

ARTIE RODRIGUEZ

TAPE 21, CR 12, SR 6, TC 11:19:22

11:19:30 Artie, you've travelled a long road with the union. People came there from different perspectives; some came out of the fields, some came from churches; you came to the union from the University. But before we talk about how you got involved with give us a personal background, what your personal life way, how you grew up and how you ended up at the University of Michigan.

11:19:53 Well, I grew up in San Antonio, Texas. My parents, Arturo and Feliz Rodriguez were from that particular community. My mom's family, her mother was raised on a small farm outside of San Antonio in a small town there, and my dad's family, his mom came from Mexico and came here during the Revolution, and my grandfather had a small farm in a little town called Forestville, California, uh, Forestville, Texas. And eventually he moved the family to San Antonio to begin working there and he spent the rest of his life working there in San Antonio. And they kept the small farm going, but it was a secondary type of thing. And we were raised in a Catholic family and, with the idea in mind of, education was an important thing and trying to do something of service to our community. And so as a result, I was the oldest of seven children, and we from an early age learned the value of really doing things not only for ourselves but also doing things, doing something for the community that we lived in. And my dad was very much that way. He was, as well as my mom, they were both very active in the community. My dad was active in the church and always doing something within the community. And my mom after most of us had grown up finally went back to school and became a bilingual ed teacher, education teacher, and then eventually

started teaching at the Catholic school where we, where the majority of us grew up at, and were raised at. And so, it was that kind of life where there was a lot of activity always going on and we were really taught the importance and the real criticalness of how family played a role within our lives and as a result we're still a very close family as well as, when I came into Cesar's family, and Helen's family, it was very much the same type of thing, and so I felt like there was that same strong emphasis put on the whole issue of family.

11:22:00 And in fact when you decided to go to the University you focused on social work and social issues.

11:22:06 Right, I went to, first of all in San Antonio Texas I went to a small Catholic University there in San Antonio, where I basically took sociology and psychology course and so forth, and there already I guess in my high school had gotten involved through...[END OF CAMERA ROLL 12]

TAPE 23, CR 13, SR 6, TC 12:00:00

12:00:00 So you were talking about focusing on sociology...

12:00:11 Right, let me just step back a little bit in that, the, in high school I was very involved with our youth group there, and there was a priest there, Father Marvin Derfler who had a real impact on my life personally in terms of, he very much believed in the social teachings of the church and talked to us a lot about that and how it was important for us to get involved and be active, not only with our communities but in work, in doing things that would change, that would bring about change within people's lives. And so, he was very much involved with the

Latino community there in the San Antonio area, and as a result when I went to college eventually at St. Mary's University there, we got involved with one of the groups there that were, again, heavily involved with the church and the reform within the church, within the Catholic Church, but also at the same time their major activity was focused around the issues of the farmworkers and the grape boycott at that time, back in the late '60's and so forth. So as a result I got exposed to that, got involved in that, became a part of that, and that helped influence in terms of what I was going to do later on with my life, and then a good friend of mine that I knew there from the university, Rebeca Flores Harrington, who's currently on our staff right now, and one of our executive board members, had gone to the University of Michigan and she came back to recruit us there, and as a result encouraged me to go there, and there was a good professor at our Lady of the Lake Community College named Gil Murillo, who at that point, I counseled with him about what to do with my life, he suggested "Get out of Texas. Go get some new experiences and get an opportunity to see what other people are doing with their lives," and so forth. And probably was one of the best suggestions I ever got, 'cause it encouraged me to leave San Antonio and to go into Michigan and go to the University of Michigan, pursue the School of Social Work there, studies, but gave me an opportunity to really reflect and get an opportunity to get a lot of exposure to a lot of other folks in terms of what they were doing, what they were active in, and so forth. And as a result, those two years at the University of Michigan, I mean, there was a good strong group of us there, Chicanos, that were, all of our free time and all of our time away from school was spent involved in the farmworkers, and much of our school work was all directed towards the farmworkers and what we were doing there, and any way that we could help Cesar and the movement and so forth. And so as a result, because of all that four of us had made the decision in that graduating class they we were going to come work

with the farmworkers, at least for a short period of time. And so upon graduation most of us either came on right away or within a short period of time thereafter, and in fact I didn't even bother to go to graduation, I just, May the 5th when, the day after I finished my last exam, May 5, 1973, I came straight to the office in Detroit and began working for Cesar's brother Richard Chavez, and that was the beginning.

12:03:23 Had you met Cesar before then?

12:03:25 Got a chance to meet him in 1972, when he came to the University of Michigan. We were active in bringing him there and we didn't really get a chance to talk much, but it was just an opportunity to see him personally in action and in terms of what he was doing and, you know, I mean, he couldn't help but influence and, I mean, he just had an aura about him in the sense that he was someone very committed, very directed, very determined to accomplish something on behalf of the farmworkers, and so it was a tremendous encouragement because of everything that was going on in the '60's and the whole War on Poverty that was taking place at that time and a lot of us were kind of disillusioned because we saw so much of that money not going really towards benefitting the people that it was supposed to serve, but oftentimes going into office and going into people's salaries and cars and trips and all this kind of thing, and at the same time here was Cesar, who was there and had a mission, and knew how to accomplish that particular mission, but all the rest of it was, I mean it was just very basic, very simple, very direct, and that had a major impact on us and we were all encouraged by that, in saying This is something really real and true and, you know, you kind of ideal at that particular time in your life, and you say, Hey, this is the true thing, this is the right thing to be doing. And so as a result it was a big motivation for us to get involved at that point.

12:04:55 The farmworkers and Cesar, in general they had a huge impact in students, and on what's now known as the Chicano Movement. What general effect did Cesar have on Chicano students?

12:05:18 Well, I mean, there were so many things going on at that particular time and of course the African Americans had done a lot, especially in that particular area in Detroit. I mean, in the late '60's they had all kind of strikes and walkouts and things of that nature, and unfortunately even riots, but we didn't really have anything happening within our particular community, and Cesar was kind of our model in that respect. I mean, he was someone that came from the grassroots, came from the farmworker, wasn't, didn't necessarily have the education, but he had, again, a real simpleness about him, and a real committed effort. I mean, he was honest, he was honest and he was sincere. And you could see that right away. I mean, there was no show, there was no flash about it, it was just simple determination to accomplish something for farmworkers and on behalf of the Chicano community, on behalf of the Latino community at large. And on behalf of people in general. I mean, he at the time too was controversial in the sense that, at the same time that he promoted and encouraged us as Chicanos to get involved, at the same time he says, "Look, we can't be exclusive either. We can't just go to the Chicano community and do something within our particular community, we've got to go beyond that, and we've got to include, be a lot more inclusive and incorporate other people, their ideas and their willingness to want to be a part of what we're doing, and their participation." And so as a result that was like, you know, you kind of looked at that and said, Hey, that's a little bit different from what everybody else was saying at that particular point in time. But, he was a real spirit of the movement. I mean, I can remember on Friday evenings, instead of

us going out and partying like most people would, students at that particular time, we'd spend Friday evenings picketing a liquor store on Gallo wine, and Sundays we would spend going out and picketing supermarkets, re the grapes and the lettuce boycott and so forth. But that was the kind of energy that he charged up on everybody, because you could see that he gave as much. He never asked you to do any more than what he was willing to do. So he was the real example for us in that respect, and we felt that he was a real inspiration to us.

12:07:45 Now let's go on to the graduation you skipped. It sounds like it wasn't really a different thing than you'd been doing anyway, you'd been sort of gradually working up to that, to go and work full time. Once you reported to the Detroit boycott office, was that a completely different experience for you?

Well, it was in the sense that I guess there was a lot of hopes...

[He's asked to use the question in the answer.]

12:08:16 Starting on the boycott was a little bit different in the sense that I guess a lot of people had expected that being a college graduate and going to a university and everything of that nature that you would go on and get a good-paying job and, I don't know what they really expected, what people really expected, but, so it was a kind of a shock for folks, that this is what I had decided to do and what I was, felt that I needed to be doing at that particular point in my life, and for me personally though it felt, it was great, because what I enjoy and what I love is organizing, is working with people and helping people, providing service to people and at the same time getting people involved in their own lives, in terms of changing their own lives. And so as a result I had a change to work

with Richard Chavez, Cesar's brother, and he was a great teacher. I mean, he was a great teacher as well as a motivator, and he would let you go out there and spread your wings as you might say, and give you the opportunities, that, gosh, we were young and most people wouldn't let you go out there and automatically take over coordination of a major area like I had the opportunity to do at that particular time. And so it was a lot of fun. At the same time it was a lot of hard work. I mean, we'd spend six, seven days a week doing what we were doing, 12, 13 hours a day, but at the same time we knew that we were moving forward and accomplishing something. So that, I enjoyed it very much. And then of course then I had an opportunity to, I came on in May of that year, and by September of that year Cesar and the executive board of the United Farmworkers had made a decision to move out all of the strikers from that 1973 strike, to come to the urban areas, to come to the cities and so, within the month of September we had a whole bunch, about 100 folks come to us from California there to Detroit to join with us there. So that was like, Wow, now we're really going to be able to do something and make something happen and so forth. And of course then I had a chance to meet my wife Lu, my future wife Lu, and get a chance to know her and meet her and spend some time with her and so forth.

12:10:35 Talk a little bit about what you went through or what you felt then.

12:10:48 Well Lu came up with her sister Silvia, and I had never met any of the Chavez family other than Cesar, and then we didn't have much time to speak—except for Richard, Richard and I became very close and we still are very close today. [CUT]

TAPE 23, CR 14, SR 6, TC 12:11:17 (slate)

12:11:14 So let's pick up again with the transition in your life from working for the union to becoming part of the Chavez family.

[VOLUME'S DROPPED WAY DOWN]

12:11:29 As I was mentioning I had a chance to work with Richard a lot back in Detroit. Richard Chavez taught me a lot, he gave me a lot of opportunities and so forth, but then he was the only one that I really knew and then Lu had come up here with her sister Silvia, [VOLUME RESTORED] and I didn't have a chance to [FALSE START]

12:12:08 Richard, I really enjoyed working with a lot, he taught me a lot, he gave me a lot of experience, he gave me a lot of opportunities to really kind of spread my wings and learn things. But at the same time gave me enough direction so that I knew that I was going to be accomplishing something, but I also got a chance then to, when the farmworkers came up in September, to meet both Lu and her sister Silvia. Silvia was the older sister of the family, the oldest of the girls in the family, but a really terrific person. But at any rate, it was great getting to know them and to work with them and of course Silvia had her children there and everything, and there was something about Lu very special. I mean, she had within her dad, as her dad does, that whole commitment and that whole wanting and the pursuit of bringing about change for people, and so I was very attracted to that, and the fact that she was young, attractive, but at the same time very very committed to what she was doing and was willing to make the sacrifices that was necessary. And so as a result we began seeing one another and, it was very traditional within the Chavez family and, as it is with the Latino community in general that once we decided we wanted to get married that Lu says, Well, you have to ask my dad, and

I says, "O-K." And we didn't see Cesar that often, so as a result we finally decided, well, I'm going to call him on the phone, and so I decided one day to finally make the call and I called him up and let him know what my intentions were and that I wanted to ask his, him for permission to marry his daughter Lu. And his first question was, "Well, where are you getting married at?" And I says, well, and Lu and I had been talking about getting married in Detroit at the time, and inviting all of our supporters and everything. He says, "Oh well, wherever you want." He says, "let's get married in California, and as long as you're getting married in California everything's OK." And I said, "Well, OK." I went back to talk to Lu and we talked about it and we said, "Sure, California, why not?" That would give her a chance for all of her family to be a part of everything. And so, he must of immediately began making plans and all kinds of discussions were going on and I can remember very vividly, Lu came here first beforehand to do some of the planning that needed to be done and get her dress ready and all that kind of stuff, and I didn't come here until about a week before, and I hadn't really met the family yet and all she described is that there's this Texan that wore boots and all this kind of stuff, that had asked her hand in marriage and was going to marry her, and then they got word through Silvia how I was and so forth, but it was very interesting to come here and to meet the family, but right away folks accepted me and it was great. It's been great ever since the very beginning. As I mentioned earlier, I mean, Cesar and Helen had developed it so that it was a very close family, a very supportive family of one another, and all the brother-in-laws are all invited to be very much a part of that family. There's brother-in-laws, there's son-in-laws and daughter-in-laws and so forth, and so we've been able to enjoy that over the last, what, 22 years I guess, 21 years of our life, that we've been a part of that.

12:15:45 So, after your marriage there's a new dynamic. You're not only working for someone that you respect and revere, but you're also his son-in-law. Does that mean that he's tougher on you than normal? What is the nature of that relationship? Can you keep those two things separate?

12:16:00 Well, I mean, I guess it was, there's always that, there was always that, or at least you felt that Cesar always had to make sure that there was no favoritism there, because of the fact that you happened to be a son-in-law, and not necessarily that he was so much tougher, but he just wanted to make sure that nobody saw that we were getting any opportunities that someone else wasn't going to get either. And so as a result we always were constantly proving ourselves and we were always constantly demonstrating that we were just as committed as anybody else was within the movement, and that we were willing to make whatever sacrifices were necessary.

12:16:40 But in terms of how you would approach it, would you feel it was incumbent on you to work even harder?

12:16:46 Yeah, I always sensed that, I had to make sure that I didn't let Cesar down. That I didn't let him down personally, and so as a result I always tried to work as hard as possible and do things in the best way possible. So that it was something that was going to be beneficial to the movement and also wouldn't put him in a position where he would have to, how would you say, excuse himself for me or whatever, at that particular point. So that was something that always kind of helped drive me in terms of what we were doing within the organization.

Let's talk a bit about Cesar himself. Talk about how you saw him as a person, in terms of working with him.

12:17:45 Well Cesar was unique. [CUT]

[SLATE]

12:17:57 So I was asking you to give me some insight into Cesar as a real human being.

12:18:13 Well, Cesar was a unique individual in the sense that I don't think I'll ever meet anybody else in my lifetime that was like Cesar. He was totally committed to what he was doing. He demanded a lot from people and he expected a lot from people, but at the same time he gave everything he had too. So it wasn't a question of demanding without giving at the same time. He demonstrated to us, he was the example for us. If he expected us to wake up early and start work early and everything like that, he was doing the same thing. And he was waking up even earlier than us, and I mean, he paced himself and he taught us and showed us how to pace ourselves. And there was all kinds of, I mean, he was, you'd see him as a compassionate person when he was working with the workers. He loved it; there was no other setting where he was more happier than to be with farmworkers and being able to talk to them and discuss with them what their problems were, but also very much discuss with them how they had to become responsible for changing their life, and to be a part of that whole process, whole system that had to take place there. It was, you know he was a true leader; at the same time he was like a father figure to you; at the same time he was a person you could go talk to, you would learn from him constantly about how to do things, how to organize better,

how to be able to talk to people, how to be able to explain to people, how to be able to get workers involved in what you were doing. I mean, he was just a total wealth of experience in that respect. And at the same time very patient, because he knew that this was going to take a long time, and someone that had, gosh, when you see the union built up and have all the strength that we had at one particular point in time in terms of actual numbers with the union, and then to be taken away from us overnight in the early 1970's, and all of a sudden all of the patience to re-begin the building process all over again, and see it happen, and then in the early 1980's with the Republican administration see it be taken away again, and see somebody just sit back and say, "OK, let's start over again, let's do what we need to do." And then the tremendous personal sacrifice. I mean, not only in terms of his time on the road and his time away from his family and time away from things that we know that he enjoyed very much doing, but also his willingness to sacrifice his own self, his personal things, the fast. I didn't have a chance to be around him much in the first two fasts that he did, but in the third fast that he did in 1988, I had the opportunity and the privilege to be there with him the whole time that he was doing that fast, for the last 30 days of the 36 day fast that he did. And I was with him there constantly, and to see him, to know how much of a vibrant individual he was and to see him there for those 36 days just lying there and not going any place except for going to mass on a nightly basis, on a daily basis, and that would be the only time that he would have any exposure to anybody outside of the room that he was staying in, to see him every day there, and to know how close he came to the point where we just didn't really think that he would survive that fast, it had a tremendous impact on our lives, on my life personally, in terms of seeing him willing to make that ultimate sacrifice that's necessary sometimes within movements that we've involved in and so forth. Or to demonstrate the seriousness of the situation, the gravity of the situation that we were involved in, the whole

issue of fighting the pesticides and trying to protect children and trying to protect farmworkers and our environment by getting rid of these pesticides. [CUT] [END OF CAMERA ROLL 14, END OF SOUND ROLL 6]

TAPE 25, CR 15, SR 7, TC 14:00:00

14:00:17 It's very easy to say that Cesar was a deeply religious, committed person. But where do you think he drew his strength from?

14:00:37 Well, I mean, it's hard to put your hand on any one particular thing, but I think one was his deep personal faith that he had. He always talked about that, he believed very much in it, he was very much a part of it. When he was alive and I still continue to do it today with Helen, his wife, that when we were here in La Paz, every Sunday morning we would go to the local church and he just felt that was a part of his renewal that he had to do, his own spiritual renewal. But at the same time he was, he had his own way of nourishing his mind and nourishing himself that he would constantly do and whether it be spending time reading, whether it would be spending time doing things that he enjoyed doing personally, that he would do as like a self-renewal for himself. But also I mean what drove him was the terrible injustice, the terrible treatment that he would see people getting, in particular case farmworkers, and the huge disparity between the farmworker and the growers, and I think that constantly kept a fire in the gut as Fred Ross used to say. I mean, we all need that fire in the gut to keep us going every day and to keep us moving forward and so forth. And it certainly was a part of Cesar. And I think it drives us all. I mean, when we see that constantly and continuously that people are mistreated and abused and not respected and not treated with dignity and so forth, that does have an impact on us, and when we know that that's not right and

shouldn't be that particular way then, and that we have a responsibility to do something about it. Aside from that, Cesar was just a brilliant individual; that kept him going. He had these...he was so creative, he was so, he just had so many ideas. When we sit back and after we all, after Cesar passed away you begin to look at the movement that he left us, and understand the tremendous work that he did. Not only was he the driving force behind the union, and the driving force behind getting collective bargaining rights for farmworkers and establishing that as a first in the United States, but at the same time we now have a network of radio stations throughout California and into Arizona already, and he was the creator of making that happen. I mean, we have housing for farmworkers and housing for low income people that again, here's a man with an eighth grade education and yet he was constantly pushing us forward to do more things, to make more things happen for people. We have a credit union for farmworkers, we have a pension plan for farmworkers, we have a medical plan for farmworkers. These were all firsts, these were things that I would venture to say had Cesar not done this during his lifetime, probably many of these things wouldn't exist still today for farmworkers, and that he left us all these things now to continue to build on, and to make happen and to develop and so forth. And so that it's...when you really begin to look at it, when you really begin to just reflect on what Cesar did within his lifetime it's just, it's an amazing track record of bringing about all this kind of change and laying this groundwork and laying this foundation so that we can in turn continue to do that work.

14:04:19 Let's switch gears now back to your personal relationship with him, and what it mean to you in '74, '75 to come to California to work on this whole new era of organizing and actually go out and do elections for the first time.

14:04:40 Well it was, I mean, to be able to come to California in 1975 to the first, to the convention at that particular time, it was the most exciting thing for me, in the sense that, well Lu and I, I remember, we had just had our first child, Olivia Rodriguez, and she was born on July the 3rd of 1975, and we were asked to come out to the convention and so everybody was coming out on buses, so here we were and Olivia was just a little over a month old, and we were travelling across country on this old bus, coming across with a lot of other people, and it took us several days to make it, but we were all excited about coming to the convention and it was the convention right before the first elections that were going to be held under this new agriculture labor relations act that had been passed here in California under Governor Jerry Brown, and so it was, there was electricity in the air for everybody, and so we got here and we were in Fresno at the convention center and there were thousands of people there and red flags and a lot of emotion and everything, and then at the close of the convention we have this march, and we're all going and there'd been a lot of rumors that people would be needed to help out on the election campaigns but of course nobody had been told anything up to that particular point, and here we are on the march, and all of a sudden somebody comes and taps me on the shoulder and asks me to come over, that Cesar wants to talk to me, and so at that point he asks me if I would stay in California to do elections for farmworkers, and man, I just, we just said immediately yes and then I went and found Lu and told her and shared that with her, and it was, we didn't even think twice about it, even though everything that we owned and had, cars, everything, was left in Detroit, because we just came with a few clothes and we just left it over there and we stayed here, and that was it. We never went back after that, but we stayed here to begin working on the elections and for me, organizing was the thing that I enjoyed, it was the thing that I, that attracted me to the movement in terms of what Cesar was doing and his whole organizational efforts

and so forth and so now getting the opportunity to do that out in the fields and actually doing these elections, although I didn't have any experience in terms of doing it, it was a very exciting challenge to do and to be a part of. And so as a result...

14:07:05 This was what it was all really about.

14:07:06 That's it. That was it. I mean, this is what we were all dreaming about being able to do is actually organize the farmworkers and make that happen. So it was, I got assigned to Salinas, to work there, and it was great. The workers, they were excited and they were ready and it was a question of making sure that they had the responsibility of getting the work done and our job was to really just coordinate those efforts, and to make sure that we did kind of the technical work that needed to be done, but they were the real organizers, they were the ones that could really make it happen, and we were there to kind of facilitate that in some particular way. But it was, there was nothing more exciting and, although we worked day and night, we slept on the floor in a basement in this one house the whole time we were there and we'd crawl in there late at night, sometimes 1, 2 in the morning and be up by 4 in the morning again to go out to the fields, but there was just nothing more exciting than doing that. And as a result we had a lot of victories because of that particular time.

14:08:00 Do you remember the first election, where you were?

14:08:05 Yeah, I sure do. I was asked to organize at one particular company, it was an artichoke company, and it was a company that was represented before by another union and so they asked me to do the organizing work there at Malletta

Packing, and we had a good committee going there and a good strong committee of workers there, and it was a small operation but then later on as we were doing the organizing everybody said, "This is going to be our first election," because we were sure we were going to win the election, and boy, I mean, the pressure was there and everything else, but the workers, they were determined that they were going to win and that was the real determining factor I think for everybody, and so as a result on September 8, 1975 all the cameras were there and there was probably more press there than there was actually farmworkers voting at that ranch, but it was a historic moment, it was the first election, and it kind of set the tone for us. We were able to win that election overwhelmingly and as a result we began using that to motivate the other workers and show that it could be done, "Sí se puede." That it could be done, we could be successful at winning these elections, so from there on we went to organize a lot of other companies, a lot of other workers.

14:09:22 Was there a sense of the certainty, that this was a tide that couldn't be stopped at that point?

14:09:34 I mean, I think that was real indicative, the fact that we won almost, we almost blanked out the company as well as any other union there, and as a result of that that just set the pace for everybody, that it was inevitable, because Cesar had always said, and we had always said with in the movement that, give the workers the opportunity to vote, give the workers the opportunity to have a secret ballot election where they don't have to fear any kind of reprisal being taken against them or fear the threat of being fired or being coerced to vote for the company or anyone else for that matter, give them the chance to vote in that atmosphere, and we'll win. And this is what it proved, and this is what it proved to the entire world within those first four months of activity, September through

December of that year, we had won about 80% of the elections as I recall, and so, everybody was convinced and it was always what Cesar had said, so there was a lot of pressure and there was a lot of expectation there, but at the same time we were confident that if we created an atmosphere where workers didn't have to fear being fired, they didn't have to choose between their job and voting for the United Farmworkers, that we'd win, and we proved that.

[END OF CAMERA ROLL 15]

TAPE 27, CR 16, SR 7, TC 13:11:15 (SLATE)

13:11:35 We were talking about the euphoric feeling in '75 and '76 and '77, and how you said that if you could create the proper conditions it would work, and a key part of that was how the law was going to be enforced. Going ahead a few years, how did the change in law affect the whole process?

13:12:08 During those first four months of activity within the law, from September through December, early January of that year, in essence and in hindsight looking back that was the only time that the law really functioned the way that we had hoped it would ever function. It was being aggressively enforced, growers were being prevented from violating the law, and if they did immediate action was taken so that workers sensed that there was power, there was a power there, there was an enforcement there like they'd never seen before. I mean, here are these growers who prior to this time had just done whatever they pleased with the workers, fired them when they pleased and hired them they pleased and disciplined them when they pleased for whatever reason, and now they were being prevented from doing that. And so workers, again, sensed that sense of power, that they were empowered to really be able to do something about their situation there

at the ranch where they were working at. And, I mean, there was a fear that at some point that was going to change, but none of us had had that much experience with working within the law. I mean, this was the first time the only farm labor law that had ever been passed in the country, and the first time it had ever been passed in the country and so we were new in terms of operating within that. When Governor Brown left office, or even in the later years of Governor Brown, already the politics had changed.

13:13:35 There was also a sense the growers became more sophisticated in the legal mechanisms and developed a set of delaying tactics.

13:13:42 That's right. And then, with their attorneys, I mean the growers were hiring the best attorneys they could, the best law firms, and all these attorneys had experience under the national labor relations act, and so they knew what they had successfully done to delay within the national labor relations act and now they were just going to apply this to the agricultural labor relations act, and they were very successful at doing it. And so immediately after we were defunded for the first, after the first four months of the law working, then we started dealing with all of these other major delay tactics on the part of the attorneys, and all the games that they began to play with workers, and so that that became very discouraging to everybody, very discouraging and then we saw these, the eventual inability of the board agents, of the agricultural labor relations board and so forth to really continue to enforce the law. They would block it with all kinds of different ways of doing things. They would appeal everything. You file a charge, a decision would come out, blaming the grower or putting a complaint against the grower, and they would appeal that. There was a hearing that would take place and a decision came out favorable for us, they would appeal it. And then once that decision went to

appeal then the hearing took place and they would appeal that and there you go on and on and on so that it began to just string out the activities and so forth of the situation, and we saw the law getting away from us, we saw the effectiveness getting away from us and as a result that climate of a secret ballot election began to leave us very quickly, after the law went into effect there.

13:15:17 So it's really harder to go out and organize under those conditions.

13:15:21 Well, today it makes it very difficult, to organize under that situation, because now currently we have a Republican administration that's there. In early 1982 Governor George Deukmejian came into office at that time, and he made no, he just came out and very directly said that, "I'm going to do everything I can to stop the enforcement of the agricultural labor relations act, to turn this around, to enforce it in a way that it's beneficial to the agribusiness industry and not beneficial to the farmworker." And he did that. He came into office and immediately began to fire personnel, immediately began to change the regulations and appoint a general counsel that supposedly is the person responsible for enforcing the law, putting in a person there that was going to side themselves with the growers. And as a result, we began to lose all of our confidence in doing anything under the agricultural labor relations act that would be effective for farmworkers.

13:16:22 And at the same time part of the deal for the law was that the farmers were willing to give elections as they got away from the pressures of certain types of boycotts, so you lost some of those tools.

13:16:34 Exactly. We lost the ability in the sense that we could no longer go out and do everything as we had done it back in the sixties and in the seventies. Now there was certain laws preventing us from doing that, or certain regulations preventing us from doing that. And we couldn't do the secondary boycott exactly how we did it in prior times. But there was still enough of that right even within the law. They gave us the opportunity to do those things, but it just made it that much more difficult, because now there was this process in place where everything had to go to court, everything could be appealed, and they would just string it out for months if not years, the whole process.

13:17:17 I think it's important when we look at the difficulties that the farmworkers had in the '80's to put it in the broader context of the attacks on the labor movement in the '80's, because that was a tough decade for labor, wasn't it?

13:17:29 It was extremely difficult, and we were...

13:17:34 The 1980's was extremely difficult for labor in general, not only for the United Farmworkers, but we were in particular hit because of the fact that we were such a small operation to begin with, and then when the governor comes in and he automatically takes charge of the situation and declares that he's going to side with the employers, he's going to side with agribusiness against us, then it made it almost impossible to do anything effective within the law. In fact it got so bad that in 1983, here we are conducting an election at a dairy farm in Fresno County, and we, the word gets back to us that supervisors, that representatives of the employer are carrying weapons on the property. So we go to the ALRB and we said "Look, this is what we hear from the workers and we'd like you just to go out and get an injunction that says that nobody, worker or supervisory personnel or

management personnel can carry arms on the property.” And they refused to do it. So as a result of that, the day of the election, because of the fact that it’s very clear that we’re going to win the election, the employer sends out his son-in-law into the property and they come with a, and pass on a gun to someone else, and there they are, they come up to the person who’s our chief organizer there, a young man named Ray Lopez who’s just about to get married, and called him over to the vehicle where they’re at, pull out a gun and shoot him right there, during the time that the election’s taking place. And so when that happens, at that point, it’s like when you’re in a strike situation and you know it’s gotten to the point where violence is going to begin to occur and nobody can control it, well that’s what was happening now within the framework of the law, that here board agents, the agricultural labor relations act was going to allow violence to occur against the workers and they weren’t going to do anything about it. So that sent a signal to everybody within the farmworker community and within the union that, how could we in good faith continue to encourage farmworkers to use a law that was not going to be enforced; to use a law that would lead them to the point where they might even be killed, we might be jeopardizing their lives, and nobody was going to do anything to stop it. So we made a very clear decision at that point that we couldn’t continue to work within a situation, within an environment like that, and that it was time for us to resort to that one major thing that always has helped us level the playing field you might say, and that’s the boycott, and it was at that time that we went and began to plan and began to look towards doing another boycott on California table grapes throughout the United States and North America and other parts of the world as well.

13:20:28 As we moved into the '80's you began working more and more closely with Cesar, and your role in the union changed. How did your responsibilities change, and your relationship with Cesar?

13:20:38 Well, during the 1980's, in 1984 Cesar asked me to take over the management of our grape boycott at that particular time, and getting that all underway again, and so as a result we spent a lot of time discussing it and talking about it and he would share with me all of his experiences and so forth, and so that we would do a lot of things together in relationship to that. For example, we declared, we actually announced the boycott in 1984, in July of 1984, and then in 1985 we wanted to spend a lot of time going throughout North America and beginning to spread the word about the boycott, and Cesar felt that it was important that he personally get involved in doing that so that...I'll never forget the trip that we took through Canada, because it was always been an important group, an important, we've received tremendous support from the Canadians throughout the years, so that we started in Vancouver in September of that year, and we had an old 1979 blue Oldsmobile carrying a little trailer in the back of us, and it was Cesar, myself and Mike Ibarra, and Victor Alemán, the four of us, and we rode in what we called "the blue goose," that's what we named our '79 Oldsmobile, and we started in Vancouver and we spent an entire month driving across Canada, and going from town to town, day after day and talking to people and doing press conferences and doing meetings and all that kind of stuff, to explain to people why it was, is that it was necessary we felt to come back to the public again in a very major way and ask for their support in this consumer boycott of California Table Grapes. [CUT]

[END OF CAMERA ROLL 16]

TAPE 27, CR 17, SR 8, TC 13:00:00

13:00:14 You were telling me about a trip across Canada, a sense that he was training you to take this role...

13:00:40 No I don't think any of us ever, I mean to begin with, thought about the union would be without Cesar being around. I mean, all of us had this vision that Cesar would be here for another 20, 30 years, 40 years. I mean, who knows, his Dad lived to be 100, 101 I think it was, and his mom lived to be 100 years old, and we were just, automatically assumed, because Cesar took such good care of himself and so forth, that he was going to be doing the same thing, so that, no, I mean, it was just a question of, I mean, I personally wanted to take every opportunity I had to learn everything I could and to be a part, in any particular way that I could be of service to him, and help in any way that he thought that I would be beneficial towards him. But no, I don't think any of us knew or felt that or understood that or believed that. Or maybe we just didn't see the signs.

13:01:42 Do you think it was an issue for him? I mean, obviously he expected to live a long time, but did he ever discuss with you the issue of how the union would be run when we had gone? Is that something that he devoted thought to, do you think?

13:01:55 No, we never really talked about that, and you know, he would just share with us what his visions were, and I think that was his way of always keeping us thinking about what the future would be of the organization. So he talked about radio stations, he talked about credit unions, he talked about the housing program and about cooperatives, and about management. I mean, a big, he spent a lot of

time with us on the whole area of management, and how important and how critical that was to our future success within the organization. And he literally, I mean we knew when he felt something was very important because he would spend his time and energy there with us, and make sure that we all went through this together, and I think it was more in terms of, he knew that, at some day when he was not going to be here that it was going to take a strong team to keep this organization alive and functioning in the way that he had set it going for us, and so I think he was always trying to develop all of us, and trying to bring us up and trying to give us the vision and the creativity that he had, even though we'll never match that, we'll certainly try to learn from his experience and learn from the example that he gave us to do the best that we possibly can.

13:03:10 Because your goal now is not to replace him, but take what he did and do something else with it.

13:03:20 That's right. I mean, nobody, nobody will ever replace Cesar Chavez—César. I mean, he was again, he was unique, he was a real heroic figure of our times, he was a real prophet within us, among us. And our goal and our mission is to take what he left us, that foundation that he built for us, and continue to develop it in the best way and the fastest way we possibly can, in a way that we know that he would have wanted to see this organization go, towards the future. It was a dream of building a strong democratic national organization for farmworkers, one that farmworkers would be, have a tremendous amount of participation and responsibility for really bringing about change. And at the same time, we not only think about ourselves but we do something for the community at large, and that's why I think the issue of food safety was always such a major motivating force behind him and behind the movement, because that was

something that we could do, not only for the farmworker community, but that's something we could do for the community at large. We have that responsibility, since we're so close with the food and the processing of food and so forth, to really make sure that it's safely produced for people, so it won't have a negative impact on people's health or on the environment or the world around us.

13:04:48 So all these threads were in place and going forward and all of a sudden Cesar wasn't there. What did that mean to you, when you learned that all of a sudden the focal point, the key in all this was no longer there?

13:05:09 Well, when, I'd talked to Cesar the day before he passed away, that evening, it was a Thursday night, and we were, I was in Phoenix, Arizona on the way to meet him the next morning so that we could begin travelling back to the East Coast, and continue to promote the campaign. At that particular time we were in the [Bruce Church?] trial, and promote the grape boycott and so forth, and when I spoke with him he just, we talked for a few minutes and he just said he was very tired and, it wasn't anything unusual because he oftentimes, I mean, you knew by nighttime that he'd spent a lot of time during the day, gotten up very early in the morning and that he would feel that way, and so as I look back at it and I think about those few moments that we had on the phone together, he really said, "I'm very tired, Art. I'm very tired." And so then the next day we left early in the morning with some supporters and we were driving from Phoenix, Arizona to San Luis to meet him there at that particular day, and José and I were talking in the car and we had Radio Campesino on the air because of our station in Phoenix, and as we were listening to it all of a sudden I heard some real sad music come out on the radio, and we had the radio turned down kind of low because we were talking to one another, and I asked him to turn it up right away, and I kind of caught, and he

caught something that said that Cesar was sick, and so we listened and we sped up to go even faster because we were in the middle of the desert at that point and we weren't near any phones, and so José started driving as fast as he could and so we get to a phone and then the next thing that we heard on the radio after there was a short interruption in the music, that he had died. [he cries] And still today it's difficult to think that Cesar's not here with us. It was, I couldn't believe it, that he was no longer alive, that he would no longer be with us here physically, that you wouldn't walk into his office and see him there, that we wouldn't be making those trips together, that he wouldn't be there to talk to and to discuss strategy with and to talk about the next organizing campaign and what we needed to do, and immediately when we got to a phone we called La Paz to find out what was happening and we talked to Paul, I talked to my wife Lu, and to Helen, and it was true. He had passed away. And so we drove as fast as we could to get to Yuma, where he had been taken at that point, and we got there within about an hour, and hour and a half, and immediately we began talking to Paul and to the family and, about making the arrangements to get him back, and working that particular part of it out. And so, I remember going to see him there, we had him in a waiting room and already there was a lot of people that were gathered around that had heard something on the news, and a lot of press was there, and wanted our reactions and so forth, and...I mean, the only thing that we could think about at that point was the fact that just Cesar wasn't there with us, and I flew back with him in the plane to go back to, to come back here to Bakersfield so we could begin making the plans for his funeral and for all those arrangements that needed to be made. [he cries] But it was...it's a moment that I'll never forget, within my life, and I'm just so grateful to God that I did get a chance to spend so much time with him, and that I did get a chance to share a big part of my life with him, and learn from him and see somebody in action who really believed in bringing about dignity and respect

for people, whether it be farmworkers or whether it be Chicanos or whether it be Latinos or African Americans, he really truly believed that. And I know that from my own personal experience with him and...and it's just, it was a great part of my life, and it always will be.

13:10:30 Something's happened since Cesar died that's truly remarkable. I know that no one expected to die, but he believed in sacrifice, and somehow his passing seems to have reenergized people in many ways, it's brought people back in touch with positive forces. It seems like the union is being reborn again now, in some way triggered by his passing.

13:11:Cesar, I guess he never stops organizing.

[END OF CAMERA ROLL 17]

TAPE 25, CR 18, SR 8, TC 14:11:19 (SLATE)

14:11:30 I guess I'd like to end the interview by having you talk a little bit about for lack of a better word, the spiritual and practical rebirth of the union after Cesar's death.

14:11:49 I guess with Cesar's passing, what's taken place in many of us, myself included, is that, it was like a real awakening to us in the sense that, here's Cesar who had given his entire life, he had given every ounce of strength that he possibly had—

[TAKE 9]

14:12:32 I think, you know, Cesar's passing has had a tremendous impact on all of us, and myself included, in that he just, it was an awakening for us all and Cesar

had given us, and devoted his entire life towards this movement, towards bringing about change for farmworkers, and we were there and we were all a part of it, and we were giving we thought everything we possibly could, but then after he passed away we really realized that, gosh, I really didn't do what I should have been doing, or I really didn't give enough of what I could have given, and as a result we know feel and sense that deep commitment that needs to be there. I mean, to really sense that fire in the gut that has to be there to drive you to make sure that you not only accomplish what you want to accomplish, but you accomplish the bigger vision, in terms of what Cesar had always talked to us about, of what the movement, what we're trying to accomplish here among farmworkers and among Latinos and so forth. And so as a result it had given us a new spirit, a new beginning, and when we planned to celebrate his first anniversary this last year, we wanted to do it in such a way that it would allow people that were having the same sense of feeling to become a part, to participate in it, and so it was actually the farmworkers that inspired us in a lot of ways to say

14:14:00 Hey, let's do something very big, very big, very dramatic that again, allows people to become a part of what we're doing. And so as a result the Peregrinación from Delano to Sacramento, yes, it was a reenactment of what was done in 1966 in the early days of the movement, but at the same time it was very important because it was a way for people to recommit themselves, it was a way for folks to come and once again demonstrate their support and their commitment towards the farmworker movement. And so, even from the first day when we started , although all of us were very nervous inside that, what if we have this Peregrinación and nobody comes to it, but even in the first days, already it created the energy that needed to be created as a result of it, and hundreds of farmworkers came on Holy Thursday, and left work and came to be a part of that, and they marched with us all along the way. We thought once we start to get outside of

Delano that there would be a big drop-off, and yet they continued with us all the way to Richgrove that first night, and we got to Richgrove and there the farmworkers really kind of set the stage for the whole Peregrinación when they had a hall already there all decorated up and everything, and they had organized people within the community there to donate food, and so they brought all the beans and tortillas and rice and whatever drink there to feed everybody that was participating in the event. We had a big meeting there that night and a big rally there that night, and then everybody went to sleep in people's homes. And that kind of set the stage, because from there on that's how the Peregrinación went every night. You start off in the mass and Father Salandini led the mass and then you would start going and we would announce that at a certain place we would be stopping for lunch and people would come to join us for lunch and bring things of that nature, and drink and so forth, and go to that night and find a place to meet at and literally, it was like a circus come to town. People would be outside on the sidewalks and they'd come and join us in the march and they would join us at the meeting and they would be there at the rally and they would bring food and take us to their homes to sleep.

14:16:10 And so it was a real reawakening, a real rejuvenation. And that triggered as a result of that a whole series of elections that began in May of last year. And since then now we've won eleven elections over this period of time, it's covering almost 4,000 workers and it's even taken us outside the state of California into Washington State where we just won the first ever, the first election for farmworkers ever in the state of Washington. And so it's continuing to create that energy and giving people that sense of hope, that we all need if we're going to continue in this effort to bring about justice for farmworkers. So that even in Cesar's passing, he's continued to motivate us, he's continued to organize us in the sense that we're doing what needs to be done to bring about change. This past year

Dolores Huerta our cofounder was the person that really took one of our major victories last year and turned it into a successful contract for us. Unbelievable. Here it was, an election that we won on December 16 of 1994, and by March 17 1995 Dolores had negotiated the agreement with Bear Creek Production Company, the largest rose company in the entire nation, negotiated an agreement and got a contract for us. And within a three-month period. Now, within labor that's unheard of, but also within our movement, within the farmworker efforts, again, that's a historic thing to make happen. And so Dolores did a tremendous job, the workers did a tremendous job, but also I think Cesar's passing also motivated those employers, that got them to the point where they said

14:17:58 "Look, the farmworkers have won this election fair and square, so we're going to do our part now, and we're going to sit down and bargain in good faith." And a lot of credit goes to their president Bill Williams for making that decision to do that. So as a result, I think it's a sign of what's taking place here. We were just alerted yesterday in fact that the Chateau St. Michel management, their management has made a decision to sit down and bargain with us in good faith, and not to fight us any longer. And even to sit down and work out a joint letter with us to go to the workers in saying, "Look, there's no fears that should be among anybody. Whether you supported the union or you didn't support the union during the election campaign, at this point we've made a decision to recognize the union and we're going to sit down and bargain with them in good faith." I mean, those are, that's not necessarily that common within labor today, and yet it's happening with us. So that, I think Cesar's spirit very much continues, not only to motivate us, to motivate me personally, but also impacts even on those that may be opposed to us. It has an impact on them and points to them in terms of their responsibility also towards their workers.

14:19:22 The last question I want to ask is, one of Cesar's favorite *dichos* was, "Hay más tiempo que vida." What does that dicho mean to you?

Well, I know Cesar always said that...

I know Cesar always said, "Hay más tiempo, hay mas, este, tiempo que vida."

One more time.

14:19:35 I know Cesar always said that, "Hay más tiempo que vida," and that was a favorite saying of his, but I don't know, I feel a certain urgency. I mean, gosh, we never expected that Cesar would leave us, and yet he did, and very much sooner than what we ever expected, so I think all of us feel a sense of urgency, that even though there is more time than life, that we do have a responsibility to do as much as we can, and to capture this period in our lives when people are feeling a sense of rejuvenation, feeling a sense of recommitment, and do everything we possibly can within this period, this window of opportunity to take forward the union and to complete the vision that Cesar set for us, in terms of creating this national democratic union for farmworkers. So as a result we're doing everything we possibly can and we're driving the organization, we're driving ourselves as hard as we can so that we can be as successful as we can and be proud of the work that we're doing and bring about that dignity and justice for farmworkers, and really fulfill our mission. [CUT]
[END OF INTERVIEW]