

Ellen Eggers 1972–1987

The years I spent working for the United Farm Workers, particularly my years as a boycott organizer, changed my life more profoundly than any experience I can think of. It's a little scary to know that I ended up with the union not because of any careful planning or burning desire to help farmworkers, but simply as the result of a casual conversation with a friend during my senior year of college in January of 1972.

I mentioned to him that I was looking for volunteer work I could do between college graduation and the fall, when I hoped to start graduate school in social work. Steve told me about the Board of Home Missions with his Presbyterian Church. Though I was Catholic, I was interested. He gave me a small brochure that unfolded into a large sheet displaying brief descriptions of hundreds of volunteer programs throughout the U.S. One of the programs was the National Farm Worker Ministry.

As I recall, the description was just one sentence long. We would be helping to organize the UFW lettuce boycott in Los Angeles. That was about it. It may have mentioned Cesar Chavez, but at the time, I wasn't that clear about who he was. I remember getting him mixed up with Che Guevara!

Nevertheless, as a social work major, the job intrigued me. One draw was that it was in California. I'd never been that far west, and my older brother lived in San Francisco and was studying for the bar. I could visit Jay! So I applied and was accepted. I learned that the volunteer stipend was "room, board, and \$5 per week." I remember thinking, "OK, well, I'll be there for about 12 weeks, so I'll make \$60 for the summer. And if I like the job, maybe they will offer me a 'real' paid job on the union staff." I would later learn that there were no paid staff jobs with this union. Everyone, even Cesar, worked for the volunteer stipend. And I certainly didn't end the summer with \$60 in my pocket!

And so, on June 5, 1972, at the age of 20, I headed to California with three other co-ed friends. I dropped them off in Denver and Jackson Hole, Wyoming, and drove the rest of the way by myself. After 15 hours of straight driving, I finally made it to Reno and spent the night. The next morning I was refreshed and enthused. The sky was blue, I was crossing over the Sierra, and Cat Stevens was singing *Morning Has Broken* on the radio. Life couldn't be much better as I cruised Interstate 80 toward San Francisco.

The first week I spent with my brother in S.F. I remember purposely making a lot of head lettuce salads for us. My thinking was that I'd better eat lettuce now, while I still could, since I knew that after I got to L.A.—that'd be it. I would later look back on my flippant attitude with a little disgust and humility. It sometimes helped me to withhold judgment when I encountered the "scabs" in the Safeway parking lot—the folks who would brush past me when I urged them not to shop there. How could I expect them to be enlightened when I myself had been purposely eating lettuce just a few short weeks before I joined the boycott staff?

Arrival in Los Angeles and Assignment to Our Boycott House

The National Farm Worker Ministry, the organization that recruited me, had directed us to meet at a church on Sepulveda Boulevard in Los Angeles on the morning of June 15, or thereabouts. When I arrived at the church, I found that there were about 10 to 15 other young people there for the same reason: to work for the UFW. The head of the group was the Reverend Wayne C. “Chris” Hartmire, a person who would stay my friend and mentor for the rest of my life. I was immediately impressed with him. He seemed to me to be as smart as he was kind. He was about 40, with an enthusiastic and attractive boyish face, obviously very knowledgeable, and just a wonderfully nice and engaging person. He led our meeting by telling us a little bit about the UFW. From Chris’s quiet intensity and demeanor, I could tell this was something that really mattered. What I remember most was that we spent much of that afternoon in a dark room, watching three or four films about “the Union.” I remember liking all the films a lot. One was *Decision at Delano*, a BBC film, and possibly *Harvest of Shame*. Several were black-and-white films, but they were all impressive, and as soon as the lights went back on I felt very excited about the work that we would be doing. With “fire in the belly,” my days of eating head lettuce were unquestionably over!

Either that afternoon or the next, our group of “recruits” was divided and assigned to an area of L.A. and to a “coordinator.” My coordinator was Ruth Shy, a wiry, energetic, smiling woman from St. Louis, who had been with the union for several years. I liked Ruth right away. I could tell she was smart, sure of herself and her job, well organized, and determined. Like Chris Hartmire, she immediately left me with the impression that what “we” were doing was vitally important, and I sensed that I would learn a lot from Ruth. Ruth was probably in her late 30s, about 5’7” with shoulder-length brown hair and glasses, and she chain-smoked. Her appearance was tidy enough, but it was also clear she had better things to do than “put herself together!” She had a quiet, rather sarcastic sense of humor, grinned a lot, and was a workaholic. Ruth was single-purposed, like so many of the union organizers. When I think of her that first summer, I always picture her at her desk, one light on at 1 or 2 a.m., poring over lists, notes, and plans for the next day, cigarette in hand. She was always the last to go to bed and the first one up in the morning. During her previous years with the union she had worked directly with Cesar at the headquarters at La Paz and seemed to have answers, good answers, to every question I had. Ruth was my inspiration that summer. I would later learn that there were many smart, dedicated, and good people like Ruth working for the union.

With Ruth at the helm, our group was assigned to the San Fernando Valley, north of L.A. beyond the Hollywood Hills. We were about eight people. Those I remember now are Alicia Calahorra, a pretty woman from Spain, about my age; Victor Gonzalez, an amusing and very gung-ho Chicano teenager just out of high school; Winnie Arballo, a 40-year-old lettuce striker from Santa Maria, who had a long black ponytail down his back (he had been growing his hair since the strike started in 1970, after making a spiritual promise not to cut

his hair until they won the strike); Kathy Mueller, a nun from the Sisters of Loretto; and Mimi Knox, a cute, smart, curly-haired hippie woman, also my age.

The first order of business for our group was to find a place to live. Our house would also be our boycott office, from where we would coordinate the operation for our area. These spots became known, quite appropriately, as “boycott houses.” I believe that there were about six or seven boycott houses in the L.A. area in the summer of 1972. Our job, like everyone else’s, was to persuade the folks in our area to stop buying iceberg head lettuce. I had no idea how this would be accomplished, but under Ruth’s leadership, I would soon find out.

I recall the day we searched for a house very well. Our group gathered at the apartment of Cynthia and Warren Bonta, a young couple with two toddlers, who were also boycott organizers. We used their apartment as a base and spent an afternoon looking through the newspaper for a house to rent in the valley. At some point, I learned that we had found a hot prospect in Northridge, but the landlady wanted to meet us first, not an unreasonable request, since we were an unrelated group of people wanting to use her house as our headquarters.

Our landlady, as it turned out, was none other than Christine Jorgensen, famous for having undergone a sex change in the 1950s. When I learned she would be our new landlady, I was in shock. I had an image of what California would be like, and so far it was not disappointing me. I remember laughing so hard, mostly because I was just incredulous that so soon I would be meeting someone I had read about in *Newsweek* years before. “Only in California,” I thought. We all met Christine Jorgensen at her rental house. She was wearing a pantsuit, a wide-brimmed hat, sunglasses, lots of charm bracelets, and was dripping with perfume, make-up, and flamboyance. I watched in awe as Ruth explained what we were about and how we intended to use her place. She was cool with it, though. “That’s what’s nice about ‘Americana,’” she exclaimed. “You can do what you want! Just don’t burn the house down!” We closed the deal and our little house on Canby Avenue, not far from CSU Northridge, would be our home for the summer. As we were moving into our place, the other coordinators, Fred Ross, Jr. and Jessica Govea among them, were finding their own staff housing in other areas of Los Angeles. The L.A. boycott was under way for the summer of 1972.

The 1972 Summer House Meeting Campaign

Our job under Ruth Shy that summer was to “organize.” We first had to learn the area, so we spent several days driving around with our map, marking schools, churches, community organizations, colleges, supermarkets, etc., and listing names and addresses, so that we could return later to speak to folks at these places. Ruth had a card file of folks who had helped with the earlier grape boycott: professors at Cal State Northridge, Chicano activists with La Raza Unida Party, priests we could count on, activists from other unions, and many others. One supporter I remember was Kathleen Sexton, a white-haired, liberal, well-

to-do woman who lived in Canoga Park. I was sent to visit Kathleen to get lists of folks that she knew might help us. I spent an afternoon with Kathleen. She recounted many memories from the “old days” (1966 through 1970) and told me about people like LeRoy Chatfield, Pablo Espinozo, and others, names that meant nothing to me then, but who would show up later in my life in the union. Kathleen passed on a list of helpful contacts.

The focus of our organizing that summer was the house meeting campaign. We were told this style of meeting was how Cesar first organized farmworkers, and that it was something Cesar had learned from Fred Ross, Sr., during the CSO days. Our job was to find folks who would invite us into their home to tell the union’s story to their friends, neighbors, and family members. We learned the whole amazing story from Ruth. She recounted the roots of the union—from Cesar’s birth in Yuma, Arizona, through his departure from the urban Community Service Organization to organize on his own throughout the Central Valley, the strike, and the boycott. We learned about the sacrifices of the workers, the march to Sacramento, Cesar’s fast for nonviolence in 1968, the signing of the grape contracts in July of 1970, only to be eclipsed by the lettuce strike in August, in response to the Teamsters being invited in by the growers. At house meetings we would tell the story, answer questions, and then ask people to sign pledge cards, pledging not to eat or buy head lettuce until the growers signed with the farmworkers’ union. We collected money, sold bumper stickers and buttons, and asked for volunteers to hold their own house meeting, so that the campaign could continue. We also sold *El Malcriado*. At first, when someone told me we were going to spend the morning selling *El Malcriados*, I thought they were some kind of Mexican food, like burritos, and we’d have to sell them on street corners. Since I’d never even seen a tortilla until I came to California, this made sense to me! In fact, the *El Malcriado* (the “unruly child”) was the union newspaper that we distributed occasionally. So, in rough terms, this is how we spent the summer: house meetings, door-to-door work getting pledge cards signed, setting up public speaking opportunities for ourselves at churches, college classes, and union halls. After becoming so well-indoctrinated in the history of the union, I remember wishing that I had gotten involved years earlier—it seemed that all of the “good times,” the historic, memorable, exciting times, had already happened. While there certainly was some truth to that view, many more dramatic and memorable times lay ahead. And I am so grateful and enriched to have been a part of them.

People always wondered how we were able to live on “room and board and \$5 per week.” I don’t really know how, but it wasn’t hard. Once during the summer we did a “food drive” for ourselves. We went door to door asking people if they would help farmworkers with the lettuce boycott, and many people would donate canned goods. We never misrepresented that the food was for our own boycott operation, but most people didn’t really care about the details. There was actually quite a lot of public support for our efforts. The UFW was in the news a lot and it was pretty apparent that Cesar was well thought of. Of course he also had his detractors. Probably for every five people who thought he was a hero, there were one or two who thought he was a “commie” who should move to Russia.

We also were given surplus food donations that seemed to be part of a federal program. The food was not given directly to us, but other organizations that supported us had extra cheese, milk, and canned goods that they would sometimes pass on to us. We would also pool our money to buy groceries and cooked as a group at dinnertime. Somehow we always had enough to eat.

I also remember learning some Spanish for the first time that summer. (I had taken six years of French in school, obviously not a good choice.) So I taught myself the important phrases by asking along the way. My first Spanish became necessary when I was going door to door, getting pledge cards signed. "This is a promise not to eat or buy lettuce. *Esta es una promesa a ni comer ni comprar lechuga.*" I don't actually know if that's correct, but that's what I said! And Winnie, the lettuce striker from Santa Maria, taught me all of the words to the song "*Solidaridad Para Siempre.*" We went over and over the words one night so that I'd be able to join in the next time we sang at a union gathering. Little by little I began to build my vocabulary.

The End of the Summer of 1972 and Proposition 22

June and July went pretty quickly. After two months I was an "expert" in the life of Cesar Chavez. Though I'd never laid eyes on him yet, I could relate the gist of his life story pretty well. Through teaching others about him, I had come to know him too. So when I found out that our boycott staff would be traveling to the union's headquarters at La Paz, two hours north of L.A., I was absolutely thrilled. It didn't seem possible that Cesar Chavez would be running a staff meeting, and I was part of the "staff." I will never forget that day. Our group arrived early and entered the North Unit conference room before the designated hour. I never expected to see Cesar when I walked in. I imagined that he would be coming in last, after the room had filled. Since we were early, the room was almost empty, and yet, seated at the desk at the head of the room was Cesar, preparing notes, paying no attention to those of us who were filing in. His presence took me by surprise and I was positively mesmerized. I felt as though I were in the presence of a saint. That is literally all that I remember of that day, except for the few snapshots I took. One of Chris Hartmire and Lupe Murguia, who was at that time one of Cesar's bodyguards. Another photo of LeRoy Chatfield and Marc Grossman talking with Cesar. Others may remember the purpose of the meeting, but I was probably just sitting there taking in the experience but barely comprehending. In retrospect, the purpose of the meeting had probably been to announce that the union might soon have to fight a grower-sponsored voter initiative that was still in the signature-gathering stage. I probably was not all that interested, since I knew I would be leaving California in the third week of August. But that was soon to change also.

A few weeks later, the L.A. boycott staff was called to another large meeting, this one headed by LeRoy Chatfield. We met, I believe, at the Loyola law school near downtown L.A. We were seated in a large lecture hall. LeRoy confirmed that we would all be needed to stay on past the summer and through the November election to fight this ballot

proposition that the growers had paid for. He said if it qualified for the ballot and passed, it would be the end of the union. He told us it was a life-and-death struggle and that we would all be working seven days a week until November. Up until then we had only worked six days a week, with Sundays off. Despite LeRoy's speech, I knew I couldn't stay. I had always planned to leave at the end of the summer, and so I would.

As we left LeRoy's meeting and headed for our car to drive back to the San Fernando Valley, I will never forget my brief conversation with Ruth Shy. She just looked at me and said, "You'll be staying on, right?" I said, "No, Ruth, you know I'm planning to go back. I have to go back." That was all that was said. It seemed inconceivable that people would expect me to stay. I promised my brand-new boyfriend that I'd be home in August. It was hard enough leaving for two months. My sister Ahnee had just given birth to the first grandchild in our family. He was born in June, shortly after I'd left for California. I hadn't even seen little Nicky yet. And my college roommate was getting married in August and I had planned to go to her wedding. I had three important reasons why I had to leave.

But on the half-hour trip back to the valley, as I rode in the back seat of Ruth's car, this thought occurred to me:

"You've spent the whole summer telling people about the sacrifices that Cesar has made to build the union. Now the growers may get a law passed that would destroy the union. Ten years from now, will it matter to you whether you went home in August or November? Doubt it. But 10 years from now, it may very well matter to you whether you did the right thing when you had the chance. The right thing is to stay here where you are truly needed and where you can act on your beliefs. If you don't do the right thing, you may certainly regret it 10 years from now."

That realization changed the entire course of my life.

By the time we arrived in Northridge, my mind was made up. When we got out of the car I told Ruth I was staying. She gave me that big grin. I don't think she even said anything. She just grinned. As it turned out, that single decision to stay did change my life. I spent the next 15 years of my life connected to the movement. I would not have become a lawyer nor had my two children (at least not these two children) had it not been for that single decision to stay for Proposition 22. After talking to Ruth, I went straight to the nearest phone booth (we couldn't make toll calls from the boycott house) and called my mom in Indiana. I sobbed and sobbed and explained to her that I was staying through November because this campaign was so important. I didn't know it at the time, but that's when my mom decided that she would come out to California too, to help out. She told me later that if I had thought it was that important, it must be, so she'd join in. The passion for building, and preserving, the union was really infectious. It started at the top, with Cesar and permeated the entire staff. People knew immediately that it was something important.

My mother *did* come out to work on the campaign for the last two weeks. She got up at 4 a.m. with the rest of us and was out the door at 4:30, assembled at Lincoln Park Pavilion at 5 a.m., and out on the freeway off ramp by 6 a.m. That was our routine for many weeks, and mom kept up with us every day.

A quick story about my mom: a couple years after I had been working for the union, I learned that my mother had been supporting the first grape boycott. One time when I was home, she put an article on my dresser that she had saved from *Newsweek* from 1968 or 1969. It told the story of Cesar and the grapes. Mom put a note next to the article that said, "See, I was supporting Cesar even before you were." I then vaguely remembered that there had been a time in high school when we were at the grocery and I wanted to buy some grapes. She indicated that we weren't supposed to do that—something about helping migrant workers. That's all I remember. The apple doesn't fall far...as they say!

The Proposition 22 Campaign: August Through November

The first part of the campaign would be voter registration. We all trained and became voter registrars. Some of us became trainers, so we could recruit more registrars. We became this huge cadre of registrars and together we turned into a voter registration machine. Someone else may remember how many new people we registered in the month of September. I just know that each of us was stationed at a "good location" and that we spent all day and well into the evening, usually until 9 or 10 at night (whenever "our" store closed), and we did nothing but register new voters day after day. Our "bird dog" would drag folks over to our table. We weren't supposed to do that because we were registrars! But the bird dogs could, and they did. But at 10 p.m. when we returned to our house (by now I had been assigned to a new house, in the San Gabriel Valley, east of L.A.), our work was not over. We stayed up until 1 or 2 a.m. copying down the names and addresses of the newly registered Democrats. The Democratic Party was paying us 25 cents for each name. With all of us working and registering 50 or more per person, we probably had 200 to 400 more names each day, just at our house. So that could bring in as much as \$100 per day, money the union sorely needed. But those days were long and tiring. When the registration campaign came to an end at the beginning of October, I was glad to be doing something else.

The "something else" was really a trip! Someone found out that the initiative had qualified because many of the people who signed the petitions had been given false information. Some were told that it would lower food prices, other were told it was an initiative to "help farmworkers." The signature gatherers were paid piece rate and would often do or say whatever it took to get people to sign. So the union decided that we would try what had never been tried before: to have the proposition removed from the ballot because of fraud.

Our staff spent two weeks contacting people who had signed. It was a very organized campaign. We divided up into areas, organized copies of the petitions by area, and started knocking on doors. We'd talk to the people who signed and find out what they were told. Our goal was to get them to sign a preprinted declaration affirming that they had been

given false information. This was not altogether an easy task, as you might imagine. We were telling them they had been swindled by a stranger into signing a legal document. Now we wanted them to sign another legal document based upon what we (another stranger) were telling them. Trust us! Yeah, right! Nevertheless, despite the odds against us, our staff collected 6000 signed declarations in two weeks. I think about that now and am just blown away that we could get so many declarations in that time. We took them to the L.A. district attorney and asked him to prosecute the masterminds behind the initiative. Then we went to Secretary of State Jerry Brown and asked him to remove it from the ballot. Brown did his best to help us, I think, but in the end, the legal decision was that the voters would have to decide. We would have to fight Proposition 22.

By then it was mid-October, less than three weeks away from the election. We had a lot of work to do. Immediately, we changed gears and revved it up for the last big push to fight Proposition 22. Every area of L.A., every boycott house, every volunteer was part of the huge plan. We all worked together, but separately in our areas, in our individual locations. One day we would leaflet all day long. The next day we would “bumper sticker” all day long. This was one of my favorite jobs. It was so rewarding. After a week of bumper-stickering, you’d begin to see cars everywhere with our sticker. It was great. Now don’t think that we just stuck stickers on cars. No, no, no. That would definitely *not* have been the union way. We had it all together, though. Armed with literally hundreds of bumper stickers (“Justice for Farmworkers, No on 22”), and just a little rag, we’d go to work in a parking lot. “Can we put a sticker on your car to help farmworkers?” Sure, go ahead. “Thanks.” Back in the 1970s people were much more sticker-friendly than they are these days. Probably one-third of the people would say yes, whether they understood the issue or not. It often had a lot more to do with the attitude and personality of the staff person, which made it fun and challenging. As soon as they’d agree, we’d quickly wipe the bumper, slap that baby on, and save the backing so that at the end of the day we could count how many stickers we got on cars. We always kept totals of what we did and reported in to our coordinator. Whether it was bumpers “stickered,” leaflets passed out, voters registered, or declarations signed, we always kept accurate tallies. The numbers were turned in, added up, and reported on, probably to Cesar and LeRoy, but always, also, to those of us who were “out there.” The union leadership was excellent about this. Always keeping us going and lifting our spirits by showing us that our little piece of the puzzle was important. Each of us was doing our job, and as grinding and boring as it could be at times, we knew we were part of something much larger. And together, we were making a dent, and hopefully, a difference. But it was tiring. Every day was a long, long grind. Some days I just didn’t think I could do it anymore. I’d come home late at night hoping for a letter from home or from my boyfriend—something to keep me going. I remember one time coming home and just sobbing uncontrollably, because I didn’t get a letter.

Being out in the public all day, I would sometimes attract the attention of a nice-looking guy who would flirt and want to take me out. Guys would say, “When do you get off work” and I’d say, “2 a.m.” So then they’d say, “Well, when is your day off?” “We don’t get

days off. We work seven days a week.” They’d think I was shining them on, but of course it was true!

There were a few really fun and exciting times during that grueling campaign. One cool event was the Joan Baez concert at the Hollywood Bowl. The union staff was given free tickets. I believe she was doing it as a fundraiser for us, and also to fight another proposition—one that would have reinstated the death penalty. It must have been voted down, but I don’t remember now. Now that I do capital appeals, I’m obviously quite interested in that topic. But back then, the UFW had my undivided, complete attention.

The most grueling part of the Proposition 22 campaign was yet to come. About two weeks before the election, the new strategy was announced. Because the growers had spent millions of dollars to buy billboards all over L.A. (“For Farm Workers Rights, Yes on 22!), we would fight their expensive billboards with human billboards. We didn’t have a lot of money, but we did have a lot of people, especially farmworkers.

This last big push of the No on 22 campaign lasted about a month. Farmworkers were brought in from the rural areas and a tent city was established in Lincoln Park in East L.A. There were hundreds, if not thousands, of volunteers working on that campaign. Every morning we would get up at 4 a.m., be at Lincoln Park by 5 and out on the freeways by 6. We would freeze in the mornings, and people would be assigned to deliver coffee and hot chocolate to us to keep our spirits up. We were holding these huge billboards up on giant sticks. They were made so that they could be “torn down” into smaller pieces, but with bolts and wing nuts, extended into giant poles that were high above our heads. This often required holding our hands up high, and at times I felt like I was being crucified. Arms extended, standing for hours, wind blowing, cold weather! But then it would be “time to come in” and we’d have a break, then go out leafleting for the day, have lunch as a group back at Lincoln Park (delicious Mexican meals prepared by farmworker women), and get ready to go back out for the afternoon rush hour traffic. At the end of each session of billboarding, Chris Hartmire would get up at the microphone and announce how many cars saw us—his totals would be based on computer traffic records that had been gathered ahead of time.

The union always researched everything so that we would be most effective in what we did. Chris could read the charts and determine how many cars passed at a particular intersection at a particular time. Of course we would be thrilled to find out that between 6 and 9:30 a.m. that day, 480,000 (or something like that) had seen our signs. Since, as a group, we might be positioned at 10 locations around L.A., we were really hitting a lot of people. We were energized to know that our “people power” was making an impact, despite the huge sums of money that the agribusiness industry had to spend on regular billboards. The human billboards had never been done before, and people were really surprised to see us out there. The *L.A. Times* did a story on us, which also helped to generate interest and support. After a while we would encourage people to honk and show support. Urging the cars to honk gave us something to do to pass the time, and kept us energized.

Since 1972, I have seen these types of picket lines and protests. I recently saw something similar here in Sacramento. People were lined up with an assortment of signs and encouraging passing cars to honk and show support. But as far as I know, we were the first ones to do a human billboard campaign, and I've never seen any group do it the way we did—on such a large and organized scale. That was the thing about the union that really set it apart from other organizations. The union was blessed with so many brilliant and experienced organizers—people who were not only very smart but also very hardworking and totally committed to the movement. After researching what they were going to do, they planned and carried out the activity as though it were a presidential campaign. And the union was always able to attract large numbers of people who wanted to help—to be part of something larger than themselves and to be part of something that seemed to be on the right track and making a difference.

I remember once that we billboarded at the L.A. Coliseum when some big event was taking place. It was a weekend afternoon and a beautiful day. We were given sack lunches that day and I remember when we got our half-hour lunch break. We ate our sandwiches out on the grass outside of the coliseum. After several hours of billboarding, I will never forget how absolutely wonderful it was to just eat our lunches and enjoy the day. I remember feeling jealous of the families that I saw out and about that day. How wonderful, I thought, it must be to just be out doing whatever you wanted to do! Then our half-hour was up and we were back at it again. There was no question that in the grand scheme of things we were all enjoying what we did and felt very committed to the work. But on a day-to-day basis, it was also grueling, difficult, tedious, and at times, mind-numbingly dull. We were able to get through it because we knew there was an end in sight. It would all be over on Election Day. We could hang in there until then.

And then the day came! This was the day that the voters would decide whether money would rule the day or whether our grassroots campaign had gotten through to people. Had we communicated that Prop 22 would hurt, not help, farmworkers? And, if we had gotten that across, did people care? Did the public support the UFW or not? This was truly judgment day for the UFW in general, and our campaign in particular. I remember feeling all day that if we lost the election, I would be so distraught and overwhelmed that I really wasn't sure what I would do or how I would take it. Hmm, wonder if I'd jump off a bridge? I really wasn't sure how it would feel, but I was scared to death to find out. We just had to defeat 22, that was all there was to it. Even though we were planning a big election night celebration, I was concerned. I ended up smoking some weed (something we were absolutely forbidden to do). I don't even remember who had it or how I had access to it, but I decided that if we lost, it would be better if my senses were dulled. As it turned out, we won 60 to 40, and it was an absolutely thrilling night. Unfortunately, I was pretty out of it and sorry that I had smoked anything at all. It would have been a much more enjoyable experience straight than stoned. People were dancing, and I remember Cesar asked me to dance. He told me that he remembered me from that first meeting up in La Paz, sitting in the audience. I was flattered, but I also had

to laugh to myself, because I knew that I was in such shock that day that all I did was stare at him with wide eyes and total adoration written all over my face. My face probably stuck out like some kind of stargazing stalker, completely disinterested in everything that was going on, other than Cesar! That was how I felt that day, and “what a surprise” that he would have spotted me! But on election night, as I danced with Cesar, I was stoned, unfortunately, so I don’t even remember too much about our little dance together. Nevertheless, it was a wonderful ending to a magnificent and successful campaign. After completing Prop 22, I knew that I would be staying with the union much longer. It was love and pretty much at first sight!

The union and the people who worked for it impressed me beyond anything I ever could have imagined. After Prop 22, I couldn’t fathom doing anything else except helping to roll that union on!

So when the campaign ended, I did go back to Indiana. I left my car in Los Angeles with Chris Hartmire’s family, and flew back home. I purposely left my car as a sort of “collateral,” guaranteeing my return to the union. I was at home through Christmas and returned to L.A. in January, ready for the next union campaign, whatever that would be. In the end, I stayed in Los Angeles for another two years. I left the union in October of 1974, but in January of 1975, I got a call to come back out, this time to work on a fundraising premiere showing of the documentary, *Fighting for Our Lives*. I jumped at the chance. I was back in my car and driving cross-country once again. My dad came out for the premiere and I was so glad that he did. He got to see firsthand why the union had captured my heart. I saw him wiping away the tears when the film concluded. He died two months later, on Father’s Day, so it was really fortuitous that my mom had purchased a ticket to our premiere and urged him to attend. After the premiere I spent about a week in La Paz, writing thank-you letters on a funny machine that could type multiple letters automatically, before the days of PCs. I think it was called the “Robotyper” or “Robotwriter.” I operated it out of the little back porch area behind the conference room of the administration building, down the hall from Cesar’s office. Every day I would bring a stack of letters for him to sign and sometimes leave little notes for him. We started every letter with “Dear Brother Jones” or “Dear Sister Smith.” I remember one letter was going to Tommy Smothers (of the Smothers Brothers). And so of course it said, “Dear Brother Smothers.” I wrote a short note to Cesar, “Hey Cesar, how does that grab you?” And he wrote back, “It grabs me nice.” I kept his little note back to me, as a keepsake, for a long time. I was so delighted to have his silly little note to me. Cesar, I must say, was always very, very sweet to me, even though in later years, we certainly did have our confrontations!

In the fall of 1975 I started law school in Indiana, at the school my father had attended. During the years that I was in law school, a lot took place within the union. Jerry Brown had signed the ALRA shortly before I left California, and while I was away, lots of organizing and elections took place in the fields. From what I heard, it was an exciting and wonderful time. I came out a couple of times during the summer while I was still in school and got to take part in little pieces of it. But then the Proposition 13 campaign happened,

and unlike Prop 22, the union was soundly defeated. Having been through Prop 22, I could imagine how awful that must have been for people. I have since learned that it was a terrible blow to everyone's morale. By the time I returned to the union in 1980, the legal department that I had so much wanted to be a part of was no more. Jerry Cohen was no longer involved in the legal department but was helping some with negotiations. Marshall Ganz and others had left, and it was clear that many internal fights had taken place.

I had returned to California to work as a lawyer in the legal department, by that time headquartered in La Paz. It had always been my dream to work at La Paz and I had finally realized it. I worked as a union lawyer until 1987, when my two young children and I moved to Sacramento. Their father was also a union lawyer and also lives in Sacramento.

All together, I worked on and off (mostly on!) for the union for 15 years. What I have recounted deals only with that first summer. There are so many wonderful and meaningful stories in between then and now and I hope to put them all on paper some day. I have started the process now, thanks to LeRoy Chatfield. I am so grateful to LeRoy and Chris and the many other brilliant, dedicated, and inspiring friends that I have had the great pleasure to know because of my involvement with the union. Of course, not all of the stories within the union were happy ones. There were lots of people who gave their all to the union and for one reason or another, left feeling discouraged and bitter. Those stories should be told as well, because they are also part of this huge drama that touched so many lives. There is still much work to be done, and for the sake of the farmworkers, I hope that Cesar's dream of building a national union will someday be accomplished.

NOTES:

Returning in 1973 for the Safeway campaign: What it was like to picket. Keeping track of the numbers of turn-aways. Nationwide numbers kept.

Picketing the day out at Santa Monica. When I left and went to the bench and cried. A little old lady came up, concerned, and asked me, "What's wrong, dear?" I asked her if she shopped at Safeway, and when she said yes, I said, "Don't you know there's a boycott going on there? Don't you know that you're not supposed to shop there?" (Of course she thought I was a lunatic, but it felt so good to finally nail a scab...shame on me...poor little old thing was just trying to be nice...but after taking so much abuse from the scabs, I couldn't resist letting her have it. Hope that God forgives me for that one!)

Dreading going to the Safeway up at Sunset and La Brea. Driving there wishing I could turn back. Lawsuits against Safeway. So much time in the sun that I turned blonde. Loved it when the manager yelled at me to get away from the door and called me, "Hey Blondie!" Cool.

May of 1973, the contracts expired and the strike started in Coachella. Visiting the picket lines at the fields. Going after Safeway with lawsuits for meat fraud, flies in their cookies, dirty stores. Serving the Safeway manager. He was not a bad guy at all...I felt bad...

The boycott house in L.A., the neighborhood, the rats, “rat patrol.”

1974: Gallo Wine campaign. Long Beach assignment. Told to find a place to live for free. Given one name: Dick Chenowith, a young lawyer in San Pedro. Spent the night on his floor. He gave me the name of an elderly lady in Long Beach who ran a communist bookstore. She lived alone and had a spare bedroom. That’s where I lived for four months (January to April). Then moved into the apartment of a young Indian man, who was working as a cook in a restaurant. He was a lefty (had overstayed his visa) and offered me space on his dining room floor. Stayed there for about two months, until he got deported. Then moved in with a family—Jay and Marie Hall and their daughter, Maura. I slept on the bottom bunk in Maura’s room from June through about October. Spoke to churches, Cal State Long Beach classes. Joel Glick helped me picket every single weekend. Spoke at the union hall, ILWU. Great feeling speaking to churches and college classes. Never would have believed I could speak in front of a class. The “brigade” going after Gallo.

Leaving the union at the end of 1974. Returning in 1975 for the fundraising premiere of *Fighting for Our Lives*. Working for the legal department on the antitrust lawsuit, gathering information about the boycott (in response to interrogatories from the Teamsters). Returning to Indiana in the fall of 1975 to go to law school. Coming out in the summers to work for the union.

Returning to the legal department in January 1980. Taking the California bar exam. Cesar introducing me to the paid reps, telling them I’d passed the bar, new union lawyer. Two years later, I was sitting across the table from these men, taking their depositions as a result of a federal lawsuit they had filed against Cesar for removing them as paid reps. It was sad and distressing for me to be there...I wanted to apologize and assure them that things could be worked out. But my job was to represent Cesar, regardless of how I might feel personally. I had to gear up to see these folks as the “bad guys” trying to bring down my boss. It was not what I wanted to be doing, not what I anticipated when I decided I wanted to be a union lawyer. But I did it and spent countless hours defending Cesar’s position. With a nursing baby along with me. Staying up night after night preparing, getting two to three hours of sleep every night. Quite an ordeal.

Driving with Carlos to the Gilroy garlic strike. Watching Marshall Ganz in action.

Getting pregnant in July of 1980, seven months after joining the legal department.

Having Tom in April of 1981 and taking him everywhere with me. Driving weekly to the lemon strike in Ventura in 1981-82 ... for court hearings. Five-hour drive back and forth. Leaving La Paz at 4 a.m. for a 9 a.m. hearing. Coming home at 10 p.m., with milk leaking

... still nursing Tom. Getting a flat tire on the Grapevine, driving to Ventura with Tom in the car (age four months). Having to drive with a flat tire for several miles. Going to two gas stations, but no one would change the tire for me.

Nursing Tom while I argued before the Arizona farm labor board. The trip to Yuma during the PATCO strike, having to take an all-night bus there from L.A. with a four-month old baby. Coming in to the yard and “Oakie” and Ray Chavez’s house in Yuma and being attacked by their dog while struggling to protect my baby. A few months later, setting up a “daycare” in the attorney lounge of the Ninth Circuit Court of Appeals in San Francisco. Marble floors, high ceilings, and Tom and all of his kid gear around the room. Chole Trevino babysat while I argued before the second highest court in the land—federal appeals court.

Tom was in so many courtrooms growing up that when he was in a regular church for the first time (not the La Paz conference room), he yelled out loud, “Where’s the judge?” People turned around and laughed, but I don’t think they realized that he really thought he was in a courtroom. (I used to whisper to him, point out where the judge was, etc., just to keep him interested and occupied.)