

## Chris Hartmire

### Tape 86

CR 124, SR 59

20:00:19      So, I've got a lot of ground to cover but I want to, let's start in the early days of the strike. How important was what the churches did and the type of support you were able to mobilize in terms of supporting the early, the early period of the strike?

00:39      Well it turned out to be pretty important. At the beginning...

00:42      I gotta cut for a second. My questions will never be on the thing so, so when I ask you a question how important was the early church support if you can try and incorporate my question into your answer so, so you would say the church, the church.....I want your perspective on....

CUT

00:46      Cesar said that the church was crucial in the early days of the strike. What, how did it work?

00:53      Well at the beginning church support didn't seem that critical to us. Um, I mean we were there and quickly tried to get people to bring food to Delano for the strikers and our staff was there with their cars and that helped with the you know the picket line but the main thing was that we began immediately to involve church people from all over the state eventually all over the country. And uh, they would come to Delano. And

they would see what they saw and then they would talk to the media uh, or if not they would go back home and talk to their friends back home and um, the growers were saying there was no strike, the growers were saying these were all outside agitators, the growers were saying you know Chavez is a Communist and yet we had Bishops and church leaders and nuns and others saying you know while we were out in the picket line today we certainly saw a strike. Um, we've talked to Cesar, we've talked to the strikers. You know we don't see any, any sign that this is uh, led by some outside force. Looks like a workers strike to us. And um, so basically without being too conscious of it at the beginning anyway that the churches were totally undermining uh, some of the growers main propaganda themes.

02:14 So, you, you obviously did a lot of traveling and talking to churches and trying to get them interested but do think bringing people to Delano was crucial to the process?

02:24 Yes. Not just Delano. Bringing people to wherever the farmworkers were on strike or in a boycott was always crucial throughout the whole process. Um, I mean other things worked also but the, the nothing could substitute for having people there, seeing with their own eyes, listening to the strikers, learning you know with their own hearts what was happening and feeling it and then going home with those feelings.

02:53 And then they become the people that spread the message rather than you, right?

02:58      Yeah. And that happened thousands and thousands of times in many many different events over the years.

03:07      Now when you came to the Migrant Ministry you had decided on an activist vocation talk a little about your background and what, what led you to working with farmworkers and your, your vision of the church's role in society.

03:23      Well I had been in seminary in New York City at Union Theological Seminary. In the summer of 1959 I came to California to be a Migrant Ministry summer volunteer. I worked in Santa Clara County. And that was my first exposure to farmworkers period. I grew up in Pennsylvania and where there were a lot of farmworkers but I was just, because I was a city boy I was just not aware of it. So I learned about farmworkers, I learned about the Migrant Ministry, I learned about the bracero program, which was a hot issue at the time and then I went back to seminary and when I graduated I went to work in East Harlem in uh, uh, what was called the East Harlem Protestant Parish. I worked with youth there and in 1961 the director of the California Migrant Ministry left and uh, went to Chicago. And he came to East and with the help of the National Council of Churches they just started putting pressure on me to come to California. I would never have come, I'd still be in East Harlem except um, my wife was assaulted, uh, with her baby in her arms in an elevator in East Harlem and she began to not feel at home so slowly but surely I realized that this was not gonna work for us as a family. So that was happening at the same time that Doug Still who was my predecessor was coming after me to come to California so I went to California to be the director of the California

Migrant Ministry in 1961. Very green, very young, um, and not really happy to go.

04:51 But did you have a vision of, of what, what as, as a priest what the church could do to, to change people's lives or to support them?

05:02 Well I was, I was trained in the Seminary and in a period in the church's history where uh, we, we all, at least those of us who were together at Union Seminary, we all believed that the church had a responsibility to be you know in the world especially where people you know were in trouble and um, not only to preach the Gospel but also to embrace other human needs and to respond to people where they were. So I mean I, it was the time of the Civil Rights Movement. You know I ended up being in a Freedom Ride in 1961. So yes I believed that the church had a responsibility to be involved in the, in people's lives, in the issues of our society and in change for justice. So that was my background when I went to California and uh....

05:56 But even so, California was a completely new world.

05:58 Com...California was, except for that summer experience you know California was completely new to me and as I say it wasn't really, I was kind of like a reluctant dragon going to California.

06:09 Um, now part of the original thought of the church helping the poor really came into conflict when you started working with the union because you ran into a church establishment that had other values.

06:23     Yeah, I mean obviously I'd been aware of that all along. Um, but I mean as a phenomenon I hadn't experienced it the way you know we experienced it in California.

06:34     What happened when you talked to the church people in Delano?

06:38     Well I mean you had to, California Migrant Ministry, I mean Migrant Ministry goes back to 1920. I mean this was like uh, this was a much beloved, I would say a much beloved and much ignored ministry of the church. I mean uh, we didn't have much money, we didn't have a lot of support but people, people throughout the main stream Protestant denominations believed that the Migrant Ministry was a good thing. And uh, so we'd been around for a long time, we knew a lot of people. Uh, we were doing all these wonderful, charitable, service things and daily vacation bible school and you know worship services for people and recreation for kids and nurses and labor camps and you name it, we tried it. Food baskets, Christmas toys...

07:21     And you tried doing something else and all the sudden the response changes.

07:24     Yeah well, after we were visible in Delano everything changed. Most of our work had been with local church people, encouraging them to work with the farmworkers in their communities especially during the summer. So, but as soon as we were visible, it took a little while, maybe a few weeks. As soon as we were visible supporting the strikers in Delano

than we were like persona, persona non grata in almost every church everywhere. And uh, I think in most, most valley churches, whatever valley, San Joaquin Valley, Coachella Valley, Imperial Valley, you name it. In all valley churches uh. we were seen as traitors you know as uh, as uh, people who were supporting this Communist, this radical, this agitator, this person who's trying to change a wonderful you know beautiful United Nations like communities of you know of people getting along happily and uh, we were you know Cesar was trying to change it the farmworkers were trying to change it and we traitorous, white church people were siding with them. So the reaction, I mean Cesar used to say Chris you know they're when we would go to meetings together he says they're, they're madder at you than they are at me. And the reason was we were seen as like turncoats.

08:47     What'd that feel like?

08:59     I was, I mean going to meetings in the San Joaquin Valley in 1965, and 66 and 67 at first was like you know I didn't know what to expect. But you know if I had gone to a Migrant Ministry sponsored meeting in 1964 there would have been twenty people there but in 1965 and 66 the churches, you know the churches were full and overfull. In some cases people were on the lawn waiting to get in. And uh, most of them were there to you know, most of them were angry. Most of them wanted uh, me to understand you know their point of view. Most of them were um, were sure that we were ignorant and uh, naive and didn't know what we were doing and if we knew we wouldn't be doing it. So the, the environment was extremely hostile. At first I'm sure, I don't have any tapes but I'm sure I tried to serve like win my way but very quickly I realized that I was not gonna

change anybody's mind and so I started just speaking to the very few people who were there supporting us, so that they would be armed to deal with their neighbors and their friends and anybody else that was gonna be arguing with them because the rest could not, could not change their minds. They were economically trapped in uh, in opposition to where we were.

10:24 And these were the same people who had when you were doing the bible study classes thought you were the experts, right?

10:31 Exactly. They were not all the same people but most of 'em, many. I, I must say there were people in every church and there were even some ministers in the San Joaquin Valley who were supportive. Some vocally, some quietly. But who, who believed that it was about time and who believed us 'cause they knew us well and they knew we wouldn't be doing this and we wouldn't be risking the finances of the Migrant Ministry over something that was just trivial and unimportant. So we had friends but um, uh, there weren't enough friends to, to open the door of any institution. We couldn't have meetings in churches.

CUT

CR 125, SR 59

11:21 Chris let's talk, let's talk a little bit more about, about how it was if the church was there.

11:29 Well the church was there because the Migrant Ministry was there. So I mean you, in a way you have to say all the church women,

particularly church women who started the Migrant Ministry in New Jersey and then in California in the 20's and 30's. And so there was like always a Migrant Ministry from the 20's and 30's on. So that every summer at least there were people working with farmworkers all over the state of California. And most of them, most of that work coordinated by the group called the California Migrant Ministry in our state. The Arizona Migrant Ministry, the Indiana Migrant Ministry etc., but in California it was the California Migrant Ministry. So we were there and every summer we were there and in California we were there not only summers but year round. And what happened was a lot of really good hearted church people who didn't much understand the, the dynamics of it, the political or economic dynamics of it, fell in love with farmworkers and their kids. And then every year they saw year after year after year that, that nothing ever changed. No matter how much they tried, no matter what they did, nothing ever changed it was like the same thing, the same families, the same children, the same dirt floors in the shacks, the same kids playing you know in ditches and in any, you know the same poverty, the same hunger, the same health problems, always the same nothing ever different. And uh, so most Migrant Ministry, Ministry people no matter what their political affiliation somewhere in their heart yearned that this would change and they didn't know how to change it. We didn't know how to change it. So then in the midst of this reality Cesar and the National Farmworkers Association comes along to organize farmworkers so that they can change the situation themselves. And most of us were just ready in fact our summer volunteers used to push us at the end of every summer, you know like why aren't you organizing? Something. Why aren't, why, why isn't this changing? They were all feeling guilty going back to college, right? So they want us to change it so next summer it'll be better.

But uh, so we didn't, fortunately we didn't try 'cause we would have mucked it up real bad. But Cesar came and there he was and they were organizing and it was just like the most natural thing in the world for us to support what farmworkers were trying to do to change their own conditions so that we didn't, they could buy toys for their own kids. So they could ne, negotiate a decent wage. So they could take care of the problems they encounter with labor contractors and with no toilets and with no clean drinking water and God knows what else, right? So it was natural for us. Fortunately we had no idea how difficult it was going to be. But so Migrant Ministry was there, Cesar came along, it was just natural. And, and he, he made sure we knew what he was doing. Prior to the strikes of 65 Cesar used to come to our staff retreats, I would stop in Delano on my trips to the valley. He always made sure that we knew what was going on and why. And he let us help us, help him in little ways. Uh, not with money or anything like that but in little ways he let us help us. And so he established that connection and made sure that it got stronger and stronger so that in 65 when the strike happened, he wasn't expecting it then, he said can you help? And I probably was the only one who knew that this was gonna be somewhat difficult, right? But I fortunately I had no idea how difficult it was gonna be. But even if I had said no Cesar this is like, this is too diff, this is too complicated, this is too political. Why denominations that support the Migrant Ministry will not support this. I'm just so sorry. I mean even if I had taken that position our staff would've gone to Delano anyway. I mean by that time they were so committed to change. Uh, but we said yeah. Yeah we'll help in these little ways and then it got...

15:25 It got bigger and bigger though. I mean I'm thinking...

15:27 It got bigger and bigger and uh,

15:29 Earlier, earlier, early in the strike, early in 65 when, when a bunch of priests organized a, a demonstration that led to people being arrested, do you remember that?

15:39 Yeah. Actually when you think about it, it was pretty amazing and um, we were sort of like available with our hearts open and Cesar was thinking about it all time, how to make use of this resource, right? So it was, couldn't have been a week after the strike started that we had people from, religious leaders from the National Council of Churches, from the State Council of Churches, from denominational groups in Delano to observe. That was when Bishop Sumner Walters from Stockton got dusted by a, by a crop duster and um, anyway they were the first high level group but that, that happened like a week after the strike started. And they made a public statement and then they made a study report that other churches could use. And then I mean like a week or two after that was when the Kern County sheriff said strikers can't cry Huelga! And uh, so Cesar thought that was a little, carrying things a little far, right? Constitutionally speaking. So we gathered a whole bunch of church people and, and Helen and some strikers and we all went out to the picket line and started shouting Huelga! And um, and of course they arrested everybody. And um, then those folks went home, they got out of jail they went home and they started telling everybody in their churches and whatever and it just you know (pause) the needs of the strikers were so obvi, first their courage. Their sacrifice was so obvious to people who came to see and their needs were so obvious and so clear that

peoples were touched in their hearts and then they would go home and do you know whatever it took. These people need our help. And you gotta remember it was like the Civil Rights time, right? So people from the cities were not surprised when people from the valley said you know these are Communists, these are outside agitators. I mean it was just like a replay of the South. So there was a lot of understanding you know that maybe the local people who say they know more than we do don't really know more than we do. Uh, they know something but they don't know the whole situation. So that was also, the background of that was, was a big help to us.

18:00      Tell me something in terms of personally what it felt like to have this caring and to finally be in a situation where you felt it was working and, and were going in the right direction. What, what did it feel like?

18:19      There was some worry right like our support from the, from the rural areas was drying up so there was some like administrative worry and then I was the one who had to report to the, to the committees. You know there was the Northern California Migrant Commission and the Southern California Migrant Commission that together they made, and then we reported the Council of Churches and the Council of Churches was made up of the denominations. So like the more controversial the Migrant Ministry became the more work there was with these constituencies to make sure that they were on board, that they knew exactly what happened and why. And so there was that kind of like administrative work. Which sometimes was tense and sometimes frustrating. Sometimes a burden.

19:03      But it was balanced by something personal wasn't it?

19:06 But it was like, it, it was like a minor thing. Because we were so busy actually you know doing the work of organizing the support. Being in Delano organizing the support, getting church people there. Seeing 'em you know turn on and get excited and go home and do their stuff so that like, it was, it was you know we were, it's hard to say we were enjoying it but we were certainly getting a lot of spiritual, human satisfaction out of this struggle. And never felt like we were doing enough. It always seemed like the farmworkers were doing that much more. So whatever we did we never really felt like we were doing enough. And um, and the administrative stuff was just like a detail that I had to handle, the rest of our staff didn't really have to worry about it that much and pretty soon the financial support from the urban areas was more than taking the place of the financial support we were losing in the rural areas. All of the sudden the Migrant Ministry in many people's minds was something worth supporting because we weren't just doing Christmas toys and Thanksgiving turkeys and you know we were, we were trying, we were involved in, in changing the situation.

20:17 Now as the, as the story continued uh, the next faze really evolved in the next few years that, that in a certain part of the boycott was a national boycott. The church played a crucial role in the grape boycott.

20:35 Yes. Um, I think looking back the church's involvement was crucial especially in the earliest days because the growers strategy obviously is isolate these strikers in this local setting and then bring all of our resources to bear and crush them, right? And of course Cesar's strategy was to make this event visible way beyond Delano. And the church became a major,

major part of telling this story all over the place. So that the growers were just like constantly frustrated. First of all their propaganda was being countered by these you know believable church people. I mean why would somebody come from San Francisco to see a picket line and lie about it. I mean everyone knew why the growers would lie about it, right? But certainly this Bishop from Stockton wouldn't lie about it. And uh, and plus we were making it more and more visible. So it was like uh, the church confused the growers. I think they just didn't know how to deal with it and it also effected them psychologically or emotionally because it was like their church. I mean this like my local Methodist Church was in fact connected to the Council of Churches which was in fact supporting this Migrant Ministry. So I mean like anyway...

21:59 They must have felt betrayed, right? They thought they had a.....

22:02 Yeah, it's kind of funny. See every, I think I would I never researched this but I believe every local church in every valley of California that was connected to a main stream denomination took a position, I uh, voted on a position to cut off support for the Council of Churches or the Migrant Ministry or the denomination support for the Migrant Ministry.

CUT

**TAPE 87**

CR 126, SR 60

30:10 Ok Chris let's, do you have any specific ideas about boycott...

30:14 Well I wanted to finish what I started before in terms of the growers and the churches and their embarrassment that their church was involved. So um, they were obviously trying to...

30:25 Wait a second. Shut the door Matthew. Ok go ahead.

30:29 The, the growers in these local churches like the local Methodist Church, the local Presbyterian Church, the local Episcopal Church or whatever right? They were trying to get their denomination to withdraw support for the Council of Churches which supported the Migrant Ministry. And church executives would write back and say I just thought you'd wanna know that you know that there really is only two mills out of your you know out of your pledge to your local church that ends up going through the Council of Churches to the Migrant Ministry and the growers responded quite appropriately, it's the principle of the thing. It has nothing to do with the amount of money. It's the fact that some of our money are supporting these new radical ministers, supporting this Communist in Delano. So anyway every denomination because of that, every denomination went through like a two or three period of war over whether the, not whether the farmworker's struggle was just and right but whether the Migrant Ministry should be supporting it. So once they resolved that then they could deal with the other.

31:27 Switching gears now, let's talk about the boycott.

31:31 Ok. Um, the churches were very involved with the boycott. Mostly because the farmworkers were in practically every major city in the

country and lots of minor cities of the country working on the boycott. So I mean there was some visibility about the Migrant Ministry and some visibility about UFW around the country, right? But it did not lead to specific actions by church groups. However, um, Al Rojas or Lupe Murgia or you know Maria Cervanez or somebody in Cleveland, Chicago, New York, Baltimore. Pete Velasco would work with local churches to get support. And the churches would get involved with supporting these local boycotters who after all had traveled from Delano, some of them not speaking English well or at all and who are reaching out for church support and union support and student support. Those were the three bases, right? So these local church peoples got involved. And their hearts got involved and so then they wanted the church to be involved. So out of all these local boycott actions were coming all this church activity. So this local Presbyterian Church in Pittsburgh goes to their Presbytery to get an endorsement of the boycott and then they go to the National Presbyterian Church to get an endorsement of the boycott because they want the church to be involved. So much of our involvement was sort of like responding to all these people around the country who were suddenly being confronted by this issue and what do we do about it? And uh, since we were another, a sister church organization they knew that whatever we said would be reliable and truthful and based on our experience and would help them deal with the grower's side, the controversy that was happening in their own local church group etc. So

33:20 So your function was to support the people.

33:23 Yeah. I mean sometimes we took the initiative but almost, I'd say 90% of the time we were responding to a controversy that was developing because the local boycotters had created it. And so this Presbytery in Pittsburgh wants to know you know what do we know before they act on this they want our information or some small grower from Coachella is coming to speak to the Presbytery, can I come and you know represent the other side? Or something like that. So churches all over the country you know just got involved and mainly because the boycotters were going to their local, to local churches to support their activities in that first grape boycott.

34:04 Um, let's move ahead a little bit. Um, uh, to another period where I think church support may have made the difference. In 73 when things fell apart and the teamsters took all the contracts and.....

CUT

I remember there were a couple of plane loads of church people that came into Coachella and there were....

CUT

34:22 Ok let's talk about how the church responded to the....?

34:30 Well of course by 73 you know the church was, all over the country was involved in one way or another in the UFW struggle through the grape boycott, the lettuce boycott, eventually the Gallo boycott etc. And but the Catholic Church mostly because of individual priests and individual nuns, officially the Catholic Church was very you know cautious. They did

not endorse, the Bishops did not endorse the first grape boycott. Instead they set up the Bishops Committee which was very helpful of course in mediating the first grape boycott, the first grape contracts. But in 73 because of the Bishops Committee, because of their involvement in Delano and in Salinas with both the growers and the teamsters and because of the teamsters sweetheart deal with the growers to sign those contracts in 1973 in Coachella, the Bishops were highly knowledgeable, knowledgeable and very involved. So that Monsignor Higgins came to Coachella right away. And what happened in 73 was because Monsignor Higgins got involved, the Bishops got specifically involved, the Bishops made statements about the teamster involvement and supported the UFW formally then Catholic Churches began to pour in and that was like, the newest thing in 73 was the, was the, kind of like the new influx of Catholic support. Um, I can't think of the right word but anyway it was just like uh, new and powerful.

36:07 And those were the people who were willing to go to jail and do those things.

36:11 All kinds of people. I mean the Protestants were still involved too but it was like the new thing was all these, all this new Catholic support. And Cesar quipped one time, well he said uh, the growers can have the teamsters, I'll take the Catholic Church. So that of course proved to be, proved to be correct. Um,

36:30 But what would that mean when you, when you would send out the call we need people to come to Fresno?

36:35 Coachella first because right that's when the, that's where the first violence was. And, and, and people were really afraid in Coachella and there was a lot of violence. Uh, Father John Banks got beat up but that was visible because he was a priest. It was happening to farmworkers and particularly strike leaders all the time. And the goons were there and they were big and they were ugly and they were, and they were mean. And they were there for one purpose only was that was to make sure that this, that the grapes got picked and the strike did not in, in anyway interfere with what was going on, 'cause these were teamster workers in the fields picking the grapes. So naturally we wanted people there to you know, any outside force is gonna you know minimize the violence. So church people from all over just came as often as we could. We changed uh, uh, a farmworker ministry board meeting from Florida to Coachella within a matter of three or four days because of the, because we just wanted to get church people to Coachella. And the United Church of Christ at that time was having it's national convention in St. Louis. This is representatives of all UCC churches and conferences all over the country and they're meeting in St. Louis and they called John Moyer who was our kind of person in the United Church of Christ that you know is there anything we can do? And we said yeah I mean what we need is people here. So they among themselves hatched this idea of renting, of chartering a plane and choosing two representatives from each state and send them to Coachella as observers, so they could come back and report to the, to the general senate about what was going on in Coachella. So they got all this done and they got all ready to come and just at the last minute John Moyer calls up and says Chris he says all the sudden we just began to realize this is a lot of money we're spending to send all these people by plane to Coachella. I mean wouldn't Cesar rather

have the money and I didn't even check with Cesar, I just says no way send the people. So they came and uh, this is a wonderful story. I mean some of these people knew all, some of these people knew about what was going on, right? But some of 'em didn't know anything at all. So they arrive first of all in Ontario and then they get on buses in the Ontario Airport and then take buses. They've been up all night. They arrive there about five, six o'clock in the morning. The strikers are all in the park in Coachella. They're all worried, nervous, things have been happening the night before and these folks start getting off the buses you know and the strikers just surround the buses and just start hugging people, clapping, cheering, singing, crying. So all these like objective church people are walking off the bus and they're just being embraced and hugged. They get up on that little platform in the Coachella park and people are singing and clapping and cheering and tears streaming down their faces, right? And, and uh, these poor UCC folks you know like just trying to, while we're hear to observe and see what's going on here and then we're going to report back to our general senate. And, but I mean that lasted, lasted for about like five minutes they were just totally involved and uh, then they went out to the picket line. Couple of them fainted during the day because of the not just the heat but the, the tenseness of the picket lines and uh, then they went back. And they reported. They had a special celebration where they reported you know they marched into the convention hall and reported it. And then they became like an ongoing support group in the United Church of Christ and it's one of the you know one of the great church support stories of what personal involvement can do in the context of uh, poor people who are really in need and in struggle.

CUT

40:39      Ok, Chris let's talk a little about the church in the 72 strikes in Fresno.

40:46      Fresno came a little bit later in the summer of 73. Uh, the harvest had moved from Arvin to, from Coachella to Arvin to Delano and then up to Fresno. And in Fresno the growers had gotten injunctions at practically every ranch. Very restrictive injunctions. It was like hard to carry on a strike. And so the strikers in that area decided the way to deal with this was to break the injunctions and go to jail. So hundreds and hundreds of farmworkers were in jail because they had broken these injunctions, like whole families. And so much so that they were, they, they had shifted to the fairgrounds as, using the fairgrounds as a sort of like an annex to the, to the jail because the jail was full. So I got up there about the time that this was, in the middle of all this. And uh, and my job there was to just get church people in jail. Gene, Gene Boyle calls me from San Francisco 'cause he's at a conference of ignations spirituality. Priests, nuns all studying you know like Jesuit spirituality. So he thought at the end of the conference they would be willing to come down. He thought he could get a bus load of folks to come down and I says go for it Gene. So again this is true. I don't know why this always happens but this bus arrives like 4:30 in the morning in the park in Fresno where everybody's getting ready to go out to the picket line. So it's my job to explain to these visiting church folks that there are two picket lines for them to choose from. There's the picket line where there is no injunction and where there will be no arrests and then there's the picket line where there is an injunction and where there probably will be arrests.

So somebody asks well what do the farmworkers need? And I said well our strategy in Fresno is to fill the jails and make it so expensive for the county that the injunctions will be ended. And, and then someone said how, if we go to jail how long will we be in jail? And I said well most people have been able to get out in three days. So they, then they, they took some time to just, just talk and so they so, you know everybody had something to do. They had just been away for a week at a conference so. But about half of the folks who had come and there were probably about sixty of 'em decided to go to the risky picket line and half to the safe picket line. So of course in the ris, they went to the risking picket line, they were all arrested. They all ended up in jail and um, and then we, we started, several things started happening. Their home churches and their home convents and their home religious orders began to call. You know sort of like what happened? Some of them never heard of the farmworker struggle. So some of these folks who went to jail were completely new to it, right? So like Sister Rose was in prison, what's it all about? And can we find out more? Can we come and find out more? Can we come and visit her? Can you send us information? So like because they're in jail all these other people were beginning to think if Sister Rose is in jail it must be something significant. It can't just be trivial because we know her, we live with her. So the other thing is we couldn't get 'em out. Two days went past, three days went past, four days went past, five days went past they couldn't get out. The only way they could get out was to uh, pay bail and the workers weren't paying bail so they weren't going to pay bail. So they just stayed. Because they were mostly non-lo, local, they wouldn't, the judge wouldn't let 'em out on their own recognizance. So days and days and days and days went by and they stayed in jail. Two weeks later they eventually got out. That was about the time

that the, the whole thing was crumbling for the growers anyway. So inside they had been visiting with the workers, they had been saying Mass. They had been praying with the workers. They had been getting to know the families. The kids would come and visit. They'd get to know the kids and they were just like, they were having a ball inside jail. Once they kind of got used to the fact that they weren't going to preach this weekend or they weren't going to lead this conference this weekend, and they were just gonna be there....

CUT

44:49 And the story concludes....

44:54 The people who went to jail, sort of like who took the risk and lost out on whatever they had been planning for two weeks you know felt to a person that this was one of the great, joyful learning experiences of their lives. The only people who had any disgruntled feelings about that event were the people who chose not to go to jail. And felt that they were put on unfair pressure when they arrived in Fresno and there had some sort of grumbling attitudes about it. So the people who took the resk, risk were happy. The people who didn't take the risk felt somehow used.

45:31 Now I want to switch gears you know even though 73 was a difficult moment it was high point in terms of energy and positive stuff. I want you to talk a little bit about, about the trajectory of the union in the 80's. At a certain point there are many reasons why but at a certain point the union stopped organizing workers in the way they had before and, talk, talk about what that meant, that change in course.

45:58 Well um,well the 80's were difficult for many reasons, right? And history will have to kind of judge what, what it really meant for the, for the union and for farmworkers and for the survival of the farmworker's movement. But in terms of the internal strategy of the union, it had to do with Duekmejian being the governor of California and taking the Agricultural Labor Relations Board and turning it into pro-grower board and staff. So that farmworkers no longer felt protected by the law. Still a good law but the administrators of the law such that, that if people were fired theoretically they could be rein, for union activity they could be reinstated but it would take forever by the time they were reinstated it didn't matter anymore. People would win an election. The election would be confirmed but by the time they negotiated the con, con, contract it wouldn't matter anymore. And or they would never negotiate a contract. Growers would like go out of business and turn their property over to somebody else so they could get out without a, out from under a contract and, and the board would do nothing about it. Anyway all these things were happening like to undermine the worker's confidence in the Agriculture Relations Board and to undermine their willingness to, to take risks for the union. So the union came to the conclusion right or wrong that it was wrong to lead people in, down this primrose path of organization and struggle when they were gonna be only losers and not winners. And so that's when the shift came to, to the grape boycott. To using the economic strength of the boycott to pressure grape growers at least into negotiating in good faith. Whether or not the board was going to you know be strong or weak. And that was sort of like the background. It also was a time when the union began direct marketing and fundraising unrelated to strikes etc. And, and began to gather in

resources from the public again. For a period of time the contract had produced enough dues that the union needed public support but not that much. In the 80's fewer and fewer contracts with every passing month, so public support was needed. So that's basically what happened. If you were inside as I was in that period you know you could see the rationale for what the union was doing. Um, from the outside it seemed like the union was giving up its, its greatest strength, namely the strength of the workers themselves. And, and the AFL-CIO people kept telling Cesar, look the National Labor Relations Act is, is not such a great law. The board is not such a great board. But we could still organize and you could also. But the union basically chose not to.

48:52 And, and, and when those decisions were made you know basically a lot of the people said well the union I believe in and there are better ways for me to spend money. But you were one of the people who didn't make that choice until very, very late. What, what was it that kept you there?

49:08 Well there were many things happening, right that, that caused people to have that opinion. It wasn't just that the union was not organizing in the fields anymore. You know people had been, people had left or been asked to leave or been thrown out or been something. So there was like the synanon thing had come and gone. Um, Cesar had gone to the Philippines and that had happened and so there was a lot more negative stuff in the air and so it was a combination of those things that, plus the fact that the union wasn't in the fields that lead people to kind of like give up their support or feel less strongly or less urgently or whatever about it. So it was, it was a

combination of things. It's possible, I don't think. It's possible that history will show that the 80's were the time when the union survived. And that the 90's were the time that the union began to grow again because it survived.

50:05 But you know that even by the end of that period Cesar severed his strong ties with the church support.

50:14 Yeah. Cesar went through, Cesar went through his I, I would say stressful periods where some of the things he did were not entirely you know um, in keeping with the past traditions and work of the union and keeping with his own you know organizing principles and with his own humanity. So Cesar had you know, went through some bad times. In the late sevent, mid to late seventies and then again in the late eighties. Uh, I think part of it was the fast of 88. Um, it was very hard on him physically. He was very slow to recover. While he was recovering he broke his wrist at La Paz. Um, but worse than anything the growers didn't call. Sort of like you do this fast, you get all this public attention, all these big events. Jesse Jackens comes, Jackson comes. The Kennedys come. It's like this huge public support for Cesar fasting and for the grape boycott. And the growers don't call and it's sort of like. All of us were thinking you know like what, what do we do in the summer of 89 that will in any way equal what we did in the summer of 88 and if they didn't call in 88 you know they're not gonna call in 89. So there was a growing realization that maybe, maybe this grape boycott wasn't gonna, maybe it wasn't gonna work. So that I think had caused Cesar a lot, a lot of stress. And under stress he had a tendency to kind of like, instead of figuring out what we were doing wrong he, he had a tendency to look inside for the problems. Somebody is sabotaging us from the inside.

CUT

CR 128, SR 61 TC 21:00:00

21:00:14      Ok Chris we were talking about what you think, how you think the fast in 68 effected Cesar.

21:00:20      The fast of 88. Well Cesar was older obviously by 1988. The fast was longer than all the other fasts. He got sicker at the end and I think it's effects lingered on much longer than they did for the other fasts. Um, and then while he was up at La Paz sort of like recuperating he fell and he broke his wrists and that like slowed his recovery also. And, and the growers didn't call. I mean I think we all expected that the fast would produce some response from some part of the grape industry but it didn't. And um, and then everybody began to think well like what can we do to top this? What can we do that will put more pressure on the grape growers than this fast in 1988 did? And Cesar must have been thinking the same thoughts. And I think the stress of all that turned him away from his natural organizers course. And that was when we're in trouble we think about what we're doing wrong, what we have to do better. How do we change our message? How do we reach out to more people? Instead at that point he began to like look for people, particularly within the boycott department who like somehow were uh, either not doing their work well or were in some way betraying the boycott. And I think the stress of the fast and the recovery from the fast forced you know pushed Cesar into that, that uh, uh, abnormal, untypical way of looking at what was going on around him. And so he began to look inward for you know, for troublemakers or disloyal

people. And eventually I was one of them and so it was shortly after that that I left. And would had I stayed um, I mean I'd often thought I should have left sooner but um, and in 81, I was still the director the National Farmworker Ministry offices in L.A., traveling all over the state and in 81 I resigned from the Farmworker Ministry as executive director and my wife and I moved to La Paz and we became part of sort of like the union uh, infrastructure. So I had sev, several jobs at La Paz in that period of time. So it was a big change for us. We liked it. Particularly for the first five or six years um, and uh, I liked my work. And um, then because I was there and, and we were sort of like a inner group strategizing together. I believed in the shift to the boycott. And uh, I believed in what we were doing. I didn't believe in everything. We had our arguments. We had our disagreements. But still I basically was uh, you know one of the, one of the loyal troops. Um, and...

21:03:13 But when, when it came to the point that you left did that force you to reexamine what.....

21:03:21 Hmmm. It mostly caused me to look sort of like at myself. Um, why had I stayed that long you know when other people had left and had opportunity to leave I didn't and I stayed and um, why did I put myself in this sit, position you know where I was like this, this vulnerable to Cesar's you know uh, power and whim. And uh, what was I going to do with my life? So I was, I was more into surviving as a human being than I was examining, examining the strategies of the eighties. I mean I'm, I'm glad to see what Artie's doing. I mean I, Artie's making all the right moves, he's reaching out to, to friends who have been estranged from the union. He's

organized the workers. They're getting contracts. It's a, it's a great thing that's happening. But to just say that Cesar could have done that in the eighties is I think too simple. The growers have used this interim time to make things worse for farmworkers. And that always prepares the ground for another day of organizing and courageous you know union activity. So and the board is a little different and the uh, general counsel is a little different. Wilson's different than Duekmejian. So lots of circumstances are different. So I'm glad for what's happening and, and people are returning to supporting the union who haven't supported it for a long time and I'm glad for that. But I, I'm not so sure that we could just say well Cesar could have done that in the eighties also if he had chosen to.

CUT

21:05:07 In the early days of the strike one of the other ways that the church was helpful which was not so obvious but you know if you thought about it for a while you realized how helpful it was. The workers, there had been strikes in agriculture. There'd been unions in agriculture. They had almost always failed. So here's Cesar Chavez, he comes along, he's the leader of the strike in Delano but you know who is he? I mean is he gonna stay, is he gonna leave, whatever. So workers are having internal struggles all the time. Do I join the strike? Do I stay on the strike? At home they're having struggles. Who's gonna pay for the shoes? Who's gonna pay for the food? You know you guys are gonna, we're gonna lose all of our money. We're gonna lose our house. And then Cesar Chavez is gonna go somewhere else and we will have nothing. So all these struggles were going on within each person, and each family as to whether to join with and stay loyal to this union movement. And the church's involvement as visible as it

was I'm sure helped farmworkers who were very religious in, in a traditional Catholic way feel that this is the right thing to do. This is like our choice has been supported and confirmed by this institution that we believe in. So in that way I think the church supported the strikers in addition to the support it provided outside the strike and, and for the boycott.

END