

## Wren Atilano Bradley 1976–1979

There are thousands of stories that could be told about our experiences in the UFW clinic that had such a dramatic effect for the workers, their families, and us as staff. I will tell one.

I was one of several nurse practitioners working in the East Salinas UFW clinic right across the street from Monte Mart in 1977. We were a burgeoning clinic open six days and nights a week—sometimes into the long hours of the night—either in the clinic, following our clients to the hospitals and aiding them as advocates, or doing home visits. With rare exceptions, medical personnel in those days rarely spoke Spanish. Our clinic staff made up almost the entire medical personnel in Monterey County that did.

While many families then were unionized under the UFW and had *Plan Medico*, many were not. And even many of those who had good union health insurance preferred to come to the UFW clinic where they felt safe, they felt comfortable, and they felt like we were *familia* in a sense.

Juanita was a 40-plus single mother who was a *lechugera* (lettuce cutter), a very uncommon position for a woman in 1977. While once she had worked under a union contract, she was currently working for a non-union company. She had always come to the clinic for check-ups in her best outfits and very clean, yet she always had the scent of lettuce on her body and clothing. Lettuce and strawberries were the scents that seemed to permeate our little clinic.

Despite her age, Juanita was very shy when it came to talking about things like her sexuality, methods of birth control, her body, and one day she showed up complaining of symptoms that would have been obvious to most women with children—symptoms of pregnancy. I confirmed that Juanita was pregnant and already almost three months along. Juanita's emotions were mixed—she was scared, excited, and fearful about whether she was too old to have this baby. But there was no question in Juanita's mind whether she would carry this baby. She was prepared and committed to continue the pregnancy and do everything right to give this baby the best possible chance in the world. And together we plotted out her schedule of visits, her nutritional requirements, and her need for getting enough rest. She continued to work.

Juanita was a sponge for knowledge. She had had four other children in Mexico with a midwife and had never received prenatal care for any of those pregnancies. Until I had the opportunity to go into great detail with Juanita about the physiological aspects of conception, growth, and development of the fetus, Juanita had no idea how this all occurred except to understand that “somehow” she got pregnant after sexual relations and *Dios* (God) made the miracle of life in her occur. It was in some ways a spiritual experience for me to be involved with someone who had such a different understanding of the world than I had.

We also spent a great deal of time talking about the risks of the pregnancy, given her age. She was prepared to have and care for this baby no matter what condition this baby came to her in. She considered this a gift from God. The visits were frequent and Juanita never missed an appointment. Into the fourth month, everything seemed to be fine. Then suddenly from one week to the next, Juanita's blood pressure started to climb. Doctor Marco, our one and only doctor in the clinic, stepped in and we came up with a regimen for Juanita, which included medications and stricter guidelines for her diet. Juanita was placed on disability to ensure she had every opportunity to protect the pregnancy. I continued to monitor her blood pressure twice a week by visiting her at her home. Juanita's blood pressure stabilized after three weeks.

My days at the clinic usually started around 4 a.m. It was on one of those early mornings when I came to the clinic that I found Juanita sitting on a bench outside the clinic waiting for someone to show up. Juanita had started to bleed and was having contractions. She was frantic. She would not go to an emergency room. After consulting with Doctor Marco, I did a pelvic exam to discover that Juanita was having a full-blown miscarriage. Nothing could have been done to save this pregnancy. However, due to the fact that Juanita had no health insurance and was undocumented, there was little to do in the way of medical assistance that any hospital could offer except to tell her exactly what she already knew and charge her a lot of money. I had to give her the very sad news and properly medicate her to prevent complications. It was now just a matter of time before Juanita miscarried. We walked the length of the clinic together for almost two hours when finally Juanita had an urge to push. I took Juanita into a room where she miscarried the baby. Juanita did not have any complications, but she was devastated by the loss of her baby. For her, to make sure that God took her baby properly and forgave her, she asked that her baby be blessed and requested assistance for a proper burial according to Catholic tradition. One of the priests on staff in our Salinas hiring hall on S. Wood St. came immediately to bless the baby and arranged for a very small but free burial plot at the local cemetery.

I made the rest of the burial arrangements and obtained a very small coffin-like box with beautiful velvet trimming. Our clinic closed down for an hour so that our entire staff could all attend this funeral to show our solidarity with this woman who was in so much emotional pain. She expressed her gratitude over and over again. She had no family here except for her other children to share this grieving time. Our staff priest conducted the ceremony and the baby received a proper burial.

For many years after the UFW clinic closed down, I would see Juanita, and we would always give each other a warm embrace and shed a tear or two. This experience in this woman's life was never forgotten to her. Each time we met, she expressed her gratitude for the support she had received from the UFW. I have never forgotten this experience in this woman's life. I learned so much from her about how precious all life is, no matter how long or short it is. She forever understood how important the United Farm Workers movement was for her.

This experience, and others like it, has forever changed how I see and interact with all people that I come in contact with. The UFW gave me the opportunities to be the best person I could, to bring my entire presence to each and every moment, to be creative and push that envelope for the betterment of *La Causa*, and to offer hope to workers. The proverbial *Si Se Puede* mentality characterized everything we did in that clinic. No problem too large to solve; no problem too small to be ignored. To this day, I carry my stories locked up in my heart and mind and draw on them for strength when facing other challenging battles. I remain extremely grateful to Cesar for having the foresight to place me in the Salinas UFW clinic. This clinic provided a high quality of health care and a level of community involvement that has never been duplicated in the Salinas Valley.