

# Cesar Chavez and His Farmworker Movement

By LeRoy Chatfield  
Friend & Colleague 1963-1973

**Dedication:** To each volunteer in the farmworker movement who worked with such energy, dedication, and self-sacrifice to build the first farm labor union in the history of the United States. If I have anything to say about it, your good work will not go undocumented.

## Chapter One

Interview with Professor Paul Henggeler

In Memoriam: Paul R Henggeler  
Professor of History, University of Texas–Pan American  
December 12, 2004

I never met Professor Henggeler in person nor talked with him on the telephone. Our only communication was by way of letter and email. He first wrote in November of 2002, asking for my cooperation by answering some of his questions about Cesar Chavez. I agreed to do so, but only in writing. For the next six months he asked pages of questions, and I answered them.

It was this exchange with Professor Henggeler that laid the groundwork for the creation of the farmworker documentation project, which began in May of 2003. Now, 20 months later, 188 essays have been written, several thousand emails have been exchanged, and almost 1000 former farmworker movement volunteers have been identified and contacted. All of this can be traced back to the research of one young academic historian.

But now he is gone. Not yet 50 years old, he died of an apparent heart attack on July 22, 2004. What a great loss. I know nothing about him personally, except that he was married. I know from our correspondence that he spent the past six years of his life researching and writing about “Cesar Chavez’s leadership of the farmworker movement.”

In one of my last communications with Paul, he wrote, “Hi, LeRoy: I can’t thank you enough for the CD-ROM (the essays) and your decision to get folks ‘talking’ about their experiences in the UFW before it all evaporates.”

For my part, I cannot thank Paul enough for his support, and affirmation of the documentation project. I can only hope that his own historical research about the farmworker movement does not itself evaporate. May he rest in peace.

### **Origin of the Documentation Project**

The Documentation Project began on November 25, 2002, with a letter from Professor Paul Henggeler, an associate professor of history at University of Texas–Pan American. He does not know this, and neither did I until I retraced its history.

In his introductory letter to me he wrote, “For six years now, I have been researching material for a book that will examine Cesar Chavez’s leadership of the farmworker movement. Unlike previous works on Chavez, the information for this book is drawn almost exclusively from primary materials available at the UFW archives.” I wondered if Professor Henggeler had any notion about how the archives of the United Farm Workers began? I doubted it. Unless he read my unpublished journal, “Cesar, 1968” (September 1968 to March 1969), how could he know that on March 25, 1969, I was the one who rummaged through the closets of the union office, more commonly know as the “Pink House,” to find press clippings, correspondence, photographs, appointment books, and a variety of other documents—enough to fill three station wagons. How could he know that I was the one who sorted through these early union “primary materials” piece by piece, separated them into general categories, and threw away the scraps of paper that made no sense in order to make the contents of the boxes look more neat and presentable for the librarians at Wayne State University when they opened them?

The founder of the union, Cesar Chavez, had made the decision that all union documents would be sent to the Wayne State University Labor Archives in Detroit for preservation and eventual public scrutiny. Yet, on this March day when most of the union leadership was out of Delano, and for no apparent reason except that I had some time to kill, I implemented Cesar’s decision. Now, 33 years later, a Texas history professor writes to tell me that he is the first historian who will write a book based solely on the examination of these primary materials. Life has many twists and turns. If I had not taken it upon myself to collect these early movement records, I can only suppose they would have been lost forever in the chaotic and hectic organizing campaigns that characterized so much of the union’s development in the late 1960s.

Without either Professor Henggeler or my realizing it, his letter of introduction planted the seeds for the NFWA, etc. Documentation Project in my subconscious.

### **UFW Interviews Unsatisfying**

After leaving the farmworker movement in August of 1973, I have been asked many times in the ensuing years to answer questions about Cesar Chavez and the farmworker

movement. I have submitted countless times to one-on-one interviews with journalists and reporters from radio, TV, newspapers, and magazines; documentary filmmakers; academic researchers; and students writing a paper “due tomorrow.” I became sick of it. I felt like an actor trotted out onto the stage and told to “perform.” And as you might expect, there came a time when those interviewing me knew so little about Cesar and the farmworker movement that unless I provided them with enough background material, they could not even ask the questions to complete the interview.

After each interview encounter, some lasting for several hours at a time, I felt washed out and left empty-handed. Hours, even days later, I would still be thinking about some of the questions I had been asked and my responses, and agonizing why I hadn’t included this or that point or, worse, why was I not able to better explain the points I wanted to make. In the end, I realized that very little was ever written or aired from my interviews, and even if something tangible did result, it was only a snippet or two. An hour of videotaping might lead to one headshot and one sentence. I stopped giving interviews. Trying hard not to disappoint a would-be interviewer, I would pawn them off onto other veterans of the farmworker wars or plead time pressures associated with my work at Loaves & Fishes. For most of the 1990s, I gave no interviews.

But in 2002, Professor Henggeler’s interview request seemed to hold more promise. For one thing, my friend and former farmworker colleague, Jerry Cohen, urged me to answer Henggeler’s questions because Jerry had already spent a great deal of time briefing, explaining, and interpreting for him many of the primary materials in the archives about which he had numerous and detailed questions. And Jerry thought I should be the one to answer his questions about Cesar’s Fast for Non-Violence, and some of the earlier farmworker movement years. I was hesitant, but in the end, I agreed to answer Professor Henggeler’s questions on one condition: I would answer them only in writing.

**Question 1: What specific role did you play in the recruitment of Ganz and Cohen?**

In 1967, Jerry Cohen was a young, legal services attorney assigned to the McFarland office of California Rural Legal Services. Positive reports from the paralegals in the McFarland office about Jerry’s work made their way back to Cesar, and he asked me to meet with Jerry to see if he might want to come to work with the National Farm Workers Association (NFWA) full time. I did so. Soon thereafter, Jerry joined the union to become its first in-house legal counsel.

Up to this time, the NFWA had relied on volunteer attorneys from a number of labor and civil rights law firms in the San Francisco Bay Area. While their service was very much appreciated, it was primarily defensive, and not immediate enough to form an offensive legal front for the movement, which Cesar very much desired.

I knew Marshall Ganz from my teaching days at Garces High School in Bakersfield. If I am not mistaken, and I might be, I first met him in 1958 during the course of my

extracurricular work as speech and debate coach for Garces High School while Marshall was a student participant from Bakersfield High School.

If this recollection is imprecise, I certainly knew him in 1964 during my second teaching assignment at Garces High School because he was active in the civil rights movement in Mississippi as a member of the Student Non-Violent Coordinating Committee (SNCC). He had come back to Bakersfield (his hometown) to raise funds to purchase a pickup truck and other materiel for his work in SNCC. During his stay in Bakersfield, he formed a chapter of SNCC, and I offered him the use of the Garces High School auditorium for the first public organizing meeting. As a result of Marshall's civil rights activism, I joined the Bakersfield SNCC chapter, and we stayed in touch.

After the table grape strike started in September of 1965 I relocated to Delano in October and began my work with Cesar. Some time thereafter, I have a recollection of a telephone call between Marshall and myself about the possibility of his working with the farmworkers' union, and I encouraged him to do so. I had several talks with Cesar touting Marshall's work in the civil rights movement, and my previous association with him. Not long after those conversations, Marshall joined the union full time.

**Question 2: When did you first take an active role in the FWA's [sic] activities and what did you do? What memories do you have of the rent strike and JD Martin strike that might be useful? And how accurate is Cesar's recollection?**

I don't know how accurate Cesar's recollection was because I don't know from your question what his recollection was about.

### **Rent Strike**

In 1965, before the grape strike began, and before I enrolled in a doctoral program at the University of Southern California, I was teaching at Garces High School in Bakersfield. Someone from the NFWA (I presume, though I can't be sure, it was Cesar because he was the only one I really knew well) invited me to participate in a "rent strike" march in Tulare County. I wore my official Christian Brothers black suit, black silk vest, and a white starched collar somewhat similar to the clerical collar worn by the Catholic clergy. I brought with me a sign to carry that read, "Don't Mourn—Organize!" The quotation was from Joe Hill, a famous union organizer who was executed in Salt Lake City for his union organizing activities. A friend of mine, a Catholic anarchist named Ammon Hennacy, operated a Catholic Worker house of hospitality in Salt Lake City, and he had brought Joe Hill (and his quotation) to my attention. Even though I had never participated in a farmworker "rent strike" march before, I thought Joe Hill's quotation was appropriate for the occasion.

### **Grape Strike**

After the grape strike began in September of 1965, and while I was enrolled at USC, I came to Delano to visit Cesar and see the strike firsthand. I was dressed again in my official religious garb, and he asked me if I would visit the strikers on the picket line in the fields. I did picket for several hours, and called out in vain to the strikebreakers to leave their jobs. By the end of the day I realized a farmworker strike would never be won by means of picket lines in the fields.

### **Working for the NFWA**

Shortly after my Delano visit, Cesar called me in Los Angeles and asked if I would come to Delano to work with him in the farmworker strike. His telephone call made a profound impression on me, I decided to leave USC and resign from the Christian Brothers in order to work with him.

Much to my surprise he asked me *not* to involve myself directly with the grape strike but to raise funds to begin a farmworker cooperative. The NFWA already had its own credit union, of which Cesar was very proud. He positively glowed when he talked about it, but he also envisioned a cooperative gas station where farmworkers could purchase gasoline less expensively, and service and repair their cars with tools and expertise provided by the cooperative. He explained to me the importance of the automobile to the economic well being of a farmworker family, and how beneficial it would be for union members to have such a cooperative. He was also mindful that such a cooperative would be yet another “organizing benefit” to attract non-union farmworkers.

He did not tell me *what* to do or *how* to do it; he set no timetable or deadlines; I was completely on my own. However, the goal was clear: raise funds to organize a farmworker gas station cooperative. Cesar did not expect me to know anything about cooperatives, and I did not, but he did expect me to find out what I needed to know, and then make it happen.

I marveled then, as I marvel today, at the realization that Cesar was so concerned with implementing his vision—or dream—of what a farmworker union should be, that he chose, in my case at least, to ignore the most important strike in NFWA history for the sake of promoting and organizing farmworker cooperatives.

For my part, I traveled to the Bay Area and Los Angeles, visited cooperatives, spoke at universities and churches about the farmworker movement, and organized fundraising campaigns, especially among university professors, liberal groups, and individuals. While my primary message was about Cesar’s dream of farmworker cooperatives, I talked about Cesar himself, the working conditions of farmworkers, the grape strike, the need for food and money to support the strikers, the need for volunteers, etc. In effect, I became another farmworker union link between the cities and the picket lines of Delano.

And because I was close to Cesar, and “working” the cities, Cesar called on me time and again for ad hoc strike-related support with union leaders, politicians, and church leaders. This initial work of mine for the NFWA lasted nearly a year.

### **Question 3: Why did Chavez accord you the degree of trust that he did?**

At the risk of self-promotion, I offer the following reasons why Cesar *might* have trusted me.

**Friendship.** For nearly 10 years, Cesar was my best friend. I could talk to him about anything: personal family matters, movement strategy, staff evaluations and gossip, Oakland Raider football, election politics, religious politics, union politics, nonviolence, etc. Several times, especially in the early years, Cesar’s wife, Helen, would call to ask me to speak to Cesar about this or that because “he will listen to you.” I also think Cesar needed someone to talk with, someone who would respect the confidence of the conversation, no matter how far out it might sound to others.

**Religious background.** When I met Cesar in 1963, two years before the table grape strike, I was a member of the Christian Brothers, a 300-year-old Roman Catholic religious order of French origin, dedicated to teaching poor kids. Unfortunately, the Christian Brothers had long since abandoned their commitment to the poor by the time I entered the order in 1949, but it was still part of their historical mission statement. As a Christian Brother, I had to take vows of obedience, poverty, and chastity, and I was expected to live a disciplined and upright life.

Cesar himself was religious, and very Catholic. He had been much influenced by a few Catholic priests from the San Francisco Archdiocese during his Community Service Organization (CSO) years working with Mexican-American communities. These priests were part of what was called the “mission band,” and they preached the social justice teachings of the Catholic Church. In effect, they provided the religious and theological context for the community-based work that Cesar was doing with Mexican-Americans.

I believe one of the reasons that Cesar and I worked so well together was because we shared the same religious references.

**Pre-strike relationship.** It is only natural, I think, to implicitly trust those who were present with you prior to the outburst of such a public media event as a table grape strike. Newcomers, as well meaning and dedicated as they may be, are looked upon with some natural suspicion for the simple reason that they are unknown to those already present.

I fit into the category of those already “present.” In addition, Cesar asked me personally to leave my career in the Christian Brothers to join him. It is possible, I suppose, that he thought he was recruiting a Christian Brother, not realizing it was out of the question for

the Christian Brothers in 1965 to assign me to the farmworker movement. If so, he never mentioned it to me.

**Work ethic.** Cesar was a prodigious worker. He worked constantly with no days off, no vacation, no Little League commitments, and no hobbies. I, too, was a hard worker, and Cesar appreciated it and said so.

Whatever the reasons, there is no doubt that Cesar placed a great deal of trust in me. For months at a time, when he was traveling throughout the U.S. and Canada talking up the farmworker boycott, I was charged with the responsibility of running the day-to-day operation of the union with the sole responsibility of making hundreds of financial and personnel-type decisions. I was expected to know—and do—what Cesar would have wanted. But even so, when Cesar returned I was expected to give him a complete briefing on what money I had authorized to be spent, and for whom. Rarely did we disagree, but sometimes we did. What was done was done, and I would know better for the future.

#### **Question 4: In 1966 what motivates Chavez? “To even the score?”**

You would have to provide me the specific references to justify taking this quote at face value. What was the labor conference? Where was it held? Was it part of his speech, a media interview, a question from the audience, etc.? Was it the same labor conference I attended with Cesar at the St. Francis Hotel in San Francisco?

This quote, if accurate, sounds to me (especially in 1966) like a throwaway quip or a flip remark. I never heard Cesar, publicly or privately, characterize his commitment to build a farmworker movement in order to gain revenge. Rather, I heard him warn us constantly not to demonize the growers, because “if some of the striking farmworkers were growers, they would be worse than the growers.” Or not to romanticize farmworkers because they are poor and oppressed; they are human beings just like the rest of us, and they embody both good and evil.

In fact, I never heard Cesar curse the growers, individually or collectively, and I, like many others, had plenty of opportunities to hear him do so, if he were so inclined. This is not to suggest that we were not locked in a kind of hand-to-hand epic combat, and not only through the picket lines but more important, through the boycott. Cesar was a competitor, but always calm and poised. If he sensed even the slightest weakness from the grower side, he poured the coals on, all the while making “peace talk” through the media.

#### **Question 5: Why was Chavez able to succeed where others failed?**

To define success and failure is tricky. Did these other union organizational efforts really fail? Or, for example, did some settle for more immediate, short-term goals, such as another nickel added to the piece rate? Or might other unions, such as Teamsters or AFL-CIO affiliates, in their attempts to organize agribusiness workers, have to settle for a contract covering only workers *inside* the winery or packing sheds, and abandon the

workers in the fields? And even if most farmworker strikes were crushed by employer-sponsored violence, is that to be judged as failure or is it more likely that seeds were planted for eventual union victories? Consider the civil rights movement and the decades it took to win even the right to vote? And 30 years later, poor blacks were still not permitted to vote in some parts of the 2000 Florida election. In a social revolution when/what is failure or success?

How do you define Cesar's success? Or failure? Is it the winning of farmworker contracts with the wineries in 1967? Is that enough to claim success? Or is it finally success when the Delano table grape growers sign contracts? Or is it sufficient to count just the Coachella Valley growers? And are Cesar and his movement to be judged as failures when the growers do not renegotiate those contracts? And is it a success for Cesar when the winery contracts are renegotiated? And is Cesar a failure when a DiGiorgio-type grower sells his business without a union successor clause? Or how do you judge Cesar's success or failure when large corporate growers refuse to bargain even when the union has been certified by the state as the bargaining agent, and California law requires it?

To judge success and/or assign failure to events in the history of organizing farmworkers in California is a slippery slope for an academic, it seems to me.

Had there not been a long history in California of attempts to organize farmworkers in this or that sector of agribusiness, albeit most of them "unsuccessful" and violently crushed, then how does one account for the almost immediate rallying response from intellectuals, liberals, union leaders, students, church organizations, and "do-gooders" of all persuasions in response to the Delano table grape strike? Is this outpouring of urban support considered success or failure?

What did Cesar have to do with the "timing" of his decision to take up the cause of organizing farmworkers? How could he have known or even predicted the influence of the civil rights movement, the free speech movement, the anti-war movement, the make-love-not-war movement, the nuclear peace movement, the assassinations of Martin Luther King, Jr., and Robert Kennedy on his own movement? Finding/ not finding oneself at a propitious place in history is success? Or failure?

**Question 6: The core of Chavez's energy and creativity? What fueled him? How to describe Chavez's leadership style? Did his celebrity status affect his decision making process? Or his relationship with UFW leaders and with workers?**

**Voluntary poverty.** The most compelling, and the most overlooked, aspect of Cesar's leadership was his decision to live in voluntary poverty. When I met him in 1963, he did not own a house, a washing machine, a car, a telephone, a suit of clothes, or a checking account. This voluntary deprivation of basic material goods for the sake of identifying with the enforced poverty of farmworkers provided him with the moral leadership needed to command the respect not only of farmworkers but men and women of goodwill

everywhere. It was because of his commitment to voluntary poverty that he attracted people to come work with him. They wanted to be part of something selfless, authentic, and concerned with the well being of others. Religious history is replete with “saints” who lived in voluntary poverty in order to serve others, and they are revered even to this day. Cesar stands in the history of that religious tradition.

It is impossible to overstate the importance of Cesar’s commitment to voluntary poverty and its impact on his movement to organize farmworkers.

**Called to service.** Before his decision to found the NFWA, Cesar developed a successful career as one of CSO’s most effective organizers. For the times, and considering his status in life as a Mexican-American with limited formal education, he was well paid and enjoyed job security, but he was not satisfied. Because of his own history, he identified with the suffering and powerlessness of farmworkers. In short, he felt called to service.

Traditionally, a call to service is a religious concept. It is not what I want to do, but what God wants me to do. I believe Cesar stands in this religious tradition. At first he tried to persuade the CSO leadership to sponsor his work with farmworkers. They refused. At that point he had to respond/not respond to his calling.

**Concept of Founder.** There is a world of difference between a “founder” and “followers.” Cesar was the founder of the National Farm Workers Association, and his board members and volunteers, despite any titles or responsibilities assigned to them, were followers. Cesar could not have changed this relationship even if he had so wanted.

It is the founder who spells out the mission statement, who sets the moral tone, who selects—and assigns—the followers, who retains the veto power, and the one who is ultimately responsible. One can pretend otherwise, but until the founder is deposed or dead, the organization created is bound up in this founder-follower relationship.

**Leadership style.** Consultation and consensus best describe Cesar’s leadership style. Soft spoken, respectful of other opinions, listening, asking questions, probing answers, offering suggestions, and weighing options were all hallmarks of Cesar’s dealings with his board of directors, his volunteers, and farmworkers themselves. He was not one to bark out orders, twist arms, raise his voice, or confront people—and he led by example. I always felt Cesar would not propose a course of action that he himself would not undertake in your stead.

While others, like myself, were often impatient with the shortcomings and indecisiveness of others, especially board members, Cesar manifested a long-suffering patience that seemed to border on helplessness. He was determined to seek consensus, and while he maintained a sort of moral veto power over what he did not want, he sought to bring about unanimity for what he did want.

With volunteer staff, I would characterize his leadership style as consultative, but more open and forthright, in determining a course of action.

**Commitment to nonviolence.** Cesar's commitment to nonviolence was both principled and practical. I am not sure to what extent his commitment to non-violence was gospel-based—I feel this was a factor—but he was an avid reader of Gandhi, and admired Martin Luther King, Jr.'s use of nonviolence in the civil rights movement.

The cornerstone of the farmworker movement was nonviolence. This policy was publicly proclaimed at every opportunity because: 1) it hindered the growers from using brute force to crush the strike; 2) it encouraged farmworkers to strike without fearing for their lives; 3) it encouraged volunteers, especially students, to come to Delano with a sense of personal safety; 4) it prompted a positive response from church bodies and religious organizations; 5) it checked the natural propensity of farmworker strikers and organizers to retaliate in kind; 6) it forced the union leadership to be more creative and imaginative in bringing enough pressure on the growers to recognize the union. Ultimately, nonviolence forced the development of an international table grape boycott, which caused the growers to fight on turf they could not control. It was the boycott that forced union recognition, brought about signed contracts, and the passage of the California Agricultural Labor Relations Act (ALRA).

**Celebrity status.** Cesar soon achieved celebrity status, especially by the time of the March to Sacramento in the spring of 1966. I don't think he cared a whit about it except to the extent that it was a royal pain in the ass. In reality, it was a two-edged sword: on the one hand it spread the word about the cause of farmworkers, and on the other hand, it caused Cesar's life to be more choreographed than he ever desired. Life is a series of trade-offs, and Cesar's celebrity status was certainly such a life.

**Question 7: "Maybe it's just a matter of trying to even the score." (Cesar, October 23, 1966)**

I interpret Cesar's remarks in this interview as his attempt to deflect any notion that he considers himself, or wants others to consider him, a "hero" or a "symbol" because of his efforts to build a farmworker union. The last thing that Cesar wanted was to be considered a farmworker version of a Martin Luther King, Jr. Rather, he places himself in a historical context, and acknowledges that "a lot of people have done an awful lot of work" with respect to organizing farmworkers. His remark, "and I'm being very frank, maybe it's just a matter of trying to even the score" is a way to dismiss any notion others might have that his work is heroic or unduly selfless.

Regardless, I can only repeat that during my 10 years of working with Cesar, I never heard him, privately or publicly, characterize his motivation in building a farmworker movement as a way to seek revenge against growers for previous injustices.

**Question 8: Do you recall participating in the J.D. Martin strike as well?**

I cannot answer no (or yes) to this question because I do not know whether my picketing activity while still a Christian Brother, to which I referred in a previous answer, was the JD Martin strike or some other employer.

**Question 9: What was the nature of the criticisms against you?**

I am not sure. I have a vague recollection that I was the subject of some private negative remarks by a few volunteers from the S.F. Bay Area, but I have no recollection of feeling threatened by these. I was certainly perceived as having a very close, and a very loyal, relationship with Cesar, and that, in and of itself, might have been enough to engender some negative feelings. I cannot be sure. I have to say now, recalling my state of mind 35 years ago, this “criticism” didn’t seem to amount to very much.

**Question 10: What role did you play in the subsequent firings?**

No direct role that I can remember. None of the volunteers you named worked for me or directly with me. It would not have been my role to hire and fire any of them. I might well have played a supportive role with Cesar behind the scenes about what the union should or should not do about this or that person, but I have no specific recollection of having done so.

**Question 11: What was your understanding for why Luis Valdez left the union?**

First of all, I never really understood why, or under what circumstances, he left the union. We were not close friends, but I liked him and admired his many talents.

My own view is that he and his theatrical work outgrew the confines of the union. When the union needed his theater for its own purposes, then everyone was satisfied. But in those long time frames when Cesar (and the union) had no need for his theater, it had to be very discouraging for him. This happened with many of us who developed and managed programs for the movement. When Cesar (and the union) needed you, there were not enough days in the week to satisfy this need, but when Cesar (and the union) had other priorities, you were left in the backwaters without any sense of direction or appreciation.

Had Cesar (and the union), for example, incorporated Luis and the *Teatro* into its national boycott strategy or treated it as a fundraising arm of the movement, perhaps the *Teatro* would have survived longer. But this would have required Cesar’s time, attention, and money, all of which were in short supply. I can say with some experience that art and artists do not easily, if at all, confine themselves to the short-term policy disciplines required by a movement fighting for its daily survival.

**Question 12: “What significance, if any, do you feel these firings had on the movement?”**

Little or none. First of all, you lump these volunteers together as if they were part of a cabal capable of undermining Cesar. I doubt that was the case. I never saw Bill Esher, for example, and Luis Valdez as being part of the same clique or even on the same wavelength. And if memory serves (I may be mistaken on this point), I believe that Luis and Donna were a couple. If that was the case, then in a movement situation when one of the partners feels pushed to leave, the other partner might well follow suit for reasons having little or nothing to do with the movement itself. There are many variables to consider in these personnel-type matters, including the fact that some volunteers needed to pick a fight with the union in order to have justification for leaving.

Second, you name six volunteers. (I have no recollection of a Ruth Robinson, and while I think I know to whom you refer, Resio is not the name I remember.) At this time in the development of the farmworker movement, there had to be at least 350 to 450 volunteers involved with the movement, in Delano, and in the boycott cities. Even if the number were 200, it stands to reason that in any given year, at least 3 percent would be leaving the movement under a variety of circumstances, positive or negative. After all, we are talking about volunteers, not career or tenured employees, and the work was grueling and mundane, the hours too long, the living deprivations difficult, and the demands on your personal life overwhelming.

While some of the six volunteers you mentioned made a helpful contribution to the movement during their stay, we should not overstate any volunteer’s participation because, myself included, when all is said and done, volunteers are only “passing through” and they have many other life options besides organizing farmworkers.

**Question 13: Were the two occasions separate or did Chavez confuse 1967 with 1966?**

I simply think Cesar was trying to make the point to the boycotters that the movement will not tolerate for long those who come from outside with other agendas. I don’t believe there was any “one” event or “one” year, except as way of making the point, because this is a recurring problem during the life of organizing a movement and must be dealt with whenever and wherever it rears its head.

The farmworker movement had a low tolerance for those outsiders, whether labor, church, students, political activists, politicians, volunteers, academics or “experts,” who would come onto the scene to tell Cesar (and the union) what to do, how to do it, when to do it, etc. And for those who came, whether from inside or outside the union, to speak against nonviolence and to advocate violence, Cesar was especially ruthless, and it soon became a “me or them” situation.

And whether it might have been 1967, 1968, or 1969, etc., I played whatever role I could (as Cesar's assistant) to help volunteers accept their assigned roles within the confines of the movement, and when they could/would no longer do that, then to help them move on.

The farmworker movement sucked in volunteers, chewed them up, and spit them out. If that sounds harsh or uncaring, consider any major college football or basketball program in this country, which is dedicated to winning. They do exactly the same thing, and no one considers it to be harsh, ruthless, or unethical. All parties seem to benefit from this relationship. Universities with successful teams raise millions of dollars, a few athletes go on to achieve multimillionaire celebrity status, and most college athletes enter into financially successful lives.

I daresay that most volunteers who really gave of themselves to the farmworker movement ultimately moved on to "successful" and rewarding (including money) careers. Volunteers had many life options when they came and even more when they left. Without doubt, every volunteer who participated in some way with the farmworker movement makes note of that service (deserved or not) on his/her resume.

### **My Last Points**

Red-baiting has always been used by agribusiness in California to counter efforts to organize farmworkers. During the 1960s, especially with the anti-communism feelings in the nation generated by the Cold War, these charges, true or untrue, could be devastating to a fledgling movement.

Cesar was keenly aware of the need to defend the movement against these charges. He was especially concerned about the Catholic Church's vigorous anti-communism stance, and its potential influence on the public opinion of farmworkers, overwhelmingly Catholic themselves, and Catholic bishops, clergy, and nuns.

Social movements inevitably attract radical political ideologues from either the left or right, or in the case of labor movements, mostly from the radical left. Having none themselves, these activists are looking for a horse to ride. Because of Cesar's years of CSO organizing, he was very aware of the chaos that could be sowed by those who came with their own agendas, and he was determined not allow his movement to be hijacked in this way. I have no doubt that Cesar sometimes overreacted to the perception or the gossip that this or that volunteer or supporter was bent on undermining the movement, but on balance, he was more right than not, and over the years succeeded in insulating the union from the constant red-baiting tactics of the growers.

The trade-offs for the sake of building a social movement are not always pretty or attractive, and there will be personal casualties.

Cesar firmly believed, and expected paid government informers to infiltrate the movement. He was extremely careful in this regard. He was helped, I believe, by having many of his family members and extended family—blood is thicker than water—and long-time associates in and around the movement scene who could provide some clues about the presence of informants, along with some insulation. I expect academics will some day uncover a great deal of information about the government’s monitoring of Cesar Chavez and his movement.

**Question 14: Who is the likely author of Cesar’s prepared statement read at the mass to end his 25-day fast in March of 1968?**

To the best of my knowledge, and I feel confident about it, Wayne C. “Chris” Hartmire was the author of the prepared statement. You can feel free to tell him I suggested you contact him. [Chris Hartmire has since told me that Cesar’s prepared statement was a collaborative effort between Jim Drake and himself.]

**Question 15: Comment on Robert F. Kennedy’s participation in the mass on March 11, 1968 marking the cessation of Cesar’s fast for nonviolence.**

I make these comments based on my perceptions at this period in 1968 as Cesar was trying to build a farmworker movement in Delano, California.

- The Kennedy family, beginning with President Kennedy, was absolutely revered by Cesar in particular and farmworkers in general. In Cesar’s mind, the Kennedys were fundamentally committed to helping the poor and the downtrodden. His respectful and positive attitude toward the Kennedys stood in stark contrast to his generally negative and wary attitude toward other politicians. For some reason, the Kennedys, especially Bobby Kennedy, were not considered “politicians” but ruling class torchbearers for social justice.

- Another common bond, perhaps more subliminal than anything overt, between farmworkers and the Kennedy family, was Catholicism. The overwhelming majority of farmworkers are Catholic. A Kennedy coming to mass with Cesar to celebrate the end of the fast would be a shared religious experience with a common denominator understood and appreciated by all present.

- We (union leadership) all understood the need to attract a major celebrity not only to help make the mass and rally a huge success but to imbed Cesar’s Fast for Non-Violence into the history of the farm labor movement. Without doubt, Robert Kennedy would be our first choice, but at the time it seemed like such a long shot, and yet I don’t have any recollection of a back-up plan to invite another celebrity if the Kennedy plan fell through. A major logistical problem with any planning was that Cesar would make no commitment to me (or anyone else) when he would stop fasting. Everything was day to day until the end of the third week when I really pressed him and threatened to set a specific day myself. He

responded by saying, “You won’t be able to get the people until Sunday.” That is how the date was set.

- It is my recollection that Jim Drake was the person from the union side who made the contact with Kennedy, and secured his commitment to come. I have the distinct impression that it was Jim who drove him to the mass and drove him away at the end of the rally. I myself was not involved in any of the Kennedy arrangements but rather served as Cesar’s planning liaison with the mass and rally events themselves.

- Bobby Kennedy’s participation in the mass and rally, along with an estimated 8000 farmworkers, brought the national media spotlight to the farmworker movement as never before. The impact was huge: Cesar’s national status was elevated yet again. His Fast for Non-Violence became the cornerstone for his movement and silenced his critics. More important, farmworkers throughout California and Arizona experienced and appreciated firsthand the power demonstrated by their union—so powerful that even the Kennedy family responded.

- Not surprisingly, it turned out that Kennedy’s appearance with Cesar jumpstarted his as-yet-unannounced presidential campaign. Cesar and the farmworker movement were big news every day in California, and with just one farmworker appearance, Bobby Kennedy captured the liberal heart of the state’s Democratic voters. In the June 1968 California presidential primary, the farmworker movement closed down almost its entire operation for three weeks in order to “get out the vote” for Bobby Kennedy—all purchased and paid for with just one appearance. Amazing.

- The afterglow of Cesar’s 25-day fast, and Bobby Kennedy’s trip to Delano to join Cesar when it ended, lasted for many, many years. In part this was due to Bobby’s assassination only a few months later, but it was mostly due to the historic public fast that Cesar undertook for the sake of nonviolence—a first in the history of this country, I would say.

**Question 16: Comments about Cesar’s relationship with the civil rights movement.**

Thank you for bringing to my attention Jacques Levy’s observation that Cesar spoke by telephone to Martin Luther King, Jr. Had you asked me straight out, I would have said “no,” they never talked. I have no reason to contradict Cesar about this, but I would offer the opinion that such a conversation had to be in the nature of a “courtesy” call because Cesar, to my knowledge, never made it a topic of conversation or the subject of a meeting.

One has to remember that in the mid-1960s, the internal politics within and surrounding the civil rights movement were intense. To my knowledge, there was never just “one” civil rights leader who could claim founder status. At the very least, CORE, SNCC, SCLC, the Urban League and NAACP all claimed some leadership role in the movement. Malcolm X and the Muslims also had major roles to play. After the assassination of Martin Luther

King, Jr., the loss of his leadership, and an ever-changing agenda, the civil rights movement dissipated; but by virtue of his martyrdom, King was raised up as the symbolic founder.

Cesar was respectful of the civil rights movement, admired Martin Luther King, Jr.'s commitment to nonviolence, but at the same time he was cautious, wary, and detached. Cesar had only one agenda: to organize a farmworker movement. He did not join other causes or marches or lend his support. He did not speak publicly about the civil rights movement or the Vietnam War, for example. He did not compare himself to King, and he did not try to link his own cause with King's. In short, he rode his own horse.

I am not aware that we gave any consideration to inviting Martin Luther King, Jr. to Delano to celebrate the end of the fast. At that point in time, I'm not sure we saw Dr. King as a future national holiday figure but rather as one leader, competing, and cooperating, with many others to advance the cause of blacks.

### **Question 17: Influence of King and Kennedy's assassinations on Cesar?**

The assassinations of King and Kennedy brought home to all of us in the farmworker movement the sobering reality that Cesar might also be a target for assassination, if not now, perhaps someday in the future. But what to do about it?

My 1968 journal clearly shows the baby steps we tried to take in order to provide some security for Cesar. But you cannot provide security without paying for it, deciding what kind of security is needed, and securing the cooperation of the person being secured. In the beginning Cesar would not authorize money to be spent for his security (we tried as best we could to override his financial veto). We ourselves could not decide what kind of security made sense, and finally, Cesar was personally very uncooperative.

As my journal states, we had a minor scare while Cesar was in the hospital in San Jose. Ultimately, some of the older Filipino strikers were dispatched to the hospital to keep watch outside the room, but this was only a temporary arrangement, and Cesar was embarrassed about it because it made him feel like a big shot. All of us felt the responsibility to do something to protect Cesar, and with Cesar still away from Delano, several union leadership meetings were held about it, and while there was much weeping and gnashing of teeth, none of us really knew what to do and how to pay for it without Cesar's approval.

I have a recollection that at some point during this time, the issue of assassination came up with Cesar present at a union leadership meeting, and he simply stated that he had already thought out his position and was at peace with the fact that an attempt could well be made on his life, but he simply had to ignore it and go on.

Over a period of time some security measures were adopted that Cesar seemed to accept. For a while at least, there was a night watchperson assigned to Cesar's home in Delano;

Cesar was given a pet, a German shepherd dog, which he named Huelga, and which was given, or had already received, some professional training. Because Cesar loved the dog so much, another German shepherd came onto the scene, which he named Boycott. These dogs gave Cesar much enjoyment and diversion in addition to providing some personal sense of security, especially in his office and at home.

As Cesar became a more sought-after national celebrity and undertook lengthy travels to promote the cause of the farmworkers and the union boycotts, he accepted the reality that union-assigned persons needed to travel with him, be with him day and night, drive him around, and provide those kinds of logistical support activities that make business travel for celebrities productive, safer, and less chaotic. The fact that the union received periodic reports from authorities over many years about threats, or rumors of threats, made against Cesar also helped him accept some security measures.

As I look back at the security issue now, I believe that in the early years Cesar realized he might well be killed because the farmworker movement was so controversial and was such a threat to California agribusiness, but since he couldn't do anything about it, he accepted it. It was only later, when his celebrity status began to overwhelm his time, his calendar, and his agenda that he accepted and used the traveling security to protect his sanity and marshal his time.

**Question 18: Cesar did not want Martin Luther King invited to the mass and rally—he did not want his own thunder stolen and he felt that King was a has-been.**

Inviting or not inviting Martin Luther King, Jr. to Cesar's fast barely makes the cut of possibilities for us during the second and third week of Cesar's fast. As much as some of us, and by no means all, admired Dr. King, there was no real public benefit to the farmworker movement, at that time, to invite him. (Assuming for the moment, that he could come, wanted to come, or saw any tangible benefit for himself or his organization in coming.)

In previous comments I noted the tensions that existed among civil rights groups regarding tactics, agenda, and philosophy regarding the black movement in the South. There was much cooperation, too, but much of it born of the necessity to project a united front against the common enemy of segregation. I ask you, why would the farmworker movement single out *one* civil rights leader in 1968 and decide that *he* could best enhance *our* movement on the national stage? Might make sense in 2003 but not in 1968. I believe it was the assassination of King and the subsequent riots that brought about his public canonization as the civil rights movement icon, not the strength of his organization.

My remarks do not demean Dr. King or suggest that Cesar did not respect him. Quite the contrary, he was especially taken with King's commitment to nonviolence. But as with any other "outside" organization or group, be it Chicano (now called Latino), labor, church, student, liberal etc., Cesar was wary and cautious. He did not want to find himself in a

situation where he had to say “no” to any of them, and he certainly did not want a public fight about policy or philosophy with groups whom he called “our natural allies.” Believe me, Cesar would never wade into the politics of the civil rights movement to try to enhance his own status or movement. Cesar always “rode his own horse so he wouldn’t be bucked off.”

For the reasons I made in previous remarks, the Kennedy family fell into a completely different category vis-à-vis farmworkers. The Kennedys were perceived, correctly or not, as social justice champions for the poor. And why would Cesar and his movement pass up an opportunity to put the farmworker movement right in the center of the national stage of presidential politics?

You say this King invitation/non-invitation is a “small, but curious matter.” Frankly, I find it somewhat silly, especially if Marshall (a good friend of mine) is in any way associated with it. Marshall was never a big fan of King because as a player in SNCC, Marshall, unlike the rest of us, viewed King from a unique vantage point, i.e., ground zero in Mississippi. Because of Marshall’s firsthand experience, I always respected his difference of opinion about King.

#### **Question 19: Cesar’s commitment to nonviolence or violence?**

Your questions on this topic are wide-ranging and overlapping. I will make a series of comments about the topic, and leave it to you to thread them back to your series of questions.

I was very disappointed to read about your use of “off-the-record” but “extremely reliable” sources to advance your work. Jerry Cohen had assured me your book was going to be that of a historian, not a journalist. Indeed, in your letter of November 25, 2002, you write specifically, “be assured that this work is a scholarly endeavor.” I don’t have to remind you that a scholarly endeavor means it must pass peer review tests, especially those that are contemporaneous and have firsthand knowledge of the subject.

You now ask me for my comments about a confessional made by a person whom I probably knew well and worked with for many years, but must remain unnamed, you say, because he has a high-profile job. Perhaps this book you plan to write is premature because “extremely reliable” sources cannot yet be made public. What prompts you to believe you are the best and the only judge to tell me which unnamed sources trashing Cesar, are to be believed and which cannot?

If I knew the name of this “extremely reliable” source, and if I knew him personally, I could evaluate his motives and make my own judgment about what/whether/why he says he did (or didn’t do, as the case may be). And because of my close, personal, and daily relationship with Cesar during the period in question, I could also provide feedback about how Cesar (now deceased) viewed this person, and his role in the movement. I might even

be able to confirm whether this person was even in Delano during this period or assigned to the boycott somewhere and/or who visited on occasion.

As an historian who has had no conversations with any of Cesar's family members or his closest union associates, how can you fairly assess this confessional? I write in this fashion not to deflect your question and avoid the subject matter, not at all, as you will see further on; rather, I ask you to reconsider and again evaluate the commitment you made to me when you asked for my observations, which you said, "would help greatly in advancing a complete and accurate account worthy of historical scholarship." Perhaps I am mistaken about this. If off-the-record commentary, the source known only to you, and its authenticity and truthfulness evaluated solely by you, is generally accepted in an academic setting as "historical scholarship," I stand corrected.

### Reports of Violence and Meeting at Filipino Hall

You are correct. On March 2, 1969, I wrote in my journal: "and yet will history report the fact [Cesar's Fast for Non-Violence] and the reason and the result. Will it also record the impalement of John Duggan, Fred Hirsch, and Tony Orendain by its point?"

Prior to Cesar's Fast for Non-Violence, there were certainly instances of property destruction, which I assumed had some relationship to the table grape strike, despite the union's public commitment to nonviolence. I heard talk of vines being cut (perhaps 100 to 200), about some attempts to shoot out the refrigeration units on piggyback trailers carried by train through the Tehachapi mountains, about holes that had been punched into the radiators of the cars of strikebreakers, and of course I knew about the two local packing sheds on the railroad siding that burned down, because I saw the smoldering ashes left behind. I never heard about any damage to irrigation pumps, but it would not surprise me if that did happen. I never heard any of this talk in Cesar's presence; it was something whispered about. Some of it I believed to be true, and some of it I believed to be bravado, depending upon who was doing the talking.

A month or two after I heard this whisper-talk of property violence, Cesar and I took a drive out into the countryside, and he told me in confidence that he was going to undertake a fast after the manner of Gandhi. He told me he was worried about physically being able to fast for any length of time because he had experimented with fasting for a few days in the previous weeks, and he didn't think he could do it. Within a few days we were called into Filipino Hall for a special meeting wherein Cesar announced there was a split in the union leadership over his commitment to use nonviolence to win the strike, but his mind was made up. The leadership, the volunteers, the strikers, and that day's visitors to the strike had to choose between his commitment to nonviolence and those who were advocating the use of violence. For his part, he said, he was going to walk to the Forty Acres, undertake a fast, and live there until the issue was settled once and for all. He walked off the stage and left the hall by himself. Then Helen Chavez (Cesar's wife) said she was leaving to go with Cesar.

Confusion reigned at the meeting. Tony Orendain and Fred Hirsch and some others seemed furious, defiant, and began muttering about Cesar's remarks; others defended Cesar, and some didn't know what was happening or what to make of this drama. Everyone present certainly understood that Cesar had drawn a line in the dirt, and the leadership would have to choose up sides.

I stood up to announce that as long as Cesar was on the Forty Acres it would be considered sacred ground, and that I did not want anyone driving their cars onto the property; they should park outside along the roadways and walk onto the property. Then I left and caught up with Cesar, but by that time he had almost reached the property. Many others came soon after—they parked on the roadway and walked onto the property—and we began the process of converting the newly built adobe building (planned to be used someday as a co-op gas station for farmworkers) into a sleeping area for Cesar (one very small room) and a chapel (a large room) that might hold 50 people or more for the daily mass that would surely be celebrated there. A group of Filipino women strikers painted the windows of the chapel room with religious and union symbols to simulate the look of stained glass windows.

### **Violence and History of Union Organizing**

Dissatisfaction among some of the union leadership, volunteers, and strikers with Cesar's commitment to use nonviolence to win the strike had been building for a few months. There were several factors, which contributed to this growing schism.

For one thing, the labor movement in this country was built with violence. Violence against striking workers, violence against strikebreakers, violence against employer property, especially vehicles used to cross picket lines, violence against hired security agencies, and violence against the police. Local courts, at the request of employers, invariably enjoined strikers from amassing in numbers that would be considered intimidating, and authorized local and state police to enforce these court injunctions and arrest strikers who refused to obey them—and they did! These clashes turned into riots, people were hit by trucks, beaten and sometimes shot, and strikers were injured and killed. It was in this climate that the CIO, the Teamsters, and the longshoremen unions were built. This same culture of violence permeated every effort made by the communists, and the AFL-CIO, and Teamsters to organize farmworkers in California.

Cesar was the first—and only—union leader in American history to adopt a formal policy of using nonviolence to win a labor strike.

Labor leaders and delegations from local and international unions from throughout the United States and Canada visited Delano to meet with Cesar and the strikers, bringing donations of money and food, and to participate on the picket lines. For the most part they were incredulous, disillusioned, and appalled. Why did the farmworkers hold back when

strikebreakers were driven across the picket lines in air-conditioned buses or when the growers, with the support of the police, came out to taunt and harass the strikers? These visitors simply could not understand the passive resistance exhibited by the Delano strikers, and while supportive of the union, they were openly critical of its nonviolent strategy. Leftist labor activists from the San Francisco Bay Area who enthusiastically supported the farmworker movement with food caravans echoed this criticism. The grape strike, in the view of these armchair activists, was seen as part of the ongoing historic class warfare that was meant to be waged against agribusiness on behalf of the farmworkers, and nonviolence was not going to get the job done.

The faction within the farmworkers movement opposed to nonviolence—especially those with a union activist background or members of unions which supported the farmworkers—was emboldened by these outside labor visitors who advocated taking the gloves off, and teaching the growers a lesson in labor history.

### **Human Nature**

Every striker, volunteer, or leader in the farmworker movement flirted at some point, even if only around the edges, with using violence to win the strike. I know that I did; it is human nature to do so. The striker's job, his or her livelihood, has been given to a strikebreaker. He or she is no longer gainfully employed but has to live off the charity afforded by the union. At the same time, a striker's cousin has been given a raise because he agrees to work as a strikebreaker. The union seems powerless to change the situation, and for the past two seasons (1966 and 1967), the grapes have been grown, harvested, and sent to market. Strikers want to fight back and win their strike, but the union says be patient, and no violence. A very tough sell, indeed.

### **Fairness, Reality, and Perspective**

With a sense of fairness and reality let us put the violence attributed to the Delano farmworkers into some perspective. No striker or volunteer, to my knowledge, was ever charged with any crime of property violence. Yet, the Kern County sheriff and the Delano police chief were hell-bent on breaking the strike and had at their disposal the tools to do so. Law enforcement had the names and addresses of all the strikers, including any union visitors from out of town, their photographs from the picket lines, and their automobile license numbers. Any visitor to the union who stayed in a Delano motel was reported to law enforcement. In such an atmosphere of surveillance and law enforcement activity, how is it possible that strikers engaged in violence were not apprehended? Or arrested for suspicious activities?

No grower or family member, no ranch manager or family member, no labor contractor or family member, no police officer or family member were, to my knowledge, ever harmed in any manner. Nor were their homes, work vehicles, or personal automobiles vandalized. Any and all of this could easily have been accomplished with a strike culture that advocated violence and class warfare.

Using the self-reporting of violence by the strikers themselves, how much total monetary damage was done, do you think, in 1966, 1967, and leading up to Cesar's fast for nonviolence in March 1968? Not more than \$40,000 and probably much less. I count the loss of two 50-year-old packing sheds at the railroad sidings, one of which might have been torched for insurance purposes. In the state's largest industry—agribusiness—located in the seventh largest economy in the world—California—\$40,000 amortized among 30 or more major growers in the Delano and Arvin areas, and the Southern Pacific Railroad, and covering an area approximately 70 miles long and 5 miles wide, doesn't meet the threshold definition to qualify as "union violence."

Cesar did not condone any of this violence, whether it was only this much or only that much. It happened because of the pent-up frustrations of people who were trying to win union recognition where none had ever existed. They were seeking this recognition without the protection of law because there were no such laws. Their participation in the grape strike caused them to lose all their possessions and to live off charity. As one who has worked face-to-face with people for more than 45 years, I'm astounded the strikers were able to accept and abide by Cesar's commitment to win the strike with nonviolence as much as they did.

### **Departure of Orendain, Hirsch, and Duggan**

When some of the union leadership began to agitate for more action, and advocated the use of violence to achieve it, Cesar brought the issue to crisis proportion by abandoning his day-to-day union work and undertook a fast to force the dissenters to either recommit themselves to the principles of nonviolence or to leave the movement. And those who could not, or would not, live by this policy, left the union. Tony Orendain was angry with Cesar because he felt singled out in public regarding the issue of violence, and was so sullen that he would not even look at Cesar during a leadership meeting at the Forty Acres. It was painful to watch, but Cesar did nothing to ease the tension. Tony soon left Delano to relocate in Brownsville, Texas, with a view to organizing farmworkers there. Fred Hirsch let it be known that he did not approve of the religious trappings associated with Cesar's fast, and he too departed. And John Duggan, one of Cesar's critics about the lack of progress in winning the strike, was isolated, and he too moved away.

### **No Winks, No Nods, a Manifesto**

Cesar fasted for 25 days to reestablish the principle that the grape strike must be won by the use of nonviolence—another first in the history of the labor movement in the United States. Cesar did not, to my knowledge, arrange for, encourage, pay for, or advocate violence of any kind to win the Delano grape strike. Had he done so, the entire agribusiness industry would have been set on fire.

As a follow-up to his Fast for Non-Violence, in the spring of 1969, Cesar published a manifesto entitled, "Letter to E. L. Barr, Jr. President, California Grape and Tree Fruit

League” which lays out his concept of using militant nonviolence to seek union recognition. In this manifesto he challenges the growers to make public, and substantiate, any information they have about the union’s alleged violence so that corrective action can be taken. In a public response, printed by the *Christian Century* and the *National Catholic Reporter*, Mr. Barr noted SNCC’s support of the farmworker movement, the use of obscenities by strikers against strikebreakers, housewives being asked by boycott volunteers not to shop at a supermarket which sold grapes, and the injury to two clerks in New York City when a fire bomb was tossed into a store which was selling California grapes. There was no mention of Delano packing sheds being torched, vines cut, irrigation pumps or trailer refrigeration units being disabled. This does not mean that this Delano violence did not happen, it just means it wasn’t very significant in the eyes of the industry. Not even significant enough to complain about it in the national religious press when given the opportunity to do so.

### **One Man’s Violence, Another Man’s Celebration**

Report in *The Sacramento Bee*, Monday, January 20, 2003 entitled: “**Rough celebration—**Rowdy crowds celebrating the Raiders’ win set a bonfire, threw bottles and rocks and broke windows along several blocks of International Boulevard, the Associated Press reported Sunday night.”

What is the difference between celebration rowdiness, and the violence perpetrated against business owners on International Boulevard? Is it intention? The amount of property damage inflicted? The setting in which it takes place? Who gets to make the call?

### **Manuel Chavez**

Manuel was in motion, likable, a storyteller, freewheeling, a family black sheep, a hustler, a schemer, a reality check, a charmer, a street fighter, generous, a convicted felon, funny, a private operator, always coming or going, and loyal only to Cesar. Cesar liked Manuel very much.

When I first joined the farmworker movement, Manuel was serving time in prison, and his warden was Abelicio Chavez, a friend of Cesar’s from CSO days. I remember Cesar talking to Abe about Manuel and asking him to look out for his well-being. When Manuel was released from prison, he came to Delano and began to work as an ad hoc organizer for the union, but this assignment did not last for long because he was unable and unwilling to be part of any organizational bureaucracy, and his only interest, his only loyalty, was helping his cousin Cesar. Manuel and I worked together in East Los Angeles in charge of the farmworkers’ get-out-the-vote for the Humphrey campaign. I saw him on the first day and the last day; that was his style; he worked alone.

Manuel moved in and out of Delano, sometimes absent for months at a time. He lived near the Mexican border and kept tabs on the recruitment of strikebreakers in Mexico by the Delano growers and their labor contractors. He was Cesar’s liaison with Mexican unions

and government officials. He was an expert in organizing wildcat strikes among the Mexican melon workers in the Central Valley, and he provided intelligence to Cesar about the relationship of the union to other nascent farmworker groups throughout the Southwest, and he tracked and evaluated any signs of internal union politics directed against Cesar.

As with other union organizers, Manuel was provided a monthly allowance with which to operate. In Cesar's lengthy absences from La Paz stoking up boycott activity on the East Coast, I administered the monthly "stipends," including Manuel's. Cesar always had two concerns about Manuel's allowance: first, to make sure that Manuel was paid in a timely manner regardless of where he was, and second, to make sure he was not paid more than was permitted. On those occasions when I disbursed more money to Manuel than Cesar had agreed to, I had to have very good reasons to justify my decision. On the one hand, in terms of activity and assignment, Manuel had a long leash, but in terms of monthly stipend or anything to do with union money, he had a very tight leash.

#### **Question 20: A Chatfield question to Henggeler**

Where do the Levy tapes fit into your research? Are there not dozens of tape recordings made of Cesar by others from 1965 to 1978, the period of your current research? As a historian you have undertaken a scholarly book about Cesar and the farmworker movement. Apparently, you have spent many years working on this endeavor and plan to spend as long as it takes to get it done properly.

Writing a book about Cesar is not like writing a book about a president of the United States. Cesar is an icon, a myth, a legend, a holiday, a postage stamp, and a modern-day saint revered by millions of people in this country and abroad; there is simply nothing you can do to change that reality. It is a given. Have you sought the cooperation of Cesar's family and the union leadership for your book? If you have not, I urge you to do so.

I also think you should discuss some of my concerns about your proposed use of "off-the-record" sources with Jerry Cohen. Jerry is a person whose judgment *can* be trusted and was, in fact, trusted by Cesar, the subject of your book, for more than 15 years.

#### **Question 21: Response of Chatfield to Henggeler's "off-the-record" justification**

First off, there is no joy in this Raider nation tonight. A dismal showing in Super Bowl XVII—and a far cry from the Raiders of old that Cesar and I watched during their glory years of the 1960s. Cesar was not much of a football fan when I first met him, but gradually he came to watch the Raiders at my house, partly because I was a Raider freak, and partly because he came to enjoy the speed, the precision, and the killer instinct they exhibited. Maybe next year.

Thank you for your commentary and response about my “off-the record” concerns. You make a good point: having an off-the-record source and using it are two different matters. I agree, but how do I know which one is in the offing? You quote to me an off-the-record source who you say is extremely reliable, and ask me to respond. Part of any intelligent response has to take into account who the person is and whether that person was even in a position to know. But since you cannot reveal the source, you reserve the right of final judgment—a difficult position for you, no doubt, but an impossible position for me.

Personally, I think you go too easy on these “background sources.” You mention Chris Hartmire as an example. I know that Chris has talked to Frank Bardacke on the record for his book. Why doesn’t your book merit his same cooperation? If relevant sources, associates of Cesar, realized your book was going to be published with or without their cooperation and, for example, that I urged—and recommended—you to interview them for the book, you might get more cooperation. Believe me, none of these people want to be “left out”—this might be the last chance in their lifetime to show their relationship to Cesar and the farmworker movement. If they were told up front that their “background” information, while helpful, wouldn’t make the final cut, I suspect their input would soon be “on the record.”

Look at it this way. Cesar himself insisted, if not for your benefit at least for some other historian’s benefit, that everything he said and did was to be on the record. All of those tape recordings to which you refer reside at Wayne State because Cesar wanted it so. If Cesar took that position, how could anyone who claims to be close to him and claims to be a player choose to do otherwise? For my part, everything I say, or write, is on the record, and I expect you to use that fact to smoke others out. Cesar hid nothing; what are they hiding? And why?

You will be surprised, I predict, when you listen to the Levy tapes because there is much there, I believe, that was not included in his book, to say nothing about the nuances of meaning when you hear the recorded voices.

If you want to find other tapes, you have to put the word out and invite every Chavez participant who wants to contribute—and be a part of your scholarly endeavor—to participate. Until I sent you my journal, you had no idea it existed. There is a lot of stuff out there!

You have made a lot of progress. You have a long way to go.

### **Question 22: Jerry Brown says, “I’m not God!”**

In the course of the United Farm Workers’ statewide political campaign to defeat Proposition 22, an agribusiness-sponsored initiative on the California ballot in 1972, we discovered that voter-related fraud was used to qualify the initiative for the ballot. If we

could prove fraud, then we thought it might be possible to have the initiative legally removed from the ballot.

The first evidence we found that something was wrong was the uniform feedback we received from our door-to-door campaign work in the Los Angeles precincts. At our daily strategy/report meetings, dozens of staff volunteers reported that they were told by people who had signed the petition that they had done so only because the petition circulators standing in front of Los Angeles supermarkets told them the purpose of the initiative was “to lower food prices.” In fact, many voters reported seeing a cardboard sign strapped across the top part of the petition that read, “Lower Food Prices.”

Because of these reports, I sent my wife, Bonnie, and a few volunteers to the Los Angeles County Registrar of Voters to examine some of the certified petitions. This was really a fishing expedition because none of us knew what, if anything, that such an examination might show. At the very least, I thought we might obtain the names and addresses of thousands of Los Angeles voters who had been duped by the “lower food prices” ploy so that we could contact them by mail and by phone before Election Day.

Bonnie came back from the registrar’s office with dozens of copies of signed petitions, but the names and addresses and signatures on the petition were all in the same handwriting. She said these copies were only the tip of the iceberg; there were thousands of certified petitions filled with names and addresses, and all with the same handwriting. It was obvious that the paid petition circulators had taken the voter registration rolls and simply transferred them onto the petitions, writing in their own hand the names and addresses and signatures of voters. Because the circulators were being paid for each signature gathered, this was the fastest and easiest way to earn money. There was no attempt at cleverness nor any effort made to hide the simplistic process they used, and each petition was signed by the circulator, stating under penalty of perjury that the petition had been properly circulated among voters. It is likely that hired petition circulators had been using this process for years and Proposition 22 was not an exception. It was a stunning discovery!

I immediately called our campaign offices in the other major cities—San Francisco, Oakland, Sacramento, San Jose, and San Diego—and asked them to review the certified petitions on file in the registrars’ offices in their counties. In less than 24 hours, we knew that tens of thousands of fraudulent signatures had been used to certify Proposition 22. But now what? With less than eight weeks before Election Day how could we prove it? And how could we effectively communicate this voter fraud to the public throughout the state without sounding like political sore losers? Even if we could prove it, so what? Would it make any difference in the election outcome or would it be simply viewed as one of those last-minute campaign accusations?

We made a plan. First, we would gather thousands of statements from voters whose names were on the certified petitions but who had not actually signed the petition. We would ask them to sign a statement, under penalty of perjury, that they had not signed the petition,

and furthermore, they petitioned the secretary of state to remove their names from the petitions. Statement forms were prepared overnight, and hundreds of volunteers fanned out into the Los Angeles precincts to track down voters whose names had fraudulently been filed. In just three or four days, we had more than 500 statements signed, all under penalty of perjury, and more were coming in each day. Our campaign offices in the other cities also began to gather statements from duped voters. It was now time to meet with Secretary of State Jerry Brown, the only statewide office-holder who was a Democrat. In his 1970 campaign for office, he had used the slogan, "I marched with Cesar Chavez and the farmworkers." It was time to collect.

I had only talked with Jerry Brown once before, and that was by telephone. I forget the original purpose of the call, but I do remember shouting at him that he should not complain when farmworkers turned to him for help. Did he think they should turn to the likes of Governor Reagan, Lieutenant Governor Curb or Attorney General Younger, all staunchly conservative Republicans? I doubt I even waited for him to respond before I hung up.

Tom Quinn, Jerry's chief of staff, a young but brilliant campaign strategist in his own right, arranged the meeting with Jerry Brown. The meeting took place in a high-rise office building in Century City where Brown had his Southern California office. I invited Jerry Cohen and Art Torres to come with me. We brought with us a couple of boxes filled with the declarations of voters who swore their names had fraudulently been used to certify Proposition 22. Jerry Brown came into the meeting not at all confident he even wanted to be there, and after the introductions, he stayed in the background. Tom Quinn took charge and I began to explain what had happened with the certified petitions, and that we needed help. But Jerry Brown broke in with a smart-ass remark to the effect that he wasn't God, what could he do with these campaign-type charges, and he proceeded in that fashion to discount any possible help he might be able to give. At this point I stood up and said, "This is a fucking waste of time, let's get out of here." Jerry and Art hesitated a minute, got out of their chairs, and started to gather up their files, when Tom stood up, extended his arms, and said in his friendly but firm Irish pol voice, "Now wait a minute, let's calm down here, let's sit down and see what we can do to help." I could sense his annoyance with Jerry's flip remarks, so I said, "Fine." The tone of the meeting had changed from how do we get rid of these guys without hurting ourselves politically to how can we help these guys and get something out of it. The clincher were the hundreds of declarations, all signed under penalty of perjury, that we brought with us. A signed declaration from a voter about election fraud was something objective and tangible, and over which a secretary of state had some jurisdiction.

The plan that Tom Quinn and Jerry Brown cooked up at the meeting was masterful. First, we were to gather at least a couple of hundred additional declarations, and then Jerry would call a press conference to announce that declarations alleging voter fraud had been brought to his attention. He would also say that he was officially turning these allegations over to the Los Angeles District Attorney, Joe Busch, to investigate and to bring criminal charges,

if the results of his investigation warranted such action. In turn, Joe Busch would call a press conference to announce that he had received these allegations from the secretary of state, and he promised to open up a criminal investigation. In turn, Jerry Brown would announce to the press that Joe Busch had informed him that a complete investigation was under way, and he awaited the results.

Jerry Brown explained to us at the meeting that he really had done nothing except publicly hand off our request to the D.A.—a Republican who was running for re-election in a tight race—who would publicly announce he had received them, etc. It was all media smoke and mirrors, but it served the purpose of publicly smearing Proposition 22 in each of these ensuing press conferences. The culmination of Tom Quinn and Jerry Brown's strategy came just three days before the general election when the *Los Angeles Times* headlines screamed "7 Indictments in Proposition 22" and the sub-headline read "Voter Fraud Used to Qualify Initiative." (Or words to that effect.)

### **Question 23: How valuable was Chavez's barnstorming in the Proposition 22 campaign?**

An election campaign is about winning or losing. Every aspect of a political campaign contributes to victory or defeat. It is impossible to know for sure which particular tactic was the most definitive.

In the Proposition 22 campaign, Jerry Brown and Joe Busch played major roles in smearing the initiative with their allegations and indictments of fraud. Bonnie Chatfield's discovery of voter fraud played a role; 30-second television commercials featuring a soft-spoken Cesar Chavez and the 60-second radio spots featuring Jack Nicholson and Warren Beatty played a role; Cesar's 30-second TV commercial, which was thought to be impossible to book on the immensely popular Archie Bunker show, played a part; the human billboarding tactics used during the Los Angeles commute hours played a part; the grassroots campaign mounted in every major city in California played a part; the unabashed coverage afforded by the *Los Angeles Times* played a role; and Cesar's barnstorming tour was yet another piece which made up the Proposition 22 campaign puzzle. Remember, Proposition 22 was a life-and-death struggle for the farmworkers' movement in California; it was a political war, and no one is qualified, including myself, the campaign director, to say who/what played the most valuable role. Winning campaigns are all of a piece.

### **Question 24: What was the purpose of Cesar's Arizona Fast?**

Cesar's Fast for Non-Violence in 1968 was similar to navigating a rickety boat over the shoals in uncharted waters, and while everyone was prepared for the worst, we made it just fine. None of us, including Cesar, knew how to act appropriately. Was the fast a personal religious act or was it intended to be a public act? None of us had the slightest idea how a modern-day fast would be perceived, either by farmworkers, our supporters, or the public at large. Would it simply be viewed as a publicity stunt? If so, how would the media

respond? And what would our defense be? All we could do was feel our way along, day by day, and take our cues from farmworkers and the media.

In contrast, Cesar's Arizona Fast in 1972 was old hat. Dusting off the badge, strapping on the holster, mounting up, and riding into Phoenix, I felt like the retired marshal who was called back to duty to restore law and order. It was clear what needed to be done; we had done it before. It was time to get to work on the hundreds of details needed to bring about a sense of order to the event. Indeed, the Arizona Fast seemed more businesslike to me than had the Fast for Non-Violence.

The purpose of the 1972 fast was unclear to me. Obviously, it had something important to say about the status of farmworkers in Arizona, but what exactly? As sympathetic and supportive as the workers were for the union, they were not yet striking the growers, seeking union recognition. Perhaps it was about confronting the governor of the state who advocated, sponsored, and signed legislation that would have all but outlawed the organization of farmworkers. Perhaps Cesar, as a native son, was trying to respond to the needs of his compatriots by challenging them publicly to stand up for their human rights? My own view is that Cesar felt compelled to use his celebrity status to identify with the second-class citizenship afforded to Arizona farmworkers. He viewed his fast-event as the beginning of a statewide mobilization effort to promote their cause. What the tangible result might be, only time would tell.

Jim Drake and I took charge of the logistics and the press relations associated with the Arizona Fast. A fast is a 24-hour-a-day operation. A large chapel/meeting hall needs to be available, complete with chairs and tables, religious services need to be scheduled, telephone lines installed, office equipment rented, on-site office space identified and set up, adequate toilet facilities provided, constant janitorial service and garbage disposal provided, a daily meal served to an unknown number of volunteers and visitors, refreshments (coffee, tea, juice, water, fresh fruit, and baked goods) available day and night, staff housing and transportation arranged, visitor introductions (including telegrams) and logistic announcements made/read at the daily religious service/meeting, an agenda prepared for the daily religious service/meeting, innumerable press interviews given to update Cesar's condition, and background provided about the cause of the farmworkers' movement, round-the-clock security for Cesar provided, meeting privately with Cesar several times a day (or night) to brief him about the status of the fast and its impact. In addition, someone must serve as gatekeeper to control access to Cesar; field and respond to telephone calls from politicians, labor leaders, and celebrities from around the nation regarding the fast, Cesar's condition, etc.; mollify and work with the facility's owners; book a facility large enough to stage the end-of-fast rally; recruit celebrities and "entertainment" for participation in the rally; prepare a program for the fast-ending rally, including seating assignments, order of procession, music selections, location of media cameras, etc. The list goes on.

In addition to these elementary, everyday activities, organizers were working with farmworkers throughout Arizona to organize their participation in the fast for a day or two at a time, and to ensure their attendance at the end-of-fast rally event. They also worked with community leaders and sympathetic state politicians to drum up public support for the fast and the cause of farmworkers.

And finally, when everything has been done that is supposed to be done, proceed to undo it all in an orderly and cost-effective manner.

I sometimes wonder if the fundamental difference between the Delano and Phoenix fasts was simply that one was rural and the other urban. The rural fast seemed slower-paced, less frenetic, more personal, with a human touch, more genuine, and less commercial than its urban counterpart. I do not want to overstate the case; it might simply be that the second time through is more easily accomplished than the first. Whatever the case, Arizona's native son left his mark on the state's history.

### **Question 25: Chatfield questions the efficacy of the ALRA**

There were no more Henggeler questions left on the table for me to grapple with, so I made up my own question and sent him my views on the subject. The question I tried to answer for myself: Why did Cesar agree to farmworker legislation when everything I knew about him would say otherwise? Perhaps it is just as simple as this: legislation is inevitable, the farmworkers have a friend in Governor Jerry Brown, so once and for all, let's make the most favorable legislative deal we can, and use the power of the governor to guarantee the existence of the union.

### **California Agricultural Labor Relations Act**

“It is hereby stated to be the policy of the State of California to encourage and protect the right of agricultural employees to full freedom of association, self-organization, and designation of representatives of their own choosing, to negotiate the terms and conditions of their employment, and to be free from the interference, restraint, or coercion of employers of labor, or their agents, in the designation of such representatives or in self-organization or in other concerted activities for the purpose of collective bargaining or other mutual aid or protection. For this purpose this part is adopted to provide for collective-bargaining rights for agricultural employees.” (Section 1140.2, Agricultural Labor Relations Act.)

I make this argument: every significant piece of labor or civil rights legislation in this country has come about because of long-term social strife and conflict; and while at first glance, the moving party—that is, the challengers to the status quo—seems to be the beneficiary of such legislation, in fact, it is the historically conservative and entrenched economic and political establishment itself which benefits the most, because the legislation itself slows down the pace of change and gives government-authorized bodies the tools to

manage and control it. Furthermore, the entrenched interests historically opposed to change have the financial power to influence the day-to-day government decisions interpreting, and implementing the legislation.

I believe this is as true for the farmworkers' movement in the 1970s as it was for the civil rights movement in the 1960s.

One may argue that legislation allows for change, but in easier-to-digest incremental amounts so that society might adjust more easily to the desired outcome. In other words, legislative change is society's answer to revolution. This may well be the case, but it comes at a great price, paid over many generations by those who need social justice.

But the promise that social legislation lifts up the disenfranchised and the underclass in society is rarely realized, even though it is widely held to be the best remedy for such injustice. In fact, such legislation serves as a drag on the momentum of those who seek social change. As an example, just consider the astronomical financial costs imposed on both advocates and adversaries to pursue the protections afforded them by the Agricultural Labor Relations Act. In the case of farmworkers and growers, who can better afford to pay for these protections? Which group has the financial staying power to impose its will?

One of the inevitable by-products of social change legislation, with its attendant legal processes, is to dampen the ardor of the movement and allow for the release of its pent-up energy through a series of government-supervised, calculated procedures. Those who one day were breaking down the barricades that protected the injustice of the status quo are now, the next day, trying to cope with new government rules and regulations, which they neither understand nor agree with. The movement leaders, who once could act with impunity because of the absence of law, now must compromise their militancy because, as responsible citizens, they are expected to respect, and accept the new law. And while this new change-legislation never makes a complete return to the status quo which existed prior to the movement demanding change, it is close enough so as not to cause too much discomfort to the old business-as-usual policies.

The ALRA is a case in point. Prior to the passage of the ALRA, the farmworker union, in the early 1970s, counted a dues-paying membership of more than 80,000 members. In the summer of 1975, after the passage of the ARLA, more than 40,000 farmworkers voted in secret ballot elections supervised by the state of California. The vast majority of those voting selected the United Farm Workers union to represent them, but during the ensuing 27 years, the union's membership never again reached 20,000 members. In fact, some large agribusiness employers have been meeting one day a year, now 25 years and counting, with the United Farm Workers to fulfill the letter of the legislation which seeks to provide for the "collective-bargaining rights" of their agricultural employees.

It must be said that these observations and conclusions are mine and mine alone, but it is also true that I learned many of these concepts from my 10-year association with Cesar

Chavez. On the record, Cesar was always in favor of legislation, i.e., including farmworkers in the National Labor Relations Act. He was especially vocal in his support of such legislation when the growers were publicly opposed to it. The same was true for secret ballot elections. Off the record, Cesar was opposed to any legislation, including secret ballot elections. He knew that government could not bring the growers to recognize and bargain with the union because only the power of the union developed through the guerilla warfare of its strikes and boycotts could accomplish this.

And yet in the spring of 1975, in the governor's private conference room filled with grower lobbyists and attorneys, state senators, and union representatives, I heard Cesar's voice on the speakerphone agreeing to legislation. Of course I knew in advance what his position would be, but when I heard his voice, I held my breath because I felt he should be opposed. But he wasn't.

What caused him after all these years to change his mind? The loss of the grape contracts, a flagging boycott, the Teamster invasion, pressure from the AFL-CIO, a simpatico governor, the only alternative left—since legislation is inevitable, cut the best deal you can under the most favorable circumstances—these are questions for which I have no answers.

Was the passage of the ALRA the end of Cesar's momentum? In retrospect, with 25 years of hindsight, I lean toward the conclusion that it is was the beginning of the end. Did it have to be? I suppose not. But once Cesar agreed to what he believed was a level playing field tilted toward unionization, it was too late for him to recover when in less than nine months from passage of the ALRA, the state's largest industry tilted the field back to more than level.

For the sake of movements yet to be born, I hope history will explain the critical factors that led Cesar, against his better judgment, I believe, to accept legislation.

## Chapter Two

Marking the 10<sup>th</sup> Anniversary of the Death of Cesar Chavez

After more than three months of doing little more than think and write about Cesar Chavez and the farmworker movement, I felt the need to mark the occasion of the 10th anniversary of Cesar's death by writing something for publication. I knew it would be a long shot for me to get something published, but unless I wrote something, there would be no shot at all.

In 1993, shortly after Cesar's death, I was moved to write a memoir, which I entitled, "Cesar, 1968." The memoir included my 1968-69 journal, some writing I did for Cesar in the course of my work with him, and some personal documents relating to my decision in 1965 to leave the Catholic religious order, the Christian Brothers, to join the farmworkers'

movement. I prefaced it with an introduction that gave an overview of my life with the farmworkers and some reflections about it all. I considered this manuscript to be private and not for publication. I printed enough copies for members of my family, some former colleagues in the movement, and I sent one to Helen Chavez, Cesar's widow.

Looking back now, I suppose I sought that highly elusive "closure" that I hear talked about on radio and TV programs. For whatever reason, it served the purpose of tying down some of my thoughts about Cesar and the farmworkers' movement. It also codified some of the documents that I had been carrying around for nearly 30 years.

As a result of my intensive writing in response to Professor Paul Henggeler's questions, I had developed several themes that I wanted to weave into an essay. (1) Cesar's vision. (2) The tension between the volunteers and Cesar resulted from the cult-like characteristics of his movement. (3) Cesar was a founder, not an elected or appointed leader. (4) Cesar's legacy had been hijacked for the Latino century. (5) Cesar's commitment to voluntary poverty and fasting for nonviolence was at the root of his charisma. (6) The California Migrant Ministry and progressive Catholic clergy played an important role in launching public support for the grape strike. (7) Cesar did not view himself as a labor leader. (8) Acknowledge that most volunteers still feel unappreciated, and others feel anger and bitterness about lost opportunities for farmworker unionization and/or the heavy-handed way by which they were dismissed. I entitled my essay, "The Legacy of Cesar Chavez."

## **The Legacy of Cesar Chavez** **by LeRoy Chatfield**

From 1962 to 1993, Cesar Chavez dedicated himself to organizing a farmworkers' movement in California. How will history remember him? Some may be content to define him simply as a historic labor leader and founding president of the United Farm Workers union. But his vision for the farmworkers' movement encompassed far more than organizing a union. And his elevation to the status of a revered icon has less to do with his union activities than with the personal sacrifices, commitment to nonviolence, and deep religious conviction that marked his life of service to impoverished farmworkers.

As one who worked with Cesar Chavez (from 1963 to 1973), I saw firsthand his commitment to establishing a broad range of services for farmworkers. The farmworkers' credit union he established, for example, was especially dear to his heart.

Some historical background is needed to fully appreciate Chavez's accomplishments and aspirations.

Chavez's National Farm Workers Association (NFWA) was not organized as a labor union but as a self-help membership association whose members would receive the mutual benefits of belonging to a credit union and a death-benefit insurance program.

Additionally, members would be eligible to receive immigration, Welfare, and income tax assistance and a variety of other kinds of ad hoc representation with government agencies and programs. This “do-gooder” kind of community organizing was, more or less, a continuation of the kind of work Chavez had done for many years with the Community Services Organization (CSO), an organization designed to assist Mexican-Americans. Now, however, his focus was exclusively on farmworkers.

Even if Chavez’s intent was, in fact, to organize a labor union for farmworkers, he knew there were two obstacles that would be difficult to overcome. First, had he advertised and promoted the NFWA as a labor union, it would have been targeted and undermined by the growers and their allies. He would have been defeated before he could get started. Second, the AFL-CIO already had a campaign in place to organize farmworkers—the Agricultural Workers Organizing Committee, AFL-CIO (AWOC). If Chavez organized his own labor union, he would butt heads with both friends and foes. He chose the community-organizing model instead, the one with which he was most comfortable and familiar.

In September 1965, AWOC—comprised overwhelmingly of Filipino workers—called a strike during the table grape harvest in Delano to seek union recognition and better piece rates. Within a few days, the NFWA—mostly made up of Mexican-American workers—joined the strike. The strike activities of AWOC, while carried out at the local level, were managed by a union regional director operating out of Stockton and carefully advised (and controlled) by AFL-CIO-paid attorneys from the San Francisco Bay Area. Chavez himself, the president of NFWA, managed NFWA strike activities along with his close-knit board of directors and a few key volunteer staff members. Responding to the common threat of the grower community, both AWOC and NFWA coordinated their strike activities, provided mutual support, and sought to maintain a shared vision despite their organizational differences.

But Chavez’s vision for the NFWA went far beyond manning union picket lines and winning the strike. He actively promoted farmworker cooperatives, a medical clinic, a legal department, a service center, an intensive educational program for organizers, a newspaper (published in English and Spanish), an international consumer boycott, a theater group, a self-insured health and welfare plan, volunteerism, a statewide microwave telecommunication system, a film making group, a preschool, a computerization project, a fully equipped mail house, a graphic arts and print shop, a retirement center for unmarried farmworkers, the purchase of Spanish language radio stations, Catholic priest union chaplains, a community living program for staff and volunteers, motivational seminars and retreats for staff and volunteers, organic gardening, healthy dieting, farmworker political action and, of course, his beloved credit union.

Early in the formation of the NFWA, the California Migrant Ministry had established a strong and supportive presence for Chavez’s organization as part of its religious ministry to farmworkers. The Ministry assigned key staff, akin to the concept of worker-priests, to the NFWA and, most important, provided a direct link back to mainline Protestant churches at

the regional, state, and national level. The NFWA strike in Delano put migrant ministry staff on the farmworker picket lines to confront growers, labor contractors, strikebreakers, and local law enforcement. Their presence on the picket lines was instantly communicated—and felt—by the state and national church community. The direct participation in the strike by these ministers called for an appropriate church response.

Chavez's years of service to the CSO, including his relationship to progressive Catholic priests from the San Francisco Bay Area known as the "Mission Band," provided a tangible network of support for the striking farmworkers. The International Longshoremen Warehouse Union (ILWU), because of its independence from the AFL-CIO and its vaunted sense of militancy, was an immediate source of strike support. The CIO Industrial Union Department, influenced by the United AutoWorkers, also took an interest in the farmworkers cause. The Free Speech Movement (1963–1964) at the University of California at Berkeley had ignited a spirit of activism among students and faculty on behalf of such causes as civil rights, the peace movement, and now, farmworkers.

Timing is everything. All of these forces—religious groups, independent labor, college students, minority community activists—coalesced around Chavez and his independent National Farm Workers Association to provide a source of volunteers, staff, strike donations, and moral support. They also provided a readymade network in the major cities, not only in California but throughout the country, for strike publicity, speaking opportunities, strike donations, and political support. This loosely organized network was the precursor of the international boycott of California grapes mounted by the farmworkers movement a few years later.

A steady stream of volunteers and supporters began making their way to Delano during the fall of 1965 and continued until at least 1980. The challenge for Chavez and the NFWA was how to incorporate this outpouring of human support into a viable organizing effort to build the farmworker movement. The immediate strike activities of the daily picket lines (often starting in the predawn hours), the administrative office and clerical support, the processing of food and clothing contributions, tracking grape shipments and the importation of strike breakers, and the lengthy Friday night union meetings helped to sift out transient, short-term volunteers from those willing to commit for a much longer period.

I was one of those volunteers. Within weeks after the NFWA joined the grape strike, Cesar telephoned me in Los Angeles and asked if I would come and work with him, "to help out with the strike," he said. I had recently relocated from Bakersfield to Los Angeles and was enrolled in a doctoral program at the University of Southern California, but because I admired his cause and we had become such good friends, I could not refuse him.

When I arrived in Delano a few days later, he asked me if I would go to the Bay Area and raise money for his hoped-for-someday farmworker cooperatives. For the next six months I traveled throughout the Bay Area and Los Angeles, giving talks to church, student,

faculty, and community groups about the strike and about the need for funds to start farmworker cooperatives. From my very first day, Chavez impressed upon me that he envisioned far more for the farmworkers movement than simply becoming a labor union.

In fact, during the course of my tenure with the farmworkers, I came to understand that Chavez, with many exceptions, had little regard for labor leaders. His general feeling was that labor leaders tended to adopt a lifestyle and an attitude more like those of their business employers than of the workers they represented. He was especially bothered by union invitations to speak at conventions held in posh hotels and resorts and declined nearly all of them. Finally, in the mid- 1970s, his need to ramp up support for his struggling union overcame his reluctance to speak at union conventions, and over the course of several years, he embarked on a whirlwind tour of more than 50 national and international union conventions, not only in the United States but Canada and Europe as well. Despite the fact that he was enthusiastically received on the convention floor, he would accept no awards or honorariums and he tried in every way possible to arrange his schedule to avoid staying overnight in the hotel. He would never be comfortable hobnobbing with labor leaders. Chavez did everything he could to avoid being referred to as a “labor leader.”

Chavez had even less regard for insurance companies—and benefit administrators—selected by the unions to provide health and welfare benefits for their members. He maintained that the money spent by the insurance companies diluted health and welfare benefits because of outrageous premium costs and by a misplaced emphasis on catastrophic benefits at the expense of more common and routine benefits, including preventive medical care, needed by workers and their families.

In my view, it was Chavez’s vision as founder of the farmworker movement, his lifestyle, his public fasts, and his commitment to nonviolence that most distinguishes him from other, more traditional labor leaders.

The most compelling aspect of Chavez’s lifestyle was his decision to live in voluntary poverty. When I first met him in 1963, he did not have a telephone, a dress suit, a TV, or washing machine. He rented a two-bedroom house in Delano, much too small for a family of 10, and drove an old Volvo. (After the Volvo expired during the first few months of the grape strike, Cesar never again owned another automobile.) One of the reasons he settled in Delano was because his brother’s family and his wife’s sister and her family lived there. He knew it would take many years to build his organization and if during this time he couldn’t support his family, relatives would help keep them afloat.

His commitment to live in voluntary poverty for the sake of helping farmworkers inspired—and challenged—others to join him. They viewed Chavez as authentic and selfless, not a self-appointed leader out to enrich himself at the expense of others. Because of his own personal example, Chavez was able to demand that all those who worked for him would be paid a subsistence stipend. Generally, this meant the prospective staff member’s monthly bills, once approved, would be paid by the union directly to the vendor,

and personal spending money would be limited to the now-famous “\$5 dollars a week.” Another financial variation used for some volunteers was that once their monthly bills were approved, the union would pay them a lump sum each month to cover those costs. No one was ever hired and paid to “scale.” Because of Chavez’s personal example, no one would ever enrich himself at the expense of the farmworker movement.

Fasting is a personal act of self-denial and discipline. A public fast is a call to action, an appeal to conscience, and a deeply held personal belief communicated through a public act of self-denial. To my knowledge, Chavez undertook three such public fasts, the first in 1968 in Delano, renewing the movement’s commitment to nonviolence, and a second in 1972 in Phoenix, seeking to guarantee the right of farmworkers to organize a union. (Many years later in 1988, Chavez undertook a public fast on behalf of farmworkers who were often exposed to dangerous pesticides without their knowledge or adequate protection.)

A public fast is dramatic because one person, standing alone, undertakes a life-threatening course of action to achieve a goal that is unlikely to be attained before death by starvation. It is also dramatic because, to be effective, such a fast requires a public response to the purpose of the fast. In the 1968 Fast for Non-Violence, thousands of farmworkers from throughout California and Arizona made their way to Delano to visit Chavez, talk personally with him, give him encouragement and support and pledge their commitment to his goal of nonviolence. (While not preplanned, one of the by-products of this public fast was to bring about the most intensive one-on-one organizing campaign ever devised by this or any other union.) In the face of his public fast, board members, staff, volunteers, and supporters already deeply involved with the farmworker movement were forced to reexamine—and resolve—their own personal commitment to the principles of nonviolence. The line had been drawn; a personal oath was now required.

In the 1972 fast to protect the rights of farmworkers to organize a union in Arizona, the purpose of the fast became a call to political action—gather enough valid signatures to recall the governor of the state. This public fast placed the issue squarely before the state (and the nation) and served to mobilize citizens of goodwill first of all to sign the recall petition (or register to vote) and second, to become politically active in order to protect the rights of farmworkers in the state. Again, thousands of farmworkers made their pilgrimage to the church in Phoenix where Chavez was laid up because they realized he was starving himself for their benefit.

From where did Chavez’s vision come? Certainly not from formal education. Chavez had attended 28 elementary schools before dropping out of school. Despite his keen intelligence and understanding of people and human nature, Chavez’s vocabulary was limited during the first few years I knew him. (Who could have foreseen that Chavez someday would become the most popular lecturer in the history of the University of California, Santa Barbara?) After the strike broke out in 1965 and volunteer “outsiders” swarmed to Delano, his vocabulary increased dramatically. He also became a voracious reader, especially of the life and teachings of Gandhi. Chavez was the kind of person who

learned from exposure to people. He often said, “If you don’t know what your next step is or what you should do, just go to the people. They will tell you.”

In my judgment, Chavez’s intensive work with poor people through his CSO years gave him an understanding of what it was farmworkers needed. He had worked with enough people in their own living rooms to know they wanted dignity, a sense of empowerment, a living wage, decent working conditions, health and welfare benefits, funeral expenses, a car in good working condition, and fair prices for goods and services—and of course, they had none of those things. This is the vision and commitment he brought with him when he founded the NFWA.

But Chavez’s vision seemed to expand geometrically as he met “outsiders” who were attracted to *his* vision and his work. As he came to understand and admire—by study and conversation—the ideas of others, he simply incorporated those things into his ever-expanding vision. He was the veritable sponge learner but also had the facility to filter out, sometimes over a period of years, what he wanted to incorporate and what he did not.

Chavez’s work with the CSO also gave him an appreciation of, and a tolerance for, human nature. Chavez was always quick to relate to—and organize—a person’s talents, skills, and abilities while not fretting much about personal weaknesses. He accepted the whole person, the plusses and the minuses. Without doubt, Chavez was a master at dealing one-on-one with people. He was focused, gentle, soft-spoken, patient, and supportive. He spoke simply and sincerely with great insight and conviction.

Vision, total commitment, conviction, voluntary poverty, organizing, public fasts, militant nonviolence, discipline—all essential ingredients of the farmworkers movement needed to build a union—also generated varying degrees of emotional overload for its most involved participants.

Every movement has a founder, a self-appointed leader—or more softly stated—a person who feels called to serve others. The founder provides the vision, recruits the disciples, lays out the ground rules, sets a course of action, and lurches forward—almost a public act of faith. The founder leads by example and provides ongoing education and encouragement to the followers because the founding stages of organization are difficult and discouraging. Even among those most needing the hoped-for benefits, few are interested or willing to give of themselves because they have their own lives to lead and bills to pay.

Most would-be movements never develop the traction needed to grow and attract a large enough following to survive. Chavez’s farmworkers’ movement developed a small base of hopeful believers who hung on long enough to be ignited by the AFL-CIO organizing committee’s 1965 table grape strike in Delano. Chavez could have remained on the sidelines and waited for events of his own choosing, but his instinct proved to be correct—he cast in, took ownership of the strike, co-opted it, and transformed it into a cause. The

movement was finally engaged and grounded, Chavez had a crisis situation to sell to the public at large.

Chavez was not dictatorial nor did he rush around bellowing out orders. His decision making flowed from consensus building—meetings and freeform discussion. He was not afraid of failure nor did he want his followers to fear it. As long as each person made his or her good-faith effort, there was no one more affirming and supportive than Cesar. However, every founder retains the power of the veto. Consensus or no consensus, no decisions were made or implemented that contradicted the founder's vision.

Participation in the movement was all-consuming. One fully involved movement participant, much younger than I, recently wrote, "At one time in my life it was all I knew, cared about, and worked on day and night." Personal considerations such as family, social life, or use of any available leisure time were completely secondary to the demands of the movement. Assignments to another city or state—or even a complete change in the assignment itself—were made at the drop of a hat. No consideration was given to career goals or personal advancement. Union programs that were deemed vital today could be put on hold tomorrow and lay dormant for months. For example, the mobilization required for such events as the Coachella Valley strike, the consumer boycott, Cesar's Fast for Non-Violence, or the Proposition 22 campaign consumed all available resources and required everyone's attention.

There was never any sense that victory was in sight. No one expected the strike to be won and contracts signed. Chavez himself believed that it would take at least 20 years to win contracts. Even in 1970, when the table grape strike was declared over and contracts were signed, barely a day passed before the union segued into another sector of the industry, lettuce in the Salinas Valley, and continued the seemingly perpetual war.

The farmworker movement, like other human rights movements and religious groups, exhibited many characteristics that are similar to—and I use the word respectfully—a cult. These include a charismatic leader, a common enemy, the total commitment of true believers to its righteous cause, tactical leverage resulting from the creative use of time, not money, an emphasis on community living and participation, material and spiritual needs of loyal participants met by the organization, and a personal sense of discipline. Inevitably, the total commitment by a band of believers to a cause soon puts their needs as individuals (and/or those of their families) into conflict with the organization. For example, career goals, educational opportunities for their children, filial duties to one's parents, future financial status, and even such matters as divorce, separation, or affairs, all serve to create tension and conflict within a movement. It took a constant stream of volunteers, both adults and college students, to fill and then replenish, the ranks of the farmworker movement. Some stayed for months, some for years, and a few even outlasted Chavez himself

And now in this month, April of 2003, the 10th anniversary of Chavez's death—and after 30 years of work in organizing a farmworker movement—what is his legacy? Why does the state celebrate a holiday in his honor? Why are there now parks, streets, and schools throughout California and the Southwest named after Cesar E. Chavez? Among many possible explanations, I choose but a few.

Chavez was an indigenous self-educated Latino leader born in Arizona and raised in California. He was a farmworker, a veteran, a community activist, an organizer, and the founder of the farmworker movement. He accomplished at great personal sacrifice—including the sacrifices made by his wife and eight children—what no other person had ever done before. In the face of undying opposition by the state's largest industry, agribusiness, he built a farmworkers' union. And following in the tradition of Gandhi and Martin Luther King, Jr., he built this union through the use of militant nonviolence.

Chavez has been held up as a symbol—or an icon, if you will—marking a new era in the history of California and the Southwest, the beginning of the Latino century. This year, more than half of all children born in California will be Latino. The vast majority of California students now attending urban elementary schools are Latino. This ethnic sea change has been born out of nearly 100 years of poverty, discrimination, human suffering, and hard work. Chavez's life work represents this historical change. Timing *is* everything.

For more than a decade, Chavez's farmworker movement provided the grist for churches and synagogues to discuss the application of social justice principles when weighed against the call of the farmworkers' union for an international consumer boycott of California grapes. We have to remember that most of the growers also attended church or the synagogue and were generous in their support. Mainline churches played a significant role in the development of the NFWA long before the grape strike in 1965. And once the picket lines were formed in Delano, they carried Chavez's message to urban congregations throughout the country. But Chavez, in turn, helped make the teachings of the church and the synagogue relevant to their religious members who tipped the scales in favor of the cause of the nation's most impoverished workers. Whether canonized or not, Chavez has been enrolled as a modern-day saint and prophet.

In spite of himself, Chavez became the nation's most respected and revered labor leader in the past half-century. His humble lifestyle, his stubborn independence, and his vision of a union's role in the lives of its members made Chavez as much of a scourge to labor leaders who operated in the rarefied atmosphere of the capitols of the state and the nation, as he was a lightning rod of inspiration for those union leaders searching for relevance, renewal, and reform.

What is Chavez's legacy for the rest of us? He taught us how to organize, how to take something that does not exist and make it exist. Results guaranteed, but only if we are willing to make the personal sacrifices and the life commitment required to motivate and inspire others to join with us to overcome all obstacles—for as long as it takes.

And what is his legacy for those participants who gave themselves to the cause of the farmworkers? For those who lived and worked in the close-knit community of the movement, it was a life-changing experience. For the sake of *La Causa*, they were recruited, used for a time, then let go when they could not or would not give any more. After their years of farmworker movement service were over, they took their newfound maturity, discipline, and organizing experience and went on to create successful lives in the real world.

But even now, years after they withdrew, tensions persist. For many, there are nagging feelings of loss and disappointment and a vague sense of being unappreciated. For others, hurt feelings surround the circumstances of their leaving. And a few express sharp criticism, even anger, about what they now believe could have—or should have—been accomplished: a lost opportunity, they say. These emotional shards are best left to future academics to sift through and posit their what, why, and what ifs.

Chavez, along with his beloved credit union, has now been buried 10 years and waits only to be resurrected by yet another indigenous leader who will rise up, in the spirit of Gandhi, King, and Chavez, to free people from injustice and oppression.

Chavez's life advanced the cause of human rights in his lifetime; that is legacy enough.

(LeRoy Chatfield worked with Cesar Chavez and the farmworkers' movement from 1963 to 1973.)

### ***San Francisco Chronicle* Op-Ed**

Now that the essay had been written, I realized it would be impossible to get such a long piece published as a newspaper op-ed piece, and the hope of getting it published in a magazine, such as *The New Yorker* or the *Atlantic Monthly*, was slim to none. I had no standing as a writer.

I asked my daughter, Clare, who works in publishing, and her husband, Tim, who is the science writer for the University of California, Santa Cruz, for help. Clare shaped my piece into the size and format of an op-ed piece, and Tim contacted the editorial page director of the *S.F. Chronicle*. The assistant editor promised to consider it but no decision could be made at this particular time. In the meantime, I turned to Richard Ybarra, Cesar's son-in-law, and a long-time friend of mine, who has a consulting firm in San Diego dealing with political issues and candidates, and with whoever/whatever needs to be "connected." Richard's daughter, Barbara, also had a contact with the editorial department of the *S.F. Chronicle*, and she requested consideration of my article.

And so, March 31, 2003, on the California State holiday to honor Cesar Chavez, there we were, Cesar and I together in the *San Francisco Chronicle*. The presentation could not have been better. A large picture of an older but elegant-looking Cesar Chavez, and my essay laid out beneath. I was pleased.

Whether the editor of the Chronicle was moved by the message of the essay, the call from Cesar's granddaughter or from the author's son-in-law, I do not know. Likely it was a combination of the three, and throw in an unknown variable for good measure.

## **Chapter Three**

### **Background Discussion of Farmworker Volunteers**

#### **Farmworker Volunteers and Vision of Cesar Chavez**

For the sake of the reader who may not be knowledgeable about the farmworker movement, I feel it is important to pause here to discuss why some of the volunteers have such bitter memories about their work in the movement. In reality, it is only a small number who feel this way, but it is also true that they were some of the most important staff members involved, and they gave many years of their life to the cause of the farmworkers. In my essay, "The Legacy of Cesar Chavez," I touched on this issue, but permit me to expand upon it.

The first thing that must be understood about being a volunteer in Cesar's farmworker movement was there was no money to be made. All volunteers were paid a subsistence stipend, the famous "\$5 dollars-a-week" salary. Of course it cost the movement much more than the weekly \$5. There was room and board, approved pre-existing loan payments (typical examples might be a car loan and insurance, student loan payments, a home mortgage, etc.), house utilities, grocery allowance for families, transportation costs, and so forth—but all union-approved and tailored to meet the individual needs of the volunteer and his/her family, if applicable. There was always financial tension between the union and the volunteer. On the union side, it was too much money, and on the volunteer side, it was never enough money.

This financial arrangement alone ensured that most volunteers would not overstay their usefulness. Volunteers without family obligations were much less expensive because young, unattached adults could live in boycott or field office communities or in the dorm rooms of the La Paz union headquarters and eat their meals in a communal kitchen.

Those volunteers who were assigned to the boycott cities had more access to additional living support than those working in Delano, or later at the La Paz headquarters, for the simple reason that they could appeal to churches and unions for additional resources.

As the years of the movement wore on, there was a concerted effort made by the farmworker staff to lobby for a modest but more traditional type of salary program, but Cesar would not hear of it. This was yet another example, I believe, of his determination to build a movement, not a union, even if it meant losing good people because of their need for more financial stability and their desire to be less dependent on the union by having to individually plead their case for additional funds.

Many of the original volunteers came from the striking farmworkers themselves. Some were single, and others were married with small children. Their first assignments were such usual strike activities as picketing, union meetings, rallies, and marches, but within a few years, as the boycott operations expanded, many were asked to leave Delano, and accept assignments in boycott cities across the United States and Canada. Some of the married strikers left their spouses and children at home with members of their extended families when they went out on the boycott, while others took their families.

Most of the volunteers from the cities who joined the farmworkers' movement were young and unattached. Some stayed for a few months, others for several years (65 percent of the volunteers stayed five years or less; 45 percent stayed three years or less). The hours and days and months of unrelenting work (and relocations at a minute's notice) were so demanding that a kind of burnout was always close at hand. It was just a matter of time before volunteers moved on to resume more normal lives that would include college or graduate school, marriage, child-rearing, and professional careers. In short, they felt the need to free themselves in order to plan for their own futures. Because of the relatively short time span of their involvement, volunteers rarely overstayed their welcome.

Many married volunteers joined the farmworker movement under the auspices of the National Farm Worker Ministry, and while no special accommodations or distinctions were made in terms of the kinds of union assignments they received or in the work expectations imposed upon them, they were provided with slightly more financial security and with much less dependence on Cesar's budget constraints.

For those union-supported married volunteers who were assigned to the La Paz headquarters, it didn't take long before the reality of the cult-like atmosphere of Cesar's movement wore down one spouse or the other, and it sometimes became necessary to create more personal space by taking an assignment away from La Paz, and work for the union from a suitable distance until the need to return to a more normal life became more obvious and necessary. But if that option wasn't available, then married (and unmarried) volunteers would tough it out for as long as they could, and sometimes that period would be measured in years.

Older volunteers who came later in their life frequently came with a specified length already in mind, generally one or two years, and many of them were associated with the National Farm Worker Ministry, which offered some outside organizational support services. Some were priests and nuns who, at their own request, were assigned to the

farmworker movement by their diocese or religious orders, which financially supported their work.

But the individual case of every farmworker volunteer was different, and there were notable exceptions to the general categories of volunteers that I have identified. In fact, some volunteers, both from within the strike itself and from the outside, adapted to the demands of the movement so well and manifested such great motivation that as the success of the farmworker movement grew, they were appointed to positions of responsibility, and some were eventually elected to the union's board of directors. These volunteers seemed destined to make the farmworker movement their life's career, and a few have done just that.

### **So then, what was the problem?**

The problems were no different than in any other organization except that in Cesar's movement it was a closely held and super-charged occupation. It was a cause, after all. People were called to undertake this all-consuming work and felt privileged to be associated with its leader, a person who was known worldwide for his dedication, leadership, and moral stature. Volunteers, more or less, depending on their status within the farmworkers' movement, shared in the glow of his celebrity status.

But in the final analysis, Cesar understood the cause of the farmworker movement to be a way of life, which not only included organizing farmworkers into a union but one that would emulate and support his vision. And while key leadership staff tolerated his demand for total commitment for the sake of unionizing farmworkers, they were much less enamored with his vision. Ultimately, the need for a personal life and individual status clashed with Cesar's priority of building and maintaining a strike force community. But no compromise was forthcoming. Cesar was the founder, it was his vision, and he had the final say. As a result, the stage was set for a few board members and key staff to be summarily forced out, and sad to report, vilified. For the sake of his vision, every one was expendable.

Today, more than 25 years later, some of these long-term, dedicated, and gifted former volunteers still feel a sense of loss. They talk about the loss of opportunity for farmworkers, snatching defeat from the jaws of victory, inflexibility and stubbornness, lack of union democracy, the refusal to incorporate and assimilate nascent farmworker unions, and an unwillingness to compromise. At the same time, after so many years of personal service, they find it difficult to express their feelings publicly concerning their forced departure, and it is this stubborn silence that engenders their personal bitterness and their feelings of loss.

It isn't a question of whether Cesar was right or wrong in defending his vision. As long as I knew him, he never pretended it to be otherwise or held out any other promise. He possessed a vision of what the farmworker movement should be, and when he felt it was

threatened, he brooked no opposition or interference, whether from family, friends, board members, or supporters. True enough, he expanded his vision over the course of years, but it was always his vision, and everyone knew it.

### **My Voluntary Departure Began with the Proposition 22 Election**

Fortunately for me, I was not one of the key volunteers who needed to be pushed out of the farmworker movement, because I left long before I wore out my welcome. But had I stayed—and I had the opportunity to do so—the time would certainly have come when my personal priorities would have clashed with the needs of the movement, and I would be out—friend or no friend of Cesar’s.

I do not deserve much credit for my voluntary departure because I had a foreshadowing of what lay ahead for me. After Cesar’s funeral in 1993, I wrote an unpublished manuscript, which I entitled, “Cesar, 1968.” In this document, I recount a conversation Cesar and I had late in the evening the night before the 1972 California general election, an election that would determine the fate of Proposition 22, the anti-union initiative sponsored by California agribusiness to outlaw farm labor unions.

I wrote, “So there we were, just Cesar and I, sitting in the big open room of our No on 22 campaign headquarters looking out onto Olympic Boulevard five stories below. It was very late in the evening, everyone had gone home or back to our farmworker encampment at Lincoln Park to get some rest for another early morning of billboarding, and our “get-out-the-vote” drive. Cesar was tired, and very nervous about the upcoming election. I was very uptight myself, and was wondering if there was any last minute campaigning that we could do. Just a few days before, with some of our Hollywood media contacts I had been able to arrange for a 30-second “Cesar ‘No on 22’ spot” to be aired on the Archie Bunker show *All in the Family*. It was very expensive (I forget how much), but all the experts said it was worth it, and a “coup” to even break into the show. I remember being afraid to blink for fear I would miss it.

Cesar spoke very softly, and with a friendly but nervous edge to his voice. He simply explained to me that if we lost the election tomorrow, I would have to take the blame. I couldn’t answer. I was totally silenced by the harsh reality of what he had said. I was completely helpless. My closest friend, almost nine years now, had just explained the political facts of life to me. I had worked on this “life and death” campaign full time since July, barely had any time to even see Bonnie and the girls unless she was in the office working, working late into the nights on the telephone plotting strategy with my staff directors in other California cities, and then worrying half-to-death about everything because of the stakes involved for Cesar and the union. And now, to top it all off, I had been reduced to a fall guy. I didn’t answer Cesar. I just nodded and gave a shrug of the shoulders.

The union won! Proposition 22 was defeated 58 percent to 42 percent. (Nixon beat McGovern 54 percent to 40 percent). I did not feel like going to the victory celebration because I am very uncomfortable at those kind of events, but I did make an appearance at the tail end of the party. Everyone was pretty drunk by that time, and thank God, all of the speeches were over! I didn't have to stay long.

Cesar tried to make it up to me. The union had a big "Welcome Home/Thank You" dinner party in my honor for all the staff and their families at La Paz. There was a banner in the dining room that called me a "Giant Killer," and Cesar made a big to-do about my work in the campaign, and how I saved the union from the power of the growers.

But I was mature enough to know that just because Proposition 22 had been defeated, it made me no more a giant killer than had it won, I would have been the person "to blame." Winning or losing Proposition 22 wasn't about me or my friendship with Cesar, it was about him, and his relationship with his vision, his farmworker movement. That was the only thing that mattered.

I remember this incident as clearly today as if it happened last night. And I'm grateful that it happened because it helped to spare me from the day, which would surely have come, when Cesar and I would be forced to part company. I did not leave the farmworker movement because of this incident, but it certainly helped to lay the groundwork for my voluntary departure the following year. The conversation that evening, high above Olympic Boulevard, reminded me again that this was not my cause; I had only come to the farmworker movement to help Cesar with his cause.

The most difficult part of my decision to leave the farmworker movement was the realization that I would have to give up my 10-year friendship with Cesar. Because of his all-consuming commitment to the cause of the farmworkers, he could no longer be a close friend. I knew it, I understood it, and I accepted the consequences of my decision. I felt a great sense of loss, and still do.

As I look back now, and even though I have long since departed, I think it was a mistake for Cesar to permit volunteers to serve on the union's board of directors because it changed their mutual relationship and blurred their expectations. Neither he nor they were as free to act as before. A volunteer who serves in an elected position puts on a mantle of leadership that is rooted in the politics of the organization, but the reality is quite different, because as a volunteer, he/she still serves at the pleasure of the founder.

It would not be fair of me to leave the reader with the impression that most or even many former volunteers were purged from the farmworkers' movement because they crossed swords with Cesar. This is not the case. Those volunteers who were forced out were few in number, and although I believe that many former volunteers, especially those who were involved for many years, still carry with them a vague sense of feeling unappreciated for their service, they do not exhibit feelings of bitterness and/or anger about their

experiences. Quite the opposite. They are proud to have been part of the movement and view their volunteer experience as an important and formative experience that served them well as they resumed more normal lives. Still, it feels good when you know your work was appreciated.

## Chapter Four

### The Start-Up of the Farmworker Documentation Project

#### Governor Jerry Brown's 65<sup>th</sup> Birthday

Some days after the publication of my op-ed piece, former Governor Jerry Brown, now mayor of Oakland, was on the telephone inviting me to his 65th birthday celebration. Imagine that. I had not talked to Jerry in almost 10 years, and here he was talking a mile a minute, as if we were back together again in his 1975 governor's office. I said I would be pleased to attend. I'm glad I did because that was the event that set the Farmworker Documentation Project in motion.

The birthday bash turned out to be a reunion of Jerry's oldest friends, supporters, staff, and political operatives. Jerry served as his own master of ceremonies. No political speeches, a few introductions (I was one of them), a half-dozen anecdotes about old times, and a few teasing references by Jerry about his future. Plenty to eat and drink. I had a good time.

On the return home to Sacramento, I thought about the evening. I recognized so many people that I had worked with during my 1974–1979 stint with Jerry Brown's administration, but I was surprised at how much older they looked. How much older we all looked. It hit me full force—I was now an old man. Of course I knew how old I was (68) but it wasn't until I saw so many former Brown campaign/administration colleagues in one place, all looking much older than I thought they should, that I realized my own status as an elder citizen.

I mused about this new, personal state of affairs throughout the week and realized that unless the stories of the volunteers in the farmworker movement were captured, they would be lost forever. In fact, we were a dying breed, and in the not-too-distant future, we would be extinct.

In Professor Henggeler's first letter to me, he talked about having transcribed more than 400 hours worth of UFW tape recordings made from 1976–1981, which meant, I presume, that for 40 days he listened 10-hours-a-day worth of UFW board meetings. Ugh! What life must be like for an academic historian. These tape recordings no more tell the story of the farmworker movement than visiting Marine World tells the story of the sea. I daresay that not even 10 percent of the volunteers in the farmworker movement are represented in the archives at Wayne State University. No, make that less than 5 percent. It is always the case

that those who do the work are ignored, and those in leadership positions are recorded and extolled.

I also realized that I was one of very few former farmworker volunteers with enough standing to organize a documentation project. I was present in the early days, a close friend and ally of Cesar's. I had major responsibilities in the administration of the union, worked in the strike and the boycott, managed two public fasts and two farmworker-driven political campaigns; and perhaps most important, I left the union on good terms with Cesar, and left behind many friends who stayed involved through the end of the 1970s. I knew the major players, and they knew me. I was not present or involved when the inevitable breakups and purges occurred, which left me free and unencumbered to speak to everyone who was involved.

### **NFWA, etc. Documentation Project**

I decided to name the documentation project "NFWA, etc." The National Farm Workers Association had given way in the late 1960s to United Farm Workers Organizing Committee (UFWOC) and was later reborn into United Farm Workers (UFW). I hoped that using the now-defunct, 30-year-old NFWA name would keep me far enough removed from the current UFW so that I would not be viewed as a "turf problem." I wanted to be viewed, in present day UFW terms, as ancient history.

For these same reasons, I initially decided to put the emphasis on early volunteers, or at least those who served pre-1975. This distinction, I reasoned, would keep me distant from the present-day union and the Chavez family politics. Additionally, it subdivided the UFW's history into pre-ALRA and post-ALRA eras, which again emphasized the difference between ancient history and the present. But after a few months of organizing the documentation project, I realized there were so many volunteers in the 1970s that it was impossible to keep this artificial line of demarcation. I opened up the project to include any volunteer from 1962 (the founding of the farmworkers' union) to 1993 (the death of Cesar Chavez).

### **The Subject Matter**

I did not want the documentation project to focus on Cesar in the sense that volunteers would be expected to write about their recollections of Cesar, what a great person he was, his impact on their lives, his role in history, etc. In fact, many hardworking volunteers barely knew Cesar and most met him only occasionally or just in passing. No, I wanted to focus the project on the volunteers themselves, on those who actually did the work of the movement. The only condition I would impose is they had to have worked at some time in their life full time for the farmworkers' movement. It didn't make much difference to me whether the volunteer had worked for just a summer, a year or two, or very much longer. I knew from my own experience in the movement that if someone had had the experience of working as a full-time volunteer, that would be qualification enough for them to have

something significant to say. And if you read the essays resulting from the documentation project, I believe you will agree.

The lack of content control was a critical factor if there was to be a successful outcome for the project. I knew that if I tried to shape the content of the documentation in any manner, I would lose participants. Those in any way disaffected by their personal experiences would be suspicious and hesitant and would express their concerns to others. I hammered away on this point. I would not be an editor, only a collector. There were no limits on length, as long or as short as you will. I would accept whatever was sent forward, no essay would be rejected. Everything collected would be published, or if unable to be published, then available to the public.

### **Finding the Volunteers**

I began the process of reaching out to contact the volunteers. As usual, I went from the known to the unknown, ever widening the circle of contacts. I wrote down the names of at least 30 volunteers that I had known and worked with. Some were on my Christmas card list, some were friends of close friends, and some were known to me because they were in the legal profession and in the labor movement. Every volunteer I found led to a small cluster of others with whom they had remained connected. Finding the first 100 volunteers was the most difficult but after the initial base became large enough and enough volunteers learned of the documentation project, the names and addresses flowed in. (Without the Internet, I doubt this kind of a documentation project would have been possible.)

I thought that most of the Filipino table grape strikers must be deceased by now, but it took several months to find anyone who could confirm any deaths. This lack of knowledge struck me as the final discrimination visited upon their lives. Brought to this country to live as impoverished farmworkers, not permitted to own land or to marry, and at the end of their lives I could find no one who knew of their passing. Cesar had always expressed to me his profound concern for these hardworking, lonely men, and yet no one in the current union could provide any information about their whereabouts, or whether they were even still alive. The plight of Filipinos farmworkers has been a sad chapter in the history of American farm labor.

### **Notice to Henggeler**

Having decided to launch the farmworkers' movement documentation project, I wrote to Professor Henggeler to alert him he might need to take into account this new primary source material that would soon be generated by former UFW volunteers.

April 27, 2003

Dear Paul,

I enclose an “invitation” which I sent to nearly 175 farmworker staff members who worked full time in the movement sometime during the period 1962–1993. Some worked for a few years, and others much longer. Some worked at the union headquarters, others in field offices, and others in the boycott.

My expectation regarding the percentage of responses (essays) is quite modest because I know how difficult it is for most people to write. If I were willing to settle for email writing, I’m sure the response would be much greater but at this point I want to keep the pressure on. I feel it is important to document the role of movement staff so that future research will better explain what transpired, and how, and why.

Consider this. I sent out 175 invitations. On the natural, I know that I will find at least another 30 names and addresses. Total: 205. I know that at least half of these staff members served on the boycott. Total: 100. If each volunteer had five full-time local volunteers working with him/her on the boycott, that is 500. (I believe five full-time local volunteers is a generous number but never mind that now.) The grand staff total: 205 + 500 = 705. Add to this a generous number for farmworker full-time “strikers,” let’s say 125. Grand total: 830. Let’s round the number up to 1000, just to make sure we count everybody.

In the United States, how is it possible that a measly 1000 people acting in concert could be the fulcrum to cause wine grape contracts, table grape contracts, and vegetable contracts in the state’s largest anti-union industry? How could 1000 people exercise enough influence to cause all of California agribusiness to agree to farmworker legislation written by the UFW’s own attorneys?

How do you explain it? What were the ingredients that provided the leaven for a whole society from 1962 to 1975? Don’t you think your book needs to address this phenomenon?

All the best,

LeRoy Chatfield

P.S. If it is of any interest, in another month or two, I should have all the names and addresses of movement staff that I believe should be included in my historical record project.

My letter to Professor Henggeler is not as innocent as it might seem. After all, he is in the process of writing a major book about Cesar’s leadership, especially post-1975. He says he has already spent more than six years in researching all the primary sources in the union archives at Wayne State University. I wanted to put him on notice that by January 1, 2004, there would be a completely new set of primary source materials, perhaps 500 to 1000 pages, written by those who were an integral part of the farmworkers’ movement, and who actually did the day-to-day work. What would they have to say about Cesar’s leadership? In

addition to this fresh documentation, I would be in possession of the names and addresses of several hundred witnesses who could be personally interviewed if he thought their views were important enough to round out his scholarly research.

I view the documentation project as a hedge against reckless and irresponsible charges about Cesar and his movement and his leadership, whether made by Professor Henggeler or any other academic who comes down the pike.

### **The Chavez Family**

As the circle of contacts for the documentation project grew ever wider, I had to face the question of how to deal with Cesar's children. On the one hand, they all met the criteria of having worked full time for the union; it might even be true to say that from the time they could walk and talk, they crossed that threshold. On the other hand, they were the beneficiaries of Cesar's only family bequest, his international celebrity status. What need did they have to participate in the documentation project? Each of them has had many opportunities to publicly represent their father's icon status, and as time went on they would have many more such opportunities, and some would prove to be financially beneficial. But if the documentation project ignored their personal contribution to the farmworkers' movement, would that not be a serious mistake? I thought it would be.

I decided to write each one a personal letter, inviting them to participate, but in the same breath saying that I would understand if any of them decided not to do so.

I wrote the following:

June 14, 2003

Dear Polly, Sylvia, Eloise, Anna, Titi-Bet, Bobo, and Birdie,

Please forgive my informal salutation but when I left the farmworkers' movement 30 years ago this August, these were the only names I knew.

I would have written this letter about the NFWA, etc. Documentation Project much sooner if I had anticipated the enthusiasm with which it has been received. My initial idea was to reach out and contact some of the volunteers that I had known and worked with in Delano and La Paz, but especially in Los Angeles when I headed up the boycott and the No on Proposition 22 campaign. In my mind's eye I figured there might be 50 or 60 I could find. I would ask them to write something about the work they did in the movement, why they got involved in the first place, and what they accomplished, if anything.

The word spread rapidly. Former volunteers began to contact me, and sent me the names of others with whom they worked 25 years or so ago. They asked me to include them in the

documentation project. Now, just seven weeks later, I have compiled a master list of more than 400 volunteers who worked full time at one point in their life for the farmworkers' movement. I have sent out 300-plus invitations asking these former volunteers to write a personal essay about their involvement. The remaining 100 are classified as "missing," and until I can find their current addresses or until I am positively informed that they have passed away, and need to be transferred to a memorial list, they will remain in limbo.

The deadline for participation is January 1, 2004. I now believe the number of former volunteers on the list will continue to grow, and will number more than 500 before the end of the year. The response has been amazing, and while I cannot be sure of the reason, it is obvious that the documentation project is responding to a felt need.

Each of you family members meets the basic criteria of the documentation project because from the time you could walk and talk, you were full-time "volunteers." I use quotation marks because I know from my own experience as a father that when I volunteered my own kids into my causes I didn't know how much they really wanted to help or were doing it to please me or because they wanted to be a loyal family member.

But regardless, when you grew up, each of you at some point in your life, volunteered of your own volition to work full time in the farmworkers' movement. Of course, by that time, I had long since left the movement.

I ask each of you to consider participating in the documentation project, not because you are sons and daughters of Cesar and Helen, but because you made your own individual contribution to the movement, and it is important for those who come after us to read what you did. In the same breath, I also say that if for any reason you decide not to participate, I understand completely, and I respect your decision. I also realize that you have, and will continue to have, many opportunities to write your own story, and I hope you do so. I believe it is important, not so much for your own benefit, but for those who come after us.

To give you a sense of the importance—and the flavor—of the documentation project, I include with this letter the essay submitted by Father Joe Tobin, a Catholic priest who is well known to you, and a person that I met only briefly in 1973. Father Tobin and I corresponded almost every day for a week about his personal essay, and he sent (10:35 p.m.) by email what turned out to be his final installment. I responded to him at 6:30 a.m. the next morning, and by noontime I had an email from Chris Hartmire informing me that Father Joe was dead. I was totally stunned.

In the weeks following his death, I was thankful, and took some comfort in the fact that I played a small part in this man's desire to submit his account of what he had done to help the farmworkers' movement. His essay is precious. I hope you take the time to read it, and reflect about his commitment not only to farmworkers but to the poor.

I know this letter is growing too long, and is beginning to wander a bit, but there is another point I want to raise with you. From 1963 to 1973, your father and I were very close friends. We talked endlessly about everything and everyone under the sun. Sometimes we talked five or six times a day, months at a time. Many times, he would use me to “test market” some of his ideas or simply to help him sort out situations or examine all the options. When I left in 1973, I told him he would never have to worry that I would capitalize on our friendship by “writing a book.” I kept my promise. With one exception, the only writing I have done about the farmworker movement has been personal, and not for publication. Let me explain the exception.

During the past year, I wrote many private essays to help fend off an anonymous detractor, and a few critics who have attempted to raise the issue about whether your dad’s commitment to nonviolence was real or not, and whether his style of decision-making was too inflexible, and ran roughshod over others. From this work, I wrote one public essay for publication. This essay, “The Legacy of Cesar Chavez” became the basis for an op-ed piece published in the *S.F. Chronicle* on March 31, 2003. I was pleased and proud to have written it, and I include it with this letter.

I hope this letter finds you in good health. You have a glorious tradition to uphold, and I’m sure Cesar’s legacy is in good hands.

Bonnie says hello. Please give your mom our best wishes. Helen did so much for us in those early Delano days, and we will never forget it.

If you have any questions or concerns about the documentation project, please contact me.

All the best,

LeRoy Chatfield

P.S. For most of you, I am sorry to say, I do not know your spouses. If they meet the criteria of the documentation project, and would be willing to write a personal essay, it would be most welcome. If they choose not to, I understand completely.

I have had no response, nor did I really expect one. I thought it possible that at least one family member would reply, and offer to write an essay just so the family would be represented in the project, but as the months pass, I think not.

The purpose of my letter was simply to set them at ease about whether or not the project might infringe on the family business of protecting and promoting Cesar’s legacy. My hope was to create a little breathing space for the project to coexist with them, at least for the next six months or so.

## Chapter Five

### Results of the Documentation Project

#### The Numbers

The touchstone of working in the farmworker movement was accountability. Every volunteer was held accountable for his or her work on the boycott or in the field offices. How many customers did you turn away, how many flyers did you hand out, how many signature cards did you get signed, how much money did you raise, how many hours did you work, how many house meetings did you organize, how many telephone calls did you make, how many people did you talk to, how many organizations did you contact—and not for the month or the week, but today? What did you accomplish for the cause, today? Brutal, I'm afraid, but effective beyond all measure.

The Farmworker Documentation Project started in late April of 2003 and as of January 1, 2005 these were the results:

1. 191 essays have been received, creating more than 1200 pages of primary source documentation material. The essays average 3000 words in length.
2. A master list of 1158 former farmworker volunteers has been assembled. It includes the names of those contacted (645), those unable to contact (345), and those deceased (98).
3. Mailing addresses and/or email addresses have been compiled for the volunteers who were found.
4. Current biographical thumbnail information obtained from the volunteers who wrote essays.

#### Good Advice from Carlos LeGerrette

In the course of the 20 months I worked on assembling the documentation project, I communicated with scores of former volunteers who, in turn, spread the net ever wider trying to snare every volunteer. But I repeat here the good advice that Carlos LeGerrette gave to me early on: “LeRoy, there are some people who do not want to be found.” It is true. I accept and respect their wishes.

#### When Is the Documentation Project Complete?

Once a documentation project had been started, it took on a life of its own, and it may never be completed. But my view is this: I deem the project finished when 1) the last essay has been written and catalogued; and 2) at least one essay is written that deals with such questions as: What did it all mean? What was its significance? Did it make any difference? Are the farmworkers, the volunteers, the supporters, and the allied organizations any better or worse off because of Cesar Chavez and his farmworker movement?

## Chapter Six

### UFW Volunteer Monument

#### Written in Stone

I believe in public monuments because what they represent and/or symbolize is written in stone or cast in bronze for all to see. There is one such monument to Cesar Chavez in Sacramento. It is a larger-than-life statue of a youthful Cesar striding forward leading a column of jubilant flag-waving followers. On each side of the monument are depicted scenes of striking farmworkers and volunteers in action. At the base, on three sides of the monument, Cesar's words are etched in bronze. The monument—a worthy representation of Cesar Chavez leading the March to Sacramento, 1966—was sculpted by Lisa Reinertson. It is impressive and commands the attention of everyone who walks by.

What might a monument depicting not Cesar Chavez but the farmworker volunteers look like? A suitable monument in my view is a slightly tapered obelisk, 12 feet tall, 24 inches on a side, carved and polished out of Arizona red rock. On the four sides at the top of each plane before it slopes upward to the point, there would be etched one set of initials on each side—AWOC, NFWA, UFWOC, and UFW. Under each set of initials, the Huelga flag would be carved. On the flat sides of the obelisk, bottom to top, would be etched in random order, the names of all volunteers—probably less than 1500 in number—who worked full time in the farmworker movement. For obvious reasons, Cesar's name does not appear on the monument.

If the farmworker movement, 1962 to 1993, was one of the most significant social revolutions in the annals of American history—and I certainly believe it was—then the simplicity of this monument, along with its height and heft, captures the spirit and solidarity—and the names—of all those who volunteered to build this movement.

#### Last Words

I thank the readers who made their way through this very long essay.

### 33 Sidebars Follow

I have written 33 sidebars, and put them more or less in chronological order, to capture some personal anecdotes, stories, private journal entries, and observations about my 10-year involvement with Cesar Chavez and his farmworker movement.

#### Sidebar #1

### Bakersfield to Boston to Delano—1963

Forty-one years ago, I traveled from Bakersfield to Boston to attend the National Catholic Social Action Convention, and there at one of the sessions, I heard a panel speaker, Father Phil Berrigan, if I am not mistaken, mention that a man by the name of Cesar Chavez was organizing farmworkers in Delano, California. I sat there dumbfounded. I had traveled 3000 miles to learn that something as important as organizing farmworkers was taking place just 30 miles from where I lived and worked.

When I returned to Bakersfield in September, I tried to get in touch with Cesar Chavez, but he was not listed in the phone book and none of my circle, fellow high-school teachers and Bakersfield activists, had ever heard of him. I finally tracked down the convention panelist and asked him how to get in touch with this Cesar Chavez. All he could tell me was that he had a brother by the name of Richard who he thought lived in Delano, and maybe that would assist me. But he reassured me that Cesar was organizing farmworkers in the fields around the Delano area. There was a Richard Chavez listed in the Delano telephone directory. I called him and he said he would get a message to Cesar. Several weeks passed, and Cesar Chavez finally called back. I introduced myself, told him I was interested in his work, that I would like to learn more, and could I come and meet him?

Cesar was very soft-spoken and sounded a little cautious. He asked me some questions about my interest, and how I knew about him, but he did finally invite me to come and gave me directions. That is how I found my way to 102 Albany Street, the headquarters of the National Farm Workers Association (NFWA) in Delano, California.

The building was located on the last southwest corner of Delano. There were open lands to the west and to the south. They were desolate-looking fields, as I remember them, with little agricultural value because of the lack of irrigation water on the west side of Highway 99.

The association headquarters was a converted church building which Cesar had painted and remodeled on the inside, so that when you walked in the front door, his office was behind a counter on the left, and straight ahead was another counter made to look like a bank teller's window. Behind that counter was an all-purpose work area and a small closet-like office that in a few years would become the offices of *El Malcriado*, Cesar's organizing newspaper—his pride and joy! There was a toilet at the rear of the building, and another storeroom, as I recall. Aside from the building on this very small lot, not a piece of landscaping could be seen. It was quite barren. I had never realized how desolate the Central Valley could be until I found the west side of Highway 99.

Cesar was very friendly and greeted me. We talked for a long time, and he told me about his organizing work. He had moved to Delano because he had a brother living there, a carpenter, and his wife, Helen, had a sister and many relatives and friends. This would give them and their eight children the support base they needed. And besides, it was all he could

afford. He knew that if he was to do this kind of work, he would earn almost nothing, so with many relatives in the area, he figured his family would not starve to death. He was building what he called the National Farm Workers Association. He did not dare call it a union because the powerful agricultural interests with their control of the surrounding towns, McFarland, Richgrove, Earlimart, Shafter, Wasco, and Corcoran, would run him out of the area. His cover was that he was a well-meaning, Mexican-American do-gooder who was helping his own people. (I'm pretty sure that my memory is correct about this: in 1963 we were Mexican-American. It wasn't until a few years later that we became Chicanos, and then later still, we became Hispanics, and now some of us might be Latinos. Though it is possible that at that point in 1963, we were still just Mexicans.)

Who was eligible to join the National Farm Workers Association? The basic requirement was that you had to be a farmworker. This was later amended to include such fellow travelers as myself. And what benefits did farmworkers receive as a result of their membership? There were four, I think: first, you received a wallet-sized card, which certified that you were a member in good standing. This card had a red band at the top with a thunderbird eagle reversed in white and was signed by Cesar E. Chavez, General Director, and Anthony Orendain, Secretary-Treasurer. Second, you paid monthly dues, which I believe were \$3.50 a month. Third, you received a small death benefit when you died, perhaps as much as \$500. This would ensure that your burial expenses would not be a burden to your family. And fourth, the most important of all, you were invested in the dream that someday—perhaps not in your lifetime, but in the lifetime of your children—you would belong to a union strong enough to negotiate with the growers for better wages, access to bathrooms in the fields, drinking water available on the job, rest breaks, an end to stoop labor with the short-handled hoe, and medical, pension and unemployment benefits. (You must remember that since the 1930s, farmworkers were specifically excluded from all labor legislation, including coverage under the National Labor Relations Act, the labor law that protected all other workers in the United States.)

I told Cesar that as a teacher, I thought education was the answer to improving the lives of farmworkers. He disagreed. He said that he himself had attended 28 elementary schools because he had to work in the fields and follow the harvest of the crops to help support the family. Farmworker families, he said, had to have some stability before their children could take advantage of education. He maintained that a farmworkers' union was the first step in this process. In truth, this corresponded with my own teaching experience in San Francisco where I had taught for many years. Most of my students did come from families whose fathers were members of unions: longshoremen, building trades, teamsters, retail clerks, and firefighters.

I asked him why he didn't have a telephone in his office. First of all, he said, he couldn't afford it, and second, who would call him? Farmworkers didn't have telephones either. If someone wanted to speak to him, they would find him. After all, hadn't I found him, and wasn't I here in his office talking with him?

Thus began my 10-year friendship with Cesar Chavez and his farmworker movement.

## Sidebar #2

Brother Gilbert's Appeal Letter—November 1965

My dear friends,

This is rather a difficult letter to write but one that I feel obligated to send because of your interest and kindness to me in the past.

Very simply put: I am withdrawing (voluntarily) from the Christian Brothers in order to work full time for the National Farm Workers Association—a grass-roots movement begun in Delano, California, by Cesar Chavez to organize farmworker families in California. (For my non-Catholic friends: my withdrawing from the Christian Brothers does not mean that I have to leave or that I intend to leave the Catholic Church. I will once again assume the position proper to that of a “layman,” i.e., a member of the Church but without the religious vows of poverty, chastity, and obedience.)

My reasons for such a decision are really not very profound or complex. I just feel that I can no longer work on behalf of social justice at the level of abstraction that my life as a religious teaching Brother seems to indicate. Then too, my ever-increasing involvement and identification with the poor only continues to widen the gap between my obedience to religious authority and my own understanding of what my life as a Christian must entail. Actually, the decision to make a decision was probably the most difficult part.

I must emphasize that it is not with an attitude of bitterness or hostility that I leave the Brothers. Quite the contrary! I will always be most grateful to them for the opportunities that I had to work with young men and women—that experience alone has been worth a lifetime to me. Then too, many of my closest friends are Brothers and will continue to remain so. In short, whatever “levels of consciousness” I have attained is due in large measure to my having been a Christian Brother.

As I have indicated, I will be working for the NFWA at a salary of \$20 a month. I will serve as the Director of CO-OP Development. Our idea is to build a complex of cooperatives (clinic, pharmacy, credit union, garage, etc.) somewhere in the valley—but this complex would be owned and controlled by farmworkers themselves. Since almost all of these families make less than \$3000 a year, this idea presents some unique difficulties that must be overcome. My job—as I see it—is to attempt to organize these CO-OPS by setting up their overall economic and legal structures and to recruit professional men and women (doctors, lawyers, pharmacists, accountants, teachers, etc.) who will give us one or two years of their lives to work for the poor through the CO-OP at prices that farmworkers can honestly afford to pay. We look upon this as a prerequisite for serious grass roots organizing.

I estimate that it will take two years to organize such a CO-OP—granting of course that it can be done! Since at the age of thirty-one I begin from “scratch” without financial resources, I will have to live in a kind of voluntary poverty for the next two years at least. By voluntary poverty I mean that I will have to live on \$100 a month and buy (and support) a Volkswagen. Since the NFWA can only afford to salary me at \$20 a month at this time, I am going to have to be dependent upon friends who believe in me enough to pledge, let’s say, \$5 a month for a year to support my efforts at organizing.

Honestly! This is not a letter of appeal. God knows you have received enough of them from me in the past. I don’t want you to do anything for me or for the cause I believe in unless you really want to. I realize that what I propose to do will strike some of you as “crazy” or “naïve” or “nuts” and maybe in two years’ time I will agree with you. But right now I am convinced that Cesar Chavez and the NFWA represents a true anti-poverty program that respects the dignity and integrity of the people involved.

For the first year (at least until June of 1966) I expect to be operating mostly in San Francisco and Los Angeles. I have two “contact” offices:

San Francisco Area:

LeRoy Chatfield  
c/o Bonnie Burns  
700 Church St. Apt 205  
San Francisco, California  
(Phone: MA 6-2281—Evenings)

Delano Office:

LeRoy Chatfield  
c/o National Farm Workers Association  
Box 894  
Delano, California  
(Phone: 8661)

For those of you who want to know what you can do, consider the following:

1. Keep me free to organize by contributing small amounts each month for my support.
2. Make a small contribution towards the purchase and support of a VW.
3. Let me know if I am welcome to stay with you for a day or two when I am in your area. Believe me, I won’t overstay.
4. Put me in contact with professional persons or persons with specialized talents who might want to work in a CO-OP situation at the grass-roots level. Warning: This work will entail a kind of voluntary poverty and the living conditions will be very basic.

5. Arrange for me to speak to potentially interested groups about the NFWA and our CO-OP movement.
6. Refer me to existing CO-OPs that you are personally acquainted with so that I can visit and learn more about them.

Thank you, thank you, for all you have done for me in the past. I hope that you will look with understanding on what I feel that I have to do to close one chapter in my life and begin another.

Love,

LeRoy Chatfield  
(Formerly: Brother Gilbert, FSC)

P.S. I suspect that my San Francisco address will be the fastest way to contact me—at least for the time being.

### **Sidebar #3**

The John Birch Society Unmasks Brother Gilbert—1966

“A top SNCC man who has been active in Delano, one Brother Gilbert, was for several years Vice Principal of Garces Catholic High School in Bakersfield. Brother Gilbert, who is also a member of the communist DuBois Clubs, has left the school and is operating in Delano under his real name, Leroy Chatfield. *The Grapes: Communist Wrath in Delano* by Gary Allen from American Opinion Magazine, June 1966, p 7.”

### **Sidebar #4**

Stop the Grapes on the Dock—1966

The call came to me in San Francisco, “The grapes are being trucked from Delano to the San Francisco docks. Stop them from being loaded onto the ship.” That was it. That’s all the information they could give me, the rest was up to me.

Because of my contacts with the longshoremen’s union, I was able to confirm that grapes were to be loaded the next morning at San Francisco pier number such-and-such, but the growers had obtained a restraining order prohibiting picketing at the dock, and without a picket line, the longshoremen’s union had no excuse not to load the grapes onto the ship.

But my informant also told me that the picketers had the right to read the injunction before the order could be given by the police to stop picketing and to disperse. A group of

us, a dozen or more, showed up early the next morning to set up the picket line, read the injunction, and disperse when ordered to do so.

When we arrived it seemed like a Hollywood stage set: there were eight refrigerated trucks lined up on the dock waiting for the pier to open so they could drop their loads shipside; the dock workers were milling around outside the pier gate waiting to see what was going to happen; the high-priced San Francisco attorney had arrived with dozens of injunctions stuffed into his bulging briefcase; the police were at the ready; and we stood across the street from the pier, next to the railroad tracks. Apparently, someone shouted “camera” and “action,” because the drama began.

One young woman from our group crossed the street holding a picket sign aloft. She walked to the main pier doors and started to walk back and forth in front of the entrance. The attorney served her with the injunction and as she read it word for word, she kept the picket sign high above her head, and when she finished reading the multi-page document, she was given the order to disperse. As she crossed the street to join the other demonstrators, she handed the picket sign to the next person, and the cycle repeated itself many times. For their part, the members of the longshoremen’s union were satisfied that as long as the picket sign was in front of the entrance, their lives might be endangered if they crossed it.

After two hours of this street theater, the grower’s attorney gave up and left. The longshoremen went to work, the idling refrigerated grape trucks remained outside waiting for another day, and we went out for a glorious breakfast.

### **Sidebar #5**

Jimmy Herman—San Francisco Waterfront—1966

“Built like a fireplug,” was an expression I grew up with and it fits Jimmy Herman. Short, squat, square-looking, and self-contained, he was a bottled-up force of power. Always impeccably dressed in the San Francisco style of the 1960s you might have concluded he worked as an attorney in the financial district instead of in his small, sparsely furnished office at the docks. His eyesight was poor and he wore glasses with lenses as thick as Coke bottles to correct it. He always drove a new car, a big Buick as I recall, and he drove it with great speed and authority even as he talked looking straight at you; it was sometimes a harrowing experience for his passenger, and I always look forward to a safe arrival at our destination.

When I first met Jimmy Herman, he was the president of the Ships Clerks (ILWU), and years later when all his political ducks were lined up, he was elected president of the ILWU, taking over from its revered founder, Harry Bridges.

I did not find Jimmy, he found me. He wanted to know what I was going to do about the grapes on the dock. Of course I didn’t have the faintest idea what I was going to do or

even supposed to do about them. In his slightly harsh and no-nonsense type of voice, he bluntly asked me if we were going to set up a picket line. To tell you the truth, I hadn't even thought of it, but he kept insisting, what we were going to do? I parried by asking what would happen if we did picket the grapes. He didn't bite; all he wanted to know was what action we planned to take. Finally, not knowing what else to say, I said we would be on the docks in the morning to set up a picket line. I looked for some sign of approval or condemnation. Nothing. He said if that's what we were going to do, you never know what's going to happen. He got up and left. He was not unfriendly, just to the point and very business-like. I didn't know what to think and I certainly had no idea what to expect. And that is just the way Jimmy liked it.

I would like to think that Jimmy and I became good friends, but I'm not sure Jimmy had any close friends. When I asked him to come to Delano to be the godfather of our first daughter, Clare, he readily agreed to do so, but that seemed to be the climax of our friendship. I called him on and off in the ensuing years, we chatted, and he always razzed me about something. We made lunch or dinner appointments that he never kept, always canceling at the last minute. I let the connection drop, if indeed there was one.

Looking back now 37 years, I wonder why he was so attracted to the farmworker movement. Part of it, I believe, was that he enjoyed playing the godfather to these young, idealistic, and firmly committed kids who had absolutely no experience with the labor movement but were still willing to take up the cause of the farmworkers. Jimmy always sided with the idealistic underdogs. I also believe he admired Cesar greatly, especially because of his commitment to live in voluntary poverty and to sacrifice himself for the sake of helping impoverished farmworkers.

Jerry Cohen and I attended his memorial service in 1998, which was held at Delancey Street. We heard stem-winding eulogies about his role as a San Francisco labor leader and about his good works and generosity with groups like Delancey Street, but I never got the sense that anyone who spoke really knew Jimmy. Some people know but they want to be unknown and this is how Jimmy Herman struck me. He knew the farmworkers, but they did not know him.

### **Sidebar #6**

#### Farmworker Leadership Oratory—1966

Cesar Chavez (NFWA) and I were present at a labor convention in San Francisco, where he and Larry Itliong (AWOC) had been asked to speak to the delegates about the grape strike in Delano, which at that time was only a few months old.

Larry went first. He began his speech with a note of self-deprecation, saying that he was a simple person, uneducated and unsophisticated; he was just a field worker. After this brief introduction, he began to shout at the top of his voice and gesticulate as if he were in a union hall meeting urging Filipino cannery workers to go on strike for better piece rates.

He hurled venomous challenges at the growers, he regaled his audience with a never-ending series of clichés lauding the rights of workers, and worse yet, he carried on far too long. The union delegates applauded.

Cesar spoke next and the contrast could not have been greater. Cesar was quiet, humble, sincere, and talked simply about the struggle of farmworkers to form a union; he did not speak long and he barely raised his voice. The delegates were electrified and they wanted to contribute right now, right here, to the strike fund.

Cesar knew how to use his lack of oratorical skills to his benefit. To his detriment, Larry did not know how to use his.

### **Sidebar #7**

#### A Labor Union Attorney Talks to Larry Itliong—1966

Some time later, it may have been shortly after our visit to the San Francisco labor convention, Cesar Chavez and I were present at a meeting in Stockton, California, with Al Green, the regional director of AWOC, and Larry Itliong, the AWOC strike director, along with a handful of other AFL-CIO organizing staff members.

Ostensibly, the purpose of the meeting was to better coordinate the strike tactics used by the NFWA and the AWOC in the Delano grape strike, and to work out strategy differences between the two groups. Cesar and I barely said a word. Larry launched a barrage of militant-sounding strike tactics that AWOC should undertake, but he was soon interrupted by the regional director, who said he needed to consult with the AFL-CIO labor attorney, the one who advised all the trade unions about labor strike tactics. He phoned the attorney and put him on the speakerphone.

After the introductions were made, Larry continued his strident advocacy for the use of tougher strike tactics in the Delano grape strike, but seconds later, the AFL-CIO attorney shut Larry up, and began to lecture him about federal labor law, the threat of employer injunctions and lawsuits, and the legal risks that might be incurred by AFL-CIO-affiliated unions. He paused for a minute, the AWOC regional director remained silent, and the attorney continued, but this time he ordered Larry around as if he were a rebellious teenager and spoke to him in the most condescending manner possible. Larry said nothing. The labor attorney summed up his final orders to AWOC and hung up. The meeting was over.

This labor union staff meeting was a real eye-opener for me, and I was stunned by what had transpired. I knew that if the AFL-CIO attorney had spoken to Cesar that way, Cesar would have simply said, “Fuck you,” and he and I would have walked out, and made our own decisions about what was best for the NFWA and its strike. We didn’t need an overpaid labor establishment lawyer who didn’t give a shit about farmworkers to tell us what we could and could not do.

As a result of that meeting, I understood that Larry was not a free man, that he had been hired by the AFL-CIO, and that whatever personal opinions he might have about this or that course of action, he was required to get permission from others who lived hundreds, perhaps thousands, of miles away from Delano. Fair or not, in my view, Larry's role as the Delano AWOC strike coordinator was forever diminished.

### **Sidebar #8**

#### Assemblyman John Burton Speaks to Tiny—1966

Early in 1966, I was fundraising for Cesar Chavez's dream of building farmworker cooperatives. I worked the professors at UC Berkeley and San Francisco State, the Berkeley Co-Op members and various church groups. I was making financial progress because people in the San Francisco Bay Area were more open than anywhere else in California to investing in the dreams of poor people.

Cesar called and asked me to put some instant boycott pressure on Schenley Liquors. I met with a small group of farmworker strike supporters, and they came up with the idea of picketing Tarantino's restaurant at Fisherman's Wharf because they served Schenley liquor products at the bar. What they didn't tell me was that the restaurant was owned by State Senator Gene McAteer.

So on a Friday evening, a group of perhaps 20 supporters showed up with signs, picketed the restaurant directly in front of the main doors, all the while shouting at the top of their lungs pro-farmworker and anti-Schenley slogans and chants. It caused quite a ruckus and must have sounded like a mini-riot had erupted to the hundreds of tourists milling about. The police showed up to find out what it was all about, moved the group of demonstrators away from the entrance, and stood by to keep watch over this wildcat boycott group. After an hour, most everyone in the group was hoarse from all the shouting, and because it was Friday night, it was time to start their weekend activities. And besides, the message had been delivered, so we all dispersed.

On the following Monday, in the late morning, I was sitting at a desk in a Mission District street level office, using the telephone. I looked up to see the front doorway occupied by the largest man I had ever seen. If he wasn't at least 6' 8" tall, and weighing more than 300 pounds, you could have fooled me. He hulked in the doorway and glowered at me across the small room. At first I thought he was too large to come through the door, but he managed to squeeze in. He looked all around the room, took a step or two toward me, and grunted something. I couldn't understand what he grunted, but I figured out he was looking for someone, and that someone was me.

I remained seated, looking at this baby-faced giant as he stood in the middle of the room glowering. He grunted some more, but I could not understand a word he said, if they were words at all. This standoff continued for a minute or two, although it seemed much longer

than that. He took one more step toward me, and I figured this was it. Standing 6' 1" tall and weighing in at 155 pounds, I knew there was no point in trying to defend myself, but for some reason I wasn't frightened. He stared at me. I looked at him.

Suddenly, John Burton burst onto the scene and shouted at the top of his voice, "J-E-E-S-S-S-U-U-S-S C-H-R-I-S-T-T, TINY, WHAT ARE YOU DOING HERE??!! WHAT THE FUCK DO YOU THINK YOU'RE DOING ??!!! THERE IS NO NEED FOR THIS SHIT!! GO ON BACK TO THE OFFICE AND PLL TAKE CARE OF IT. Tiny looked at Burton with a startle, hesitated for a second, and then shuffled toward the front door, squeezed through it, and was gone. I realized I had met my first labor goon, courtesy of the San Francisco Labor Council and Senator Gene McAteer.

To this day I don't know why John Burton showed up when he did, or who called him, but he saved my hide, that's for sure.

### **Sidebar #9**

#### The NFWA Strike Fund—1966

In 1966, I recruited Doug Weston of the Troubador Club in Los Angeles to produce two sold-out back-to-back Joan Baez concerts at the Santa Monica Civic Auditorium and raised \$60,000 for the farmworker movement. In addition, and in about the same time period, I organized a \$100-a-person garden party event in Beverly Hills, which netted perhaps \$15,000 for the farmworkers. These monies were slated to be used to organize farmworker cooperatives, an assignment I had been given by Cesar when I arrived in Delano in October of 1965 to begin my full-time work for the National Farm Workers Association. The Joan Baez concert and the garden party events were the culmination of my fundraising efforts during my first year of service to the farmworker movement.

At the conclusion of the garden party event, Cesar took me aside to tell me he wanted to start a strike fund for the NFWA and would I be willing to assign the funds I had raised in Los Angeles to this purpose in exchange for taking charge of an annual grant provided by Jack Conway, head of the Industrial Union Department, through an organization with which he was affiliated, the Center for Community Change? Cesar told me the grant amounted to \$50,000 a year, would be renewed each year for at least three years, and was to be used to provide such services as co-ops, social services, credit unions, etc. I readily agreed. The burden of raising funds was lifted from my shoulders and I was now free to implement many of the plans that Cesar and I had discussed throughout the year.

Three trustees (two ministers and a Catholic priest) were appointed to set up and oversee the new strike fund. One of the trustees was a CPA and he took responsibility for filing the annual reporting forms with the IRS. Neither Cesar nor I had any direct control over the fund, and when I left the union toward the end of 1973, the fund was only used to

accumulate interest so that someday it would be large enough to pay strike benefits for farmworkers.

As late as 1978, I had reason to believe the fund was still being held in trusteeship, but I cannot say for certain.

### **Sidebar #10**

#### **Kern County Courthouse Cathedral—1968**

Cesar was in the second week of his Fast for Non-Violence and living at the Forty Acres. Farmworkers were coming from miles around to visit Cesar, attend the daily mass in the evening, and moving into the tent city we had set up. Just as we had transformed the newly constructed co-op gas station building into a chapel, we were building a 24-hour-a-day farmworker city.

Perhaps that is how the idea came up. We would transform the Kern County Courthouse into a farmworker cathedral so that when Cesar had to make his court appearance to answer charges filed by the growers claiming that Cesar was fomenting violence, the playing field of justice would be more level.

In those days we were young, and working around the clock meant nothing. Marshall Ganz took the lead in organizing thousands of farmworkers to descend on the multistory courthouse building several hours before Cesar arrived. Marshall and I led the unending column of workers into the building when it opened and we lined all the corridors on all the floors. A hushed and profound silence settled over the courthouse as the workers began to softly pray the rosary and other religious devotions. All was ready, and we escorted Cesar into the building to walk the silent corridors to the designated courtroom. Not a word or a *viva* was uttered.

For the first time in its short history, the farmworker movement had officially arrived in Bakersfield, the county seat of California agribusiness. The grower's attorney was furious and represented to the presiding judge that the presence of the praying farmworkers was intimidating.

"Mr. Quinlan," the judge replied, "if I order this courthouse cleared, it will just be another example of gringo justice. I don't consider this to be intimidation." The day's hearing was canceled. The farmworkers filed out as silently as they had entered. It took nearly an hour to vacate the newly consecrated cathedral building.

Jerry Cohen, the general counsel for the farmworkers' union, has said many times that he never again felt the oppressiveness of the Kern County justice system when he entered the courtroom to represent the legal rights of farmworkers.

### **Sidebar #11**

“Very tired. Just a few random notes.”—1968

Chatfield Journal—October 12, 1968

1. Cesar is cool to the idea of getting a doctor because some day he wants Doctor Brooks to come back.
2. Gil Rubio has been neutralized by Cesar getting Jerry Cohen to defend him—and some of our people—against the police.
3. Manuel Chavez and I will be working in East Los Angeles for the presidential campaign (Humphrey for President) by organizing people there to help us and then bringing in our own workers.
4. Cesar is feeling much better and was in a very good mood today. Very crabby and irritable day before yesterday.
5. Manuel Chavez and I hit the UAW up for \$10,000 for the ELA campaign.
6. Alan Cranston came to see Cesar for endorsement and to get his picture taken, etc., on Thursday.
7. Mack Lyons is picking up the ball to push the security for Cesar through—with or without Cesar’s approval.
8. I spent Monday, Tuesday, and Wednesday in bed with a bad cold.
9. Just impossible to juggle all of the things we have cooking. Seems like we just transfer them or put them off until we simply have to act. Spread very thin.

### **Sidebar #12**

Involuntary Poverty for the Chatfields—1968

Chatfield Journal—November 21, 1968

“Bonnie ran out of money for the month today. We discussed it at length. The question of buying. what and how much. But looks like we’ll have to take money out of the Credit Union to make it through Christmas. And then we have the coming baby. We owe \$100 more to the doctor and we will owe the hospital \$150 at least. We still owe \$340 to my folks for the furniture we bought, but if the insurance money comes through for our stolen stuff we will use it to pay them off. That still leaves our big bill with Sears for our washing machine and the one we bought for Helen Chavez.”

### **Sidebar #13**

Robert F. Kennedy Farmworkers Medical Plan—1969

Chatfield Journal—January 3, 1969

“Once again, today was spent in discussing the Health & Welfare Plan with Cesar. He is a stickler for details—constantly probing and asking questions—many of which I have to answer with an educated guess. He is very concerned about translating what the alternatives are to the membership and making them understand—forcing them to understand. Cesar maintains that the union health and welfare plans are one of the major reasons why union members hate their union. Too often they accumulate millions of dollars in reserves and act like investment companies. Our latest idea is to put all the alternatives on colored cards and to let the leadership deal their own plan—limited of course by the restriction of what amount of money is available per month per worker. In this way they will realize the variables involved and the cost of medical care—which are fantastic!”

Chatfield Journal—January 27, 1969

“Our plan, on paper, deals almost exclusively with out-patient care and our benefits are more substantial than other union plans. What is upsetting to me about the other union plans is that they pay a lot of “half-things”: 1/2 maternity, 1/3 hospital, 1/3 doctor visits but don’t pay completely the usual, everyday family medical costs.

Aside from the pride of authorship we have the making of a solid, well thought out master plan for family health care. Of course since we are placing our premium costs (educated guesses) so close to our income, we will probably go broke! But what the hell! At least we will never have millions in reserve used in real-estate investments or in the stock market.”

Chatfield Journal—February 11, 1969

“We are meeting with the ranch committees to explain the Health & Welfare Plan. Cesar really digs these meetings. He lectures, he preaches, he gives homey examples, and he definitely responds—elated is the word—to their enthusiasm and delight at the proposed program. Sometimes I think he forgets about his back when he gets all wound up. But these meetings are too strenuous and he will have to stop going. Last night at the Pirelli Minetti winery meeting, the workers were shell-shocked about the benefits. One of the workers said, “A year ago I had nothing and now you ask me if I like these benefits? They’re great!”

#### **Sidebar #14**

Nixon, Jesus, Gandhi, and Chavez—1969

Chatfield Journal—January 20, 1969

“Richard Nixon was inaugurated today. Say it isn’t so. Just doesn’t seem possible. What a feeling of ennui overcomes me when I think about it.

As a person grows older—or perhaps it is because I have seen power at work and what prompts it to work—he loses respect and his fear for authority. How I used to think in awe of the Pope, for example, until I realized what forces were at work to make him Pope and why he said certain things and in a certain way. The personality, e.g., JFK or RFK, of a man can command respect and speak with authority while those around him are still aware of the “humanness” of his position.

Something like that occurred to me a few days ago. Reading a few excerpts from Gandhi made me glow all over. What he said was great and it should have been said and its purpose was a kind of propaganda calculated to appeal to my idealism and to win me over to the justice of his cause. Cesar is frequently the same way. He will teach and preach and really turn people on, but knowing well enough that it is the ideal he is expounding and something not attainable, even for himself. I wonder if Jesus was the same way? I’m sure he was.

I realized too—and vividly—that Jesus never wrote anything himself. That the writers of the Gospels could be as “free” and as “loose” as they wished about what Jesus said and did. I can imagine some of us who will be writing about Cesar some day. We will overstate that which was appealing to us and that which we want to drive home to others.

I also realized that movements have to have leaders and be embodied in personalities. In some of the student movements there is a deliberate attempt to keep the leadership anonymous and in the background. While a certain kind of self-effacement and humility is powerful, people must have a person to identify with and relate to. They will idolize and “blow up” that person but they need someone. And he has, therefore, to be willing to meet the press and give his views and explain what’s happening. Events and acts do not magnetize and lead people. A person creating events and acting can.”

### **Sidebar #15**

La Paz UFW Headquarters—1969

Even as early as 1968 Cesar talked to me about finding a union headquarters outside of Delano.

His ideal was to find a place that could also serve as a vacation area for farmworker families, especially those members of the union who were elected to ranch committees. I found a place in Santa Barbara—one of Cesar’s favorite places in the world—and we went to look at. It was on a hill overlooking the city and the ocean but it was too fancy a neighborhood for our needs. Then there were a few hundred acres I found on the side of a hill overlooking the ocean, but the terrain was quite steep and it was bare ground. I looked around in the area of Mission San Antonio because Cesar loved to come there for some of our retreat meetings—it was quiet and secluded. I could find nothing.

I found La Paz in Keene, California, a few miles down the mountain from Tehachapi, and Cesar wanted it. Frank Denison, our Service Center attorney at that time, structured the deal with movie producer Edie Lewis who bought it at auction from Kern County on behalf of the National Farm Worker's Service Center.

It suited Cesar's purposes. There was a wide range of housing (duplexes, hospital rooms, single family homes, etc.), there were offices, there was a central kitchen and dining facility, it had acreage, it was in the mountains, and was off the beaten track. I take whatever credit is appropriate for the purchase of this property for the headquarters of the union and I was a most loyal supporter, but I still wonder if our relocation from Delano to Keene (renamed by Cesar: La Paz) was wise. I think a case could be made that this headquarters isolated us from the farmworkers' dirt and changed our orientation. But now that it is Cesar's burial place it will serve a purpose in history that outstrips any second-guessing about what was best for the farmworker union movement. Cesar has the last word, again.

### **Sidebar #16**

#### **Grower's Response to Cesar's Open Letter to E.L. Barr—1969**

The grower's "Response to an Open Letter on the Grape Boycott" is precious. If you read nothing else, you must read that. It contains all the elements of the grower's public relations theme-strategy to defeat the farmworker movement:

Cesar is a hypocrite because he can read and write. His union receives big money from big labor. Dolores Huerta knows how to dress up for fundraising parties. Cesar only wants to build a union to collect the dues. Cesar is a hypocrite!

Cesar is destroying the family farmer.

Cesar is supported by the ACLU, SNCC, CRLA and many other "new left" groups. (You know what that means.)

Table grape workers are the highest paid farmworkers in California. Farmworkers in California are the highest paid in the nation. Go pick on some other state and help some really poor farmworkers.

The secondary boycott of grapes intimidates housewives and store clerks.

Cesar does not have the support of my workers.

The growers support national collective bargaining legislation for farmworkers, as long as there are no strikes at harvest time or boycotts later on. Cesar does not.

Cesar does not want a union, he wants social revolution.

Saul Alinsky was a mentor of Cesar's. (You know what that means.)

These snide, condescending, and flag-waving smears were always the same. I heard them first in Berkeley in 1965 when I debated a public relations agent representing a growers' association and then like a drumbeat that carried on incessantly until the grape strike was won in 1970. I have always been surprised that California agribusiness could not have purchased better propaganda. Sometimes it seemed to me like an unfair fight.

### **Sidebar #17**

Fusco, Kircher, Matthiessen, and Valdez—1968-69

#### Paul Fusco of Look Magazine on assignment in Delano

“Paul Fusco of Look Magazine called. I think he got the word from Zimmerman that we are a little upset about Look not running the article and yet they keep coming to Delano to gather more pictures. Paul sounded a little sheepish about asking to come back and get some pictures of the Schenley workers or perhaps he is just more sensitive than most photographers and journalists. I suspect that Schenley Industries were responsible for killing the last story; perhaps the editors hope to placate them this time by giving them a boost.” (Chatfield Journal, September 9, 1968)

“Paul Fusco of Look was here today doing some shooting. He picked a gondola of grapes at Schenley just to see what it was like. He seemed genuinely impressed about how hard the work was and how fast the people had to work.” (Chatfield Journal, September 10, 1968)

#### Bill Kircher—AFL-CIO National Director of Organizing

“Bill Kircher came to Delano from Washington to ride up to San Francisco with me. Bill has accepted, I think, the role of a campaign director in California in the Humphrey presidential campaign. He talked at great length about some of his misgivings with the labor hierarchy and others and what kind of a job it should be, etc. Then too, I think Bill is wondering if he really could cope or even understand the issues in California. The young radicals or anarchists or whatever seem not only to annoy him by what they do and say but because he feels helpless to deal effectively with them. And after 20 years or more of what he terms liberal activity, he sounds rather bitter that instead of being rewarded by being listened to, he is really an outcast and considered part of the establishment and power structure that he has confronted. It is really a harsh time for older activists and liberals of another era. Especially if they need recognition and praise for their past accomplishments.” (Chatfield Journal, September 12, 1968)

#### Peter Matthiessen—Writer for the New Yorker Magazine.

“Yesterday I made the final arrangements with Ann Israel and Peter Matthiessen to finance the heating of David Averbuck’s pool so that Cesar can continue his therapy when he returns from Santa Barbara. I stressed to David the pre-condition, that is, the water must be heated to 97 degrees. If Cesar returns and the water at Delano is only 95 degrees, he’ll comment that the water in Santa Barbara was 97 degrees and he felt so much better there. The whole cost is expected to come to \$900 and I have sworn Ann and Peter to secrecy. We’ll see.” (Chatfield Journal, November 20, 1968)

“Peter Matthiessen was here today. He’s finished his article for the New Yorker and has enough for a book, which he is turning over to Random House for publication. Now he is off to Africa for six months to do a series on wildlife preservation, again for the New Yorker. He brought \$900 for the pool, discussed how he might buy and donate Cesar’s birthplace and finally he wanted to donate a large oak tree to be planted at the 40 Acres. The perfect symbol for the union.

All in all we spent about three hours talking. He’s a great guy and terribly perceptive. I got the impression that his book cuts sometimes to the bone. At one point he said Cesar told him, “It hurts, but it’s true!” (Chatfield Journal, December 5, 1968)

“Peter Matthiessen sent the first \$1500 that he received from his article in the New Yorker to the Service Center. I think it fantastic the amount of money he is paid for a story but grateful that he sent it to us. What a great guy he is!” (Chatfield Journal, January 1, 1969)

#### Luis Valdez—Founder of El Teatro Campesino

“I remember the night that Luis Valdez met Cesar. Luis was selling copies of *Progressive Labor* at one of a series of meetings that Cesar was speaking at early in 1966 or late 1965 to raise money for the strike. Luis was capitalizing on our crowds and even asked us for a ride to Cesar’s next speech so he could sell some more papers. Someone did give him a ride, because he was there when we got there. After the meeting Cesar talked with him. In fact, I believe we gave him a ride back to San Francisco from our meeting at the Franciscan church in Oakland. Cesar explained to him some of his ideas about using theatre and songs to communicate. Luis was very turned on and the next time I saw him was in Delano starting El Teatro Campesino. If memory serves me correctly the last remark that Cesar made to Luis that night was, “You, I like, your friends, I don’t! (Referring to the other Progressive Labor guys.)” (Chatfield Journal, February 12, 1969)

#### **Sidebar #18**

##### Irwin DeShetler’s View of Contract Language—Late 1960s

Irwin DeShetler walked on his toes—tilting slightly forward, he barely touched the ground. He looked to me like he might have been a lightweight boxer or an accomplished dancer. Irwin’s grooming was impeccable and his wardrobe fashionable but slightly understated, so

he did not look out of place in the farmworker union board meetings. He was a good-looking man, fit and trim, and well along toward retirement age.

In truth, DeShetler was an AFL-CIO organizer from Los Angeles who was assigned by Bill Kircher, the national director of organizing for the AFL-CIO, to work with the United Farm Workers in Delano. Aside from the fact that he would serve as the eyes and ears for the national AFL-CIO, I am not sure he had any specific assignment, but that did not mean he did not make himself useful. For one thing, he had a reliable late-model car and a gasoline credit card, which meant that our union negotiators could be ferried up and down the state. Irwin was also a walking repository of labor union history and experience. In this day and age, I think we would refer to him as a resource person or consultant.

I still experience flashbacks now and again about the interminably long and heated meetings we had among ourselves, board and staff members, about our contract proposals to the growers and their attorneys. Hour after hour (and sometimes carrying over into the next day) was spent arguing about one word, one nuance, one clause that, according to the differing views of our negotiators, was a life and death matter for the farmworkers themselves and the future of the union.

On many occasions during these heated and oftentimes accusatory discussions with raised voices, Irwin would make references, in his soft-spoken manner, to labor union history wherein fledgling unions would initially settle for union recognition, better wages, some benefits, and then over a period of time work out with the employers more complex and sophisticated protections for the workers and the union. Because I was bored much of the time with these arcane and seemingly never-ending discussions, it always struck me as good advice, but I don't believe we ever followed it. I suppose we knew better.

### **Sidebar #19**

“Cesar Says”—1970

“Never ride a horse you don't own. You can easily be bucked off.”

“Don't romanticize the poor. If some of them had the power, they would be worse than the growers.”

“Don't believe your own propaganda.”

“Working with people is like working with sandpaper. It will rub you raw.”

“If you don't know what to do or what the next step is, go to the people, they will tell you.”

“You spend the currency you have. The growers have money, the farmworkers have time.”

## Sidebar #20

### Farmworker-Style Political Action—1970

I remember the case of the liberal state senator who refused our request to publicly call for an investigation about the misuse of police power against striking farmworkers. In our view, his public statement was deemed essential because if he spoke out publicly, it would be taken seriously by the media, but if we, a rag-tag group of activists, raised the issue, it would be considered self-serving and easily ignored. I pleaded with him. He said no. His office said no. He made it very clear that he had helped us on many occasions but this time it was final, his answer was no. And stop bothering me.

I asked five people, farmworker staff and supporters, some of whom could barely speak English, to visit his Los Angeles office and wait there until he agreed to meet with them. (I knew, of course, that state senators are rarely in their district offices because their daily work keeps them in the state capital. They return only to their district for speechmaking and ribbon-cutting events.) I instructed the volunteers to carry with them thermos bottles, blankets or sleeping bags, and a picnic cooler filled with food and drink. They were not to agree to any meeting with an aide or the office receptionist; they would say instead that they would wait until the senator had time to meet with them.

Less than two hours later, I received a call from the senator's office in Sacramento asking me what it was I wanted the senator to do. I spelled out the items I thought should be in a press release and I stressed how important it was to raise the issue in the media. Less than an hour later, I heard the senator quoted extensively on the two Los Angeles 24-hour radio news stations. Speaking forcefully, he said it was vitally important that government agencies investigate these allegations raised by the striking farmworkers, and he himself would be monitoring the situation, etc. He could not have been more helpful.

I ask myself how could this brief, nondescript "sit-in" bring a powerful senator to reverse himself and come out swinging for the rights of farmworkers when he swore he would not do so? It must be the geometry of the situation that changed the relationship.

## Sidebar #21

### Los Angeles Boycott Strategy—Thank You, Betsy Goldman—1970

I was not raised in the labor movement and none of my relatives were union members, or if they were, I never knew it. In fact, on my mother's side of the family, they were rice growers. My first introduction to a picket line was as an observer, not a participant. It came in the late 1950s, when as a religious teaching brother, I was stationed in San Francisco and lived at Franklin and Ellis streets. A group of activists was picketing a supermarket in the Western Addition and it had something to do with civil rights, if I am not mistaken. I remember it being raucous and chaotic but short-lived.

My first activity on a picket line came in late September of 1965 when I had brought food and money from Los Angeles to the Delano grape strikers and Cesar asked me to visit the picket lines in the fields. Because I was decked out in my religious garb, Cesar might have thought it would be “inspirational” and “affirming” for the striking farmworkers, while at the same time giving the finger to the growers and the assembled police officers.

I spent all afternoon on the picket line and got into the spirit of this confrontational activity very quickly. Pleading with—and shouting at—the strikebreakers, ignoring the personally abusive remarks of the growers and their superintendents, and always careful not to let the police intimidate or push me around. Yet, at the end of the day, I knew with certainty that the Delano grape strike would never be won with picket lines. And I never forgot it.

When I was assigned to direct the Los Angeles grape boycott in 1970, I brought my bias about the strategy of the picket line with me. As a farmworker staff member, I had participated from time to time in boycott picket lines both in San Francisco and Los Angeles, but I was never very impressed with their long-term effectiveness. It took a great deal of time and energy to organize a picket line for one location and it seemed to be a one-shot deal that didn't last very long. People came late, left early, or didn't show up at all, and although it was raucous, confrontational, and chaotic, I couldn't understand its purpose in a place like Los Angeles, which seemed to be non-union at best and more likely anti-union.

I was determined to try something else. My thought was to assign one boycott person to the same store each day of the week. With a volunteer staff of 30 or more people, we could cover that many stores of a supermarket chain. I also reasoned that each boycott person was likely to attract a few others from the surrounding area to help, if not every day, at least several days a week. The strategy was to arm the volunteer with a grape boycott leaflet and approach the potential customer before he or she could exit their automobile. Explain in a few words how they could help the cause of the farmworkers and ask them to please shop at another store. We tried it and the daily reports began to show that many customers would cooperate and drive to another store to shop. Some reports were as high as 80 to 90 customers honoring the “picket line.” I wasn't convinced; I wanted to see for myself.

Betsy Goldman, a 17-year-old Beverly Hills high school graduate was a summer boycott volunteer and was living with Bonnie and me and our family at our “loaner” house on South Harvard Street. Ralph's Supermarkets was our boycott target and I had assigned her to one of their flagship stores at 3rd and Vermont. Without telling her, I selected her as my test-marketing expert.

I showed up at the Ralph's store on a weekday morning, shortly before noon. I watched from the sidewalk on the street so that Betsy would not know I was there. There she was, hustling from car to car as they drove into the lot to park. She approached the car, leaflet in

hand, and talked to the driver, frequently a woman. After a few seconds, the car would move on and exit the lot or no, the driver would get out of the car and walk to the store. But when that happened, Betsy was already hustling to another newly parked car to talk to its driver. And so it went. It was obvious to me that Betsy was turning away dozens of would-be Ralph's customers, but did Ralph's know it and even care?

Not even an hour had passed when I noticed two well-dressed executives standing in front of the huge superstore; one had his arms folded over his chest and the other was pointing—both were looking at Betsy turning away their customers. They couldn't believe it. I couldn't believe it either. A soft-spoken, non-threatening, and attractive 17-year-old young woman was throwing a wrench into the gears of one of the largest supermarket chain stores in the Los Angeles basin. They could not have been more displeased than I was pleased. This was my kind of boycott: at least one person, every day of the week, nine hours a day, pleading one-on-one but not confrontational and taking its cumulative financial toll week after week.

We settled with Ralph's and they could not have been nicer or more helpful. Not only did they not sell grapes, we had complete access to their stores and distribution centers for inspection, and they gave us valuable feedback and gossip about the effectiveness of our grape boycott.

Hard work? You got that right! Thank you, Betsy Goldman.

## **Sidebar #22**

### Chiquita Banana—1970

Farmworkers in the United States do not pick bananas, but they do work for the United Fruit Company operations in the Salinas Valley, and United Fruit owns Chiquita Banana. Now you understand the boycott relationship between California farmworkers and the United Fruit Company.

I was serving as the boycott director in the greater Los Angeles area, which covers approximately 56 percent of California consumers. Because of the Los Angeles Boycott activities, Mayfair Markets had long since given up carrying non-union grapes or any other designated grower produce that showed up on the farmworkers moving target "Do Not Buy" list.

The produce buyer for Mayfair and I had developed the kind of friendship that sometimes arises from highly competitive contests in which the warring contestants develop a healthy respect and admiration for each other's skills. During those seven-day-a-week boycott days, I would visit the L.A. Produce Terminal several times a week trying to keep abreast of where the "do not buy" produce was coming from and what markets were buying it. Arriving before 4 a.m., I would hook up with my buyer friend, and he would take me along

as he made his buys from the 50 or so vendors doing business in the terminal. He would introduce me to the produce brokers he knew well, and with good humor cautioned them about getting on the wrong side of the farmworkers' cause.

One morning we were having breakfast, and I floated my idea of targeting Chiquita Banana. Before I could even flesh out my idea, he said, "Do you want to meet with the head of Chiquita? He's a friend of mine." Now I was stuck. What started out as the typical farmworker underdog bravado now turned into the real thing. I said, "Sure!"

He set up the meeting and came with me. The Chiquita man was about my age. He was tall, expensively dressed, and carried himself like an athlete. After the introductions, the Mayfair buyer simply said that he enjoyed a good working relationship with me, and I had confided in him about a possible boycott of Chiquita Banana, which of course would put Mayfair in a real bind, and so he thought the best thing to do was bring us together and talk about it.

It was my turn. I spoke softly and without hype. I explained how the farmworkers were trying to build a union in the Salinas Valley, that the United Fruit Company was opposed to the union's efforts, and that because of our long-term relationships with the longshoremens' union not only here in Long Beach but in San Francisco, Oakland, and Seattle, I thought it likely that they would come to our assistance by not unloading the bananas from the ships, especially if we put up picket lines at the docks. I told him I could not be sure this would happen, but based on how much help they had given us with the grape boycott, I certainly thought they would.

That was all I said. I talked softly, and tried to give the impression I was carrying a big stick. He said that if that happened it would be disastrous because the bananas were gassed in the ships on the way to the U.S. ports so that they would be properly ripened when they arrived. If that process were interrupted, an entire boatload of bananas would be lost. All he could do, he said, was call United Fruit and convey to them my concerns.

Two days later, he called me. We were to meet with two representatives from the United Fruit Company who were flying in today from Boston. Could I make the meeting? I could. We met in their room at one of the major airport hotels. One was thin and wiry and I knew he was the person in charge. The other was younger, well built, and looked like a linebacker with a baby face. The one in charge said that he and his partner were the labor negotiators for United Fruit Company, and they had been sent out to California to take charge of the farmworker problem, and from that time on, neither the Chiquita man nor I were to be involved. The meeting was over.

It was not too long, as these things go, before union contracts between the United Fruit Company and the United Farm Workers were negotiated.

I could only pull off a stunt like this because of the success of the farmworker boycott since 1966: Schenley, DiGiorgio, table grapes, wine grapes in Canada and abroad, non-union lettuce, the list goes on. It was the hard work of many hundreds of volunteers on the boycott across the country for many years that put the big stick in my hand. Thank God, I knew how to talk softly.

### Sidebar #23

#### The True Believer

“A few days before the summer program came to an end all the volunteers were called to a meeting in the front yard of Harvard House. LeRoy Chatfield spoke at the end of the meeting. He said he knew a lot of us would be leaving soon, heading back to college. “Ask yourselves this question: Can you think of anything more important to do with your lives right now than to help farmworkers build their union?” I did and I couldn’t.”—Chris Schneider, Los Angeles Boycott 1973

Chris Schneider included this anecdote in his essay written for the farmworker documentation project. I don’t remember the date or the setting, but without doubt, those words are mine. I was a true believer in Cesar Chavez and his farmworker movement, and 35 years ago I could not believe there was anything more important in life—especially in the life of a college-age student—than the cause of the farmworkers. Do I believe that now, at age 70? No, I don’t, but that is due in large part to the fact that I am no longer a true believer in anyone, or in any cause, and never will be again.

When I offer my views about the role of volunteers in the farmworker movement, 1963 to 1973, I am recounting to the best of my recollection, the reality of that time and place. I am not passing judgment about what should have been done, or what other alternatives there might have been, or whether I—or Cesar—was “right or wrong.” I seek only to describe and explain the world of the movement as I knew and experienced it. If Marshall Ganz and others remember it differently, then I would be pleased to read their recollections and analyses. Marshall and I go back many years together, even to the years of the pre-strike era, so I do not take offense at his characterization of my views as “disgraceful” and “unworthy” because Marshall is Marshall; but my first preference is to hear from colleagues who were there with us about whether my recollection and analysis are accurate or not. And if not, why not? The farmworker movement documentation project is not about “good or bad” or “right or wrong” or “should have/could have” but about what **was**.

Those who worked with me, for example, on the Los Angeles Boycott, remember that I ran a tight ship. I demanded long hours, if not seven days a week, then at least six. Late into the evening without fail, I called each area coordinator for a complete accounting of what had been accomplished for the cause that day, not generalizations, mind you, but specifics. How many customers turned away? Why so few? How can you do better? How

many community volunteers showed up to help? Can you recruit more? What feedback did you get today from customers or store clerks that show we are having an impact? If I had personally checked on their parking lot work, I discussed my findings with them. And so forth.

No matter how much I realized that the boycott coordinators hated this daily one-on-one grilling about the accountability of their work and leadership skills—I knew they detested it because I was a keen listener and I kept my ears open—the harder I pressed them. I showed no mercy, accepted no excuse. I was the daily organizing thorn in their lives. They hated it, but they produced, and that was the only thing that counted with me.

When a volunteer dropped out, or fell by the wayside, I did not wring my hands and mourn their loss. Rather I redoubled my efforts to replace them with someone as good, and sometimes as luck would have it, with someone who was twice as good. What happened to the volunteers who dropped out? Sad to report, I had no idea, but since they were no longer part of the movement, or at least my piece of it, I didn't even think about them. They were gone, the struggle of the farmworkers had to go on. I had no time—and made no time—for those who had departed.

Aside from the recruiting efforts of the National Farm Worker Ministry, and the staff boycotters themselves, I don't know how or why so many volunteers found the Los Angeles Boycott, but they did, and when they showed up, if they were not hard at work on the boycott within a few hours after their arrival, I felt we were letting the cause of the farmworkers down.

Intense, day after day, months at a time, I don't know how the volunteers did it, I don't understand how I did it. But then victory was in the air, you could feel it, and besides, there was no such thing as a defeat, because the seeds of victory were sewn in a temporary setback. Nothing was impossible, everything was possible, and God was on our side.

I don't know how the description of my boycott leadership of the Los Angeles Boycott strikes the reader, but even though I believe it to be accurate and true, I cringe as I write these words 35 years later. In the years after my farmworker experience, when I had several opportunities to build other organizations, I studiously avoided many of the “true believer” characteristics I had embraced so easily during my farmworker movement years. I don't know if it made my later work any better, but I felt better about myself and about the relationships I had with the people with whom I worked. Perhaps I felt more human, I don't know.

As effective as I might have been on the boycott, and there were many signs of affirmation from Cesar Chavez and the farmworker movement that I was effective, I could not hold a candle compared to the work of Marshall Ganz. In my view, Marshall was the most accomplished and effective organizer in the United Farm Workers. No exceptions. But here is my admission: as a UFW volunteer, I could never have worked for

Marshall because he was too tough, too demanding, too detailed, too intolerant of incompetence, too insensitive, and required too many meetings. And while many, many volunteer organizers thrived and prospered under his direction and leadership, I would not have been one of them.

### Sidebar #24

Arizona Fast, 1972

I insert here an article by Jack Rice, published on June 7, 1972 in the *St. Louis Post-Dispatch*. It captures, I think, some of the nitty-gritty flavor of the fast and the bone-tiring activity that is required to pull it off, and it features Jim Drake (and yes, yours truly).

#### Article from St. Louis Post Dispatch—June 7, 1972

“Ardent Apostles of Cesar Chavez” by Jack Rice  
Dateline: Phoenix, Arizona

When Cesar Chavez settles down to a lengthy fast, and each of them has been one more than is good for him, there is publicity value in it for his United Farm Workers. Two men most appreciative of that, and most revering of the purity of their leader’s purpose, and most wishful that he would choose another way to express it, are Leroy [sic] Chatfield and Jim Drake.

Chatfield and Drake are identified, on the infrequent occasions they come in public view, as administrative assistants to Chavez. Apostles are more like it. Preferably they are anonymous apostles, providers and framers of The Union Word for others to spread, in the farm fields of California, Florida, Arizona, Texas, Washington, Oregon, Michigan, among the migrant workers. Drake says they save reporters a lot of time.

“If you had to get the story from the field organizers,” he said, “you’d have a hell of a time; only about 12 percent of them speak English. That’s why it takes our union so long to organize and have meetings. We have to say everything twice, once in Spanish and once in English.”

Chatfield, 36 years old, is clean-shaven, blond, thin. He moves with the haste of a priest late getting to the confessional. He is pleasant without smiling much. He was in the Christian Brothers, a Catholic order of teachers, for 15 years, and when he asked for release from his religious vows in order to follow Chavez, in 1965, he was assistant principal of a high school in Bakersfield, Calif. He uses hell and damn a lot in conversation, with an almost Christian touch, for respectful emphasis.

Drake, 32, is bearded, swarthy, 6 feet and strong. He smiles often. He received a bachelor’s degree in philosophy at Occidental College, and then went to Union Theological Seminary

in New York. He received a bachelor's degree in divinity in 1962 and went home to the San Joaquin Valley in California.

The California Migrant Ministry, an affiliate of the California Council of Churches, assigned him to the Chavez movement, where he was an oddity because he was being paid for his work, \$6000 a year. He long since has given up the salary.

Chatfield and Drake came here to administrate while Chavez fasted for 24 days. That is not a record for him, but the 44-year old Mexican-American labor leader is, as always, terribly weakened. Chatfield and Drake go on administering. Nominally, their enterprise now is to obtain signatures on a petition for the recall of Jack Williams, Governor of Arizona.

Actually, they are trying to get farm workers to register as voters, and stacking up signatures on a recall petition is being done as a show of union strength. They need 103,000 signatures, or 25 per cent of the total votes cast when Williams was re-elected in 1970.

"We will get the signatures," said Drake, "but we are not naive. We know we haven't got a chance at the recall. THEY can stall us off easily in the courts and Williams will stay in office until the '74 elections, but THEY will know we've got strength too, by then."

Williams became Chavez's opposite symbol. Establishment villain versus Worker hero, last month when the Governor signed a new Arizona farm labor bill. The bill forbids secondary boycotts and strikes at harvest time. Secondary boycotts occur, for example, when people show up at supermarkets carrying "Don't Buy Grapes" signs.

The law does not become effective until Aug. 13, but the cantaloupe crop in the Yuma area started to approach the pickable stage about the time Williams signed the measure.

Chavez and his assistants came to Phoenix and set up headquarters in the barrio, at the Santa Rita Community Center Building. Chavez took to a bed in a small room, about the size of one a monk would call home. The message intended was: Don't pick melons.

Chatfield and Drake set up an office in a house trailer parked next to the Community Center. The trailer is air-conditioned but, parked on the unpaved and littered and dusty lot, it really lacks what they have come to consider the comforts of home.

Home for them, their wives and their children, is La Paz, the national headquarters of the United Farm Workers. Chatfield described La Paz:

It formerly was a 144-bed tuberculosis sanatorium and is near the town of Keene, about 30 houses on a bend in the Santa Fe railroad tracks. About 200 people live there, 125 of them adults on the staff of the United Farm Workers. Chatfield's wife is secretary to Chavez.

“I don’t know of any other labor union that started this way,” Chatfield said. “I don’t want to give the impression it’s a commune, it sure as hell isn’t. My wife and I and our four little girls have three rooms in one of the out buildings—that’s another thing, there are a lot of out buildings, we don’t have to live dormitory style in the old hospital—two bedrooms and a combination living room and kitchen. There are 200 acres on the place; for the kids, it’s really great.”

The Union has 22,000 members, and the dues are \$3.50 a month. The union’s money has an unusual respect for gravity. Most of it falls back to the membership, in benefits, leaving very little at the top, among the officers.

Each worker at La Paz is paid \$5 a week to squander at will, and a food allowance of \$10 for each adult in his family—\$5 for each child.

We were sitting in the Community Hall, talking about the hospitalized Chavez, which almost is the same thing as Chatfield talking about himself.

Chavez came off his fast last weekend. He had been taken to the hospital on the twentieth day and doctors there achieved what seems a wonder to Chatfield. They persuaded him to drink water that had been strained off boiling vegetables. That gave the water taste, and diminished his nausea. Chatfield said, unsmiling, “Well, it’s better than at home when he isn’t fasting—just one damn diet cola after another.”

At the other end of the Community Center two of his daughters were having supper, from the center’s kitchen, run by volunteers. A man volunteer was setting up chairs, for the daily evening Mass, at 7:30.

He was getting the maximum volume from the combination of metal chair legs and concrete floor, and not a decibel of it was getting through to a volunteer asleep on an air mattress. Someone came to Chatfield and handed him three telegrams, from hundreds received during the fast.

One was from Oscar Ehrardt, president of the St. Louis Labor Council. One was from Clarence Luetkenhaus, president of the St. Louis and the Missouri council of United Auto Workers. He pledged himself anew against nonunion lettuce.

He had the company, in the matter of sending a telegram and encouraging the fast, of bishops, the governor of Rhode Island, Bobby Seale, Angela Davis and union people in Japan, England, the Continent.

Chatfield smiled, faintly, an expression of glee running wild, for him. He touched the telegrams from St. Louis. He said, “These things don’t just happen, you know. We have a bureau of volunteers in St. Louis.”

He was tired and it showed. He was asked what kept him going. Food obviously does not play much part in his energy. He looked almost sad and stared at the floor so long that his silence seemed building to a no comment. It wasn't.

He said, "It has a religious element, partly. And Cesar. It's an unusual opportunity. I was a teacher for nine years, at Bakersfield and in San Francisco. In both schools the children I taught were from families that had economic stability. In San Francisco, especially, it was stability based on their fathers' union memberships.

"In 1963 I went to a National Catholic Social Action convention in Boston, and that is where I first heard of Cesar Chavez, living only 30 miles away from me, in California. When I came home, I went to meet him. And in '65, when the grape strike started, I told myself what this guy's doing makes a lot more sense, trying to improve the lives of poor families, poor children, than what I'm doing.

"I went to my superiors and asked them to be relieved of my vows of chastity and obedience. Usually you have to do that by way of Rome, and that is one long way around. But when I told them what I wanted to do, I was out of the order in 40 hours."

Drake had been cranking a mimeograph machine. The union gets its five bucks worth each week out of his right arm, at that machine.

He said, "I grew up in Thermal, near Palm Springs. My father taught there eight years, until he was fired in '55, when I was 15. He'd been going out in the fields, hauling kids to class, cutting their hair. I didn't know what was going on, what got the school board mad at him, but I sensed there was some screwy set of values at work against him.

"Well, when that '65 grape strike came along, from 1000 members and only \$80 in the treasury, suddenly we had a cause, and it was colorful, and we became a movement. That's when I gave up my salary from the Council of Churches. The growers weren't happy about the ministry helping the strikers."

There is talk, of course, sniping if not openly snide. A movement that is most of and for Mexican-American workers, many of them Mexican nationals in the States on work permits, depends heavily on such Anglo-intellectuals as Chatfield and Drake.

Drake laughed. He had a Cesar Says answer. They have a million of them. He said, "Cesar says he doesn't care what you are. It's only what you want to do for the cause."

### **Sidebar #25**

#### The Human Billboards—1972

I had developed a Proposition 22 campaign tactic, which we called "human billboards." Hundreds of union campaign volunteers were organized into squads of 50 or so, each

carrying a placard approximately 2 by 3 feet in dimension. All were identical—white block lettering on black—except for the message. These stark looking “billboards” carried such messages as: “LA Times Says No On 22,” “AFL-CIO Says No on 22,” “Council of Churches Says No on 22” and on and on.

We started the human billboards in the last two weeks of the campaign. Our squads were deployed in the early morning (6:30 to 8:30 a.m.) to the major feeder freeway entrances in San Fernando Valley, Santa Monica, San Gabriel Valley, etc. By placing each human billboard 10 yards apart we were able to cover three or four city blocks on both sides of the street that led to the major freeway entrances. And then in the afternoon (3:30 to 5:30 p.m.) we reversed the process by deploying our forces at major entrances from Central Los Angeles to catch the commuters leaving work at the end of the day to drive back to the suburbs. The goal of each human billboarder was to make friendly eye and hand contact with the driver of the car and point to his or her billboard.

The effect was sensational! Commuters were honking their horns and waving their approval. The radio and TV traffic helicopters and planes picked it up and rolled it on the air during the morning and evening drive times, updating the commuters where the farmworker human billboards were located and why they were out there on the streets waving and “talking” to the commuters. Those of you who are not familiar with California campaigns have to appreciate that the L.A. media market reaches 56 percent of the state vote. This meant that the farmworker human billboards were reaching an audience from Santa Barbara in the north to San Bernardino and Riverside in the south. Thousands of dollars of free and sympathetic advertising.

One Sunday right before the election we brought all the billboard squads together and completely surrounded (10 yards apart) the Memorial Coliseum for three hours before the L.A. Rams football game, which probably drew 80,000 spectators. By this time almost all of the football fans in L.A. knew what these human billboards were and why they were there. This time, however, our human billboards were to remain silent. It had a powerful and sobering effect on the thousands of people who had to pass through these billboard lines. Once again, the media picked it up and rolled it out.

### **Sidebar #26**

#### Chatfield Family Housing in the Farmworkers Movement—1973

After Bonnie and I were married in June of 1966, it was because of Cesar Chavez and his farmworker movement that we lived in a trailer park in Torrance, in a mobile home in an open field next to the Arroyo Farm Labor Camp in Delano, in a custom farmhouse next to the rose fields between McFarland and Delano, in a Delano tract home across from the high school ball field (two separate times), in a one-room apartment in the Silver Lake area of Los Angeles, in a custom-built home high up in the Hollywood Hills, in a two-story Berkeley-type home in the black ghetto of Central Los Angeles, in a parsonage house under the LAX flight pattern in Inglewood, in a two-room house in Guadalupe (Arizona), and in

a three-room, 500-square-foot duplex at La Paz with four very small children. That's only 11 moves in seven years, so I might have missed a few.

### **Sidebar #27**

#### A Boycott Story

I have no recollection of telling anyone this boycott story, but please stop me if you heard it before.

During my tenure (1972–1973) as the boycott director in Los Angeles, my office was located in a five-story office building on West Olympic Blvd. In fact, I sublet office space from Chris Hartmire and his National Farm Worker Ministry. The California State Employees had a field office on the same floor in the same building as did a California assemblyman, whose last name might have been Warren, but I am not sure. And there were many other tenants on different floors whose names I do not remember.

Compared to my offices in Delano—first, next to the Pink House, then later in Filipino Hall—and then in the former morgue at La Paz, I found this Los Angeles office building to be the lap of luxury.

One day, late in the morning, we received notice to immediately evacuate the building because a gas leak in the building had been detected, and the Los Angeles Fire Department had been called. As we gathered ourselves up to leave, the hook-and-ladder fire truck and several other emergency vehicles pulled up outside the building with red lights flashing and their sirens winding down. As we exited out the hallway and down the stairwell, I could smell the gas odor.

For more than an hour, all of the people who worked in the various offices of the building milled around on the street waiting for the emergency fire personnel to complete their investigation. They examined the heating and air conditioning systems and all the hot water heaters, but despite the obvious smell of gas, they could not find the source of the leak. They brought in several commercial-size portable fans to draw the air out of the stairwells and the hallways. Finally, they pronounced the building “safe.” Everyone returned to work.

When I had settled back into my office, Ken Doyle, one of our boycott staff members, came in, said he needed to talk to me but wanted me to go outside with him. I walked with him down the hall, and he took me into the five-story stairwell. When I closed the door, he mumbled something apologetic saying it was only an experiment and assured me he had used only three drops.

You may not know this; I certainly did not. Natural gas is odorless and an “odor agent” (my word for it) is added to natural gas to give it its distinctive odor. Ken had found a commercial source for this additive, purchased some, and conducted an experiment. He

had released three drops at the bottom of this five-story stairwell, and it was these drops that caused the emergency evacuation order.

I leave the rest of this boycott story to your imagination.

### **Sidebar #28**

#### **Chewing Up and Spitting Out Farmworker Volunteers**

I have offended the sensibilities of some of my former farmworker movement colleagues by writing that the movement sucked in, chewed up, and spit out volunteers. Too harsh, some wrote. The fact that the top 50 NCAA colleges and universities treat their scholarship athletes the same way, or worse, doesn't seem to be as controversial. Even less so, it seems, when the U.S. military treats its young recruits in a similar fashion. I suppose many former farmworker volunteers view their service as exemplary, morally uplifting, and altruistic, and they fear that my somewhat crude characterization tarnishes the image of their years of service. Let me explain again what I mean.

First off, let me state again my view that not only were United Farm Worker volunteers valuable, they were invaluable. In my judgment, there would have been no farmworker movement, no successful Delano grape strike, no Agricultural Labor Relations Act, and no UFW today without the work, the dedication, and the commitment of hundreds of UFW volunteers. It is for this reason I entitled the CD publication of the documentation project, "Cesar Chavez and his farmworker movement, 1962–1993: Essays written by the volunteers who built his farmworker movement."

So, if volunteers were so valuable to the movement, why do I write as if they were expendable? I do so because that was the reality of their situation. Consider this: when a volunteer left the UFW, another volunteer immediately took his or her place, and the farmworker movement did not miss a beat. The same happened to me and to every other volunteer who joined and subsequently left the movement. There were always volunteers coming into the movement who were able, and willing, to take the places of those of us who left.

I realize it must sound crude or harsh when I write that the farmworker movement sucked up volunteers, chewed them up, and spit them out, but I am simply hammering on the point that each volunteer came to the movement with a burning desire to help. They did whatever was asked; they went wherever they were sent, sometimes on a minute's notice; they worked long days for months on end, without time off or vacation; they worked for the love of a cause, not for money; they were separated for long periods of time from their spouses and children and so forth. These are only a few examples of the unrelenting and insatiable demands made by the farmworker movement upon its volunteers, and they responded with a heartfelt yes. I characterize this work period as the chewing up process.

The spitting out process occurred when each volunteer came to the realization that for a variety of reasons—personal, ethical, marital, parental, financial, educational, career, and physical—they could no longer participate, or did not want to. Some came to this realization because they felt unwanted, unappreciated, unneeded, or physically and emotionally spent. I view this voluntary leaving as the normal and natural result of idealistic volunteers throwing themselves headlong into a cause, without thinking about—or even caring about—the personal consequences of such a decision. Sometimes the realization that it was time to move on took years to materialize, sometimes only a year or two, or even just a summer, but at some point during the volunteer's service to the farmworker movement, the realization came because it had to. For the vast majority of people, living a Cesar Chavez–inspired movement was an abnormal life. It could be done, but only for a time.

I pause here to make the point that not all volunteers who came to Delano were acceptable to the movement, nor should they have been. Some were lazy and did not have enough personal discipline to cope with the hard work, some came to make policy and run the union, some were romantic revolution drifters, and others came to peddle their own brand of ideology. Generally speaking, these kinds of volunteers were soon weeded out by requiring them to participate in the grinding hard work of manning the picket lines in the fields or in front of supermarkets.

Was leaving the movement inevitable? Theoretically, perhaps not, but since the cause of the farmworkers was seen as an all-important, life-and-death struggle, the movement was wired to place the needs of the organization above any of the personal needs of its volunteers. The movement demands upon the individual volunteer were relentless and insatiable, and they could never be met, because there was always a new set of demands waiting in the wings. I compare the farmworker movement to a moving river—a volunteer never stepped into the same river twice. It was a life of constant change, much of it crisis-driven, and semi-organized chaos.

Yes, there were some occasions—not too many by my estimate—when volunteers were pushed overboard. Sometimes it was done nicely, and sometimes accusingly—no explanation was requested, no questions were asked, no reasons were given, and no justification was deemed necessary. Cruel? Yes. Unnecessary? Probably so. I have no adequate explanation why terminations were handled in the manner they were, except to observe that the cause itself was deemed so important, that such individual personnel matters paled by comparison and seemed insignificant and inconsequential.

Admittedly, the leaving part of the volunteer equation was more stressful than either the coming part, or the working part, because leaving frequently generated emotions and feelings of loss, guilt, failure, sadness, anger, or resentment. In my case, for example, there was certainly a feeling of loss, sadness, and some guilt. True, leaving sometimes generated feelings of relief because one was returning to a more normal life, but, in my view, this was generally not the case.

The work of the volunteers not only built the farmworker movement, but it prepared the volunteers for their own future careers. They learned valuable organizing skills, they met people from all walks of life, they were exposed to new career opportunities, and they worked in rural and urban areas throughout California, the U.S., and beyond. Many learned a second language, how to speak in public, and all developed a sense of self-confidence with an infectious can-do attitude. Correct me if I am wrong, but because of Cesar Chavez and his farmworker movement, the volunteers ultimately created for themselves a more financially secure and rewarding life. I doubt if there is even one former volunteer who has not highlighted his or her resumé to show their involvement with Cesar Chavez. Not only is it considered to be a badge of honor, it has the potential to be used as a self-promotional marketing tool.

So as impersonal, indifferent, and insensitive as the farmworker movement was in accommodating the personal needs of its volunteers, all parties ultimately benefited from the enterprise—the movement was built, the volunteers prospered.

### Sidebar #29

#### Chatfield's Account of the ALRA Passage—1975

Jacques Levy, author of *Cesar Chavez: Autobiography of La Causa* came to Sacramento in February of 1994 to interview me for a future book. Almost 10 years later, in December of 2003, he sent two excerpts from his yet-unpublished book for me to review and acknowledge the accuracy of my quotes. I print these two excerpts here in their entirety. The quotes are mine but the commentary packaging the quotes belongs to Jacques. The passage of the ALRA in 1975 marked the end of my active involvement with Cesar Chavez and his farmworker movement.

“During that period there was intense jockeying. LeRoy Chatfield, a former Christian Brother who for years had been one of Cesar’s top lieutenants, had run Brown’s Northern California campaign, then joined his staff. Using techniques he learned with the UFW, Chatfield orchestrated multiple meetings of key groups with the governor. ‘The idea was to create momentum to the point where there had to be legislation,’ he explained. He rounded up representatives of growers, religious groups, labor, and minority organizations, all invited to private meetings with the governor in Sacramento.

‘I remember one occasion we had four different meetings going on in the governor’s office at the same time, and Brown was shuttling from faction to faction,’ Chatfield said. ‘Some of these meetings took place at 2 or 3 o’clock in the morning. These things went on for hours and hours and hours and hours.’

‘You have to appreciate Brown’s intellectual ability in this,’ Chatfield commented. ‘He did nothing for weeks except this, and he actually became completely versed in the nuances of

the language. I'm talking about over commas, over words. This is not a person just interested in overview. He considered it a personal challenge.'

Chatfield said Brown spent so much time on the issue, 'his chief of staff, Gray Davis, (who later also became California governor), practically got into a fight with me because I was monopolizing Brown, his interests, and his time. Gray felt threatened about my involvement, in effect taking his position as chief of staff. I mean he was very, very angry about it.'

Chatfield admitted he felt torn between loyalty to the governor and the union. 'I saw that if I was helpful to Brown, if he pulled it off, this was his platform to the future. But I wasn't that loyal to Brown that I was willing to hide harmful things from the Farm Workers. That was just not part of me at that point.

'The growers weren't in the governor's office because they wanted to be,' explained LeRoy Chatfield. 'What they saw in Jerry Brown was a way to get a bill that would tame Cesar in this guerilla war. There were less concerned about what was in the legislation than I thought they would have been. Sure they wanted the boycott outlawed and they wanted some key things which they thought they got, but they could no longer continue to operate their industry the way it was going.'

'They didn't believe that Cesar would accept legislation. Why would he? He was winning,' Chatfield said.

'So that was part of the governor's power over the growers. "I can deliver Cesar's approval of a bill." If he were a conservative Republican, the growers would know he couldn't deliver Cesar. But he was a liberal Democrat, who identified with Cesar. Therefore, if Brown said he could deliver Cesar, they were hoping he could.

'I'm not saying that they were just rolling over and playing dead,' Chatfield continued, 'but this bill had plenty to protect the rights of growers, otherwise you couldn't get it by the legislature. The question is how much did it tilt to the protection of farm workers, and the fact is it tilted a lot.'

Chatfield years later would recall the scene. 'Brown is the ringmaster. It was midnight or 12:30 when the final telephone call was made to Cesar. You had legislators and growers sitting in the room, attorneys, Cohen and myself, Rose Bird, all these groups. It was a packed house. There must have been thirty, forty people there, sitting on chairs, on couches, on the floor. Brown had his desk at the front and this phone put in.

'The growers and a lot of legislators there are absolutely convinced that Cesar is going to nix the deal. They had already been on record with us that if there were going to be changes in the legislation the deal was off. But Brown too didn't want any changes because he knew that the thing would unravel.

‘Then Cesar came on the speaker phone,’ Chatfield continued, ‘and Brown briefed him, not in terms of the legislation but where we were and who was there. Of course this made Brown look very powerful because here he was talking firsthand to the nemesis of all these people. Brown told him everything was ready to go, that he had seen the bill and that his people had signed off on it. Then he sort of built it up, “Well, Cesar, what do you say?”’

‘There was this big pregnant pause, I mean, a long pause,’ Chatfield recalled. ‘You know how Cesar gets. He sort of feels sick, his voice gets real thin, and so this big pause.’

Finally Cesar answered. He would agree to it, he said, but only under one condition. The growers leaned forward in their chairs, holding their breath. Cesar’s condition was blunt. He would agree, he said quietly, only if not one comma were changed. The room exploded in applause.

‘Everyone was shaking their head in agreement,’ Chatfield explained, ‘Because no one wanted any changes. They felt they had been through the ringer for too long, and this was it. It was all or nothing. It was a dramatic, historical moment.’”

(The working title for Levy’s future book is *Cesar Chavez’s Guide to a Just Society*. Unfortunately, I must report that Jacques Levy passed away before he finished his book.)

### **Sidebar #30**

Even in Vienna Dreams—1993

Chatfield Journal—8:51 a.m. in Vienna, Austria—April 13, 1993

Last evening I dreamed twice about events—dream events—that involved Cesar Chavez. Isn’t that strange? Maybe I really am finally on a vacation. In one event Bonnie and I were moving to Williams, California, to buy a ranch-style house with a big back lot, and the seller was very mysterious in the manner in which he divulged to us the price. He finally flashed an official-looking document with the price of \$234,000 contained in the text of this official-looking document. It was quite a spacious house and a good buy for us by selling our Sacramento house, but the first night when I went to close the front door, it came right off the hinges. Cesar figured into this dream because somehow my moving to Williams put me into his “territory” or sphere of influence and how would he react to that?

Later in another dream event, I visited Cesar at his palace-like center of operations and there was much speculation by Jerry Cohen about how the visit would go. But Cesar was so gracious and friendly and took time to greet me even though I didn’t have an appointment, etc. He asked me to come back and see him the next morning at 8 a.m., and while I had not planned to stay overnight, I agreed to come back. I remember how clean and picked up everything was. The grounds especially seemed fixed up and in good order.

When I came to see him at his office the next morning, there was a High Mass going on and a bishop with all his red regalia was presiding. I could see that my 8 a.m. appointment had been replaced by this clerical intervention.

(On April 23, 1993, at the age of 66, Cesar died in his sleep in San Luis, Arizona. Is it possible that Cesar was thinking of me on April 12th or 13th?)

### **Sidebar #31**

“Well, What Did You Learn from Cesar?”—1993

During Cesar’s wake, in the tent set up on the Forty Acres that held 10,000 seats, a reporter from the Riverside paper (or was it San Bernardino?) asked me why I had left the union in 1973. There were four reasons, I said: 1) My oldest daughter (of four at that time, now of five) was just getting ready to start first grade and that meant that we needed to decide where to anchor ourselves. 2) My father had died in 1970 and my mother was by herself in Sacramento. I had been away from “home” since I was 15 years old. 3) My wife was from San Francisco and she missed Northern California. And 4) I had been asked by the Gilbert Padilla of the union board if I would stand for the position of secretary-treasurer at the first convention of this newly approved AFL-CIO International Union. This request, while tempting (and should I admit, flattering), helped me to realize that it was time to leave because I had come to Delano, at Cesar’s request, only to help out, not to spend the rest of my life there. If I now decided to become an officer, that meant I was making a long-term commitment.

I could tell the reporter was disappointed because he was working on an angle. “Well,” he said, “what did you learn from Cesar?” I answered, “How to organize.” He was blank. I tried to spruce it up for him. “Cesar taught me how to make something out of nothing. He taught me how to take something that does not exist and make it exist.” He wrote it down.

### **Sidebar #32**

Eulogy for Cesar E. Chavez  
Delivered by Fernando Chavez—April 29, 1993

“On behalf of my mother, my brothers and sisters, all the grandchildren, my aunts and uncles, and all of our family, I want to say, “Thank You” for being here with us today on this very sad occasion.

All of you gathered here know that my dad dedicated his entire life to help farmworkers in their struggle for justice, for equality, for dignity. And I am proud to say that my mother and our entire family supported dad’s commitment in every way we could and sometimes, as you can imagine, at great personal sacrifice. I hope and pray that we did our best.

My father chose to live a life of voluntary poverty and yet I believe that his legacy will be rich. His legacy to our family, his legacy to all of you here and to the whole country is a legacy of nonviolence. A legacy in the tradition and spirit of Gandhi, Martin Luther King, and Bobby Kennedy.

My dad's life has proven to me that his nonviolent struggle for the rights of farmworkers was a true manifestation of his faith in God and his practice of the teachings of the Gospel.

Some people might say that my father was a "famous man" or that he was a "VIP." Perhaps he was. But for all of us who knew him, including all of you here, I can attest to the fact that he was never, ever too busy to give his complete attention and interest to each and every person with whom he spoke. Be that person a field worker, a store clerk, a student, a grieving parent, or a complete stranger. He was that kind of man.

My mother and our family understand that dad's life is finished. But we also understand that each one of you must carry on his spirit of nonviolence and continue his struggle for justice for farmworkers."

### **Sidebar #33**

Prophecy of LeRoy Chatfield—April 1993

Cesar is dead and buried. So what does the future hold for his farmworker movement?

It's very simple, really. What Cesar was unable to accomplish during his lifetime, i.e., building a national farmworkers' union, will be accomplished over a period of decades through his death. But, in my opinion, this larger victory will be won from the "outside-in," just as the table grape contracts were won through consumer boycotts waged thousands of miles from Delano. This victory will come about not because of any strike or boycott activities planned by the current union leadership but because Cesar's life, through his death, will take on proportions that far exceed anyone's expectation and certainly far, far beyond the bounds of the union.

This will be threatening and confusing to the union leadership especially because the "public" and the media will expect Cesar's wife, Helen—and his children—to speak in Cesar's stead. To attend memorials, participate in dedications, open ceremonies, etc. The union, which after all has declined in recent years, will recede further into the background. It will become more like the stage backdrop behind the development of Cesar's larger-than-life image. Their first and understandable reaction will be to bottle the genie Cesar up so that he can be let out as needed.

It is a paradox. Cesar's mystique will grow exponentially larger and larger in the public consciousness—not only in North America but throughout the entire world—and the

union's will grow smaller and smaller. And as Cesar's public legacy grows in public opinion centers of urban areas, outside the agricultural hinterlands, it will set the stage for farmworkers themselves to light the matches which will cause wave after wave of crippling agricultural strikes to protest their oppressive working conditions and to manifest their determination to have their own union. It is precisely at these flash points that the farmworkers' union must be prepared to intervene and provide leadership, support, direction, and the know-how to represent these workers.

I compare this readiness of farmworkers to act spontaneously with the John F. Kennedy aura in East Los Angeles in May of 1968 during Bobby Kennedy's campaign for president. Our farmworker volunteer presence for "Robert Kennedy for President" in these barrio neighborhoods was all that was needed for people—poor people, working-class people—to join our campaign to work and vote for Kennedy. It was almost impossible for us to find enough campaign work for people to do. As for "get out the vote," forget it! Many precincts had turnouts of almost 100 percent. It wasn't any special campaign activity that "we" concocted that made the difference. It was simply the fact that people at this level were responding to the brother of their slain hero. They wanted to be part of that special mystique.

How much more so with Cesar! A person who spent his lifetime working on behalf of farmworkers who were defenseless and without a voice. A person who sacrificed all his material possessions, lived in voluntary poverty and disciplined himself and his movement with month-long fasts. A person who preached with his deeds.

For those who think I exaggerate or find this far-fetched, consider this. Cesar has not even been buried yet 30 days and already his life and death are taking on a life of their own in California.

High school students at Fremont High School in Oakland have turned in 1400 signatures to the school board to change the name of their high school to "Cesar E. Chavez High." Parents in Union City are lobbying to name their middle school after Cesar. An Oakland city councilman wants to rename a major city street after Cesar. San Jose officials want to rename Plaza Park. And the city and county of Los Angeles are just beginning to get into the "street-naming" act. All of this is in addition to a bill introduced in the California legislature by Senator Art Torres and Assemblyman Richard Polanco to declare March 31, Cesar's birthday, a state holiday. This is only the beginning.

The pilgrimages to La Paz to visit Cesar's grave have already begun. It won't be long before the union bureaucracy will have to relocate, leaving others behind to give the tours, to tell Cesar's story and sell the books, videos, and other mementos associated with these kinds of activities. But this outpouring of homage and respect will not, in my judgment, advance any particular boycott or strike activity on the present union's agenda. But if packaged thoughtfully, it will create, over a period of time, a historical mystique about Cesar's life and work that will lay the groundwork to prompt a wave of agricultural strikes and

farmworker union activities throughout the country that will resonate well with national public opinion.

Even the growers, true to form, are doing their best to throw gasoline on the flickering fire. The *San Francisco Chronicle* (May 25, 1993) quotes one Bruce Burkdoll, president of the Central California Farmers Association, “I’m not at all in favor of renaming schools and streets, and a holiday is completely ridiculous. He (Cesar) was a labor organizer and a poor one. I don’t see anything heroic about it ...” Deja vu! This is the same off-the-wall anti-Mexican rhetoric that enabled us in the early days of the Delano grape strike to ratchet up the national debate over the rights of farmworkers. We could always count on the growers and their public relations firms to make our best case.

Do you think students care about the niceties raised by the school board over the renaming of a school for Cesar? That it will cost money to have new stationery printed and to have new listings in the telephone directory? Do you think thousands of Oakland residents—Hispanic and blacks—care that it will cost the city money to replace street signs that say Cesar Chavez instead of East 14th St.? And a March 31 California holiday honoring Cesar’s birthday is already a foregone conclusion. Not this year or next but you can bet it will be an issue in the next California governor’s election. And the one after that.

Cesar confided to me many times that he thought it would take 20 years before the first union contracts were won. They actually came in less than two. (In retrospect, a case could be made that it might have been better for the union if it had taken longer, because a 100-fold growth was not possible to digest. But since there are no choices in these matters, the point is academic.)

Cesar was completely resigned to the fact that it would take a lifetime to build a national farmworker union—and now he gets a fresh start!

### **2004 Looking Back—People Important to Me in the Farmworker Movement —and Beyond**

- ❖ Cesar Chavez, founder of the National Farm Workers Association. It was his vision, his movement, and his life.
- ❖ Gilbert Padilla, the handsome, suave, and engaging David Niven look-alike who taught us the nuts and bolts of a farmworker service center.
- ❖ Marshall Ganz, one of the most gifted union organizers ever to walk the agricultural fields of California.
- ❖ Marion Moses, the nurse-organizer who made health care such an integral component of the farmworker movement.

- ❖ Chris Hartmire, the urban executive of the farmworker-priest ministry who provided the connection and interpretation for churches and synagogues to embrace the cause of the farmworker movement.
- ❖ Jerry Cohen, the very young attorney who defended the rights of the farmworker movement aggressively and intelligently—and with great passion! He sued the bastards at every turn, pursuing them even to the California and U.S. Supreme Courts.
- ❖ Helen Chavez, soft-spoken and caring, but always a fiercely loyal and steadfast partner with her husband and his cause.
- ❖ Bonnie Burns Chatfield, the young wife who managed our growing family with such grace and equanimity that she made our commitment to the farmworker movement possible, and bearable.

### Special Thanks

- ❖ To Professor Paul Henggeler who asked me to answer his questions about Cesar Chavez and his farmworker movement. May he rest in peace.