman of the AFL-CIO in the west coast at the time spoke. He said before the audience that we, the Filipinos, pointing towards us were the ones to start the farm workers movement.

In 1928 George Catalan left the Philippines for the Hawaiian Islands. His job for 2 years before he came to the U.S. in 1930 was in the sugar plantation. In Seattle Washington where he landed, he transferred to another ship and came to Cal.

In Santa Cruz where sprouts are mostly grown, he went to Salinas and worked in the lettuce and sugar beets fields. He also worked as an irrigator for the ??? in Co.

He went to the service during World War 2 in 1942 from Hollister, when released went back to Hollister. He did planting garlic and other vegetables. From Hollister he went to Summerton Arizona with friends. In 1950 he continued to work from one place to another till he came to Delano. He then settled and worked in the grapes till the strike in 1965. George was sent to N.Y.C. in 1968 with other strikers to boycott and stayed for 13 months. From N.Y.C. he was transferred to Chicago to boycott under Eliseo Medina, for 2 weeks. Back to N.Y.C. that winter of 68-69. He went to Coachella and Arizona to organize the workers. From there he was sent to La Paz as a security guard, then to Delano and helped in various jobs in the administration offices.

He came to the village in 1979 to retire.

In 1925 Celedonio Lacuesta went to Hawaii. He was 18 years of age by the time. He worked in the pineapple and sugar plantations before he came to America after 2 years. He landed in San Pedro, and picked lemons in San Dimas Ca. One month after that he went north to Stockton and worked cutting asparagus. The next Feb in 1932 he went to Yakima Washington. Then traveled to Montana and Idaho and back to Washington State and California. After going from one place to another in 1959 he decided to reside in Cal. — worked for John Pagarulo in Delano. He transferred from that ranch and joined friends at Anton Caratan. From Caratan he walked out with the crew in the 1965 grape strike. He picketed, boycotted in many cities in California. Celedonio Lacuesta came to retire at the Agbayani Village when the building was finished.

## BIOGRAPHICAL ESSAY

By Fred Abad

In 1929 when I came to America, Filipinos came in sizeable, highly visible numbers. I came with Salvador Abad my second cousin and Fidencio Dorpella, a friend. The 3 of us, in our teens had just graduated in what we call in the Philippines intermediate school equivalent to grammar school in the U.S. The three of us were really young but I was also the smallest.

Between my house and the municipal building, is still the national highway. The truck that took us to Manila, stopped between the 2 buildings and when we started to climb into the truck I saw my auntie and the girls crying. I was asked by my auntie how long till I'll go back home and I said not very long — maybe 3 years. I never went back. Because of my age and size, my teacher who came from the U.S. that year did not believe I was going to America. He looked at me with great surprise when I climbed on the truck, he said I should go to the provincial capital, because there was no high school in our small town, and become more mature. I told him that I'll go to school in America because I had promised my mother, but I never went back to school. The rest of our classmates went to Vigan and some finished high school and 3 became doctors and lawyers.

The crowd was big because beside Salvador, Fidencio and I there were another three more for the U.S., and two girls to go to school in Manila. When the truck started to move I looked through the window and saw my auntie and the girls with tears in their eyes. They cried. I hollered to them that I'll come back. I never went back.

Life in America for me was very exciting because of the big buildings in the cities from Washington to California. We transferred to a smaller ship from Seattle to San Francisco, and we all went to Oakland. I stayed for 3 days with my relations and then to San Jose, in a camp. I was impressed with their kind of life when I joined my relations in San Jose.

They worked as irrigators on a 150 acre patch of tomatoes and I had to bring them their lunch and drive their car if they were far to the other side of the field. That was how I learned to drive. In a few days I studied how to park the car by putting two stones with a

distance longer than the touring model 1927. My relations told me to read the license books so that I could go for an operator's license. When I was not yet a good driver one of them didn't work one day and asked me one afternoon to drive to San Jose, the distance of 9 miles. I parked the car somewhere on the south of the rail to go to downtown. From there we took the electric car and we went to Chinatown. We entered a building and I came to learn that it was a gambling house. I went outside where a great number of Filipinos were on the sidewalk. When Denis came out we went to the store across the street and he bought groceries. After we ate a cone of ice cream, we went home. We went again to San Jose after few days and the 3<sup>rd</sup> time I drove through the city without a license. I liked the situation and I stayed to work cutting onion flower for seeds.

I went to Gilroy then where 5 of my town mates were waiting for the prunes to ripe. After the prune harvest I went back to San Jose to pick cannery tomatoes.

Picking tomatoes in San Jose was piecework – 5¢ a box that weighed 40 lbs. Before the harvest started more men came mostly town mates. The rest worked and picked with the boxes while I did with 2 baskets. The box was too heavy for me, and beside if I transferred the 2 baskets of tomatoes in a box to the road, I didn't have to shake it and it held less tomatoes than the rest who used the boxes. There were times that I picked more than many of them. I had to lie to the other young men if they asked how many I picked. If they said how many they picked I told them 9 or 10 boxes less and they were laughing and they said that I should work harder. Picking was piecework and the price was 5¢ a box. Sometimes I used to make \$4.50 dollars a day. Only a few times I made \$5.00 a day. However we spent less on meals than when someone boarded us.

I did not take a row close to them in order not to see how I did. I used to laugh at Johnny because as he put his box on the road, he would feel his chest. I saw him do it many times a day. I also did feel my chest when I knew he was looking at me. I told the others to do the same when they knew Johnny was looking. When we got to the camp, at the west edge of the tomato patch I would sneak to the bath house. I was always the first to take a shower because the rest ate first.

During payday I told the boss, a town mate, to pay me the last. We were paid by cash. I told Vincent the boss to tell the others that he paid me \$1.00 less than their pay. That went on for three pay days and one evening when Vincent went to gamble in San Jose, Johnny and the others went to his room and saw his book. They found out that most of the days, I picked more. I always went to the field first as soon as I could see the tomatoes, still a little dark.

After the harvest Pulong and I went to spend our first winter in Berkeley. We stayed in an apartment in Shattuck Ave. but we went to the varsity hotel just in front of the campus. We had a town mate who worked in the hotel. We stayed until after the new year and I went to San Juan Bautista where relations were in a camp. There we planted garlic. We had to do it even if the frost had not yet melted. We stayed in that camp for the rest of that winter and went back to San Jose in March to plant tomatoes.

To cultivate the tomatoes a tractor pulled a pair of cultivators and two of us rode on the cultivators while one had to drive. The job was steady because we had to irrigate after the cultivation. That went on till the harvest began. I stayed in San Jose for two more years and moved to Gonzales to thin lettuce and sugar beets for 10¢ an hour. I stayed in Gonzales for a year and went to San Luis Obispo when Ben my cousin came after me, then to Pismo Beach then to Arroyo Grande. All vegetable farms Seven of us lived in a camp that winter and picked peas that coming spring. We had to go fishing to the Avila pier sometimes to pass the time on Sun, till the spring job started. When the pea picking was over in two months we went to look for extra work in Pismo Beach, where Japanese farmers grew vegetables. In 1933 we went to a ranch 3 miles north of Pismo. The job was all year round.

In April of that year 4 of us left for Terra Bella. We picked market tomatoes, squash and beans. The temperature in Terra Bella during the 30's from April to mid June was 115 to 122. We went back to Pismo after the TB season and work for a young Japanese couple. They were nice but the man wanted to pay us after the crop. We agreed but we asked for him to stand for groceries and to give us \$5.00 each Friday, because there was boxing fights once a week. Admission was \$1.00. There were Fridays that they didn't have the money and we told him, tomorrow we'll not work if you don't give us money to go the fights. He asked me to go and pick 3 crates so he can go to town and sell the 3 crates of peas to the Japanese store owners. We stayed till Oct. and we went to TB again for the winter. We went back and forth up to 1940.

The next spring of 1934 we went to Pismo and worked for a woman who farmed vegetables by the ocean. She boarded us \$1.00 a day and I liked it because she had a Japanese woman who cooked good. Our wages was 35¢ an hour and we worked 10 hours. The job in that ranch was steady and the camp was fair. The woman farmer was always with us and she worked hard. When I knew she liked me because I was a good worker, I started to pick with gloves. Nobody in that ranch worked with gloves and she came and told me not to wear gloves. I stood up and started to go back to the camp, she came after me and said that if I wear the gloves the others will too. I started to leave and she said, okay Fred. I told her that I always worked with gloves and she said alright. The others were afraid that they never wore gloves. I was not afraid because I knew I could find work in Arroyo Grande.

My town mate worked for another Jap east of Arroyo, 5 miles from town. After I left TB the next year I went to Arroyo Grande for one season. One Sunday when I went to the camp of the woman north of Pismo, Sutsomi asked me to work for her all year around after TB, the next year. I went to work for her because of the steadiness of the job. One day Sutsomi asked me not to go to TB anymore and I agreed. When the time came to go to TB I asked her to let me go and she said what I agreed with her. I always went back and she always took me back.

Back and forth from the coast to Terra Bella for 9 years till Ben went to the service and I was rejected. I went back to Pismo Beach then, I thought I'll never go to Pismo again.

One night I thought of buying me a car. I left then for Terra Bella and the next day I went to Fresno. I saw a Packard Coupe and I bought it after I tried it around. I took an operator in Porterville in 1933. I went back again to Pismo Beach to work till I thought it was hard to pay for the monthly installment. I left Pismo Beach for Isleton, lived with town mates. We worked as pear pickers. I left the job after two days because the ladders were heavy for me. The next day I befriended a Chinese dealer in the gambling house and we made money by paying my bet without even looking my cards. I paid the car with dishonest money in two years.

I met a good friend in a gambling home in Stockton, who had a camp in Woodland. I went to pick tomatoes and when the harvest was over I went to L.A. In the field I met my wife. She was with her mother.

When Mary Joyce and I got married in the early 40s we first lived in Terra Bella, where a friend was farming. We then bought a trailer house in 1944 and parked it in Earlimart on a lot. We were asked to pay \$400.00 and located by Leo's or Cecilia's place. The location of the lots for sale was on Oak St. We paid the lot little by little till it was all paid. I can't remember how long it took us to pay. (Cecilia and Joyce are sisters)

When I was working at Manko Zeninobates a young boy by the name Cornel came to live with us. One summer in 1950 a relation of our foreman came for vacation from Sacramento and had with her a friend. They were in their teens. The friend was a white girl from broken parents. Cornel and the white girl became boyfriend and girlfriend. Before little Cornel was born Senior Cornel went to the army. Months passed and when big Cornel came on furlough his wife lived in town and Cornel was born. The mother and Cornel got married before Cornel was inducted to the army. Cornel came to the camp on furlough and he showed me papers that he was sued for divorce. He told me that he cannot contest the case. I told him that he'll not see his son any more if he does not contest the case. He told me the wife already gave little Cornel to a couple, and if he fight the case he didn't know no one whom to give Cornel. He also said he had to report back in two days and be sent to Korea. I told Cornel to call his officer and explain his problem. He did and was given a few days. I told him that his wife is unfit to be a mother and that if he wins the case to give the little boy to us.

The next day, Monday, the case was heard and Senior won and the judge gave little Cornel to his father. He gave us the boy with the understanding that if he'll be lucky and come back he'll take his boy with the agreement for our visit. After 4 years he came back and waited 6 months before the boy joined his father.

When I called home and asked Mary to take Cornel to the camp she asked me why. I explained to her the matter and she came. We were very happy. She knew that father and son will get together when he got back from the service.

When big Cornel got married in Porterville he came for the boy and that was the day of unhappiness. My wife cried and held little Cornel and talked to him and told him that he was going for a ride and might stay with his parents for a few days. He didn't like to go but we asked and urged him to visit his father. He held with Joyce and both cried.

We gathered all his toys and clothes and put them in our car. The three of us rode in our car and Cornel and his wife were ahead of us. Mary and I talked to Cornel on the way and told him we'll come and see him in two or 3 days. The boy was sensible but reluctantly agreed — crying. In three days Mary went, took Cornel to buy some clothes and told him to stay with his father more. Mary told me when she came back that Cornel didn't want to stay but she told him that we'll go and see him again. We went to Porterville on a Sunday and the first thing the boy asked was if we were to bring him home to Earlimart. It was really hard for us to answer him and his father said he could come to Earlimart but to bring him back in 3 or 4 days.

When I came home from work that Monday I talked to him and made him understand that big Cornel is his father. He said that we were his daddy and mommy. It was really hard but we had to do that till he went to school in Porterville.

As time passed little Cornel understood and on Friday evenings he came to see us and go back Sunday afternoon. When he finished high school he was inducted to the service and went to Vietnam. After Vietnam he got a job from a friend he met in Vietnam. He drove a semi truck from Texas to N.Y.C. and at times from Houston to S.F. He stopped to see us when his route was S.F. He came to see me in Coachella in 1974 at Freedman. He got married in Texas and brought his wife and child. I've not seen him for a few years now.

(UFW Organizer) David Burciaga came to Delano in 1970. Before that he was in charge of west Fresno area — Mendota, Huron, Firebaugh, Tranquillity and San Joaquin. In 1972 David and I negotiated with Carakedian, and I became a (ranch) committee member after we signed a contract.