WE ARE THE LEGACY OF CESAR CHAVEZ

On March 3, 1961, Jesus Marin Barrera (called Marin by his friends) and his wife, Amelia Barrera, packed up their car with bare necessary essentials such as blankets, pot/pans and clothes and left Mission, Texas, for a new life in Porterville, California.

It was a very difficult decision but they had little choice. Both had been working at a factory which had closed down—leaving them with mounting bills and three kids to support, Yolanda, age 10, Marin, age 8 and Enedina (“Annie”), age 5. They had been earning $1.05 an hour. They tried working in the fields—picking cotton—something they had done before but the hourly was $.50 an hour.

Like so many other Tejanos, they put their faith in God and struck out for California.

They found that living in California was more difficult than they anticipated. They quickly found work picking oranges and tomatoes as well as thinning plants. The hourly wage was higher than in Texas, $1.00 an hour, but the expenses were much higher.

Soon, however, the Barreras became accustomed to life in Porterville. They worked hard to save money to one day return to their ancestral home in Mission, Texas. That was never to happen!

Marin and Amelia sold their home in Mission for $2,000 and with that money, they purchased a home in Porterville, California. As they had been taught by their parents, they paid cash for their home. It was a small, one bedroom house which eventually became the headquarters of the Farm Worker's Union.

One day, Marin and Amelia met a man who would change their life forever—Jim Drake.

Jim Drake was a man like no other known to Marin and Amelia. He towered over others, physically, mentally and emotionally. He inspired all who came in contact with him to do something meaningful with their lives.

And thus it was that Marin entered the world of “La Causa”. It began innocent enough. Jim suggested that Marin find some other individuals who might be interested in obtaining decent housing for themselves. Marin contacted some of his friends and eventually there was a group of about 20 families who were interested in self-help housing and in general, they were interested in making changes in the world around them to benefit
not only themselves but others as well.

After a few months, Jim suggested that since the group was already together, perhaps the group should remain a cohesive group and they should work toward obtaining better conditions in the field. All agreed and they became the Farm Worker’s Organization with the headquarters at Marin’s house.

Under the direction of Jim Drake and David Havens, from the Migrant Ministry, and with Marin Barrera as president of this group of FWO, the group prospered.

The Migrant Ministry paid for an office on Olive Street and the members paid their dues either to Marin or his daughter, Yolanda, who worked in the office for two hours after school. The members qualified to purchase various items for cars such as oil, tires etc at a discount. The group purchased gas in a huge tank which could be purchased by the members at a discount. The office was opened circa 1965 and whereas gas sold generally for $.31 a gallon, the members could obtain it for $.23 a gallon.

In 1965, Jim Drake suggested that the FWO join a larger group from Delano, California headed up by a man named Cesar Chavez. The group agreed to meet with Cesar Chavez and hear what he had to say. Cesar Chavez met with the FWO and convinced the group that there was strength in numbers. The group unanimously agreed to join with Delano to fight the injustices in the fields but they also agreed to maintain itself as a group with Marin as the local president of the Porterville FWO.

The Porterville FWO was very active. They would organize caravans of vehicles to travel to Delano and take as many people as possible to the Friday meeting in Filipino Hall. They would recruit members to join them. When the strikers in Delano walked out in 1966, the Porterville FWO organized deliveries of food and clothes to Delano. The Porterville FWO worked incessantly in organizing fund raisers to raise money for the strikers and for the FWO in Delano. All individuals volunteered their time, energy, and money.
Here is Marin at one of the Delano meetings with his list of donations.

Marin even permitted his daughter to interpret at the weekly Friday meetings in Delano, California.

At left bottom, a photo of Yolanda Barrera interpreting at a weekly meeting of the UFWOC—photo appeared in El Malcriado, the Union newspaper.

At right, Marin’s daughter, Yolanda interpreting at the meetings and during a break consulting with Larry Itilong.
At left: Marin organized the Porterville FWO to picket at the local stores during the boycott days.

At right: a picture of Marin’s daughters, Yolanda (in green) and Annie (orange-front), picketing at Smith’s Grocery Store—urging consumers not to purchase grapes.

Marin’s family, which by now included young Mario Barrera, all participated whole-heartedly in La Causa.

At left: middle boy is Marin Barrera, age 12, at one of the functions in Delano.

At right: The middle girl is Annie, age 9 as she listens attentively at one of the Friday meetings.

At left: Amelia (on right), Marin’s wife, and Maria, Marin’s sister (on left) at the March on Gallo in Modesto, California in 1972.
Jesus Marin picketing in Porterville.
When la peregrinacion began in 1966, Jesus Marin, still the president of the Porterville FWO, organized the members to assist the peregrinos. The marchers left Delano and went through Earlimart and spent the night in Ducor. The Porterville FWO took the peregrinos coffee and snacks. In the morning, Jesus Marin and the Porterville FWO met the peregrinos at the entrance to Porterville on Main Street. Jesus Marin had organized the event in Porterville and had mobilized several hundred farm workers to meet up with the peregrinos and to support the March. The plan was to march down Main Street, turn right onto Putnam and end up at Murray Park. Jesus Marin attempted to get a parade permit but the City denied it and threatened to arrest anyone who marched without the permit. Fearless and undaunted, the Porterville FWO nevertheless congregated at the entrance to the city and persisted in marching.

At left is Jesus Marin with his trusty accordion and his brother, Jose Raul ("Rico") Barrera with the guitar when they met the peregrinos with music and the all familiar, "La Adelita", a Mexican revolutionary song.
At the park, the Porterville FWO presented the peregrinos with food for their bodies and food for their soul—prayers, encouragement, music and promises of continued support.

Pictured below is the Porterville FWO at the rally in Murray Park in Porterville, California.
Front row: left Luis Conde, Simon Sanchez, Richie Alvarado, Jose Olivares, unk, Sebastian Zamora, unk, Jose Raul Barrera, unk, Jose Garcia, Suarez, Mr. Higareda and his granddaughters,

Second row: (man with cigarette) Jesus Marin Barrera, unk., Pablo Espinoza (man with white short sleeved shirt), Lucio Chavera, Margarita Lopez (black vest) Julia Flores, Amelia Barrera, Socorro Norona, Juvencio Serna, Lupe Olivares (in plaid shirt), Josefa Alvarado, Maria Garcia, several unk.men, Antonio Rosas (man with crossed arms), unk lady, unknown man
In the morning, the peregrinos continued their march to Sacramento. Jesus Marin and his entire family, including Mario, age 2½ marched through Strathmore and then on to Lindsay where the peregrinos spent the night. In the morning, the Barrera family continued with the next leg of the march, through Exeter and on to Visalia, California. From there, the children went home but Jesus Marin, his wife, and his brother, Rico Barrera, and others continued to march with the peregrinos as they could.

They would work in the morning picking fruits and then drive to join up with the peregrinos and march with them until the evening hours and then return home again and do this the next day. On the weekends, the Barrera brothers, their wives and their friends marched with the peregrinos. The Barrera brothers always marched with their accordion and guitar.

At left, Marin with his accordion and Rico with his guitar during the march.
The March to Sacramento was a life-changing event for the Barrera family. Cesar Chavez changed the life of the Barrera family. The Barreras learned that nothing is impossible—even a march on foot to the State Capitol—even contracts with all-powerful contractors—and yes, even to change the plight of the farm workers—all in the life-time of one man—Cesar Chavez.

Jesus Marin lives with his wife, Amelia, in Porterville, California. His oldest daughter, Yolanda, is a federal criminal defense attorney in Los Angeles, California; his son, Marin, works as a psychiatric technician supervisor at the Porterville Developmental Center. Annie, is an account executive with AT&T. Mario is an attorney employed as a deputy with the Alternate Public Defender for Los Angeles County in Palmdale, California. A new generation of Barreras is now emerging. Jesus Marin’s oldest granddaughter, Veronica, is now an attorney working as a deputy county public defender with Los Angeles County.

When Jesus Marin and Amelia first came to California, like so many others, seeking a better life for themselves and their children, they couldn’t even dream of what life had in store for them. But that’s because they had not yet met Cesar Chavez, a man who would change their lives forever—just like he did with millions of others.