

Joel Glick 1971–1973

I first became involved in the United Farm Workers boycott on a Saturday morning during my senior year of high school in 1969. A group of students at Lakewood High School in Southern California had decided to do leafleting in support of the grape boycott outside Boys Market in Lakewood Center. I believe that the action was organized by Minerva Castillo, a local Democratic Party activist and the mother of one of my classmates, Sylvia Castillo.

The leaflets that we distributed were of the generic “Don’t Buy Grapes” variety. We were not engaged in a secondary boycott against the supermarket. The manager, however, was absolutely furious. He not only called the police, but also contacted the “Housewives United to Protect Food Prices,” a front for the John Birch Society. Two well-dressed gentlemen, who were obviously not housewives, soon showed up and began handing out their own leaflets, accusing Cesar Chavez of being part of a grand communist conspiracy to take control of our nation’s food supply.

Most of the shoppers were fairly receptive to our message. The largest employer in the area at the time was Douglas Aircraft (where my father worked). The workers at Douglas were represented by the UAW, so they had some familiarity with UFWOC and the grape boycott. On the other hand, we did encounter some outright hostility. As I tried to hand a leaflet to one middle-aged woman, she proceeded to take a Band-Aid off her knee and show me her scab. It took me a few minutes to figure out that she was trying to tell me, “I’m a scab and proud of it!”

A couple months later, Minnie brought a group of us to Delano. She had been collecting food and supplies for the UFW and made periodic trips there to drop them off. During the drive, Minnie taught the non-Spanish speakers how to correctly pronounce “Santana,” which she played on her eight-track all the way to Delano.

When we arrived at the Forty Acres, we attended a dinner, rally, and dance. I don’t think Cesar was there, but we met Larry Itliong, some of the other UFW leaders, and a number of the strikers.

Months later, I was shopping at Ploughboys Market with my parents when I saw the very first lugs of grapes with the UFWOC label on the side. I was excited and proud; I insisted that my parents buy some union grapes.

These first experiences with the boycott must have had a major impact on me because I remained involved, in one way or another, with the UFW for another six years.

My first experience volunteering full time for the UFW was during the summer of 1971. I don’t remember how I got recruited, but the union was in the middle of the “Wine Nine”

campaign against Beringer, Mondavi, Almaden, and six other wine companies that had not yet signed contracts. As a result of the secondary boycott, a number of drugstores and supermarkets in the Los Angeles area had already agreed to take the Wine Nine off their shelves. The current target of the secondary boycott was Clark's Drug Stores.

The owner, Mr. Clark, was a Catholic and had been a supporter of Robert Kennedy. Chris Hartmire and Dale Van Pelt had tried, unsuccessfully, to use contacts in the Catholic Church and the Democratic Party to persuade Clark to honor the boycott.

A relatively common UFW boycott tactic in those days was to picket the homes of presidents and CEOs of targeted chain stores. So one afternoon, Mr. Clark and his family encountered nearly 50 boycotters chanting, singing, and marching around in front of his home in the hills of Encino. After about half an hour of picketing, a couple of neighbor boys on Stingray bikes approached the picket line and pointed to another house on a neighboring hill. "See that house?" they told us. "Steve Allen lives there."

I ran over to our picket captain and told him the news. "Steve Allen is a long-time UFW supporter," I told him. "When I was in junior high school, I did a report on a book he wrote about farmworkers." I couldn't remember the name of the book, though. Then we then turned around to look at Steve Allen's house and noticed a woman waving at us from the backyard. We immediately decided to send a delegation to Steve Allen's house. I was appointed to lead the delegation since I had, after all, read his book about farmworkers. Three of us walked up the hill and rang Steve Allen's doorbell. A maid's voice came through the little screen on the front door. "Who's there?" she asked.

"We're volunteers with the United Farm Workers and we'd like to talk to Jayne Meadows, please."

"She's not here," the maid told us abruptly.

"Well some lady was waving at us from the backyard."

The maid immediately changed her tune. "Wait a minute. I'll see if she's here."

A few minutes later a very familiar voice came through the screen.

"I noticed the United Farm Workers signs down the street. Steve and I have supported the farmworkers for many years."

"Yes, I know. I read your husband's book. It's what first got me interested in the farmworkers," I told her truthfully.

"Oh, you mean *The Ground is Our Table*."

“That’s right,” I said.

“Well, I’d invite you in, but I’ve got a cold.” She didn’t sound like she had a cold, but she probably didn’t have her makeup on. “Please tell me why you’re picketing.”

We proceeded to tell her about the Wine Nine boycott and how we were trying to get her neighbor Mr. Clark to take the boycotted wines off the shelves of his stores. Ms. Meadows was friendly and gracious. She offered to prepare snacks for us next time we picketed Mr. Clark’s house.

A few days later, the management of Clark’s Drug Stores announced that they would no longer sell the Wine Nine until the companies reached a settlement with the United Farm Workers. At our next weekly boycott meeting, which was held at the Migrant Ministry office in Los Angeles, Chris Hartmire announced that the UFW had received a copy of a letter that Steve Allen had written to Mr. Clark. In the letter, Mr. Allen mentioned that one afternoon, he had noticed some young people picketing Mr. Clark’s house. The letter went on to explain many of the issues involved in the farmworker movement. It ended with Mr. Allen asking his neighbor to support the boycott.

Shortly thereafter, the Wine Nine signed contracts with the UFW, and that particular boycott ended. Though I’ll never know for sure, I’ll always believe that our brief encounter with Jayne Meadows played a role in the victory.

Following the Wine Nine campaign, I was assigned to the Orange County boycott for the duration of the summer of 1971. About six or seven full-time volunteers were working under the direction of Mel Huey. We lived together in a rented house in a working-class neighborhood in Costa Mesa. The boycott target that summer was Mayfair Markets, which had many stores throughout the Los Angeles area. Mayfair Markets was owned by the Arden-Mayfair Company, which also owned the A & M chain of discount supermarkets in Southern California and produced Arden milk products.

Coincidentally, I had once worked for Arden-Mayfair. The company owned the Farrell’s Ice Cream Parlors in Southern California. I had worked as a cook at the Farrell’s in Downey during my senior year of high school.

Our daily regimen was probably similar to that of UFW boycotters across the country. Six days a week, our day would begin at about 7 a.m. We had a phonograph at the house, and I had brought over my treasured Folkways album of union songs. It had the Almanac Singers on one side and Pete Seeger and Chorus (a.k.a. the Weavers) on the other. Mel would blast out “Solidarity Forever,” which would both wake us up and inspire us for the day’s work.

Following a hearty breakfast of cereal, eggs, and, sometimes, canned menudo, Mel would drop us off in pairs at one of the Mayfair or A&M markets throughout Orange County. Our supplies were picket signs, leaflets, and sack lunches. On the weekends, we would often receive some help from farmworkers and local supporters. On weekdays, however, we generally spent eight hours boycotting by ourselves. I say “boycotting” rather than “picketing” because we really couldn’t set up a picket line with just two people, but we could, and did, turn away a lot of customers from the stores.

Here’s how we did it: We knew that once people got as far as the front door of the supermarket, they were rarely willing to walk back to their cars and shop somewhere else. So rather than stand in front of the supermarket door, we would approach people as they were pulling up in their cars or as they were just getting out of their cars.

We wore homemade signs that were attached to us with string around our necks. The signs generally said something like “Boycott A &M Markets, Support Farm Workers, UFWOC, AFL-CIO.” We would hand the customers a two-sided 5-by-8 leaflet and quickly say, “Please support Cesar Chavez and the United Farm Workers by not shopping at A&M Markets. We are trying to persuade A&M to not sell non-union lettuce.” Sometimes we would engage in lengthier (but not too lengthy) discussions, especially given the rather complicated nature of the issues regarding the Teamster contracts with the lettuce growers and the fact that A&M employees were unionized. The other supermarkets where we were encouraging customers to shop were also selling non-union lettuce, so often it required some quick explaining to persuade people to shop elsewhere.

Most of the time, customers who were either pro-union or pro-UFW would turn around and drive away. The majority of customers, however, ignored us. Some were openly hostile. (Remember, we were in Orange County, home of Walter Knott and a bastion of the John Birch Society.) If a customer turned away, we would add that person to our count on the back of our signs.

We did this eight hours a day, six days a week! Sometimes, business would be slow, in which case Russell Gray, whom I often boycotted with, would take out his harmonica, which he was teaching himself to play Sonny Terry-style.

After eight hours in front of the supermarkets, Mel would finally pick us up and take us home, where we’d prepare something out of boxes and cans that we had received as donations from local churches. If it was payday, we generally spent our \$5 on cheap beer (one of the boycotters, a young woman named Debbie, used to call it “piss water”). Sometimes we’d go out to a dollar movie. Once, we actually saved enough from our \$5 a week to go to Disneyland.

On Saturdays and Sundays, farmworkers would sometimes be brought in to the L.A. area to help us with the boycott. Russ and I would often entertain at the dinners and rallies held on Saturday evening. I’d play guitar and sing songs like “You’ve Gotta Go Down and Join

the Union,” “Solidarity Forever,” “Union Maid,” and “Swinging on a Scab” accompanied by Russell, who got very good on the harmonica after so many hours of practicing in the supermarket parking lots. Of course, we also performed all the farmworker standards like “*Solidaridad Pa’ Siempre*” and “*De Colores*.”

I often wonder how Chris Hartmire felt about all the anti-religious Wobbly songs that we’d perform. “You’ll get pie in the sky when you die, that’s a lie,” we’d sing, or “If you’ve had enough of the blood of the lamb, then come join the Grand Industrial Band.” Though I don’t remember Chris ever voicing any objection to them, I do recall Dale Van Pelt once commenting, “You know, for some of us, our religious beliefs are the reason we’re involved in this struggle.”

In the fall of 1971, having finished my three months of working full time on the boycott, I returned to Long Beach City College. I started a “Friends of the Farm Workers” organization on campus, which raised money and made sure that the cafeteria sold only UFW lettuce. By spring, however, I had had enough of school was ready to return to the UFW full time.

I think that, in many ways, the spring of 1972 was a high point for the UFW boycott in Southern California. There were full-time boycott teams in Long Beach, Los Angeles, the San Fernando Valley, the San Gabriel Valley, and Orange County. This time, I was assigned to the boycott in my hometown of Long Beach. Ken Doyle led the boycott in Long Beach. About six of us shared a rented two-bedroom apartment.

Most of my days in Long Beach were similar to those that I had spent in Orange County. A big difference, however, was that I knew most of the local political activists and organizations in Long Beach. For that reason, we spent a lot more time doing community outreach, and we received more help picketing the supermarkets than we had in Orange County.

This was the time of the “Farmworker Weekends.” The UFW would bring farmworkers into L.A. almost every weekend to participate in the boycott. Having the farmworkers with us in front of the supermarkets made us much more credible with the shoppers. We would generally work in pairs: one volunteer and one farmworker would approach the shoppers. Shoppers were much less likely to ignore the boycotters when a genuine farmworker was standing in front of them, even if the farmworker spoke no English. On Saturday evenings, we’d have dinner and a rally.

At the rallies after dinner at the Ward A.M.E. Church, each boycott team would give a report on how many shoppers they had turned away and relate an amusing incident that had occurred that day. Jessica Govea would usually sing “*La Paloma*” and the farmworker standards. I would sing songs like “Swinging on a Scab” and “Roll the Union On.” The

farmworkers would sleep over, and we usually had a Sunday morning religious service before the farmworkers returned home on Sunday morning.

It was during the spring of 1972 that the National Labor Relations Board issued a ruling that the United Farm Workers could no longer engage in secondary boycotts. I'm sure that the documents at Wayne State University can shed more light on the NLRB's rationale than I can. However, my recollection is the ruling had to do with the UFW representing some packing shed workers who were covered by federal labor laws, which outlaw secondary boycotts.

The ruling was outrageous and unfair. Farmworkers would not enjoy the benefits of federal labor laws such as the right to union representation elections. The UFW would, however, be subject to the restrictions imposed on unions covered by Taft-Hartley.

The UFW's response to the NLRB was to launch a unique campaign. We suspended our boycott activities and generated letters, not to the NLRB, but to Senator Robert Dole, chairman of the Republican National Committee. We stood out in front of supermarkets and asked people to sign these letters (handwritten either by them or us) to Senator Dole, asking him to tell the NLRB not to attack farmworkers. Then we would put bumper stickers on people's cars that said "*Abajo con los republicanos*" and "Republicans Hate Farm Workers." At the Farmworker Weekend rallies, instead of reporting on the number of shoppers we'd turned away, we reported on how many letters we had collected and bumper stickers we had placed on cars.

I don't know who came up with the idea for this campaign, but to my surprise, it actually worked. After sending tens of thousands of letters to Senator Dole, the NLRB issued another decision, which allowed the UFW to continue the secondary boycotts.

The evening that the new NLRB decision was announced, our supporters in Long Beach got together for a victory celebration party. After drinking a few beers, I took out my guitar. Someone requested the Bob Dylan song, "You Ain't Goin' Nowhere." When I got to the line, "I don't care how many letters they send," we all cracked up.

I returned to Long Beach City College during the fall semester of 1972. Then I decided to go to Cuernavaca, Mexico, to study Spanish during the spring of 1973. After a couple of months in Cuernavaca and another couple of weeks traveling around the Yucatan, I was almost out of money and decided it was time to head for home. I didn't have any particular plans, however, so I thought that rather than take the train back to California from Merida, I'd fly to Tampa and then take a bus up to New York to visit my aunt, uncle, and cousins.

While staying with my relatives, I realized that I had some time to kill before my classes began in the fall, so I decided to contact the local UFW boycott to see if they could use

some help. The answer was, as always, affirmative. Dolores Huerta was directing the boycott in New York at that time.

Our secondary boycott target was Pathmark, a chain of big-box stores on the East Coast. One morning after a couple of us were dropped off in front of Pathmark in Brooklyn, two rather creepy-looking men got out of a car. One was small and thin; the other was tall and heavysset. The small one asked us what we were doing. After we told them about the lettuce boycott and the UFW, the smaller man informed us, "You got to go picket somewhere else. We've got action on this parking lot." I had no idea what this guy was talking about. What the hell was "action" and who was he to tell us that we couldn't picket there?

I told him that we had a right to picket and had no intention of moving. At that point the big goon got out of the car and proceeded to kick me in the ass. He injured my pride more than he did my butt. My companion, a native New Yorker, insisted that we get out of there pronto. "Those guys are in the mob," she told me. "They don't mess around."

I insisted that we file a complaint at the local police station. The cops took the report but seemed to have no interest in investigating the incident any further.

A couple of weeks later, I was assigned duty at the Hunts Point Produce Market, New York's central produce terminal located in the Bronx. The duty at Hunts Point required us to get up at the crack of dawn, picket the wholesalers, follow the trucks out of the terminal, and, finally, picket the produce markets that were selling scab lettuce.

One morning we followed a truck all the way to Jersey City. As we were approaching the George Washington Bridge, a traffic cop pulled us over. "Please let us go," my companion told the officer. "We're with Cesar Chavez. We're following a truck full of scab lettuce. We need to know where it's going." Much to my surprise, the cop let us go without so much as a warning. New York was definitely not like California!

Jersey City was another story, however. As soon as the truck unloaded at a produce store, we got out our signs and began picketing on the sidewalk. The manager immediately called the police. An officer in a squad car soon arrived and decided to place the two of us under arrest. We placed our picket signs and leaflets in the trunk of the squad car and got into the back seat. The cop didn't bother to handcuff us. When we arrived at the station, the cop tried to explain the reason for the arrest to his superior officer. "You can't arrest them for that!" the cop was told. The cop then asked us to get back into the car. He brought us back to the produce market, opened the trunk, gave us back our signs and leaflets and drove away. In all my years of political activity, which includes countless demonstrations and picket lines, that was the only time I've ever been arrested.

One morning following a meeting with New York boycott volunteers, someone approached Dolores Huerta with distressing information: "I just heard on the news that the Teamsters have signed contracts with the grape growers in California." Dolores was

visibly upset. She made some comment about how this was really an opportunity to take on all the growers at once, but I could tell that she was just trying to keep up our spirits.

Up until that moment, the UFW had made slow but steady progress in its efforts to organize the nation's farmworkers. The loss of the grape contracts in 1973, however, represented a serious setback. Thirty years later, the UFW has still not fully recovered from that devastating blow.