

## Nancy Quigley 1972–1973

I lived at La Paz in the early 1970s, for about two years. Jack, my husband then, and I came to the farmworkers' union with Glen and Susan Percy. We were fresh from another volunteer effort in southwest Georgia, eager and ready for the simple lifestyle of the union, unfazed by the \$5-per-week salary, the demand for long hours, and the inconvenient housing arrangements. In surprising ways, those years were easy and happy for me. There was a clear commitment to a worthy cause, and there was a wonderful sense of community. Our neighbors were dedicated, lively, eccentric people of varying ages, from various ports-of-call, Chicanos and Anglos, working side by side. We lived in the tiny town of Keene in trailers, hospital rooms, and half-houses. We were kids, families, single folks, and older people. (I remember the charming Maria Rifo from Chile and the cantankerous bearded skinny maintenance guy with a twinkle, Mike Kratkov.)

I used my nursing background to work in the clinic in Delano two days a week—midweek, when the doctors were off and the clinic was open only for emergencies and acute care. The clinic was open for regular hours on the weekends, when patients were able to come. I was very impressed by the commitment of the staff, including its four young doctors. I would hear the doctors on the phone talking to someone in Atlanta or New York City, an expert on this or that illness that was new to the staff or complicated or perplexing. Their goal was to give the patients the state-of-the-art best possible care. The clinic was new, thoughtfully planned, well stocked, cool, and welcoming. There was a lab, an x-ray, beds for recuperating, and a pharmacy. The patients were union staff, farmworkers and their families, Filipinos and Mexican, even Arab workers. They had to pay a small amount at each visit, encouraging ownership of the place and of their care. My Spanish was pretty minimal, but the folks were patient with me, and I learned a little as time went on from my best translator, Bea Chavez. I examined patients of all ages, ran tests in the lab, counted pills in the pharmacy, retrieved medical records. Long days, but I enjoyed them and even came to appreciate the hour-long drive from and back to La Paz. The mornings were especially lovely—the bright poppies in the fields alongside the road, the morning mist on the mountains, the snow peaks further up in Tehachapi, and the hot flat fields of the San Joaquin Valley.

My nurse duties in La Paz were sparse. I gave a few vitamin B-12 shots, immunized the children of the staff, and worried over a feverish baby one night and a child with croup another. A visiting lawyer was bitten on her leg by the dogs, and I tried to take care of her wounds. I swabbed throats for strep, listened to lungs when someone was coughing, sent someone to the hospital with appendicitis. I learned a bit about nontraditional approaches to illness, like the use of garlic for a toothache. I consulted by phone with the doctors at the clinic for this ailment or that, but I think their impression of the La Paz population was that we were a few too many hypochondriacs. We were, on the whole, healthy, but stress, fatigue, and loneliness affected more than a few.

I also worked part time in the accounting office. My job was to go through check copies for various accounts each month, recalculating until everything balanced to the penny. Outside the office, I had enough spare time to bake bread, hang out the laundry on a dry warm day, eat lunch with my husband, visit the Tehachapi library for books, take a walk after dinner, or play cards with neighbors. There were impromptu parties; we had a piano, and I tried to learn to play "*De Colores*." We were glued to the television for the evening news after work as Watergate unfolded. Sometimes there were community meetings in the evenings to discuss a union issue or a community problem or sometimes to listen to a speaker. I remember gathering for communion—baskets of tortillas passed, wine poured. I remember the death of a new baby, the La Paz family concerned, sobered, caring. I remember the big garden and baskets of its harvest. I can picture women in the community kitchen gathered to make hundreds of tortillas for some dinner, hands covered with flour, each tortilla perfectly round, chattering with one another. I learned to make flour tortillas from Carolina Vasquez, our neighbor in the trailer next door—no recipe, just a feel for the right balance of ingredients.

I was never involved in the politics or the projects of the union, except at the fringes. The day-to-day problems and the struggles of the farmworkers were being discussed and dealt with just a few doors away, but the intensity of these issues seemed distant. It was certainly a stressful time, with strikes, confrontations with the Teamsters, a death in the fields, and Cesar's fasting. But my memories are mostly of one-on-one relationships, of families working and playing together, of like-minded coworkers committed to the cause. The uniqueness of that experience provided a richness and color to my young life then, and I am proud and so glad to have been a small part of that effort.