

Bob Johnson 1975–1977

I first heard of Cesar Chavez and the farmworker movement while in high school in Central Illinois, during the late 1960s. I was attending a United Methodist Church weekend retreat for young people. During dinner on Saturday evening, a young minister suddenly stood up and started speaking, as if something had suddenly moved him to do so. He began by saying that what he was about to tell us was controversial. He said that some say it is “communistic.” With that, he proceeded to tell us about Cesar Chavez and why we should boycott grapes.

The next time that someone talked to me directly about boycotting grapes was in August of 1973. I had just started my junior year at the University of Illinois in Champaign-Urbana. The woman I was dating had just heard from someone in her dorm about the United Farm Workers’ grape strike that was happening in California. She was deeply moved by the story and was spreading the word to boycott grapes.

In February of 1975, I was a delegate to the College Democrats National Convention in Atlanta. There was a resolution to support the boycott of Gallo wine. Gallo had sent several free cases of wine to the convention to influence the vote. A delegate supporting the boycott stashed the wine in his room and did not allow it to be distributed. I got involved in the effort to get the resolution passed. There were those who opposed the resolution and wanted the free wine, so we had to work at it.

The resolution had not been voted on when it was time for the convention to adjourn. Those who opposed the resolution demanded that the convention adjourn immediately. The son of a Chicago politician, who held the gavel, ruled that his watch was the official clock, and according to his watch we had not reached the time of adjournment. About 30 minutes later, the resolution passed. I think that was the only time I appreciated how politics worked in Chicago.

Soon thereafter I received a thank-you letter for helping with the resolution and an invitation to attend the East Coast Mobilization to Support the Farmworkers, which took place in Washington, D.C. on a weekend in April of 1975. I also received a phone call from Eliseo Medina, who was in charge of the Chicago boycott office. While at the convention I had talked with a boycott staff person, who was there to organize support for the resolution. It has been many years, but I think it was John Heller. He had passed on my name and number to the Chicago office. I told Eliseo that I would be attending the East Coast mobilization and we agreed to meet and talk there.

I had not been directly involved with the farmworker support committee on campus. I personally supported the boycotts. As a member of the student government, I had voted to endorse the boycotts and to contribute financial support. I had gotten involved at the convention, but that was it up to this point.

I was graduating in a few months with a degree in social welfare, but I did not have a job lined up and was not sure what I would be doing next. I had seriously considered becoming a United Methodist minister, but had reached the conclusion that perhaps the lifestyle restrictions were too demanding. I was searching for something meaningful and worthwhile to do.

Five of us from the University of Illinois attended the mobilization. We took my car and made the trip from Urbana to D.C. in about 16 hours, arriving late Friday evening. The event took place at a school. We slept on the floor in sleeping bags.

The next day was truly amazing. There were hundreds of people there from all over the East Coast and the Midwest. In the morning we met in the gym to hear from several speakers and then were divided into smaller groups in the classrooms. The classroom that I was in had been assigned to Cesar's brother, Richard Chavez. He told us about his experiences growing up with Cesar and the story of the farmworker movement. His talk was very moving.

That afternoon we reassembled in the gym to hear Dick Gregory and then Cesar Chavez. Cesar's speech was very inspiring. That was it for me. I knew for sure that I wanted to be a part of this. I met with Eliseo and made a commitment to join the boycott in Chicago after graduation in May. It was real simple. An injustice was being done, and here was a way in which I could get involved to fight that injustice.

Initially, my dad was not happy about my decision. He was a strong union man and had held various offices in his local of the American Postal Workers of America. His father before him was also a union activist in the Brotherhood of Railway Carmen. Dad had expected that I would get a college degree and thereby get a good-paying job. He had saved money since I was born so that I could go to college, but now my first job out of college paid \$5 per week.

What neither he nor I realized at the time was that I was about to get the best education possible and I would learn skills that I would use for the rest of my life. Every person I know of who spent at least a year working on the boycott went on to be successful in whatever they did thereafter.

For example, I once had a situation in early 1989 in which I was desperate for work. I had been making a living working on political campaigns. The 1988 election cycle had ended and there was nothing going on in early 1989. I took a job selling new and used cars at a Chevy dealership in San Francisco. In the first month I sold more cars than anyone except for a 30-year veteran. He and I tied and shared the title of salesman of the month. I did not do anything special. I just did what I had learned to do and applied it to the current situation. Soon thereafter Cesar's oldest son, Fernando, offered me a job doing research and investigative work at his law firm, and I gladly left the car business.

I did learn a car sales phrase, which applies to what organizing is all about: “Nothing counts but taillights.” A “maybe” or a “possibly” don’t count. Working on the boycott, we learned that it did not matter how many people said they might come to the picket line at the supermarket. What mattered was how many said that they would definitely be there, and how many of them actually showed up.

In everything we did, the key to success was accountability. Although they were volunteers, we conveyed to them that we expected them to show up when they said that they would. We did this by getting a firm commitment to take part in an event, by making reminder calls before an event, and by making follow-up calls to those who did not show up. We let people know that their participation mattered and it was noticed if they did not keep their commitment.

Just as we held the volunteers accountable, we too were held accountable. By being required to report our results in hard numbers, we developed a strong desire to do well. Nobody wanted to come to a staff meeting without results to report. This required discipline to follow all the steps that we had been taught and not be tempted to take shortcuts. If something fell through, it was usually because a step was skipped.

Another thing that my dad and I did not realize at the time was that my involvement with the United Farm Workers would lead to numerous friendships that have lasted to this day. It also provided me with a network of contacts that have led to every career opportunity that I have had through the years and put in motion a series of events that resulted in me meeting my wife, Janet. It changed my life in a wonderful way that I could not have even dreamed on that fateful day in April of 1975.

In late May of 1975, I reported to Chicago. In early June, I was sent along with six other new staff to attend a week of training, which took place at a convent on the Hudson River, north of New York City. There were more than 100 of us there. Fred Ross, Sr. led the training. I knew of his important role in the movement, so I was truly in awe to be at a training that he was conducting. I was also afraid of, and at the same time excited about, the new technology, videotaping, which was being used in the training. We were videotaped as we practiced a mock house meeting.

Back in Chicago, my assigned territory was Edgewater, Rogers Park, Evanston, and Skokie. Rogers Park is the part of Chicago just south of Evanston, along the lakeshore. Edgewater is just south of Rogers Park. My responsibility was to organize support for the boycott within this territory. This included conducting house meetings and lining up speaking engagements at union meetings, churches, and schools to persuade people to support the boycott, recruit new volunteers, and generate financial contributions. I organized the volunteers into a variety of activities to put pressure on supermarkets and to persuade consumers to support the boycott. These activities included regular picket lines in front of supermarkets, delegations to meet with supermarket executives, and phone-ins, in which at

a designated time volunteers would flood a supermarket chain headquarters with calls. We also had letter-writing, postcard, and petition campaigns.

Another great tactic was human billboarding. We would stand along busy roadways with signs during the morning and evening rush hours. In January of 1976, we especially wanted people to know that the boycott had not ended. Governor Jerry Brown had signed the Agricultural Labor Relations Act in 1975 and workers were voting overwhelmingly for the UFW. People were beginning to think that the fight was over. The boycott had not ended, so we launched a campaign titled the "Boycott Continues." That was our slogan on leaflets at the supermarkets and on our human billboard signs.

In the dead of winter we did human billboarding for two hours during the morning commute and for two hours during the evening commute every weekday for at least a month or more. It has been said, "If you can survive a winter in Chicago, you can survive anything." Car batteries are affected by the cold. Our cars were parked outside on the street. Sometimes it was so cold that we had to bring the car battery inside and warm it up to get enough juice to start the car.

Our cutoff point for human billboarding was 0 degrees. We would get up very early and listen to the weather forecast on the radio. If it was 0 degrees or above, we started piling on many layers of clothes to get ready to go out. If it was below 0 degrees, we got to go back to bed. The campaign got a lot of positive response and a photo in the *Chicago Sun Times* with 20 of us standing on a freeway overpass.

Another event was shop-ins, but this was limited to staff and a select few of the volunteers. There were different variations of shop-ins. Some were very public events in which people caused a scene inside the store and in some cases got arrested for refusing to leave the produce section. Another type of shop-in involved several of us going into a store, filling up a bunch of shopping carts and then quietly leaving. A favorite tactic was to put ice cream in the bottom of the cart, hoping the cart would not be discovered as abandoned for some time. With the proliferation of video cameras, I am not sure if we could do this today, at least if we wanted to remain anonymous.

We also had citywide events such as fundraisers, marches, and rallies, which were exciting with all of the collective energy in one place.

I loved my time in Chicago on the boycott. I was suddenly exposed to many different peoples, cultures, art, food, and labor history that I had not known growing up in the middle of Central Illinois cornfields. We had a wonderfully diverse group on the boycott staff that included nuns from the Milwaukee Peace and Justice Center, a Presbyterian minister from Tennessee, two guys from Germany, a woman from Argentina, and Latinos from Chicago and California.

I enjoyed the energy and spirit of the “city of broad shoulders.” I had grown up in a small town, and while I had attended a big university, it was nothing like being in Chicago. Next to San Francisco, Chicago is still my favorite city. The winters are harsh and the summers steamy, but it is an amazing place with a special life of its own.

I was assigned a great area to work in. Many of the supporters I inherited with the area had been actively supporting the farmworker movement for years, several of them since the first grape boycott of the 1960s.

There was a large community of Jewish retirees in Rogers Park, many of whom had been active in labor and political movements since the 1930s. Some of them had served in the Abraham Lincoln Brigade in Spain. In one neighborhood in Rogers Park no one on the picket line at the local Jewel store was under the age of 65. I nicknamed them the Geritol Brigade.

There were students from Sacred Heart High School, Mundelein College, and Loyola and Northwestern universities, along with sisters from Mundelein College, priests in several parishes, members of various unions, and many other hardworking people who gave up their evenings and weekends to help make a difference.

My office was at the Evanston Peace Center. It was a small storefront that I usually had to myself. By the summer of 1975 the peace movement was fairly quiet.

It was great to have a solid core group of experienced supporters, but with it came expectations. They had seen many a boycott staff come and go. I was new and green. One of the longtime supporters, who took me under her wing, was Julia Century. For me, she became combination grandmother, mentor, labor historian, and drill sergeant. She would call me and verbally kick my butt if I had not followed up on calling someone, whom she had told me that I should contact. Then she would ask what I had eaten that day and, regardless of the answer, she would demand that I come over and have a meal with her. She would tell me stories about organizing in the garment industry in the 1930s. I owe a lot to her.

Another one of my Rogers Park grandmothers was Bessie Chall. Once she invited me over for lunch, and as I was leaving she handed me a jacket that looked new. She told me that her grandson had left it during a recent visit and insisted that I take it. The jacket was my size and I wore it for years.

Bessie was also a huge help with stilling my own mother’s fears about me being in the big city. My parents came to visit. They attended a support committee meeting with me. We gave Bessie a ride to and from the meeting. My mother told her how worried she was about me. Bessie told my mom not to worry. Bessie said that she was 75 years old and went wherever she wanted in the city on public transit and nothing ever happened to her.

Bessie promised my mom that she and others would look after me. My mom went home feeling much relieved.

I also learned a great deal from John and Rachel Heuman. I was a frequent guest for dinner at their home in Evanston and I learned much during our discussions. Rachel rarely missed leafleting at the supermarkets on Saturday mornings. She showed me how to effectively work a supermarket parking lot, not waiting for a customer to approach the store, but instead greeting them and handing them a leaflet as they got out of their car. I have remained friends with John and Rachel through the years and see them whenever I return to Illinois for a visit.

Although we were paid only \$5 a week, we lived well. People admired what we were doing and wanted to help. Several supporters like John and Rachel provided meals on a regular basis. Mechanics donated their services to repair our cars. One of our staff who was from Chicago, Beto Barrera, regularly got meat donated from a butcher shop in the Latino community.

There were five or six of us to an apartment. One of the guys in our apartment was collecting unemployment. When his check came in he bought pizza for all of us. That was a big deal. We would start checking in by phone at midafternoon to find out if the check had arrived on the expected day.

We worked hard six days a week, having Monday as a day off, but we played hard too. We would often gather for a party on Sunday evening. There was a strong sense of community among the staff. Of course we had our differences and difficulties, but we were united by a common purpose and usually got along.

Many in our group also had a great sense of humor. At weekly staff meetings we were asked to tell the highlights of our week. Richard Grossman would often say he did not have many highlights, but he had some lowlights to share, and proceeded to tell a funny story about some disaster he had endured that week. Chris Schneider always had a funny story to tell. Jerry Hurtubise had a tough area out in conservative Park Ridge, but always found the lighter side of the challenges he faced.

In addition to having my assigned area, I ended up being responsible for designing and doing the layout when we needed leaflets and posters. I would create a camera-ready copy and take it to a shop to get a metal plate burned, which was then run on a printing press we had. This was before personal computers. I used a typewriter, Chart Pak letters that had to be rubbed on one letter at a time, and pictures and graphic images that I would literally cut and paste. A layout that now takes minutes on a computer used to take hours.

I kept track of the supporters in my area with index cards. That 3-by-5-card file was the most important thing I had. On those cards I keep a record of each time I tried to contact a supporter, each time I reached a supporter, and the result of that contact. I also kept

track of every time a supporter participated in an activity. I carried the card file with me and took it home with me each night.

In August of 1975, all of the boycott staff from throughout the country got to go to California for the UFW constitutional convention. That was really exciting. I had only been to California once—when I was two years old. To get us there, the union bought a fleet of used Greyhound buses on the East Coast and picked up boycott staff along the way. Several buses converged in Chicago and then left together from there. We were in a convoy of 10 or more buses.

The trip was not without incident. The first night out of Chicago, somewhere along Interstate 80 in Nebraska, one of the priests in our group was trying to fix a problem with the toilet on our bus. Earlier that day an attempt to empty the holding tank had failed, and no one could get it to work. The tank was full and now we could not use the toilet. So as we are cruising down the highway, this priest was in the bathroom trying to figure it out. Well, he pulled a lever and all of the sudden there was this huge, crashing splash noise from underneath the bus. He jumped backwards out of the bathroom and yelled to the driver, “Faster, faster, drive faster!” The good father had solved the problem.

On the return trip home, the bus I was on broke a belt in the middle of Nebraska and we spent most of the day on the side of the road. Two of our group hitchhiked to several towns in search of a replacement. Finally, they decided to try a lawn mower belt that looked close enough. It worked and we made it back to Chicago.

It is hard to describe what a wonderful experience it was to make that trip to California. We were at the convention with Cesar Chavez and other key figures of the union, whom I had only read about but had never seen in person, along with hundreds of boycott staff and thousands of farmworkers. We also got to go to Forty Acres, near Delano, and to La Paz, the UFW headquarters, near Keene, California. After reading and hearing about the union, the struggle, Cesar Chavez, Forty Acres, La Paz, and so much more, it was just fantastic to see it all in person. I was walking where history had and was happening.

So it was great to be there, except for when the lawn sprinklers came on in the middle of the night at the athletic field that we were sleeping on while attending the convention. At least it was hot enough that it didn't really matter, and we soon dried out.

When we first arrived at the convention site in Fresno it was in the afternoon and there was a large crowd gathered in a circle. A band was playing, and in the middle of the circle was Cesar Chavez, dancing with his wife, Helen. Here was Cesar, who had started this huge movement and seemed bigger than life, enjoying a dance with his wife. At first I was surprised, but then I thought it was neat.

In March of 1976 we got a big surprise. In order to collect enough signatures to put the farmworker initiative, Proposition 14, on the ballot in California, boycott staff were being

pulled from throughout the country to come to California. We had one day's notice to get ready to go. Cars were going to be in great demand on the campaign, so 10 of us left Chicago for California in four cars. Two of the cars, including mine, had stick shift, and only four of us could drive with a clutch, so two of the cars had only two drivers, while the other two cars had three drivers.

We drove straight through, only stopping briefly for gas and food or to change drivers. We changed drivers every three hours, so my driving partner and I alternated between driving and sleeping every three hours. We traveled the 2200 miles from Chicago to La Paz in about 46 hours.

We arrived at La Paz on March 31, Cesar Chavez's birthday. There was a big party that evening, and the next day it was off to Los Angeles. There was a large group of us, probably more than 100, staying at an abandoned seminary. Every day we would go out to collect signatures at 9 a.m. and come back at 9 p.m. We had breakfast before we went out, were given a sack lunch, and had dinner when we came back in.

My mom was worried about me going to California. She and my dad had seen the film *Fighting For Our Lives* and thought I would be in danger. I had told her not to worry, because we were going to be in the cities wielding clipboards. I was sent out to collect signatures in West L.A., Santa Monica, and Venice. There was still snow on the ground when I had left Chicago. Now it was nice and warm and a whole different world. I was totally fascinated by my new surroundings. I also collected signatures at the corner of Hollywood and Vine, but the neighborhood was in decline and not at all glamorous.

I experienced another good example of why the farmworker movement was successful. There was always constant critiquing and ongoing training of the staff and volunteers. Fred Ross, Sr. and others traveled around to the various sites to check on how we were doing. One day he stopped by when I was at the Farmers Market on Fairfax. He watched me for a moment, told me what I could do to improve, and worked with me for a while. My production greatly increased and I got some of the highest daily totals, pulling in over 300 signatures a day.

I also got a really good lesson in not stereotyping people. One day I was in front of a Santa Monica supermarket when a hippie-looking dude came walking up. I thought it would be an easy signature. Instead he started yelling at me. He was the son of a grower.

The signature drive was a huge success. We had collected hundreds of thousands of signatures in one month and met the deadline to put the initiative on the ballot. We had a huge party to celebrate. After a few days in La Paz for meetings, we headed back to Chicago.

The boycott structure was reorganized. Mark Pitt, who had been in charge of the Chicago boycott, became the Midwest regional director. I became the Chicago boycott director. I

was young, with limited experience of being in charge of others, so there are certainly some things I would do differently now, but I am glad I had the opportunity. Throughout the union there was this willingness to give young people a great deal of responsibility.

In August of 1976, I was called back to California, along with a lot other folks on the boycott, to work on the Yes on 14 election campaign. My assigned area was Long Beach, Carson, and Torrance. I organized a rally that was held at Long Beach State University the day before the election. Cesar and Tom Hayden were there. I was greatly relieved the moment that Cesar was in the car driving away. There were threats on his life and there had been reports of suspicious people being spotted at campaign events the day before. I was so glad that nothing happened at my event.

It was a bitter campaign, with the growers spending millions on a deceptive ad campaign. One of the provisions of the initiative was that it guaranteed the union the right to talk to workers, including those who lived on a grower's property in housing provided by the grower. The opposition seized upon this and claimed it violated private property rights. Their slogan was "Vote no to protect private property." It worked, and the initiative was defeated. I cried that night while watching Cesar speak to the media.

We spent several days after the campaign in La Paz, while Cesar and the top leadership planned a reorganization of the union and reassignment of most of the staff. Initially, I was asked if I would be willing to be in charge of a boycott office somewhere other than Chicago, perhaps in California. Then the union's leadership formed into teams of two, and each one of us was interviewed. One of my interviewers was Fred Ross, Sr. Just as the interview was concluding, I said that I had heard that the union was going to open a political office in Sacramento. Fred asked me if I was interested. I said yes and that I was very interested in politics.

One evening soon thereafter, we were all gathered in the big room of the building called the North Unit at La Paz. Our name and then our assignment was announced aloud to the group, one person at a time. A lot of people were being assigned to the representation election campaigns. My new assignment was the citizen participation department, run by Mack Lyons in Sacramento.

I drove back to Illinois to spend Thanksgiving with my parents and pack for the move to California. I know that was hard on my parents, especially my mom. I was their only child and now I was going to move 2000 miles away. I did not plan to stay permanently in California. I still considered Illinois home and thought that I would be back after a while.

My assignment in Sacramento was difficult at times. To support the legislative effort, I was assigned to do research, which was boring for me. I tried very hard to make the best of it and do whatever was asked of me, but I missed the excitement of the boycott and the regular interaction with people. Fortunately, things came up that allowed me to get out of the library some of the time.

There were some wonderful longtime supporters in Sacramento and we did some good demonstrations when needed. Once we were asked to stage a sit-in in the governor's office. Governor Jerry Brown was usually supportive of the UFW, so I think it might have been for show to give him some cover on an issue. Whatever the reason, we packed the outer office and made the head of the state police really mad when we refused to stop eating food, which was prohibited. Several of the women brought homemade food that we passed around.

Another time we did a sit-in for several days at the offices of the Agricultural Labor Relations Board. This was not just for show. The ALRB had made some bad decisions and we were applying pressure. Dennis Banks and several members of the American Indian Movement brought a huge ceremonial drum. Six people at a time sat around the drum, beating on it. The sound bounced off the walls throughout that state office building. Volunteers came over from Berkeley and San Francisco.

In April, I spent a few days in East L.A. to help with Get Out The Vote (GOTV) for Mayor Tom Bradley, who was running for reelection, and had been endorsed by the UFW. We had staff and volunteers who did not speak Spanish and farmworkers who did not speak English, so we put an English speaker and a Spanish speaker together as a team to walk precincts. It worked well, because in some homes only Spanish was spoken and in some homes only English. The challenge was for the team to communicate to each other.

My mom continued to worry about me being in danger in California, but I kept reassuring her that I was spending most of my days in a library. That changed in the spring of 1977, when I was assigned to help with a strike at the Klein asparagus ranch between Stockton and Tracy. The workers were striking to get their first contract. Ruben Serna was in charge of the strike and Mack Lyons was heavily involved, too.

I worked with our supporters in Sacramento to help the strikers. I recruited volunteers to be on the picket line and collected food for the strikers. I spent most days at the picket line and then held meetings with supporters and made phone calls in the evening. Boycott staff and volunteers came from as far away as San Francisco to be on the picket line.

I unexpectedly got arrested twice within three days. The first time it took the union 36 hours to make bail for me. Then an attorney was assigned to the strike, and the second time he got me out in a few hours on my own reconnaissance, even though I had been charged with assault with a deadly weapon both times.

The first time I was driving in my car with another staff person. We were driving onto the ranch to pick up strikers who were living in housing provided by the grower. A group of neighboring growers was there. Partway into the ranch some of them were standing across the road, blocking our way. I had already had one of the grower's security guards point his shotgun at me, and another goon had tried to run me off the road, so I figured that if I

stopped, they would pull us out of the car and beat us up. I kept going, and the growers jumped out of the way. They claimed that my car grazed the hand of one of them. Both of us in the car were arrested for assault with a deadly weapon, my car. Of course only one of us could have been driving at the time, but both of us were arrested.

I was put in a cell with two other guys. It was like the group W bench in Arlo Guthrie's "Alice's Restaurant." They looked at me and I looked at them. They asked what I was in for and I said assault with a deadly weapon. I asked what they were in for and they said breaking and entering. I told them about working for Cesar and the UFW. They had worked in the fields, decided I was okay, and shared their *Playboy* magazines.

The second time I was trying to follow a labor contractor's van to find out where some scabs came from. We had been successful at following scabs home and persuading them not to return, causing the grower to have to keep finding replacement workers on a daily basis. To stop us, a hired security guard in a car would follow the van, slow down, and weave in and out of the other lane whenever we tried to pass. The van would then get away.

Not long after leaving the ranch, the van had to slow down to make a turn at an intersection. I positioned my car along the side of the road so that I could pull in behind the van before the security guard could make the turn. It worked and I was behind van. The security guard tried to pass me and cut in between the van and me. I stayed on the van's tail and would not let him in. He then started bashing my car with his car. I fought back and almost put him in the ditch on the other side of the road. He then backed off and continued to follow me.

The van drove around for a while trying to shake me. Finally, it appeared that the van driver had given up on shaking me and took the scabs to a group of buildings out in the country on the other side of Stockton. I drove by when the van pulled in the driveway. The security guard pulled in behind the van. I turned around to come back by for one more look. The security guard pulled his car out across the road, blocking my path. I could not stop in time and hit his car. He jumped out and started running at my car, waving a nightstick. I put my car in reverse and backed away fast down the road, before he could get to me. I then headed for town. The deputy sheriffs believed his story that I started it, and I was arrested.

The grower eventually agreed to a contract! The union dropped numerous unfair labor practice charges against the grower and all arrest charges were dropped against me and other staff who had been arrested. I was very proud of what we had accomplished. I certainly learned a lot, too.

A few months after the strike, I decided I was ready to do something else and went to work at the California Conservation Corps, which was run by LeRoy Chatfield and Richard Ybarra. My CCC experience could consume a whole other essay. Mostly because of my

friendship with Richard Ybarra, I stayed connected with Cesar through the years and had some wonderful experiences with Cesar and other folks associated with the UFW.

In 1983, Fred Ross, Jr. recruited me to work on Diane Feinstein's campaign against a recall and then later that year her reelection as mayor of San Francisco. Fred Jr. brought in his dad, Fred Sr., to train the campaign staff. That was a wonderful experience. I had Fred Sr. critiquing my phone bank scripts and going with me to house meetings. I loved to hear him tell stories.

In 1984, when Richard Ybarra ran for county supervisor in Kern County, I got to spend a lot of time at La Paz and interacted with Cesar and several members of his family. One day I witnessed a special moment between Cesar and Helen Chavez. Anna, Richard's wife, had become ill and was in the hospital. Helen, along with Richard's mom, Minnie Ybarra, helped take care of the family in Bakersfield while Anna was in the hospital. After several days, Richard and I drove Helen home to La Paz. We were in the living room of Cesar and Helen's little house. Cesar came in, sat next to Helen, and told her that he had missed her so much. She responded that she had really missed him too. After many years of marriage, they still genuinely missed each other when apart. It was a very touching moment.

When Cesar did his last fast, in the summer of 1988, Richard Ybarra recruited me to volunteer to help raise money for the union. Along with some other folks, I phoned unions and faith-based organizations throughout the country to ask them to buy an ad in the commemorative booklet for the celebration when Cesar would break the fast. I spent most of my time doing phoning at a union office in Los Angeles. One time when I saw Cesar, before he broke his fast, his condition really worried me. He did not look good.

From 1989 to 1991, I worked at the law firm of Fernando Chavez, Cesar's oldest son, and continued to see Cesar and various members of his family from time to time.

When Cesar died, I learned of it while watching CNN. A few hours later, I got a phone call from Richard Ybarra and Fernando Chavez, asking me to come to Delano to help with logistics. I had already started packing and making arrangements to go before they called. I could write a whole other essay about that experience. The thing that I remember the most is all of the people who just kept coming, arriving at all hours of the day and night, to pay their respects. Cesar had touched so many lives, including mine.