

Ruben Montoya 1970–1974

My name is Ruben Montoya and I was living in San Jose, California, when my wife, Daneen, and I got involved with the movement in 1969. I started out making picket signs for those who wanted to picket Safeway and other supermarkets. There was no boycott office in San Jose at that time. I think that the first time we had anything to do with Delano was when we registered voters for the state. We would sit at a table in front of a supermarket, usually on the east side, and guys known as “bird dogs” would approach customers as they were getting out of their cars and bring them to our tables. Because Robert Kennedy was running, Cesar sent workers up from Delano. The person we mostly worked with was Dale Van Pelt. He was good. With his help we registered 300 people in two weeks. By the way, Bob Kennedy won Santa Clara County.

Somewhere about this time, I think, Frank and Elizabeth Rodriguez opened a United Farm Workers Organizing Committee (UFWOC) office in San Jose. We started to give them more of our time. We started to picket more stores; we went to other unions and gave talks on the boycott; we went to churches to ask them to collect food for us to bring to Delano; and we silk-screened Huelga flags and picket signs. Whenever my garage got full of canned goods, I would rent a trailer, tape a sign that read “Another Load of Food for Striking Farmworkers” on the back, and deliver it to the Filipino Hall in Delano. One time while delivering a load of food, a car passed us somewhere near Delano and as they went around everyone in the car stuck their arm out the window and gave us the finger.

About this time, Frank and Liz were talking about moving to Delano to start up Taller Grafico (Graphic Shop), a store that would sell posters, political buttons, pins, T-shirts, etc. They sold them through the mail (I laid out their first catalog and had it printed) and at union rallies. Somehow Cesar found out about our graphic art and printing experience and we were asked to come to Delano to work with Taller Grafico and help set up a print shop.

I quit my job to work for the union. Since the Forty Acres was not finished yet, we moved to a converted tuberculosis sanitarium near Keene, California, that the union had just purchased. We were the second family in what later became known as La Paz. Lupe and Kathy Murguia were there with their family. (By the time I left in 1974 there were more than 100 people living and working in La Paz.) Lupe was sort of the caretaker of the place, along with Mike Krackow. My wife and two sons moved into one of the nurses’ quarters.

I was living in Santa Barbara because the Catholic diocese of Los Angeles was going to close its print shop there and had said they were going to give the union all the equipment. Cesar wanted me to become familiar with the equipment before it was moved. I traveled back and forth between La Paz and Santa Barbara with material I had printed for Taller Grafico, such as bumper stickers, forms, posters, etc. We even printed a farmworker calendar with pictures drawn by Andy Zermeno. Andy was also living at La Paz by this time. He did a lot of artwork for the union, including a set of stamps for the union to sell through Taller Grafico.

The Catholic Church moved the presses from Santa Barbara to Los Angeles, and I went to L.A. with the presses to continue printing. The print shop manager, Bill Sutton, was very helpful in teaching me to run the equipment. The church later decided not to give the equipment to the union, so I moved back to La Paz and went to work for *El Malcriado*, the union newspaper. Blaze Bonpane and Venustiano Olguin were the editor and writer for the newspaper. Elaine was the typist, Maria Rifo was the proofer, Glen Percy was the photographer, and Glen's wife, Sue, drew editorial cartoons. I laid out the paper and took it to Fresno to be printed until we got our own web press.

During this time we worked out of an office above the accounting office while a Butler building print shop was being built. Jim Lefever and Mike Krackow, along with some other volunteers, built the print shop. Since the presses were not donated, we had to find other presses. Cesar, Andy Anzeldua, Blase Bonpane, and I, along with two of Cesar's security guys and the dogs, went to the San Francisco Bay area to look for presses. We found a shop that was going out of business and got the presses for a good price. Once the building was finished, the presses were moved in and we went into operation. Brad Washburn was the pressman. The staff of *El Malcriado* also moved into the new building. We had only small presses, no web press yet, so the newspaper still had to be taken to Fresno to be printed.

Sometimes I drove a bus filled with farmworkers from Delano to San Francisco to picket the supermarkets. Once the bus was so heavy it wouldn't go up one of the steep San Francisco hills, so everyone had to get out so it could get moving. Once we pulled up to a Fosters Freeze stand and let 40 or so farmworkers order hamburgers.

Sometimes we were asked to picket along with the farmworkers. We were sent to picket at the Guimarra farm once when a group of Teamsters from L.A. was brought in to beat up the strikers. We got there in time to see sheriffs everywhere, so we decided not to join the picket line. The sheriffs of Kern County were no help to the striking farmworkers. Once at a grower's house in Bakersfield, we went to picket early one morning when we were told that anyone still on the scene in five minutes time would be arrested. We looked around and everybody was gone, so we left, too.

Sometime in 1971, Daneen and I got divorced, and she returned to San Jose with our sons. I stayed at La Paz. The stress of working for the union played a part in our divorce. In 1972 I met Claire Walter, who was taking care of Nick and Virginia Jones's kids. There was no cook in the cafeteria at the time, so anyone who wanted to eat there pooled their money and took turns cooking. Claire and I were assigned Tuesday breakfast together. I helped her with the kids by taking them to Tehachapi and Bakersfield once in a while. She helped me at *El Malcriado* by running headlines and bringing me supper when we had to work late. In March of 1974 we got married in the meeting room. Glen Percy, who was a minister, officiated. Claire's parents came from Pennsylvania. Cesar couldn't stay for the wedding, the first one at La Paz, but he did meet Claire's father, a sociology professor who was very

happy to meet and talk with Cesar.

In May of 1974 we moved to Pennsylvania and I got a job running a small press in a little town near Claire's hometown of Johnstown when we first arrived. Over the years I have worked in several print and silkscreen shops and now run my own screen shop.

There is so much more to write about, and every time I reread this I think of more that I could say. But I will say that I am glad that I could be there to help the farmworkers get a union. I'm also glad that I got to meet and work for Cesar Chavez. He was a great man.
VIVA LA CAUSA!