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**PETE VELASCO**

TAPE 14 TC 8:00:00:00 CR 6 SR 3

8:11:40

8:11:40 Peter, when you first came over in 1931, what was it like for a young Filipino like you to come over and start working in the United States?

8:11:51 Great. This country is new to me. It is very much different from my own country, so the change make me sort of very much alive and enjoyed being here.

8:12:11 How long were you here before—

[TAKE 2]

8:12:20 What was it like when you started working in agriculture in the fields?

8:12:28 I think it was great, because I have been to the countries where I saw some people suffering from lack of food, like all the countries I have been to, Casablanca, Sicily, Italy, France and Germany, all those countries were lacking of food, so I thought that being in agriculture I could be contributing to help feed the hungry. [CUT]

8:13:27 Tell me what you remember of Sept. 8, 1965. What happened then?

2????

8:13:33        September 8, 1965. That is when about 1,500 Filipinos went on strike against the grape growers in Delano. And it was a wonderful day because we have a very good response to the strikers against the grape growers. In my place, I didn't start the strike until about noon hour. That was the deadline that I have decided to do. At noon hour. You see, we work in the morning, and we pick grapes. What we did is pick the ripe grapes and trim it, and then pull them down under the vine and so on, keep them down, and then move on to the next vine, and do the same thing. And at noon hour there are a lot of picked grapes under the vines and that is when we quit and went home.

8:15:00        Were you involved in organizing this first strike in 1965?

8:15:07        No, I was not involved. In fact, Larry ITLIONG came to my camp. I was assistant foreman in my camp then. He came over to my camp and that's the first time I met Larry. He introduced himself, I introduced myself, and he told me that he is organizing a union, under AWOC, Agricultural Workers' Organizing Committee. And the reason he is organizing Filipinos to go on strike is because we needed to have better wages. At the time we were just receiving one dollar and ten cents an hour, and his demand was one dollar and forty cents an hour, and twenty five cents per picked, packed box brought to the avenue, from the middle of the row to the avenue, and we asked for twenty five cents. They only paid us five cents to do that.

8:16:38        When did Cesar and the Mexicans join you?

3????

8:16:43        September 16, 1965. That is when he and his members, some 2,000 Mexican members and volunteers joined with our strike. It was great. A lot of people.

8:17:08        So what happened when the Mexicans and the Filipinos joined up?

8:17:13        Well, we joined our membership to go out in the field, and strike in the ranches from which we have gone out on strike against. It's a big crowd, and the highway patrolmen, it seems to me, that they have connection with the growers, because when we were thinking of going to go on picket, put our picket line, they knew we were coming to that ranch. So we suspected that they have used the toy radio to contact the grower.

8:18:14        When did you first meet Cesar Chavez?

8:18:19        Strange, how I meet him. I met him after they have joined with the Filipino strikers. I met Cesar in the Filipino Community Hall. He was talking with another Filipino at the entrance of the Community Hall, and the entrance is so narrow that you have to have to ask permission to pass in between people who might be conversing right there at the entrance. So when he was, these two men were talking to each other, I asked permission, "Excuse me please." Then I pass in between them. And a few steps past them, I heard a mellow voice saying, "Hello, brother." I stopped, looked back, and then walked back to shake hands with this Mexican who was talking to a Filipino, and said, "Cesar Chavez." And I introduced myself,

4????

“Pete Velasco, glad to meet you.” That is how we met. Ever since that time, we have been calling each other brothers up to the end.

8:20:10      Tell me the story about when you got sick with cancer. What did Cesar do?

8:20:18      In January 1992 I was diagnosed as having colon cancer in my colon, and while I was there waiting for this surgery, Cesar Chavez and Father Saladini, who is a good companion of his, came to visit me, and he visited me twice while I was, during, in the hospital. And the second time he came to visit me Father Saladini was with him again, and he said to me, “Peter, when you are clean and get out of this hospital, I will teach you and Dolores how to cook macrobiotic food. “Brother Cesar,” I says to him, “I am clean now. They have not fed me for 52 hours. So I am clean now.” “No Peter, not that way. When you get out, there is no meat, you don’t eat meat, you don’t drink hard alcohol or wine, and you eat mostly vegetables and product of soy beans. Those are practically all the food that you and Dolores would eat.”

8:22:11      So did it cure you?

22...15      I think.

ROLL OFF

I say this time and again, that I think that it cured me because I am alive up to this point. 1992, ‘93, ‘94, now it’s ‘95. So I think I am on the road to recovery.

5????

Tape 15 TC9:00:00:00 CR7 SR 3[  
SLATE]

9:00:10 I have to ask you that question again about, were you cured, did he cure you?

9:00:15 I believe so. But there is a spot in my lung again, and suspected that a node may have caused that spot in my lung. I think I am cured of my colon surgery because last month I had a CAT scan taken, and the report was good, so they did not find any spot or any trace of cancer in my interior.

9:00:57 When the Filipinos and the Mexicans got together, did you all get along pretty well, or was there tension?

9:01:06 Some did not make it easy to be with Mexican, but for me, it is a joy to have some Mexicans working with us, because to go on strike you just don't go on strike all by yourself, because Filipinos have failed in lots of strikes because when Filipinos struck in the past, it's only Filipino strike. And what do you think, there are Mexicans, there are whites and there are blacks, and if you don't involve all the others to be with you, you are sunk, you fail, because those nationalities that are not involved become your scabs and they break your strike. So I think the merger of the Mexicans and Filipinos is a great, great thing.

9:02:25 Tell me the story of the pilgrimage to Sacramento. What do you remember of that?

6????

9:02:30           The pilgrimage to Sacramento was a great, great event, because some 10,000 people assembled right there in the Capitol Hill, in front of the Capitol Hill, and the pilgrimage started with just a few of us, you know. And I remember me, I was already raising funds in Berkeley at the time. I already [?], I have a jacket, I pin buttons all over my jacket in the back and the front etcetera, for me to sell to donors who are interested to get some buttons. And that I remember very clearly, because it was a heavy load after all those buttons have been pinned down on my jacket.

9:03:48           Now, you were born in the Phillipines, grew up there. What made you come over here, and what was it like when you arrived here?

9:04:00           My intention was to further my studies. You see, right as soon as I graduated from high school I told my father and mother, “Dad, Mom, I’m going to the United States,” and I’m going to follow my cousin, who came here 1927. That was April 1931 when I came to America, and my father and mother said, “Oh, no. We don’t want you to go to the United States. We want you to go to, we want to send you to military school.” You see, my father was so interested sending me to military school because he wants me to be a military personnel. And besides, he said “You have beautiful legs and if you put those stuff around your leg it will look beautiful.” [laughs] Can you imagine that kind of thought? [laughs] But, I said, “No, no Dad. I want to go to the United States. So what you are going to spend for me to go the military school, please use it, give it to me for my transportation to go to the United States.” So, we were poor. And money, so much money for my transportation, that’s too much to give right now,

7????

because I want it now, and so we have about five or ten hectares of land, so what they did is they mortgaged some of our land to give me some money. And I made sure that all the cost that they have used to mortgage the land I have repaid all those from here. [CUT]

[SLATE]

9:06:54                    So now that Cesar's gone, what is the legacy? What should we remember?

9:07:01                    That he is gone. A million and one things. You know, Cesar, to me, was a gift to the farmworkers, and to all peoples, to me. He was a gift. You see, he is out of this world...I have worked with Cesar all along since the time I became a board member in 1970. And he had taught us how to walk in the jungle. He had taken us by the hand and show us how to walk in the jungle and not be afraid. And he had taught us not to be afraid, he had taught us to maintain dignity, because to us the growers look at us just like dirt, and he didn't like that. You have to maintain dignity by acting like a first class citizen, because you are a first class citizen, he said. And his legacy is something that revive the spirit in all farmworkers. You see, the spirit of the union has some way, somehow just become stagnant like, but the force of the grape boycott was still going on, OK? And so, when he passed away you see some 3,000 people attended his funeral. 3,000 people. Never have I seen any funeral attendance as much as we had when he passed away. And all these 3,000 people are the ones that have received the legacy that he had left us. And spirit within everyone of us has become renewed just like new all over again, just like the spirit of 1965 has come back to life.

8????

And that was a beautiful legacy that we received from our brother Cesar Chavez.

Thank you. Very eloquent.

END OF INTERVIEW