

Barbara (Carroll) Tuttle 1973–1977

Colorado Springs: 1970

It's the summer of 1970. I'm 16 years old and ready to start my first job, with a minimum wage of \$1.60 an hour. My best friend, Carol, and I have been hired to go door to door circulating fundraising envelopes for the Cystic Fibrosis Association. We're given an address where we're supposed to pick up our materials: a home on the poor side of town, a neighborhood we've never been in because we're sheltered middle-class girls.

Every morning, when we drop by to collect a new batch of cystic fibrosis envelopes, we're greeted by the two good-natured and jovial men who live there. We chat and kid around with them. Carol asks them every day, "What do you guys do?" They never give us a straight answer. Instead they ask us what we think of the Vietnam War, nuclear weapons, and social problems in America.

One of the men, Steve, asks us what we know about St. Francis. I know that wild birds supposedly sat on the saint's arms, and I know the prayer Francis wrote. As an idealistic Catholic teenager, it was one of my favorites: "Lord, make me an instrument of your peace."

Then Steve tells us the St. Francis story we didn't know—how, as a young man, Francis rejected his family's wealth, taking off all his clothes in the town square and striding off naked into the forest, where he lived ever after, devoting his life to the poor.

Wow. St. Francis sounded so 1960s! Later I learned that Steve, the "mystery man," was a Catholic priest who fed the poor and agitated for peace. He was a stirring example—my first example—of a person who worked for justice with both passion and good humor. This galvanized my adolescent idealism and girlhood Catholic spirituality into a passion for social justice.

Center, Colorado: 1972

The town of Center is right in the middle of the San Luis Valley, in south central Colorado. It's an agricultural area, far from the Colorado most people think of: the city of Denver and the ski resorts in the mountains. The San Luis Valley is absolutely flat—a high desert covered with crops such as lettuce, potatoes, and hops. In the summer of 1970, the lettuce workers went on strike, and a Colorado UFW field office was born.

In February of 1972, I spent a weekend in Center, along with a few other teens from Colorado Springs and Denver. Through our high schools, we had organized a successful fundraiser called the Walk for Development, part of a national effort in cities across the U.S. Each Walk Committee funded two developmental projects, one in the U.S. and one abroad. For our domestic project, we chose a clinic for farmworkers, operated by the

Colorado Migrant Council, and we jumped at the invitation to spend a weekend visiting the clinic and seeing the San Luis Valley.

None of us had ever seen a town like Center. The town seemed neatly divided in half: half was Anglo, with paved roads; the other half was Chicano, with dirt roads and poorer houses.

While we were there, we met the UFW field office staff: Magdaleno “Len” Avila, the director; Bob Thompson, who had moved to the valley as a VISTA volunteer and stayed on to work for the UFW; Leroy Maez (called “Corn”); and an assortment of others.

By then I was a student at Colorado College, a sheltered and well-off liberal arts college. During my freshman and sophomore years, I periodically made the four-hour drive to Center in my parents’ light blue Volkswagen bug. I’d spend the weekend hanging out with the UFW folks and helping in small ways. What was happening in the San Luis Valley seemed so much more vibrant and real than life at a small college studying sociological theory in classrooms.

In June of 1972 I drove to the valley to join a gathering commemorating the anniversary of the Colorado lettuce strike. People were talking about how Cesar was fasting in Phoenix to protest the imminent passage of anti-UFW legislation in Arizona. A caravan of cars was leaving that night for Phoenix, driving straight through, to be part of a rally. Would I like to go?

Of course I said yes. I was thrilled—I couldn’t believe I was going to be that close to Cesar Chavez. I phoned my parents, told them I was going to Phoenix that night, and crammed into the back of a hatchback with a 14-year-old kid who was carsick. Still, I felt like I was flowing into the stream of history, going to my first grand-scale UFW event. After that, there was no turning back.

Denver: June 1973 to May 1974

It was inevitable. I wrote to Colorado College, requesting a “leave of absence” to work for the UFW boycott in Denver—only for a year, maybe just a semester. I packed a few necessities into my green Samsonite suitcase, embroidered with flowers on the side. A gift from my parents, I secretly thought it was pretty, but oh, how I cringed at the thought of the boycott staff seeing this fancy bag of mine. And worse, the chariot in which I was being delivered: my parents’ big boat of a bronze Lincoln Continental.

On a beautiful summer afternoon in June of 1973, my parents drove me 70 miles north on I-25 from Colorado Springs to Denver. They were grim, worried, and silent. They had grown up during the Depression and came from humble immigrant stock. My dad had worked hard to attain that prosperous, comfortable life of ours and that Lincoln Continental and the house in the country club section of town. They couldn’t understand

what I was doing. But still, they were my parents, and they made sure I arrived safely at the boycott house on the corner of 24th and Clarkson: two blocks from Five Points, reputedly the biggest drug-dealing spot between Chicago and Los Angeles. Years later my mother told me that after dropping me off, they cried.

The Five Points neighborhood, in the heart of Denver's African-American community, turned out to be a pleasant place to live. Filled with big Victorian houses and lots of families, the area was dotted with little churches—African Methodist, Baptist, and others—that I wished I were brave enough to visit on a Sunday morning.

I spent nearly a year on the Denver boycott staff, which was headed by Richard Longoria, an ex-seminarian from Texas (Houston, I believe.) Listed below, in shorthand fashion, are some random memories:

- Picketing Safeway, all alone on weekdays, eight hours a day, marking the tally of “turn-aways” on my picket sign. The prospect of picketing alone was huge motivation to overcome your shyness, get on the phone, and call supporters to join you for a shift on the weekend.
- Dining, boycott style, especially the game of “Pass the Chicken.” Money being tight, there'd be one baked chicken for the crew of us. That meant only one piece per person. To keep it fair, we'd pass the pan of chicken over our heads so no one could see which piece they were choosing. The first one you touched was yours, whether it be breast or wing.
- Everything zucchini: A supporter, an avid gardener, came in with a donation: a zucchini so huge that he had to heave it over his shoulder. For weeks, we ate zucchini stew, zucchini soup, sautéed zucchini, stuffed, baked, you name it.
- Singing Woody Guthrie songs around the table after dinner.
- Lots of laughs with Carol Longoria, Richard's wife, who was from North Carolina. On the picket line, she'd put on her Southern accent, and people thought that meant she was a farmworker, so they'd believe anything she said.
- Staffer Sister Maureen Monaghan (called Sister Mo), who told us funny tales of skiing in her nun's habit during her days in the novitiate at the Sisters of Loretto motherhouse, how she rode motorcycles in high school, and how she asked the Reverend Mother if she could do a ministry to beach bums.
- Staff member Jerry Ryan, who effectively closed down a Safeway one afternoon in heavily pro-union and Chicano northwest Denver. He parked our beige Studebaker wagon in front of the store and climbed on top of the car, bullhorn in hand, broadcasting all our favorite slogans. No customer dared enter the store, and we had one irate store manager!

- Spreading the UFW message by speaking to group after group: neighborhood house meetings, unions, churches, synagogues, and university students. Getting over my fear of public speaking because I represented a cause greater than myself. Living by the Rolodex: constantly phoning supporters for money, support, letters, donations in kind, and above all, help on the picket line.

On to California: May 1974

After a year on the Denver boycott, I knew I wanted to be in California, in the middle of the UFW action. At every meeting in which we drummed up support for the union, we showed that famous film footage of the grape strikers being clubbed by the police in Arvin-Lamont during the summer of 1973.

The violence was horrible to watch, and I was scared, but California was where I wanted to be, so I asked for a transfer. My old Colorado friend Bob Thompson, who had moved to field office administration in California, vouched for my reliability, so I got sent to La Paz.

Back in Colorado Springs, my parents put me on a Greyhound to Bakersfield late one night. As the bus pulled out, they cried again. Now they knew their girl wouldn't be going back to Colorado College.

La Paz: May 1974 to September 1975

In La Paz I worked first for El Malcriado, handling the office aspect of circulation and distribution. I replaced Brian Kinkel, a nice guy who was leaving the UFW to travel in Europe. After several months, I moved to boycott central in the administration building, sharing a cozy little office with Kathy Murguia and Jim Lynch.

Like everyone else who worked for the UFW, I have so many memories it would take a book to tell them all, and some of them—the big political events, in particular—will be better and more accurately recounted by others. But here is a list of random, specific, and personal memories:

- Arriving at La Paz on a quiet weekend afternoon, when no one seems to be around, and settling myself into my assigned room in the hospital, on the lower level. Someone tells me stories about its days as a tuberculosis sanatorium and how there are actually old stains on the wall—blood that had been coughed up by patients.
- Fire watch: Jostled from sleep at 2 a.m. by the previous person on duty. Feeling especially spooked while patrolling the kitchen, the daycare, and especially the loop past the North Unit. Wondering what good I'd do out there solo if any “bad guys” jumped out.
- Bob Datz making personalized valentines out of construction paper for us “hospital inmates” on Valentine's Day. The Catholic sisters at the end of the hallway got one saying,

“Happy Valentine’s Day from one godless communist to another ... (open the card) communist.” The sisters got a laugh out of that!

- Peanut butter pie at the Round-Up Café in Tehachapi. My favorite title on the jukebox: “Radiator Man from Wasco.”
- Driving to Caliente for milkshakes on Sunday afternoons.
- Having lunch at the LeGerrettes’ house with Al Green playing on the stereo, Linda loving cooking for others even when—especially when—she was fasting.
- Good times with Wendy Simon, who finally succeeded in teaching me to drive a stick shift on the dirt road through La Paz. Wendy and I remained friends, post-UFW, both of us living on the East Coast. She died of malignant melanoma in the summer of 1979. She was the most warm and generous of souls, and I still miss her.
- Staffers packing into Danny Ybarra’s room one night a week to watch M*A*S*H on Danny’s TV. (He had one of the only sets in La Paz.)
- Lots of laughs and good talks with Kathy Murguia and Jim Lynch in the boycott central office, especially in the afternoon, when we got tired and punchy.

Field Offices: September 1975 to January 1977

After the Agricultural Labor Relations Act was passed, I was dispatched to work on the election campaign, like many other UFW staff. For two weeks I worked in Delano, living in Agbayani Village with the Filipino brothers. Inspired by Cesar, I was a vegetarian then, but my discipline was sorely tried by the Filipino diet of white rice and greens cooked with meat. So I’d eat only white rice. Then I’d run out and buy a Hershey bar to feel a little more satisfied. Chocolate will do it every time.

After September in Delano, I spent October in Visalia, living in the home of an older farmworker couple. When somebody brought Kentucky Fried Chicken into the office, I ceased to be a vegetarian, right on the spot. After that it was north to Yolo County, where the air smelled like old ketchup.

After we started winning elections, Cesar pulled together some negotiations teams. He thought it would be crucial to have close, nearly word-for-word records of bargaining sessions. It was likely the growers would not bargain “in good faith,” as prescribed by law. To prove this, we would need documentation. I was one of several UFW staffers appointed to be “negotiation assistants,” who would sit in those bargaining sessions taking notes.

I worked in contract negotiations at several locations: in Salinas and then Bakersfield, where contracts with several lettuce growers were hammered out; in Oxnard and Carpinteria, with vegetable growers and nurseries; in the Coachella Valley, with citrus growers (DeBonne is one name I remember); and in San Ysidro, with tomato growers.

That final year I spent as a UFW staff member—out in the field offices—was by far the most valuable, and I'll always be grateful for it. This was when I experienced firsthand what the union was all about. I've never ceased to be amazed by the following:

- The two experienced negotiators from the United AutoWorkers, Bob Lopez and Ernie Moran, who came from Detroit to teach and help us in the early stages. Bob, in particular, sat beside us day and night working out the smallest details on a legal pad, like the fine points of piece rates for Napa lettuce at little Akitomo Nursery, to dealing artfully with the slick, highly paid attorneys for the Salinas growers. He became a friend and role model and took us out for pie, coffee, and philosophy after a long day at the bargaining table. Thank you, Bob, wherever you are.
- Meeting with ranch committees and learning what issues they cared most about on their ranches.
- Watching leadership develop among the workers. Seeing farmworkers who barely knew English and could barely write learn to articulate their demands to the growers. Watching these workers grow in confidence and autonomy and begin to make full use of their talents and guide their destinies.
- The warmth, kindness and generosity of farmworkers toward my partner Ann Smith and me as we pieced our way through the brand-new (to us) world of field offices, contract negotiations, and communicating in Spanish.

To everyone who served in the UFW and especially to the farmworkers: Thank you for a life-changing experience. It is still part of me, even 30 years later, living far away in the Midwest. Some of my best and closest friends are still fellow UFW volunteers. Like war buddies, we will always be bonded by those years.