

## Living In The Past

It's confusing.

I look forward to this evening, maybe tomorrow, and perhaps even the day beyond that, but not much more. Why would I? Living in the past happens to many of us – the elderly, getting older – and it has certainly happened in my case. Most every day now, I live in the past. This state of being started with the advent of the Farmworker Movement Documentation Project, which I began in May 2002.

At first I did not notice the change in my orientation, but the more I delved into the very early years of Cesar Chavez and his farmworker movement, the more I began to reside there. And as former farmworker movement colleagues came forward at my urging with their own reminiscences about that era, I remembered even more. Details, pieces of conversation, sequential events, the tone of voices, the names and faces of people not seen for more than 40 years; I even began to recreate some of the meetings in which I had taken part. This state of mind began to consume more and more of my consciousness, especially throughout 2004 when I organized and served as moderator for an eight month online discussion with more than 220 former colleagues.

This backward living continues unabated, so much so, I have developed a rationale to justify it. At my age, how many years do I have left? Pick a number, any number, but the cold reality is this: not many. Think about it: if my seventy-plus years have passed like a flash – my God, how did they go by so fast? – how quickly will the number you chose for me pass? I have stacked up more years behind me, than I will ever have access to in the future. It is literally downhill, steeper all the time. Besides, I tell myself, I enjoyed those years – not just my farmworker years, but other career years as well, so why not plumb them for additional enjoyment? What's the harm in it? Yes, this sounds a little bizarre, even to me, but what to do about it?

“Don't live in the past”! How many times have we heard this admonition? Why not, I ask, what's the harm? And if in the course of this backward-living, I am able to produce one of the most unique and important documentation projects in American history – or even if it merits only an honorable mention

- how bad can it be? Especially if I do not make a talking pest of myself by badgering others with ancient history. Would it be more personally satisfying to me or would I be more productive if I focused all my effort and attention on the uncertain future?

I think not.