

## Rey Huerta 1968–1975

### The Most Memorable Times of Our Lives

The following essay was composed to the best of my recollections in order to share with others the memory of a great man, Cesar E. Chavez, as well as the United Farm Workers of America. I do this so that his legend may continue.

The incidents I relate may not be in chronological order. The fact that so many things were happening so quickly did not allow much time to keep a proper journal. We were virtually fighting for our lives and the lives of future generations. We were going to live Cesar's dream. This was the greatest honor that could be bestowed on my family and me: To have worked alongside the greatest man I had ever met, and to be part of such a historical event that will never be duplicated, an event that we shall never forget.

My family's relationship with the United Farm Workers Organizing Committee began in 1966. My late wife, Yolanda, and I were invited to a fundraiser at Alex Miramon's home in Montebello, California. The event was sponsored by the East Los Angeles Junior Chamber of Commerce (ELAJC), of which I was a member. The fundraiser would benefit the National Farm Workers Association (NFWA), based in Delano. The invitation included a request for donations of canned goods, clothing, and money.

Dolores Huerta, cofounder of the NFWA and a legend in her own right, made an appearance that evening representing the association. Dolores went on to explain to the group why she was there. She depicted the life of the farmworkers and explained in great detail how the farmworkers struggled to survive with large families on meager wages under deplorable living conditions. The poverty that existed in rural California was despicable. Dolores Huerta said, "*¡Ya basta!*" ("No more.") The battle cry was to be "*Viva la Causa*" and the words "*Viva la Huelga*" would be heard throughout the world. Dolores then asked for the support of the ELAJC. The response was overwhelming. Most of us had parents, grandparents, and other relatives who had slaved in the same fields and experienced the same plight. These conditions were about to end. The farmworkers in Delano had begun the struggle. They considered us lucky to be living in a large city where everything, including medical attention, was readily available. Not so for the farmworkers.

The presentation was heart-wrenching. All who were present were saddened while listening to the accounts of how our people were being mistreated, exploited, and slowly poisoned with DDT and other dangerous pesticides. The numbers of children born with birth defects and cancer in the farm communities were staggering when compared to their urban counterparts. The wages were deplorable: \$1 an hour. If children worked alongside their parents (even in the heat of the summer), the children did not receive any compensation for their work, and the parents shared their meager wages so that the children would not feel cheated. There was no drinking water provided. Workers had to lug around plastic milk containers filled with water, which became almost impossible to drink because the

water heated up during the day. There were no toilets, nowhere to relieve oneself unless he or she walked farther into the fields. The women grew weary of perverts watching them from across the vines while they defecated between the rows. There was nowhere to eat the food that, by lunchtime, was heated in the midmorning sun and littered with sand. Coachella Valley temperatures can run as high as 125 to 130 degrees Fahrenheit during the months of June and July, the peak of the season.

Once the grower was satisfied that *he* had picked enough for the season, all workers were then laid off except the year-round workers, such as the irrigators and the tractor drivers. Any workers who tried to continue living in the labor camps were asked to leave immediately and to take whatever belongings they had with them. The grower closed the labor camp and evicted any stragglers, whether or not they had another place to live. The growers felt no responsibility whatsoever for their workers once harvesting season was over. Incidentally, every year, the rural high school students were allowed to leave school early in June to help the growers bring in their crops during the peak of the season. Guess who sat on the local school boards? And guess who lost out on their final examinations?

The farmworkers would then load up their families in their old beat-up vehicles, weighed down with children, cooking utensils, bedding, and whatever clothing they could carry, and head for the next farm that was about to harvest their crops. North or south, east or west, the migration in California would begin around late May or early June and not end until the last part of November. One dollar an hour, without any benefits like basic health care, Social Security, and most important, unemployment benefits. All were benefits that we in the cities took for granted, but none were available to the farmworkers, migrant or not.

ELAJC members were so motivated that a caravan loaded with food, clothing, and a large check was organized and dispatched to arrive in Delano the following week. Yolanda and I volunteered to drive the lead truck. The caravan arrived on a Friday evening, just in time for the Friday night meeting that was held every week at the community center in Delano. This was my first encounter with Cesar E. Chavez. The man was charismatic! Little did I know at the time, but I would follow this man to the end of the earth if need be. I learned from the first Friday night meeting that Cesar and Dolores were first class organizers! Luis Valdez and members of his Teatro Campesino were there, as well as Larry Itliong, Cesar's counterpart in the Pinoy community.

About that time, I had been working as a design draftsman for an engineering and architectural firm based in Gardena, California. From the windows in my office, I saw Los Angeles burning from the Watts race riots. Shortly after that, my firm decided to move some of the operations to Fresno in pursuit of a large contract. It was then that I, too, moved my family, along with house pets and all of our household goods, to our new quarters in Fresno County. We were tired of living in the barrios of East Los Angeles, with their gangs, drugs, graffiti, smog, traffic, and gridlock.

I worked for the firm a short while longer while in Fresno. Then I decided to accept a position with Fresno's Community Service Organization (CSO). I still hadn't forgotten Cesar and the farmworkers. The position would allow me to become directly involved in organizing in the various rural areas of Fresno County. The CSO had been seeking a community organizer with some experience. Having been raised in East Los Angeles and attending its school of hard knocks, I surmised that I had ample experience in dealing with all sorts of *fulanos* (folks). The job was designed to provide the mobility to do some heavy community organizing in the soon-to-be-organized Fresno County. My involvement was increasing; the time for change was in the air.

This was my first opportunity to meet Mr. Saul Alinsky, one of the great organizers of his time. Most of Mr. Alinsky's experience was working with poor African-Americans in the Chicago and New York City ghettos during the civil rights movement of the 1950s and 1960s. Mr. Alinsky was out visiting the Fresno area from Chicago on an invitation from Mr. Gilbert Lopez, president of the Fresno CSO. When we outlined our goals to Mr. Alinsky, he seemed honestly pleased with the work that we were accomplishing in the rural communities of Fresno County.

So it was that we put together close to 18 or 20 CSO chapters throughout Fresno County and also managed to form the same number of youth groups. We had the access and mobility to communicate and meet with the various leaders of each community throughout the county, providing assistance to the rural farm communities. I found that most of the chapter members and leaders coincidentally were in some way connected to the United Farm Workers (UFW), and in some cases entire boards were made up of UFW members.

In 1968, I joined the farmworker movement through Mr. Gil Padilla, the Selma field office director and treasurer of the NFWA, a man who would become my good friend and mentor. I joined the union as an associate member and was part of the NFWA death benefit program while concurrently working as the newly appointed director of the Fresno County CSO. What I witnessed out in those rural farm communities will be forever emblazoned in my mind. The poverty that existed in those rural communities was deplorable. People were living in squalor in one of the richest farming valleys in the world. I remember people who were dying of pesticide poisoning sprayed on them by crop dusters. What was far worse, however, was the lack of concern of the public officials in that entire region. The farmworkers in that countryside were out of sight and, therefore, out of mind. The public officials showed no interest at all. Learning that a UFW volunteer earned just five bucks a week plus room and board was a big deal for me. What can you buy for five bucks? One reason for the five-buck-a-week plan was to eliminate jealousy among the volunteers about pay; this was a system that was used to weed out the opportunists who might want to take advantage of the union and the farmworkers. Also in those days, there really was not enough money coming into the union as dues to warrant any substantial wages for anybody. The union was operated strictly on donations from the general public. During that time, even Cesar was on the five-bucks-a-week plan.

By 1970, I was ready to commit and join the union as a full-time volunteer. Of course, my family was not thrilled with my decision to join the union full time. The family vote came to four against one, not in my favor. It left me with no alternative but to claim five votes so the motion would carry! They could not stop crying. I had to persuade them that they would not starve to death, that they would have clothes and shoes to wear to school, and that the growers would not drive by and shoot at us. It took them quite a while to adjust to the discipline, but we all finally did.

At 3 a.m., it is so dark outside that a person cannot even see his hand in front of his face, but there we were, at the west end of Fresno with flags flying and headlights flashing. It was my first huelga. My wife and children were all jammed into our old car, except my youngest son, Ray, who was still sleeping in the trunk of the old Pontiac. When we arrived at the designated ranch, we immediately got out of our cars and started setting up picket lines around a peach grower's field. The huelga ladies knew their job and started to set up the huelga kitchen. We all needed our caffeine and tortillas con chile so that we could be energized for the long day ahead.

We were assigned to picket all day and then spend the night at this particular ranch. Our cars needed to be moved out of harm's way during the night, so we resorted to sleeping on the ground around the perimeter of the ranch to assure that the peach grower would not try to sneak scab workers by us in the middle of the night. This particular strike lasted six days and seven nights. The tactics were raw, but the outcome was a positive one: The grower agreed to negotiate a contract. The reason we selected to hit that peach grove was because we knew that the grower also had grape orchards that we could not locate. Striking his peach orchard forced him to disclose the location of the grapes! *¡Si se puede!* The strikers were jubilant. They did not expect such an easy victory. That was in the spring of 1970, and the other grape strikes and boycotts were still going strong. I was then assigned to the UFW Selma field office. I was to work directly under the supervision of Gil Padilla, the UFW treasurer and one of Cesar's most trusted friends. Gil Padilla was also one of the UFW's top-notch organizers. Originally from Los Banos, California, Gil brought to the union years of experience in community organizing. He was very informed, diplomatic, and political; he could negotiate contracts and was a great leader. Gil reassigned me to Salinas right before the strike broke out. He felt it would be good training for me because I really did not have much strike experience.

Salinas was a rude awakening for me, as it was for most of the new volunteers arriving in the Salinas Valley for the lettuce strike. It was one of the first big gatherings of the UFW's finest recruits. Salinas was slated for a major strike. Fred Ross, Sr., along with Jerry Cohen, the UFW's legal point man and *conciliari*, were there to help Cesar schedule the various tasks needed as we grabbed the tiger by the tail. Marshall Ganz, Father Neri, Jim Drake and his charming wife, Susan, Eliseo Medina, LeRoy Chatfield, Chris Hartmire, and a whole collection of lawyers, organizers, various ministry folks, and office people were to take the thousands of calls and messages that would be generated from the strike. There were the huelga cooks and the security staff led by Richard Ybarra, Cesar's son-in-law. Also present

were the many paralegals from all parts of the country. We were getting ready to do battle with California's agribusiness giants of the Salinas Valley, the West Coast lettuce industry. It looked to be a horrendous task, to say the least.

A chapter of the UFW's lettuce workers based in Calexico, California, was planning a general strike as they arrived to the Salinas Valley. The lettuce workers were one of our strongest groups, so Cesar decided to back the lettuce workers in their pursuit of a union contract that was to include seniority rights and a substantial pay increase for the arduous labor that the lettuce workers endured on a daily basis. The short-handled hoe would forever be outlawed in the lettuce fields of California because of the notoriety of its damage to a person's lower back. This was truly stoop labor in its cruelest form. Cesar put an end to it by having the notorious hoe banned from the fields in California.

Salinas is home to some of the largest lettuce, celery, cauliflower, artichoke, and strawberry growers in the country. Those growers have the money to support their whims. So who must have been running the city and county governments in the Salinas Valley? It was plain and simple: The multimillion-dollar giant agribusiness ran the show.

As soon as we set up the pickets, we began gaining immediate farmworker support as they started to leave the fields of the Salinas Valley. The growers and the courts got together soon enough and began handing down court injunctions like there was no tomorrow. They desperately tried to stop us from winning over their longtime farm laborers by trying to prevent such things as gathering in large numbers and limiting the area and space where we were striking or picketing.

The court injunctions were ludicrous. They soon arrested Cesar because he would not bow down and put an end to the strike! *¡Si se puede!* I recall our holding all-night candlelight vigils in front of the jail where Cesar was being held. There were thousands of supporters praying and chanting with us. We were out there for almost two weeks before they released Cesar from the Salinas County jail. Much to my dismay, I also spent a week in that same jail with 10 to 12 other strikers from one of the cauliflower companies for picketing a field that was covered by an injunction issued by the Salinas superior court. We were released after a three-day hunger strike; we were refusing to eat the food that was given to us, which was primarily lettuce.

The cops chased us, the hired goons and thugs chased us, and the growers chased us. To add insult to injury, they even hired and brought in big dogs to chase us. We stood at the edge of the field next to the road waving our flags to attract the attention of the workers. The goons' supervisors would come at us with vicious dogs on leashes in an attempt to intimidate us enough to want to abandon our posts. Fat chance! Like a tree standing by the water, I remembered, we shall not be moved!

There were waves upon waves of red flags with the black eagle flying everywhere in and out of the city. One could drive along the highway from Salinas all the way south to

Gonzales and beyond and see a continuous mass of flags waving in the coastal breezes. People waved at us in support of our struggle as they passed us in their autos. It was a beautiful sight: thousands of people lined up for miles, waving their flags and shouting and singing with pride, “*Viva La Huelga*, Long Live the Strike,” and as the chorus from the song of the time went:

*Viva la revolución,  
Viva nuestra asociación  
Viva la huelga en el fil,  
Viva la causa y la historia,  
La raza llena de Gloria,  
La Victoria va cumplir.*

We were enthusiastic and ready for all of the action. We took everything the growers and courts threw at us. My adrenaline was at a constant high and I was always ready to go and then some. We were operating on three or four hours of sleep each night. We got up before dawn in order to meet the workers as they tried to get into the fields on company buses. The *esquiroles* or scabs no longer drove into the fields in private autos. That year I also learned patience from Cesar. I learned to restrain the rage I felt toward the establishment that was obviously purchased by the growers. As was expected, I had to learn to incorporate the nonviolence practiced by Cesar. I had to do some real practicing myself. Let me tell you, this was not easy for a barrio dude like me! To let the rednecks call us degrading names, to let them beat us, arrest us, then run over us—all these things were really stretching my commitment to the cause for justice. As one of the Brown Berets so aptly put it, “The courts don’t mean justice; they mean just us.”

The strike ended in a stalemate. There were many arrests and twice as many casualties, all on our side. Although we ended up not signing any new contracts with the lettuce growers that time, we gave the wealthiest agribusiness people around a run for their money. It showed them that we were in for the long haul. *¡No nos moveran!* We shall not be moved! Negotiations had been going on in the background. The lettuce growers desperately wanted to settle, and so did we, but not for the status quo. Negotiations finally broke off. We would not yield, so the growers chose to pay their lawyers millions of dollars to make us go away instead of using those millions to pay the workers a decent wage. I can still recall sneaking into the labor camps on those moonlit nights in order to talk to the workers. We could not talk to them in the fields, so we had to resort to innovative ways of reaching the workers in the evenings. In addition, I recall the time I woke up in the hospital after being run down by a supervisor. All of these incidents played a role in what was yet to come. Coachella was to be my next assignment

At this same time, the union’s new national headquarters was being readied. *Nuestra Señora de La Paz*, as it was christened, is located in the Tehachapi Mountains, east of Bakersfield. The 200 acres of land for the new headquarters had previously been used as an institution for people who suffered from tuberculosis. The place had been closed for many years and

was in disrepair. It was bought and then donated by a group of Hollywood stars who were sympathetic to the cause of the farmworkers. It was perfect for us.

La Paz was to be our new headquarters, our new home. As the lettuce, cauliflower, broccoli, and celery harvests were being plowed under, we immediately began to plan our strategy for bringing down the Salinas growers along with the grape growers. “A double whammy” was how Cesar referred to this most recent strategy. Not only were we going to crank up the grape boycott, but we were also going to add the now-scab lettuce from California to our boycott list. As it soon turned out, both items were a scarce commodity in the supermarkets all over the country. God bless the sympathy that was expressed by millions upon millions of people who refused to shop at supermarkets or stores that carried scab California grapes or lettuce.

I arrived in Coachella the latter part of April. The weather was still mild and somewhat cool. Cesar had sent me from Delano’s Forty Acres to help Marshall Ganz, one of the union’s top organizers, enforce the newly won grape contracts. The Coachella grape growers had folded under the pressure of the boycott. The Freedman and KeyKas ranches were first to sign contracts with the union. They wanted to be the first to sell their grapes under the union banner. And sell they did. The two growers could not keep up with the demand for union grapes. Later that year, the union had won the rest of the 30 or more contracts in the Coachella Valley.

And work we did. As the field office director, I now had the task of enforcing those contracts. We had to sign up all of the workers at all of the ranches, making sure that the growers understood and would abide by the language of the newly won contracts. The contracts now included language that would provide clean potable cold water, toilets, job security, seniority rights, and health and retirement benefits, just to name a few of the benefits included in the best contracts ever written for farmworkers. Our work went on for the next two years, as we enforced the contracts, making sure the growers did not try to cheat the workers out of their benefits or their new salary increases. It was a horrendous job to enforce the contracts and to run the hiring hall. Men like Armando Cobos, Andres Gonzales, Jose Luna, and Jesus Quintero were sent to help. They were excellent organizers, but none of them had any experience in running a field office.

During this same time, Dolores Huerta was pushing a bill at the state level to provide unemployment benefits for farmworkers—the first time in United States history. Cesar wanted this bill passed very much. This would be a landmark decision in favor of farmworkers, the lowest paid workers in the country.

Coachella was an anomaly to me. It is an unwritten rule that labor unions are supposed to support each other in times of battle. This has always been the practice. Imagine, then, our amazement when one morning we showed up to picket our designated ranches and found, to our utter surprise, members of the Teamsters union, surrounding the grape fields in order to prevent *us* from talking to the scab workers brought in from Mexico to replace the

strikers—in this case, the local workers. We asked the Teamsters what they were doing in the fields. They could not answer. The common reply was, “We’re in it for the money.” The Teamsters union had cut a deal with the growers. Either the growers or the truck drivers union was paying these professional union-busters around \$50 per day plus room and board. This was back in the early 1970s, and \$50 was a lot of money in those days.

We had our suspicions about this move by the Teamsters after later watching John Fitzsimmons, then president of the powerful Teamsters union, on national television, advocating an alliance between the Teamsters and the growers. We knew that something crooked was going to take place. This move would more than likely hurt our movement, and it did.

Sure enough, shortly thereafter, the Teamsters union signed a sweetheart contract with the growers, meaning that the workers had no say whatsoever about the contract. No choice! The workers would have to accept whatever terms the Teamsters had negotiated on their behalf, which was almost zero. Everything in our contracts benefiting farmworkers had been eliminated. Toilets and potable water were now under the state’s jurisdiction; everything else went out the window. Benefits such as medical, retirement, job security, seniority rights, and many others were now lost. The Teamsters had launched a bitter war against us, which continued in the fields of the Coachella Valley. The Teamsters were afraid to go to the Imperial Valley since not everybody there was nonviolent. Manuel Chavez, Cesar’s cousin, ran that operation.

Unlike in Salinas, the company foremen and supervisors were no longer chasing us; the Teamster goons were now chasing us. Racist rednecks brought in from Los Angeles were now allowed to wreak havoc among us. The cops were letting them get away with it, looking the other way. The people being arrested were the farmworkers, not the goons. The cops would send empty buses to the fields, arrest a busload of strikers, and then haul them to the Indio jail, fingerprint them, and throw them in a cell. In the meantime, the goons were running the strikers off the roads and beating them with baseball bats, boards, grape stakes, and whatever else was handy. The goons went so far as to attack a Catholic priest. The goons confronted Fr. Banks at a nearby restaurant and tried to pick a fight with him. Fr. Banks, a nonviolent man, refused to raise his fists against the goons. It didn’t matter; the main goon who went by the name of Falco, broke Fr. Banks’ nose. Where were the cops? Good question. Fr. Banks was rushed to the emergency hospital at Indio.

The goons, now feeling better after having beaten up a priest and getting away with it, started targeting the UFW organizers to play out their violence. We were being run off the roads at 50 miles per hour. We could not afford to retaliate; we had agreed to commit to nonviolence. If the public or the courts found us involved in any violence, they would immediately call for an end to the strike, and we would therefore lose the strike by default. The violence continued throughout the harvest. Reports of beatings, shootings, and large-scale arrests were still pouring in. Cesar decided to call off the strike in the Coachella Valley after observing that the growers were not picking any more grapes, but turning the grapes



into raisins. Although the growers had a Teamster contract, they still could not sell their grapes; Cesar had reactivated the grape boycott.

Once the harvest was over, most of the strikers headed north to Arvin, Lamont, and Bakersfield to follow the crops. All of the union organizers were also sent north to the Arvin-Lamont area to help the strikers there—except me. My next assignment was in Fresno, where thousands of farmworkers were waiting for us to help them organize the strike there. I was later told that the Arvin-Lamont campaign turned out to be bloodier than Coachella. Not only were the Teamster goons beating and killing strikers, the Kings County sheriffs were now involved in the same practice of beating the strikers. They knew we would not resort to violence. More arrests, beatings, and killings followed the strikers to the end of that campaign.

Meanwhile, I arrived in Fresno eager to get things going. My first order of business was to gather the leadership and find out what had been going on. The strikers there had tried to organize their strike but were having some difficulties because of the immense size of the area to be covered. We immediately began organizing the strikers ranch by ranch. Workers were to strike the ranches where they had previously worked. Prior to this plan, strikers had been randomly picking a ranch to set up pickets. Sometimes they returned the next day, but most times they did not. That was no way to run a strike. By the end of the week, we had most of the strikers organized by ranch. Many of the strikers were from the Coachella Valley. Not wanting to be strikebreakers, they had migrated to Fresno County to find work. We met every evening to determine what ranches we would be striking the next day. At 4 a.m. we were already in the fields trying to locate workers who did not yet know that we had launched the strike. Many workers decided to keep moving north. They needed the work, but did not want to be *esquiroles* or strikebreakers. By this time the county sheriff figured out what we were up to and began following the caravans to the ranches we were to strike. Shortly thereafter, the court injunctions started to appear. We were restricted from picketing *any* ranch unless we were 50 feet away, which would put us inside the property of the next ranch we were to picket. We also had to keep the 50-foot distance from that ranch. So we had to set up our pickets 50 feet up in the air or be arrested.

There were from 200 to 300 arrests between the Coachella and Arvin-Lamont areas. In the end, Fresno had a whopping 1900 arrests, including but not limited to nuns, priests, religious representatives, or whomever. If someone were standing at the picket lines with a striking farmworker and the sheriff's deputies showed up, that person was arrested. I think even Sister Theresa was arrested that time. Joan Baez was there, too. I cannot recall if she was arrested or not, but she was there singing "God Bless America" to the growers' wives who were counter-picketing. It was so funny to watch the growers' wives yelling and screaming, and calling us communists while Joan Baez, with a guitar strapped around her shoulders, was singing patriotic songs. There were so many arrests that the county could not find enough jails. The juvenile hall was full. The youngsters were standing firm alongside their parents, so a lot of them were sent to juvenile hall, my son included. I wanted so badly to be arrested so that I could be with the strikers. Cesar was angry with me

when I mentioned it to him. He said, "If you get arrested, who in hell is going to help get all of those people out of jail?" "Okay, okay!" I said. All of the organizers working with me had been the first ones to get on the buses that would take them to wherever they found space to herd them in. Cesar was right, of course. I gave up that idea very quickly.

I recall surrounding the county jail located in downtown Fresno with hundreds of strikers holding candlelight vigils. The county jail was located inside a city park. We used the park as a rallying point from which we took turns walking around the jail facilities, which covered about two square blocks. We chanted all night so that the strikers in jail would hear us and know that we had not abandoned them. We were later told that the strikers did hear us and were motivated to do their own chanting inside, which caused extreme unrest to the jailers. They were uneasy that we would give in to violence and cause complete chaos within the jail. The arrests had ceased, since the jails throughout the county were jam-packed with strikers. They even contemplated herding us to the county fairgrounds where they were preparing the cattle barns for us. Cesar immediately met with one of the judges and put an end to that plan. By late September, Cesar was already sending some of the strikers to man the boycott cities throughout the country. The growers started to plow under any crops that they could not hide in the cold storage warehouses. Technically, the strike had ended, but we still had 1900 court hearings to deal with.

All of us pleaded not guilty and requested a trial by jury as outlined in our constitution. It is not hard to imagine the look on the prosecutor's face when Jerry Cohen presented our proposal: 1900 different trials and juries. So Cesar, being nonviolent, was going to be kind to the county and agreed to the terms of the court. The court said that if the union would stop the strike, all charges would be dropped against the people arrested for breaking the court injunctions.

With that problem solved, we packed our gear and headed for La Paz, our new mountain home. From there I was assigned to the Los Angeles boycott. My job was to keep the scab lettuce out of East Los Angeles. It didn't take the community to long to switch from lettuce to shredded cabbage. Danny Montoya, one of our youngest upcoming organizers, was instrumental in making that happen. I was sent to Oxnard, then to Porterville.

There is so much more to write about: The time we found out that there was a plot to assassinate Cesar, but the would-be assassin could not bring himself to kill this man and turned himself in to the feds; the trip east to pick up the strikers and volunteers from their boycott city and bring them back to Fresno to attend the union's second annual convention; or the time that a couple of lettuce growers signed contracts with our union. So many things happened so quickly that we had trouble just trying to keep up.

Most memorable of all were the thousands upon thousands of people we met and with whom we struggled together. They were good people, wanting to work for a living so that they would not have to ask this government for handouts; strong people, whose children were being cared for by friends or relatives while they endured hardships in the jails;

dedicated people, who held their ground under adverse conditions; and most of all, people who wanted to better their lives by hard work, not by burning up the field.

By 1975, all strike activity had come to a screeching halt. The state of California had introduced a better tool, as they claimed, to resolve future disputes in the fields of California. The newly formed Agricultural Labor Relations Board had been established by the Democrats, but by the time it was put to use, the Republicans had taken over the state. The new agency became a political football, which in turn became a useless tool for both sides. By law, the union could not declare a company on strike unless the union followed certain procedures. The procedures were being ignored at the highest level, thus making it impossible to win any more contracts. At this point, I decided to leave the union and pursue something more exciting than waiting around for the state to decide my future.

In 1975, I decided to hire out and work for the Santa Fe Railway Express Company. My wife died in November of that year at age 38, and my children were all in college, so there wasn't anybody to keep me at home. I began as a switchman, then became a brakeman, fireman, and finally, a locomotive engineer. I was sent to Topeka, Kansas, in 1978, and there I passed my training and examinations for my locomotive engineer license and certificate. I continued to work for the railroad until I was able to find something more suitable. As a railroad engineer, I was required to stay on call 24 hours a day, seven days a week, 365 days per year. I made very good money, but I could never spend it. So in 1984 I headed back to my hometown. I could always land a job in Los Angeles.

I decided to go back to college and finish my bachelor's degree in education. I graduated with honors from California State University at Long Beach and pursued a career in teaching. My assignments took me to Watts, then to East Los Angeles to teach drafting at my old *alma mater*, Roosevelt High School, in Boyle Heights. This job was very highly stressful. Roosevelt had about 4000 students at that time; in addition there were teachers, support staff, plant maintenance staff, and groundskeepers. The school plant was like a micro-city. I was not really happy moving back to East Los Angeles. Things had gotten worse. There were more gangs, drugs, graffiti, and gridlock. I kept remembering how much I loved the desert and the people in Coachella and decided to move back to the desert to teach. I was hired by the Coachella Valley Unified School District in 1988 as a vocational programs facilitator and ended up teaching mathematics in bilingual classrooms until my retirement. I loved my job and still do. I continued my education and completed my graduate work at California State University at San Bernardino. I graduated as a vocational educator.

To this day, I continue to work for the district as a substitute teacher. I just cannot stay away from the children. They have kept me young all of these years. In order to keep busy and continue doing the work I love, I opened a private tutoring service so that I can keep trying to help educating these youngsters to the very end.

I really hope that some day, more of our youth will want to hear the rest of these historical events; there is so much more to tell.