

APPENDIX C

Dr. Marion Moses did not write an essay for the Documentation Project but instead sent copies of articles that she had previously written for various publications regarding her work with the farmworker movement, especially her role in the development of health care for farmworkers, her research about the effects of pesticides on workers, and her role as the personal physician for Cesar Chavez. I chose to reprint here in its entirety the article she wrote for *The Catholic Worker* in its June-July issue of 1993.

Marion Moses 1965-1971 1983-1986

The Catholic Worker
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“Cesar Chavez, 1927 – 1993”
by Marion Moses

It was early Friday afternoon and we were returning from a meeting with campesinos at Las Mercedes coffee cooperative in El Salvador, over miles of rugged dirt road in beautiful mountain country, when the car radio squawked that there was, “un mensaje urgente para la doctora” (an urgent message for the doctor). When we arrived at the office an hour later, the secretary handed me a note written in pencil “Helen Chavez aviso que fallecio Cesar Chavez” (Helen Chavez wanted you to know that Cesar Chavez died). There was also an urgent message from the coroner in Bakersfield, California who was planning to do the autopsy that evening and wanted information from me, as Cesar’s personal physician, about his past medical history.

When I got through to the United Farm Workers headquarters in Keene, and spoke with Helen (Cesar’s wife), she told me that Cesar had died in his sleep in San Luis, Arizona. He had been there to testify in a court retrial of the Bruce Church Industry case in Yuma and was staying at the home of a longtime union supporter. He had completed his testimony being on the stand for two full days. He went to bed around 10 pm on Thursday evening (April 22). At 8 am on Friday morning, he had not come in for breakfast. David Martinez, the union officer who was traveling with Cesar and was also staying at the house, knew how intense the testimony had been and how tired Cesar was from his hectic schedule, so decided to let him sleep another hour. At 9 o’clock, when David went in to wake Cesar, he found that though he seemed asleep, he was dead. Cesar died about 20 miles from Yuma, where he was born 66 years before on March 31, 1927.

My first hours of grief were spent making arrangements to return to California from San Salvador, my mind teeming with memories of my long association with Cesar, whom I first met in October, 1965, at a meeting at the Unitarian Church in Berkeley, when he came to ask for support for the grape workers who had gone out on strike in Delano on September

8. I remember some of what he said but I mostly remember his gentle manner; that, although he wasn't a particularly good speaker, he had a strong moral force, an inner quality which the often used word "charisma" cannot even begin to describe. One of the organizers of the meeting was Dorothy Legaretta Kaufmann who was working at Peter Maurin House, the Catholic Worker House in Oakland, and who was my first link with Cesar and the farm workers. Dorothy and Ann Draper, a trade unionist from San Francisco, actively recruited me to the farm worker cause in 1964 when I was a student at the University of California in Berkeley. It was also through Dorothy Legaretta Kaufmann that I first met Dorothy Day in 1964. I first heard of Dorothy Day and began to subscribe to "The Catholic Worker" in 1957, after reading "The Long Loneliness." Cesar Chavez and Dorothy Day would continue to be inseparable parts of my life and work through the coming years.

I left Salvador early Saturday morning, and read Cesar's obituary in six different newspapers before the day was over – in San Salvador, in two newspapers in Mexico City, in the Los Angeles Times, and in the two San Francisco papers when I finally arrived home. All of the papers said that Cesar had died of natural causes. The Salvadoreno sitting next to me on the plane said that he didn't believe it was natural causes as the paper said, an attitude that I would find quite prevalent in the days ahead (the autopsy confirmed that he died of natural causes). I called Helen from Los Angeles and told her I would leave the next day for La Paz.

I drove through Pacheco Pass and down Highway 99 still not believing what I knew to be true, not wanting to see what I knew I would see when I arrived at La Paz – Cesar's lifeless body. So I kept trying to think of Cesar when he was alive, of his incredible energy, drive and commitment (which at close sight could not always be distinguished from obstinacy). I remembered the Friday night meetings at the Filipino Hall in Delano, especially the one where I noticed how much pain Cesar seemed to be in. I took care of him during his illness in 1969 when I called Dr. Janet Travell (President John Kennedy's doctor) whose treatment made him pain free after years of severe back pain. I remembered taking care of him during his first public fast in February 1968, and many shorter ones, and his last public fast in August, 1988 which lasted 36 days. I remember how difficult and stubborn he could be (he said the same thing about me). His stubbornness was reminiscent of my being Dorothy Day's doctor, since, like Cesar, she also had her own ideas about what was appropriate treatment. We both usually ended up giving a little ground.

Pesticides and Cancer

I remember one of the first questions Cesar ever asked me when he found out I was a nurse was "Do you know anything about pesticides?" Answering this question led to my leaving the union in 1971 to become a doctor, and pesticides was a major part of my work when I returned to work for the UFW from 1983 to 1986. I returned to my own practice in San Francisco but continued to work closely with Cesar and the union. My last public

appearance with Cesar was in New York in December, 1992 for a national television show about pesticides and cancer in farm worker children.

Cesar was one of the most realistic people I ever met, who understood exactly what the UFW was up against, and what it would take to change it. He was a man of clear vision and strong opinions whose superb organizing abilities, great personal integrity, and commitment to nonviolence not only changed the way farm workers thought about themselves, but also the way we thought about farm workers. He did not believe in government handouts or legislation which invariably sanctified the status quo – a position amply justified by the failures of the California Agricultural Labor Relations Act passed in 1975. He didn't believe in top down problem solving, and never lost touch with the workers.

Working with the UFW meant extraordinary personal demands and sacrifices, and the need to sustain a high level of commitment over the long term. The inspiring and the lofty were mixed in with a much greater amount of the tedious and mundane. It was not always easy to adjust or sort it all out, and over the years, many left the union in varying stages of confusion, bewilderment, or turmoil. Cesar was a living example that if you never forget the people, if you don't get distracted, and can keep your sense of social justice intact, you won't get lost along the way; you won't "burn out" and can make impossible things happen. He broke the cycle of hopelessness, pessimism and despair. There are millions whose lives were touched by Cesar because he showed us a way to do good, to join the struggle, even if it was only by the simple yet profound act of not buying grapes.

Many of us putting our thoughts and feelings into words will struggle, as I am struggling here, to try to say what he meant to us. The sense of loss is overwhelming, but so was the joy of sharing his life. Goodbye Cesar, dear friend and fellow worker.