

"Viva la Causa!"

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A nurse who worked with the migrant farm workers found that their cause had to be hers; it was as important for her to work as a boycotter during the grape strike as it was to remain in the strikers' clinic she'd helped set up. Only after they had established their rights and organization could the farm workers turn to setting up permanent clinics and a health care plan which would provide the kind of care they wanted. This is the story of that five-year effort told by a nurse who was part of it.

MARION MOSES

We as health practitioners have much to learn from the poor. Perhaps we can begin by trying to understand the despair and distrust of those who have had only crumbs from the tables of the medically affluent for too many years. The poor are teaching us that the struggle for health care is inseparable from the struggle for human dignity.

No group has demonstrated this more clearly than the migrant farm workers who, though exploited and oppressed, have developed, through their own organization, a health care system that is economically and professionally sound. They did it without pilot projects, demonstration grants, or federal money. They did it with the help of professionals but without the control of professionals.

I first became interested in the problems of farm workers in the spring of 1964 while I was a student on the Berkeley campus of the University of California. My introduction came from a student sitting at a card table surrounded by pictures showing conditions of poverty among migrant workers in California. During the next few months, I worked with the Citizens for Farm Labor and met many of the labor officials, ministers, lobbyists, and

others who were trying to bring the plight of migrant workers to the consciousness and the consciences of the American public.

We reactivated an organization called the Student Committee on Agricultural Labor (SCAL) and gradually began to build a base on the Berkeley campus, for activities relating to farm workers. It was during this time that I first heard of Cesar Chavez and Delano and other valley towns that I later came to know well. It was at this time also that I first learned of efforts to organize farm workers who were excluded from the labor legislation which protected the rights of other working men and women.

The struggle in which later I was to become involved began in September 1965 in Delano, a small town situated in the southern part of one of the world's richest agricultural areas, California's San Joaquin Valley. Filipino members of the Agricultural Workers Organizing Committee, AFL-CIO, walked out of the grape vineyards demanding a 10-cent-an-hour increase in wages from \$1.10 to \$1.20 and the right to have a union. They were joined by the National Farm Workers Association led by Cesar Chavez and the grape strike was on. After five years of strike and boycott, the United Farm Workers, AFL-CIO (the two groups merged in 1966), signed contracts with over 90 percent of the area grape growers. The union now has many other contracts in California, Arizona, and Florida.

From the earliest days of the strike, union members and leadership were concerned about health care. Local doctors refused to care for the strikers, and volunteer doctors and nurses from San Francisco and Los Angeles gave weekend help to Peggy McGivern, a registered nurse who was a full-time volunteer with the union.

At the time, I was working at the Kaiser Research Institute in San Francisco and was a part-time volunteer with the local Bay Area support committee. I made my first visit to Delano, a five-hour drive from San Francisco, in January 1966. I walked in the door of the strike headquarters around 8 o'clock in the morning and someone asked, "Can you type?" and handed me 25 letters to union leaders throughout the country asking for support.

The next three nights I slept on the floor of a farmworker's home. Mornings I was out on the picket line at 5:30 a.m. and I ate in the strike kitchen at an abandoned camp about 2 miles from strike headquarters, appropriately called "The Camp." The Camp was an active place. It was there that food and clothing donated by supporters was stored and dispensed and picketers got gas for their cars. There would be a clinic there, too, one day but at that time a "clinic" was set up on Sundays in the kitchen of "The Pink House," a house in Delano used by the organizers.

As the strike continued and more health professionals got involved,

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