

## Julie Greenfield 1968–1971

I was a teenager on Long Island, New York, active in anti-Vietnam War activities. My parents, Gordon and Doris, were old labor and progressive activists. And it was the 1960s, with the explosion of the civil rights movement happening all around us. So it was natural that my sister Wendy and I would become interested in the farmworkers' struggle.

I have to admit that Wendy, my little sister, actually got involved first. It wasn't until I saw a store manager pushing her around that I realized I had to become involved personally. Once we were mobilized, however, we and several friends from school, Syosset High, including Gordon Victor, faithfully picketed and cleaned out not only our own town, but also, eventually, neighboring towns of the offending grapes. At that time, the Long Island boycott was organized by a housewife named Gretchen Haynes—an Englishwoman, I think.

When I graduated from high school and went on to New York University in the fall of 1969, I volunteered to take on the Gristedes store, which was only one block from my dorm room. (Gristedes was a small New York chain that catered to the affluent—the only chain in New York that never succumbed to the boycott.) I got SDS (Students for a Democratic Society) activists and anyone else I could to help me. I got to know the New York staff, who became family to me: Mark Silverman, Ray and Barbara Ortiz and her five children, Marilu Sanchez, and later, Jerry Kay. When the semester ended I moved into the Brooklyn boycott house, behind the Ex-Lax factory, and basically started working full time for the union (although technically I was still in school). Our office at that time was in the ILGWU building. I knew little about organizing techniques, was not trained, but had a lot of enthusiasm and did the best I could. I remember riding the subway at all hours of the day and night and thinking that, although I was only 19 years old, this was probably the best, most meaningful job I would ever have.

After the exciting victories of the first grape contracts, the spring of 1970, and the momentous other events in the world—the invasion of Cambodia, and Kent State and Jackson State, all of which resulted in campus unrest and occupations, which I was involved in at NYU—I officially left school. In June, I set out with two Catholic seminarians, one of whom was Richie Ross, in an old, barely functioning Renault, and drove to California to see what all the excitement was about. Relieved that we made it through the desert and over the mountains, we stopped briefly at La Paz, where we were greeted by Kathy and Lupe Murguia, and then on to Delano. There I was assigned to the new RFK Medical Plan, where I posted hours by hand. It was tedious work, but just being in Delano was exciting to me.

After a few weeks, we started hearing things about the situation in Salinas heating up, and happily for me, I was sent there just as the lettuce strike was starting. What an amazing experience—the huge rallies and the rousing speeches by Cesar, Dolores, and many others. I tell everyone that is how I learned Spanish, which is at least partly true. The 3 a.m. rising

time for picket lines; thousands of farmworker cars bearing eagle flags and proudly zooming through the Salinas Valley; listening to workers on the picket line and seeing how this event changed their lives and view of themselves from one of subjugation to one of pride and dignity—witnessing all of this was and is a pivotal event in my own life as well.

After the high of the Salinas strike (end of September, I think), I was sent back to New York to work on the lettuce boycott. With Jim and Susan Drake, the Iziguirre family (from Salinas), Paul Chavez, and others, I drove in a car caravan back to New York. I was the Manhattan organizer, but the truth was that I had fallen in love with California and wanted very much to go back. I resigned from the union in February and drove a union car with my sister Wendy, Gordon Victor, and one other person back to Delano.

In Delano, the construction of the medical clinic had just started under the direction of Molly Malouf, a wonderful contractor from Marin County. Wendy and I were put to work digging ditches for the foundation, which was backbreaking but a totally new and empowering kind of work for us. I remember the first time Cesar came by and saw us, he said to one of his aides, “Get those girls out of there!” However, we soon convinced him that we really wanted to be there, and he left us alone. I ultimately stayed on through the clinic construction, and even later—until November of 1971, I believe.

It was a wonderful growing time for me personally. I got to know many of the union leadership and volunteers and made some close friends (Flo Kelly and Pat Kelly particularly come to mind). Kevin Brown, Clyde Golden, Mike Kratko, and other members of the crew I have not had much contact with but remember fondly. Duane Anderson, the union mechanic, a conscientious objector, was my main love interest at the time ...

One small incident that may have been a harbinger of later events in the union was a small protest that occurred among the Forty Acres staff not long after I got there. Several families, including Maria Flores, who was Cesar’s secretary at the time, apparently circulated a petition asking for a raise in the \$5 a week stipend. They were mainly families who had children, who were finding it increasingly difficult to explain to their children why they couldn’t go on field trips or do many things that the other kids could do. Their requests were modest—I think they wanted \$10 a week, though I can’t remember all the details. There was a big meeting in the hiring hall. Cesar rejected the demands.

Afterward he fired the people involved in the petition effort, including Maria. I had a very hard time accepting that and even approached Cesar on one of his many walks around the clinic site. To his credit, he spent about half an hour talking to me about his reasoning. He told me that I really didn’t understand, that there were people basically out to take over the union. Afterward, there actually was some effort made to make conditions somewhat better for families, and I think we started getting a grocery allowance, etc. But I still could not understand what happened at the time...

Near the end of my time in Delano, the medical staff arrived, including Dr. Dan Murphy,

his future wife, Janet, and the rest of the doctors and nurses from Stanford. It was very exciting and helped launch me into the field I'm in now. I became a nurse and then a nurse practitioner. I originally hoped to work in a farmworker clinic, but it did not work out exactly that way. I work as a school nurse in Hayward, mostly with handicapped children, and I do work with immigrants, including Mexicans. Everything I learned in the union comes into use in the course of my work. I try never to forget where the people I work with come from, the hardships they have had to endure to get here, and what they endure every day to survive. I see myself as an advocate for them.

My organizing skills have been put to good use in the past few years. There was a threat to eliminate school nurses in my school district. I knew, as some other people apparently did not know, that we had to organize—get people to write letters, come to school board meetings, and speak for us—if we were to survive and do the work we felt was important. So far it has worked.

The greatest compliment I remember was in the letter of reference that Jim Drake wrote for me when I applied to nursing school. “Julie Greenfield,” the letter began, “is an organizer.” I think that is about all I have to say. I left staff at that point. I did not want to move to La Paz. It seemed too removed from the people. I did help with the Proposition 22 campaign, and was and am a supporter. I played a very small part in the UFW, but the UFW has played an enriching, meaningful part in my life. Viva La Causa.