

Alberto Escalante 1975-1977 1985-1987

The Saga of the 1975 UFW Imperial Valley Organizing Campaign

We Changed the Lives of Farmworkers Forever

In the winter of 1975, a select group of committed and highly motivated UFW volunteers, consisting of organizers, paralegal workers, and a minimal support staff of office personnel, were sent to the Imperial Valley to take part in what would ultimately turn out to be one of the most productive organizing campaigns ever conducted by the union. To simply say that this episode changed the lives and future of California's farmworkers would be an understatement. The 1975 Imperial Valley Campaign and the consequential effects it would have would eventually reverberate and be felt throughout the state and country. Its effects were felt not only by the workers who worked in the fields and had voted to have UFW representation, the shockwaves were also felt on Wall Street, in the halls of academia, and ultimately in the political environs of Sacramento, including the offices of the politicians who decided which state programs would receive further funding and which would not. I have often wondered what would have happened had the UFW not been so successful and won so many elections. Would California legislators still have held back the ALRB funding? This is a moot question because the funding was held up, and the ALRB was forced to effectively shut down its operations.

Our organizing activities were curtailed and we were given a brief leave of absence and told to go home and rest. When we returned, it wasn't to the Imperial Valley but to La Paz. This would effectively end all organizing activities. They wouldn't resume again until late 1976 after the ALRB was revived and our organizing activities were resumed. And even though we were still effective, winning 14 out of the 19 elections we entered, we were nowhere near as dynamic a force as we had been when we were forced to halt our organizing activities and regroup earlier that year. The only plus that I could see was that we now had about twice as many organizers as we had before. Many had joined the union during that summer's ill-fated experience with Proposition 14.

The UFW Imperial Valley Organizing Committee consisted of some of the best farmworker organizers and election campaign tacticians who ever worked for the farmworker movement. It is amazing how the UFW was able to consistently attract such a tremendous array of people and, after teaching them some basic organizing skills, would assign them to work in the election organizing campaign.

When the 1975 Imperial Valley Organizing Campaign began, most of the organizers on staff were already seasoned veterans. Most had organized somewhere in California, and of course we also had the usual assortment of veteran experienced farmworker organizers like Lupe Murguia, Mario Vargas, and Jose Luna – people who had been part of the union’s earliest campaigns. Others, like me, had some experience, having joined when we’d first learned of the proposed organizing campaign and the new farmworker law, the Agricultural Labor Relations Act.

I had worked as an organizer in Oxnard, Northern California, and Santa Maria before finally being assigned to the Imperial Valley. Even before the law went into effect, workers throughout the state were demanding to have an election at their workplace. On many occasions, the UFW would be deluged with stacks of filled-out and signed union authorization cards that were brought in to the office by farmworkers clamoring for UFW representation. Many times it was obvious that there just weren’t enough organizers available to handle all of the organizing necessary to meet all of the election demands of California’s farmworkers. And sad to say, we were right. We realized that in order to have an effective organizing campaign, we had to have a sense of order and stability in the workplace and fields, and to date there hadn’t been any.

There were men and women on the Imperial Valley Organizing Committee who had once been part of the UFW boycott staff. They had come to California from areas and cities throughout the United States and Canada. They came hoping to help facilitate the passage of the new farmworker law that would soon go into effect. We all shared a common goal, which was to organize and win as many elections as possible, as long as we met certain criteria stipulated by the law: (1) that a majority of the workers where an election had been requested had freely and on their own signed authorization cards saying that they wanted to have the UFW represent them when they entered into any contract negotiations; and (2) the election had to be held

during the “peak harvest” period, or when the majority of workers that were hired by the company during the year were working. For many farmworkers, this was the first time they had ever participated in anything like this or even voted for anything, in any election, anywhere. For many, this was the first time they were able to do anything to improve their situation, position, or wages.

By late 1975 it became obvious that the growers were going to try to kill off or end the operations of the ALRB when its funding ran out. And from all indications, the growers and pro-agribusiness groups were going to do everything they could to derail the law and pressure the California legislature to stop any further funding of the ALRB. The growers had seen the writing on the wall as the majority of farmworkers chose the UFW as their sole representative and bargaining agent in election after election. Now with the ALRB funding running out, all sides were poised to do whatever was needed in an attempt to win as many farmworker elections as possible.

Most ballots listed three choices for the workers: UFW, Teamsters, No Union. But toward the end of 1975 a couple of disgruntled ex-Teamsters began to request that they wanted to have the name of their organization, the Independent Union, placed on some ballots. They were operating with questionable financial backing, and most observers saw it as just another attempt by the growers to subvert the entire election process by placing the name of a fraudulent nonentity on the ballot.

As the ALRB drew near to the end of the first funding period, the UFW realized it had to accelerate its organizing campaign to reach out and enfranchise as many farmworkers as possible in the event the ALRB ceased operations. It was the ALRB that guaranteed farmworkers the right to participate in open, secret ballot elections to determine which union, if any, they wished to represent them. This was an exciting time and had a certain ring of freedom to it.

Little by little, the fears and suspicions of the workers were allayed as more and more workers began to sense the power they possessed through their participation in union elections. By the end of 1975 the UFW had won elections at more than 140 farm locations. It soon became obvious to everyone that during this brief period of time between the harvest of 1975

and the winter of 1976, when California farmworkers were allowed to listen to and freely hear the message of the UFW, without any outside interference or coercion, threats, or intimidation, they overwhelmingly chose the United Farm Workers to be their sole bargaining agent. As the growers and agricultural barons of California saw one ranch after another vote for UFW representation, they knew that they had to do something. That something came their way when the funding for the ALRB ran out. The growers sabotaged the law by using their political power to prevent the legislature from authorizing additional funds. But by the time the growers and the California Farm Bureau were able to prevent further funding for the Act, the UFW was the hands-down winner of the majority of all the farmworker elections that had taken place.

Where Were We From? Where Did We Go?

Many of those who were volunteers and organizers during this historic episode would eventually leave the UFW to go on and become leaders in their chosen fields of endeavor using and applying many of the skills they had learned from working for the UFW to their benefit. Those who decided to stay with the UFW would go on to become the future leaders of the union. They too had learned their lessons well and would eventually become some of the best farmworker organizers, negotiators, and election campaign tacticians ever to work for the union. This second wave of union leadership would step in and fill many of the positions that opened up after the shakeups and splits that occurred within the union hierarchy in the late 1970s.

The fact that the UFW was able to continually attract and gather such a tremendous array of talented organizers and skilled activists was always a source of amazement to me. This said much about the drawing power and the allure that Cesar Chavez had during this and other “crisis” periods. I’m sure that many of those who came to work for the UFW during this period, as well as those who came during other times when Cesar would make a public appeal for volunteers, were primarily attracted to the movement, *La Causa*, by its charismatic leader.

I asked many of those who volunteered to work on the 1975 farmworker election organizing drive what had attracted them to the union. And unequivocally, the answer was Cesar Chavez. Especially in the Imperial Valley

organizing campaign, which, as I have said, was staffed with a wide assortment of veteran, novice, and fledgling UFW volunteers. Many, like myself, had either joined or been recruited in the early part of 1975 specifically for the job of “farmworker organizer” because of our belief in Cesar’s vision that once organized and stabilized, the job of farmworker organizer would be like that of many other trade and craft unions. All that was missing was the essential factor of stability. And that’s why the leaders of the UFW knew that the new ALRA, or Agricultural Labor Relations Act, was essential in order to achieve the stability that was needed to effectively have free and open union representation elections.

Once the ALRB was in position, it would open the floodgates for farmworker union elections throughout California. And that is exactly what happened. Anticipating this deluge, the ALRB had sent out “feelers” to find suitable candidates for a new, very mobile “task force” of ALRB agents, field examiners, and lawyers to supervise these elections. People who had “street smarts” and were not your average run-of-the-mill bureaucrats and career state employees. Not surprisingly, the task force resembled the UFW organizing team in many ways, the most obvious being that they were ex-UFW people themselves! This would come back to bite the agency in the butt later, when the accusations and finger pointing began, but for now let’s just say that the ALRB had also assigned its best people to work in the Imperial Valley because this agricultural area was a potential bomb just waiting to explode. If a strong and effective ALRB was ever needed, it would be in this valley.

The Imperial Valley ALRB Task Force

Early on, the emphasis of the ALRB had been to gather and disseminate as much information as possible about the new law to farmworkers, especially their rights regarding self-determination and union representation. Information was also disseminated about the rights of union organizers, such as access to workers in the fields. What constituted an unfair labor practice (ULP) was still being defined and hashed out in Sacramento by the new ALRB Board, the various ag groups, and the two unions in contention, the Teamsters and the United Farm Workers.

By the beginning of the Imperial Valley Campaign, many of these issues had been properly dealt with. To avoid having to deal with many of the same problems that the ALRB had encountered during its first couple of months of existence, Sam Cohen, an attorney with the ALRB, hand-picked a special task force of lawyers, field examiners, and field agents to supervise the union representation elections in the Imperial Valley and investigate any unfair labor practices.

Most task force members were longtime participants and activists in the struggle to bring justice to the rural and farmworker community. People like Mo Jourdane, a bright, charismatic young attorney who had worked for the California Rural Legal Assistance and had filed suit to outlaw the use of the short-handled hoe, which is now banned in California. Brian Georgiou, a lawyer with an absolutely brilliant legal mind and fearless demeanor. Shirley Trevino, a fiery *Chicana* activist and strong proponent of *La Raza* and Latino issues who hailed from Tierra Nueva in San Jose, CA. Carlos Bowker was an outspoken militant Chicano activist and a longtime resident of the Imperial Valley. Luis Lopez, quiet and unassuming, who had apprenticed under Jourdane, was completely dedicated to the cause of farmworkers. This task force would transform the ALRB office in El Centro into the finest in the state.

They knew that it would be their job, along with their fellow ALRB employees, to oversee and insure a level playing field for the elections and union activity in the Imperial Valley. They were the strongest group of ALRB agents and investigators ever assembled. Many would be threatened and set upon by irate growers who felt that the Imperial Valley ALRB was too “pro-Chavez” and biased, or not neutral enough. In other words, the growers knew that the El Centro/Imperial office couldn’t be bought or scared off. In fact, when the funding was halted, many of the ALRB staff declared that they would continue to work even if they didn’t get paid. This was indicative of the atmosphere that existed by early 1976 when the asparagus harvest was set to begin. Everyone knew that the majority of the asparagus workers were very strong “Chavistas” or UFW supporters. The pressure cooker atmosphere of the Imperial Valley was always on the brink of going off.

The Scene Is Set

The majority of the men and women assigned to the UFW Imperial Valley Organizing Committee were from UFW field offices and boycott staff. The boycott staff had come to California from areas and cities throughout the United States and Canada. They came full of hope, dreams, and aspirations of helping to facilitate the passage of this new law that would soon go into effect.

Those who had been designated as farmworker organizers and field office staff were given their initial training at the UFW national headquarters at La Paz, which is located in Keene, CA (a tiny hamlet situated on Hwy. 58 between Bakersfield and Tehachapi, CA). By the time they were assigned to Calexico in the late fall and winter of 1975, the majority had already completed their training at the “Fred Ross Organizer Training Program.”

Immediately upon receiving their initial training, these fledgling organizers were sent out to augment the existing UFW organizing staff in field offices throughout the state. Some, especially the organizers who’d come from outside of the state, had to acclimate themselves to the political and sociological atmosphere that existed in California at this time. These were very volatile times.

Because of the incredible success of the UFW boycott, many California growers were desperate to stop the huge financial losses that they had suffered. They hoped that allowing the passage of the ARLA would stem the losses that had resulted from the years of relentless economic problems brought on by the strikes and the urban boycott activities of the 1960s and 1970s. But when the majority of elections were won by the UFW, the growers claimed the ALRB and its staff were “pro-UFW.”

These newly trained UFW organizers were assigned to ply their new skills under the close supervision of the most experienced UFW organizers, people like Eliseo Medina, Marshall Ganz, Fred Ross, Jr., Jim Drake, Richard Chavez, Dolores Huerta, Ben Maddox, Al Rojas, Pablo Espinoza, Abby Rose, and others. Initially, organizers were assigned to a specific location or geographical area to organize workers and show them how to set up and petition the state ALRB field offices in order to trigger an election under the new law. But when a specific election also covered workers in other parts of the state, the organizers became migrant workers of a sort.

The UFW organizing plan was to finish off 1975 with one huge organizing effort in the Imperial Valley, which would be headquartered in Calexico. Only the most dedicated and talented UFW organizers would be assigned to the Imperial Valley campaign. Hopefully, this essay will provide readers some insight and some of the story of the people who were responsible for the success of one of the most momentous periods in the history of farmworkers.

A Bumper Crop of UFW Victories

The Imperial Valley lies at the southernmost part of California and is surrounded on three sides by the De Anza Desert. Until the early 1900s it was a vast, arid desert land, but when water from the Colorado River was diverted to form the huge All-American Irrigation Project, it turned the once dry and desolate desert sands into rich soil that would become some of the world's most productive farmlands.

On the south, the Imperial Valley butts up against the metropolitan Mexican border city of Mexicali, Baja California. All that separates the town of Calexico from Mexicali is a steel wire mesh fence about ¼ inch thick and 12 to 16 feet tall. The fence is the only barrier that separates the rich farmland of the Imperial Valley from an almost endless supply of farmworkers, readily available in Mexico, to supply the daily needs of all the farms and ranches that make up the lush, verdant Imperial Valley basin. In 1975, the UFW field office was located a block from the U.S.-Mexico border.

Mexicali has always been a stronghold of militant farmworkers, and the majority of the Imperial Valley farmworkers had supported Cesar Chavez and the UFW from its earliest days. Cesar's cousin, Manuel Chavez, had been actively organizing farmworkers in the Imperial Valley for many years, and he commanded quite a following amongst the farmworkers of the area. Many of the workers could still remember how it was before Cesar began his fight for justice, better wages, and safer working conditions. Many had also worked under UFW contracts from 1970 until 1973, after the growers entered into "sweetheart contracts" with the Teamsters Union. The landowners, growers, and the labor contractors all felt that the Teamsters were the best chance they had to control the farmworkers, especially in the Imperial Valley. But now, with the new farm labor law, the workers could choose which union, if any,

they wanted to represent them. And when the farmworkers were allowed to choose their own union, they overwhelmingly picked the UFW. This would also eventually lead to the downfall and disbanding of the Teamsters Agricultural Workers Union that had tormented the UFW since the early 1970s – brilliantly captured in the UFW 1974 documentary film, *Fighting for Our Lives*.

After the ALRA went into effect (1975), in the first month alone, the UFW won 86 elections with 52 percent (13,410) of the total number of votes cast. After the second month, the UFW increased its total to 114 victories. By the end of the year, the UFW had 145 certified victories – 76 percent of the 191 elections that were certified – with almost that many more victories still awaiting ALRB certification. In the elections that followed, the UFW won an overwhelming series of victories, and by 1977 the Teamsters had withdrawn from the fields. Just when it seemed that the goals of the UFW had been reached, things started to slip away.

Growers dragged out negotiations for years and used legal loopholes to slow the process down. Of the hundreds of elections that the UFW won from 1975 to 1980, fewer than half ever led to contracts. The law had ruled out the use of boycotts to win union representation, so the UFW couldn't appeal for public support like it had done in the past. The number of organizing drives and elections began to drop. Why the UFW leadership put less and less emphasis on the fields and more and more attention on reaching the American public is something that will be the subject of debate for years to come.

Why Iceberg Lettuce Is a Popular Crop

The largest single crop planted and harvested in the Imperial Valley every winter is iceberg, or head, lettuce. The main reason is because of iceberg lettuce's innate ability to withstand prolonged periods of cold storage and lengthy transportation by refrigerated truck or rail car without suffering significant loss. Most other green or red leaf lettuces would soon begin to show the effects of refrigeration storage or transportation normally associated with prolonged cold storage. Thus, iceberg lettuce's ability to handle refrigerated transportation and storage made it a more popular – and profitable – product. Because of its ability to travel and withstand the

harshness of cold storage, by the early 1970s, iceberg lettuce had grown in popularity with growers; so much so that it had begun to open up markets in areas that it had never before seemed possible or feasible to ship to – even overseas, for example. Until the advent of iceberg lettuce, no one could guarantee that enough lettuce would or could arrive in edible condition to the Eastern seaboard or England and Europe. The ability of iceberg lettuce to withstand refrigeration made it possible to have beautiful, crisp, fresh-looking heads of lettuce in markets everywhere in the world.

Agribusiness companies like Interharvest, which had union contracts with the UFW, profited greatly, not only because of the popularity of head lettuce but because there was an incredible demand for lettuce that displayed the UFW label. At times it seemed as if Interharvest couldn't produce and ship its lettuce fast enough to suit its customers both here and abroad.

The Stage Is Set

In the late fall of 1975, Marshall Ganz, the director of organizing for the UFW, went to Calexico to set up the logistical services necessary to prepare for the largest organizing campaign in the history of the United Farm Workers. The peak harvest time, that is, the time of year when growers in and around the Imperial Valley employed the maximum number of farmworkers, was fast approaching.

Under the newly passed ALRB, a secret ballot election for farmworkers would be triggered when the union acquired enough worker-signed authorization cards to qualify for a showing of interest; i.e., when 50 percent of the workers plus one had signed authorization cards asking for an election. The cards were turned over to the regional office of the ALRB and a board agent was assigned to oversee the process. The state agent and his/her investigators were responsible for conducting a fair, impartial, and legal election. The agents would oversee the actions of all the contending parties to make sure that the workers' rights weren't violated. They also ensured the rights of the growers and the unions. In a perfect world, this would be enough to insure a fair and equitable election, but, as we all know, this world is far from perfect. There were many times when the workers and the union organizers would have their rights violated. It would then be up to the organizers or the UFW legal workers to go out and take declarations or written testimony of the party

whose rights were alleged to have been violated. Any gross violations of the ALRA were known as ULPs (unfair labor practices). If enough ULPs occurred, then it was up to the state to step in and make a ruling or seek a remedy.

Two Separate Organizing Campaigns

Most of the growers were small, and the union needed only an organizer or two to gather the number of signatures needed to qualify a petition to the state for an election. But then there was the Bruce Church company.

Because of its size, the Bruce Church company was assigned a select group of union organizers. These organizers were assigned to follow the Bruce Church crews through out the Southwest. No, that wasn't a typo, it was exactly what I meant to write. Bruce Church owned land in three states – California, Arizona, and Colorado – on which they grew and harvested crops. This roving band of organizers, led by Fred Ross, Jr., followed the Bruce Church workers who worked outside of the Imperial Valley until they returned in late December, 1975. Luckily, the majority of the Bruce Church property was in California, but they also rented land on the Indian reservation in Parker, Arizona, and around Yuma, Gila, and San Luis, Arizona. One day while organizing around the San Luis area, we had a break in our work while the Bruce Church crews were moving to a new location. One of the UFW organizers was an Interharvest worker who had taken a leave of absence to help in the Bruce Church campaign. He asked me if I wanted to take a short drive. I said, "Sure, why not?" And off we went in his new truck. The worker, whose name was Hilaron, drove me onto a dirt road marked by signs that read, "Do Not Enter/Property of Bruce Church Farms, Inc." "Oh great," I thought, "we're on Bruce Church property, and with my luck we'll get stopped, I'll get arrested and/or cited for trespassing." And because this was Arizona and not California, union organizers had neither access rights nor any other rights for that matter! But Hilaron was confident that nobody would question him in his new truck. (The truck was less than a month old; he'd bought it shortly before leaving the Salinas area a couple of months earlier.) As we neared a small turn in the road, he slowed a little. "Look over there," he said, indicating a small pile of adobe bricks and some timbers. It appeared to be the remnants of an old building or shed. "*Allí nació Cesar*" or "That's where Cesar was born." "Wow," I said, "I never knew Cesar's birthplace was

so close to Bruce Church land.” “Close? This IS Bruce Church land!” Later, I would learn that many of Cesar’s relatives still lived in the area in Gila, Arizona. I thought to myself, “What an ironic twist of fate this would be if we won the Bruce Church election and this place was again “Chavez land.”

Mike Payne Becomes the Perfect Target

In 1975 Bruce Church had a general manager named Mike Payne, who was a tall, stone-faced individual with a butch haircut and a square jaw. He was a perfect target and I used to torment him continually with the cartoons in my leaflets. The workers loved those leaflets and I tried to make Mike Payne out to be a real joke. But the Bruce Church farming operation wasn’t any joke; most of the land was in California where they had the majority of their workers and many different locations where they had crops. They also had cooling sheds where they stored their produce until it could be cooled off or chilled before shipping to market. In this way they insured that the produce had maximum freshness or shelf life.

The Bruce Church organizing campaign was huge. It was more like having to organize and prepare for 100 elections instead of just one. And, because of its size, at any given time Bruce Church had lots of different types of crops either being planted and growing or being harvested and stored in one of their cooling sheds. But somehow a peak harvest period was ascertained, and it was during this peak harvest period in the Imperial Valley that we would have the Bruce Church election. And because the election was going to take place mostly in the Imperial Valley, the company would have hundreds of workers harvesting lettuce, but also other workers who were working in various other assorted row-type crops and melons. Yes, the Bruce Church election would prove to be a huge victory, coming as it did at the very culmination of ALRB-sanctioned elections shortly before the state agency ran out of operating funds.

By the end of 1975, or the first season of the ALRB-supervised elections, we were ecstatic to learn that we had won more than 140 elections. And by the end of the Imperial Valley campaign, this count was even larger. But this amazing string of victories finally ended when the operation of the ALRB was shut down because the Republicans in the California Legislature, under pressure from the California Farm Bureau and other agribusiness

organizations, refused to approve additional operating funds. It was obvious then to the UFW that as long as the funding of the ALRB could be held as a political hostage, its organizing efforts were also vulnerable.

In frustration, the union undertook the passage of Proposition 14, which would have guaranteed future funding for the administration of the Agricultural Labor Relations Act despite the political power of the growers and their agribusiness industries. Unfortunately, Proposition 14 was defeated, and despite the fact that funding for the ALRB was restored for an additional year, the union's organizing campaign would never be as successful as that first wave of organizing and election victories of 1975-1976.

Who Were the Organizers?

We were all sorts of people; most of us were young, in our 20s and 30s, some were in their 40s, and a few, like Jose Luna, who, as the story went, had organized Almaden Vineyards in Hollister in the 60s all by himself, were in their 50s or so. Mostly we were all part of a tremendous social movement that had begun long before anyone ever imagined there could be such a thing as a state farm labor law. Some, like myself, were community and social activists, people who'd come of age during the 1960s, a time of great social unrest – inequities and inequalities were being challenged and attempts were being made to right certain wrongs.

Working for social reform made a lot more sense to me than joining the army or sitting around waiting to get drafted. And the simple truth was that I viewed all life as something that was sacred and a gift from God. I was very much opposed to all wars and violence. When I found out that Cesar Chavez and the United Farm Workers were committed to peaceful nonviolence, working for *La Causa* seemed to fit my needs to a T.

Most of the people I would meet during my UFW years were people much like myself, 17- to 40-year-olds with a real desire to see justice done and progress made, not just in the lives of farmworkers but in the lives of all oppressed people worldwide. I had very little experience working as a farmworker, except for a couple of summers spent learning what “real work” was like, thanks to my parents, who took me and my brothers out to work picking plums and walnuts. But what I did share with the workers was a bond

that I had felt all my life, a sense of unity that I was finally able to understand and fully appreciate.

The UFW was the catalyst that bonded together many people's dreams and aspirations. It also gave me an avenue where I was finally able to demonstrate and show the workers (and other poor people) that they had the support of a great many people like myself in the non-farmworker Latino community. And, as I would soon learn, many others on staff had very little, if any, real year-in and year-out farmworker experience, but it never became nor was it ever made an issue. Some of the best organizers were people like Arturo "Artie" Mendoza, who was attending college classes right up until he was talked into going out to California by Gene Lee, who then brought Artie to Santa Maria, CA. That's where I first met Artie. His two-week trip to California lasted for more than 10 years, with Artie eventually being elected to the UFW board of directors. During this time he and his wife, Anita, were married, and they had five really great kids. Artie had been coaxed out to California by Gilbert Padilla's trainee, Gene Lee, who just happened to be going to the same university as Artie Mendoza. At the time, Gene Lee was one of the best organizers that the UFW had on the staff of the Washington, D.C. boycott. He convinced Artie that all he'd have to do was accompany Gene out to California and spend his summer vacation "helping out" on the farmworker organizing campaign.

I met Artie and Gene at the Santa Maria UFW field office where I was sent after having spent a lackluster season organizing in and around Northern California under the direction of Al Rojas. It wasn't until I was in Santa Maria that I was finally able to use many of the organizing skills I had learned during my initial training. I wish that I had met Al Rojas earlier than I did, at a time when he was really focused on the UFW organizing program. I'm sure my experience would have been different. Unfortunately, I didn't meet Al until his final UFW episode, one that ended with his departure after almost 14 years in the trenches fighting the good fight in California and on the boycott in the Midwest.

Al Rojas, the person Sam Kushner described as one of the union's "young Turks" in his book *Long Road to Delano*, decided that he had come to the bend in the road where he would have to leave the UFW. He decided to stay in the Sacramento area to be near his children and where he was able to use one of

his many contacts to land a job with the state of California. Over the years, Al had developed an incredible network of people in Sacramento and the Bay Area, so it was easy for him to make his move from farmworker organizer to community organizer. He eventually bought a house in Sacramento, where he lives today. Today, he is very involved with the heroic struggle for independence and the freedom of the Zapatistas, the valiant Indians of Chiapas in southern Mexico.

Al was one of the funniest people I have ever met and he could tell the greatest stories about the early days of the union. Within minutes he could turn the soberest, driest, and dullest occasion into a comedic tour de force. Using many different facial and vocal expressions, he'd have people literally rolling on the floor holding their sides and laughing uncontrollably. Al Rojas had a gift and sense of charm that could disarm or neutralize even the bitterest of situations. He was the real thing. Unfortunately, he had found himself on the wrong side of the spinning "wheel of time," and circumstances that were beyond anyone's control had placed him in the outgoing tide of the "old school" of UFW organizers – people like Pancho Botello, Paulino Pacheco, and Winnie Ybarra, who were unique in every respect, the real McCoys, as innovators and organizers of the early UFW years.

I met Paulino Pacheco in Santa Maria, and it was there I learned some real organizing strategy from Jessica Govea, who was my team leader, and Fred Ross, Jr., who was in charge of the Santa Maria campaign. I stayed in Santa Maria about a month or so, and then we were told we were all going to the Imperial Valley. Earlier that year, Al Rojas had told me that after going to La Paz, I would be sent to Calexico. But as soon as I arrived at La Paz in early fall, Cesar redirected me to Santa Maria, CA, rather than directly to Calexico or the Imperial Valley. In this way he was able to get Fred Ross's and Jessica Govea's assessment of my potential organizing abilities. I'm thankful it was their approval that reinstated me on the organizing team; otherwise, I could just as easily have been sent home. I'd really done very little in the way of real farmworker election organizing, and my only claim to fame was that I'd almost been killed when I was run into by an angry farmer in his truck. (See: Yolo County; *Kimura vs. ALRB*, 1975, or *The White Papers, A UFW Documentation of Violence in the Fields During the First Year of Organizing Under the New ARLA* by Marc Grossman and Jacques Levy, UFW Press 1975). In addition, I believe that I was the very first organizer or staff person to give

Cesar a report on the way the workers were reacting to the new farm labor law. On August 28, 1975, I had visited my farmworker contacts early that historic morning as they went to work in the fields, and I stopped by Al Rojas's house in Yolo. As I entered the house to give Al my somewhat exuberant report, I noticed that there were lots of people in different parts of the house who were just starting to get up. Cesar came out of the back bedroom with a blanket wrapped around his shoulders, which REALLY made him look like an Indian. "What's going on?" he asked. Al Rojas quickly answered, "Oh, it's just one of my staff who came by to give me a report on how the workers are reacting to the new law." Afraid that I had blown it by not calling first and that Cesar was going to be pissed off that I had violated the perimeter that should have kept me or anyone else from entering the house unannounced, I toned down my euphoric delivery a bit. "Yes," I said, "the workers know that a new day is coming!" Which wasn't really a fib or a lie, it just wasn't the complete truth. The workers I'd spoken with for the most part had been too busy trying to earn a living and didn't really have the time to discuss the new law or any other law. That day now seems like a thousand years ago; well, it was more than 30 years ago. Those events all seem so innocent today.

Anyway, by the time I did reach La Paz, Cesar was probably still wondering if my commitment was real or not. He was a pretty good judge of people, and for sure he wasn't going to have any useless prima donna or glory seeker around. If I wanted to stay on the staff of the union, I was going to have to prove myself. And there was no one better than Fred Ross, Jr. or Jessica Govea when it came to judging whether or not a person was sincere or worth his salt as an organizer and knew what the score was. Neither of them would stand for anyone who couldn't produce or wasn't able to commit all of themselves to *La Causa*. Just saying that you wanted justice for the workers was nothing but a bunch of empty words unless YOU were totally and completely committed to the farmworker struggle for justice and better working conditions. So, unbeknownst to me, I was being analyzed and under the watchful eyes and ears of two of the union's strongest and brightest people, who could spot a phony a mile away. And I guess they saw something they liked in me because they gave me the big A-OK.

It wasn't until much later that I found out that their decision could have gone either way, but that's the way it always was for anyone who was on staff.

Nobody was above the scrutiny of the union. If someone was considered to be a slacker or just along for the ride and not producing or at least trying to be productive, well, they didn't have to wait for long before they were given the boot, and once you were gone, that was it! You were out for good! The UFW couldn't afford the luxury of having goldbrickers or dead wood on staff. It was a simple fact: if you didn't fit in, it was nice knowing you. No one had the right to occupy a staff position or get paid with workers' dues if they weren't completely committed to *La Causa*. This applied to everyone from Cesar on down. It didn't matter what you had once done or were going to do, but what you were doing for the union right now! No one was able to rest on their laurels for too long or they'd start to feel the heat. The UFW that I knew in 1975 was very result-oriented, and yesterday's victories were quickly put aside to prepare for the next campaign.

Our Roots

Sometimes an older person would come in to the field office from the street and ask if they could help with anything. They would hear that the UFW was doing an organizing campaign and would come in and spend the day helping out around the field office and service center, doing whatever they could. They were never disruptive or presumptive, just there to help. They were very disciplined and resourceful. They'd even bring food that they'd cooked to share with us. Some were old people whose hands were so crippled, lumpy, and crooked, with fingers so gnarled up from rheumatoid arthritis or old injuries that it was painful just to look at them. You could only imagine how much pain they must be in. In most cases, their condition was the result of years of working in the fields before there were any health and safety laws. Eventually, you'd hear that they had taken part in one of the Brawley and Holtville strikes of the 30s! They'd show us gunshot wounds and jagged knife cuts and kid us about how we had it "so easy" nowadays. They'd tell us, "In order to really appreciate what you've accomplished, you got to have been shot or at least beat up." Adding, "We don't mean those 'love taps' that the cops give out nowadays!" Yes, those old folks really paid their dues, and they signed the check with their own blood, sweat, and tears.

How Were Campaigns Managed? What Were the Rules?

The requirements were strict and purposefully tough. And yes, the workdays were all very long. But the rewards were well worth it. I don't mean that you were allowed to stand up at every union meeting and receive praise and applause; no, that stuff was usually reserved for VIPs, guests, visitors, or farmworkers who had done something of merit or who deserved special recognition. Then we would bring them up to the front of a general meeting and give them a rousing hand of applause, UFW style. The UFW applause was unique. It began with a slow deliberate tempo and grew in crescendo and excitement with each pass until it was almost deafening. Then it would quiet down and begin all over again, like the waves of the ocean, except this was wave after wave of celebratory applause. Once you've heard the "applause" you'll always remember it. Sometimes even thinking about it makes my heart beat faster! Yes, the farmworker movement could be as comforting and nurturing as the love of your family, because that's what it became. You had very little time or resources to venture much beyond the boundaries of your work assignment, but if you received some bad news from home or were lonely or homesick, well, that's when your coworkers closed ranks and came to your aid. Your UFW "family" would always be there for you. The workers who were around the office could be great, too. What we lacked in finances, we more than made up in *animo*, or spirit. I sometimes wondered what it was that always compelled me to be at my post. Doing my "little" job for the union was truly a labor of love. I really loved the union, and in turn the union provided me with a sense of purpose. I found out early that having a sense of purpose was a priceless commodity, because without providing a sense of purpose, even the best paying and easiest job wasn't worth being at or doing. But because of it, or having that sense of purpose, working for \$10 a week made it seem like you were really someone special. And you *were* special, as your UFW family would always let you know.

People who worked with you and who were also part of the UFW became closer than your blood relatives. We addressed each other as Brother and Sister, *Hermano* and *Hermana*. It was more than just a fraternal greeting, it was because you loved the UFW family with whom you worked and lived. Sometimes, after being separated from one of your UFW family for a while, when you saw them again you were really, truly happy to see them. I believe that the \$10 or \$5 weekly stipend did more than encourage commitment; it created within our ranks a certain equality and a basis for real friendships to develop. We were all equals, and that feeling remains to this day.

There were lots of organizing whiz kids in our group: Lupe Murguia, Paul and Barbara Carrillo, Lupe Gamboa, Stephen Roberson, Artie Rodriguez, Tanis Ybarra, Will Kirkland, Fred Ross, Jr., Bob Purcell, Roberto Garcia, Lisa Hirsch, Jose Luna, Mario Vargas, Jessica Govea, Artie Mendoza, Miguel Contreras, Rosa Lopez, Maria Elena Pacheco, John Gibson, Bobby De La Cruz, Jan Peterson, Jim and Vivian Drake, Lupe Cordova, Eddie Cuellar, Pablo Espinoza, Alfredo Figueroa, Marcelino Lopez, Lorraine Agtang, Rosario “Chayo” Pelayo, Tom Dallzell, Doug Adair, Carol Schoenbraun (Lambaise), Celestino Rivas, and many other great people, farmworkers and lay volunteers alike, who came to help.

Feeding Hungry Organizers

The arrangements made for food were set up beforehand, mostly along these established lines. The leaders of the organizing campaign had contracted with a local fellow who was both a very active supporter and a cook. As I recall, Marshall Ganz had directed that this fellow be given a certain amount of money to provide a hearty breakfast each day for the organizers as they came back to the Organizing Committee office. Breakfast was delivered in the trunk or back of a pickup and it consisted mainly of scrambled eggs, potatoes (*papas*), beans, tortillas, and some of the hottest salsas I’ve ever tasted. One day I almost blinded myself when I inadvertently got some salsa in my eyes because I rubbed them right after I’d tasted it with my fingertip. Unless it was some special occasion, I can’t remember any other meals being served on a daily basis. Sleep and rest were two other commodities that were hard to come by. We were always so exhausted that sometimes we’d fall asleep riding back to the office after being out in the fields talking with the workers. No matter how many hours we worked, we always had to go to one more place and talk to one more worker. There was never enough time in the day to do everything we had to do. The organizers’ day would usually begin about four hours after they went to bed. That’s about the average sleep we’d get: four to five hours. We went full-bore until we were physically exhausted and couldn’t go any further. Hopefully, when we crashed we would be safe inside the room, but sometimes we’d fall asleep in a car or off in some corner. We were always exhausted.

We slept in a room which we shared with as few as four or as many as ten others. It depended on the size of the room and/or the number of organizers. At the beginning of the campaign, when the accommodations were being allocated, it was more along the lines of four to six bodies per room. Later on, for our benefit, the group housing and sleeping arrangements were sometimes rearranged. Also, since there were both men and women organizers, in addition to the legal staff, who needed accommodations, housing was usually set up and divided by gender. Usually, women slept in one room and men in another. Later on, as people got to know each other better, the division was more along the lines of who you felt most comfortable being around. Unless, of course, there were couples who were married or were living together; in those cases, they usually were able to stay together. It was difficult to maintain a relationship if you both worked for the UFW, because you had to dedicate all your time to the union. And the pay was nonexistent; it was \$10 a week plus room and board. Some few exceptions were made. In my case, for example, to keep me around the UFW sent my wife \$700 a month.

It's now 30 years later and I'm just starting to appreciate the incredible talent the UFW was able to gather together to undertake its incredible cause.

Marshall Ganz, the director of the organizing campaign, was able to accomplish so much for the union for relatively little money. At the end of the 1975 campaign, Marshall called me into his office and started to chew me out for going WAY beyond what I'd been allocated as my budget for the Leaflet Department. I think I had gone about \$100 over my budget, which was \$20 a week! I didn't know how to scrounge for everything like the organizers who had worked in the cities on the boycott. Eventually, I learned how to keep my operating costs down, which really pleased Marshall and his office manager.

I'm proud to have known people like Doug Adair, Jim Drake, Artie Rodriguez, Jessica Govea, and Marshall Ganz, without whom, my much-vaunted career as a UFW leaflet maker wouldn't have been anywhere near as successful as people tell me that it was. To all of the unknown farmworkers and so many others who befriended me and showed me that friendship is the best thing there is in this world – and in the long run, all that really matters – I would just like to somehow say thank you for being my friend.

The Boycott Staff Were Resourceful and Hard-Working

I learned a lot from the people the union had brought in from the boycott. At first I didn't know how to handle their boundless energy and resourcefulness. They epitomized all that was good about the non-farmworkers who had volunteered to help spread the message about the plight of the farmworkers in the cities and non-rural areas where they were assigned. Many came from families whose closest relationship with a "farmworker" was their gardener. But their participation and diligence in the boycott was in large part responsible for the passage of the Agricultural Labor Relations Act. Now here they were in the Imperial Valley, helping to get the union message out to the farmworkers themselves. And the farmworkers really appreciated the fact that the ex-boycotters wanted to be out here in the fields of California, instead of going back to their own communities or colleges or wherever they had come from when they first volunteered. The current UFW president, Arturo Rodriguez, came to California from the Detroit boycott. And before he was sent to organize in the Imperial Valley, he had already done some farmworker organizing – about six months – in Salinas, California.

The one trait shared by the majority of boycotters was the fact that they were well trained to make the optimum use of their time and to get whatever they needed for free. Luckily for me, I was able to pick up some of their boycott hustling ideas and straighten out much of the overrun I had accumulated toward the end of the 1975 campaign. (I had spent more than double my allotted budget for the leaflet department.) During a UFW accounting audit, I was able to convince the auditors that I was hard at work trying to rectify the problem and I was both resourceful as well as remorseful. And when Marshall asked me if I had anything to say about why I had gone over my budget, all I could say was, "Marshall, you know that it was a very hard-fought campaign!" This answer was so ridiculous that it caught Marshall by surprise and all he could do was laugh. But he told me that I couldn't buy any more supplies! Which was OK, because the ex-boycotters had helped me stockpile enough materials to last me through the end of the 1975-1976 organizing campaign, which culminated with the huge UFW victory over the Teamsters at Bruce Church. I loved working for Marshall Ganz; he was an absolutely brilliant organizer as well as being a great tactical statistician. He was a wonderful friend. I'll always remember the night the entire Bruce Church campaign had come down to the wire; it was the night before the election. Marshall called all

of the organizers together, sat them down in a circle, and said he wanted to know only one thing: “How are the workers going to vote?” His “one thing” meant he wanted to know how each and every worker was going to vote. And to emphasize this, he went to each and every organizer, sat down with them, and asked them to tell him how he/she thought each and every person that we had on our employee lists was going to vote. His vote tally list consisted of three columns: one for Yes votes, one for No votes, and one for Unsure votes. After he’d gotten the information, he told each organizer to go out and locate all the Unsures and find out how they intended to vote. As soon as each organizer returned, Marshall sat them down, one by one, crew by crew, until he had listed all of the Bruce Church employees onto big pieces of butcher paper that he had put up all over the empty hall. He had diagrammed three columns: Yes, No, and Unsure. This was union organizing at its best. I had never met anyone who could organize as well as Marshall Ganz! Finally, by 1 or 2 a.m. the next morning, there may have still been a couple of Unsures left unaccounted for, but Marshall demanded “close to the vest” accounting with no hidden surprises. He then proceeded to place the few leftover Unsures into the No, or anti-UFW, tally. Luckily, the majority of Bruce Church workers, even many of those we had listed as No or Unsure, voted for the UFW that day.

Marshall Teaches Me a Valuable Lesson

On the morning of the Bruce Church election, Marshall Ganz did something he’d never done before. Even though I had devised and put together well over 100 individual leaflets and fliers for him and the other group leaders, Marshall told me I had to pull or destroy one of the leaflets I’d drawn for limited distribution on Election Day. This leaflet was only supposed to go out to “our people” right before they boarded the Bruce Church buses. Perhaps I inherently knew that I had crossed over the invisible line that separated the humorous from the vulgar and crude, but in my verve and excitement to make a point, I’d chosen to ignore the thin fine line of propriety and had drawn a really risqué rendition of the famous “Sweethearts in Bed” cartoon and leaflet. But as tired as Marshall was, staying awake all night working on the Bruce Church voter tally, the leaflet’s crude nature didn’t escape his critical eye. So he pulled it! He’d never questioned my work before, but that day we were playing for all of the marbles. It was the Bruce Church election and he didn’t want to risk offending and losing some of our Yes votes – or

those who were in doubt and still making up their minds whom to vote for. This one leaflet might cause them to vote for the Teamsters or No Union because of its off-color drawing. (I must admit I had purposefully drawn it to be a real “in-your-face” cartoon.) Marshall was correct and wisely pulled it.

The original leaflet had only been seen by a couple of our organizers before Marshall told me to get rid of the rest, which I burned in the incinerator. I quickly put together another leaflet, and thankfully, no one was ever aware of the incident. In retrospect, Marshall may have been wrong and may have been overly sensitive, but knowing how much the Bruce Church election meant to him, he was right to go with his instincts, because in the end he was the one who was ultimately responsible for us winning or losing, and Marshall Ganz did not like losing. He taught me so much about integrity and accountability for one’s actions.

Bruce Church Election Day

The entire day of the Bruce Church election had a surreal and strange feel to it. Would we win or would we lose the most important election of the year? Well, actually, all of the elections had been important, especially to the workers at the farms and ranches we’d organized. For workers, their own election was the most important one of all. But in terms of clout and because we’d invested so much time and effort into organizing and even being able to have an election, Bruce Church was the Grand Prize, the Big Enchilada, and the Ultimate Victory all rolled into one! Everybody had their own take on what a Bruce Church victory was, and I guess for me it meant that spiritually anyway, Cesar was going to be able to return to the place where he’d been born – that little store and house by the bend in the road near Gila, Arizona, that I’d seen when Hilaron Castillo drove me out onto the Bruce Church property the previous year.

As soon as the voting was over and the ALRB agents said we could, we started to go over to the Imperial Valley Water District Offices in El Centro, California, for the Bruce Church vote count. By the time we arrived, everything was all pretty much in place. Each of the parties on the ballot had their observers sitting at the vote count table. They were responsible for making sure that the ballots were counted properly. One by one, all of the people who had taken part in the election began to show up. The people who

represented both of the unions (UFW and Teamsters), the company, the ALRB, and the No Union all were seated and ready as the vote count began. There were at least a couple of hundred interested people in attendance that night. You could hear the murmuring in the audience as the ballots were pulled out and counted. It seemed like the vote count was dragging on and taking forever, but soon there was only one ballot box left unopened. That's when Jim Drake came over to where I was sitting. "Alberto, I need you to do me a BIG favor." He sheepishly asked me in that big voice of his, "Could you please call this number and tell the person who answers what the final vote count was? I'm supposed to call, but I need you to go over and take that public phone hostage." Then he handed me a piece of paper with a phone number on it. "Remember, it's very important that you call exactly when they announce the vote count. Go to that phone over there and stay on it like you're talking to somebody, OK?" I said, "Sure thing, Jim." I went over to the phone. Luckily, I got there just before one of the local news people came over to use it. Boy, he looked really upset and disappointed that he couldn't use that phone. Remember, this was in 1976 and nobody had cell phones, not like they do today. But that had been Jim's plan all along and something he'd probably learned many years before, that in order to assure you had access to a phone when you needed to make a phone call, you had to take a phone hostage. And from his vantage point, Jim could see them counting the last few ballots, and he began making hand gestures, which indicated that he wanted me to start dialing the phone number, which I did. When I'd reached the last two digits of the phone number, I held up two fingers, wiggling them to indicate I was ready. I heard a huge roar that indicated we'd won. Jim ran over to where I was and handed me the actual vote count he'd just written down, and as he did so, the reporter tried to barge in and steal the phone from me. "Sorry!" I told the intruder. "Can't you see that I'm making a phone call?"

An Historical or Hysterical Moment

The Bruce Church Vote Count: UFW– 462; Teamsters – 311; No Union –17; Challenged Ballots – 110. Even though I tried to hand the phone receiver over to Jim, he just smiled and waved me off with a hand signal and reiterated, "No, you go ahead, you place the call! Just tell the person who answers that we won!" I could hear the phone ringing on the other side and again I tried to hand the phone to Jim Drake so he could talk to the party that

I had just dialed up, but he just shook his head and firmly said, “Nope!” Now the phone was ringing and again he said, “Just go ahead and tell them what I told you,” as he lit his pipe with a satisfied smile on his face. “Hello,” the person on the other end answered. I immediately recognized the voice and said. “Hello, Cesar? Sir? Hi, Jim Drake told me to call this number and tell whoever answered that we’ve just won the Bruce Church election!” Then I repeated the actual vote count that Jim had handed me. “Who is this?” Cesar asked. I told him who I was, just as I handed the phone over to Jim, who was smiling ear to ear! That was Jim Drake. To him it wasn’t any big deal, he’d seen so many vote counts and reported on so many election results that this one was just one more. No big deal, and letting someone else have the chance to report something like this was just Jim’s way of sharing the spotlight. I don’t think fame mattered much to Jim; he was a very special individual who never needed the clamor of fame and fortune.

What was I thinking about during all of the commotion? You REALLY want to know what was I thinking about? Well, would you believe that through all of the commotion and cheering that had turned the once-quiet confines of the Imperial Valley Water District offices into an almost Mardi Gras-like scenario, all I could think about was that day a couple of months before when I had been out at the Bruce Church Arizona property where my friend Hilaron showed me the place where Cesar was born. It wouldn’t be until April 23, 1993, that the circle would finally make its complete turn. That was the day Cesar passed away. It was after a particularly long and arduous day of relentless questioning by the Bruce Church attorneys regarding supposed wrongdoings and legal infractions that they alleged the union had committed while trying to get them to agree to a contract. I can’t help but wonder what would have happened had we lost the Bruce Church election?

What Went Wrong?

I don’t know what it was or how it started, but for some reason, people started to question Cesar’s authority. Many were volunteers and staff who had been with the union, which Cesar had worked so many years to create, since its inception and were some of the strongest followers and supporters. Many had voiced to me how they felt like they were almost part of the Chavez family, as if they were more than just “employees.” Some who had worked alongside him since their adolescence felt as if they were one of his children. How they could suddenly, or over the course of time, turn away from him like

they did is still the cause of much pain and anguish. Many chose not to discuss it publicly or privately, while others were, and still are, quite vocal in their anger and hostility toward Cesar Chavez and the union. To them, the fact that they left or were summarily dismissed by the UFW was much worse than a failed love interest or a simple job loss. Most have voiced a sense of betrayal or worse. Speaking for myself, I know that I could have applied myself more and done more than I ultimately did. But success does terrible things to a person's ego, and pretty soon the messenger starts to imagine that they are just as important, if not more so, than the message. I realized this one day when I found myself getting really upset that I hadn't left myself enough room to write a legible signature on a cartoon I'd just done for a leaflet.

After struggling to make myself heard and finally recognized, I realized that once I'd achieved a certain level of power, I didn't want to take on the extra responsibilities that went along with the position. I was lucky enough to have worked for the UFW alongside such truly great people as Jessica Govea, Richard Chavez, Dolores Huerta, Lisa Hirsch Medina, Eliseo Medina, Al Rojas, Marshall Ganz, Jim Drake, Ben Maddox, Fred Ross, Jr., Artie Rodriguez, and Tanis Ybarra.

To this day, my UFW experience remains quite possibly the most remarkably effective period of my life. The memory of having studied under Fred Ross, Sr., Cesar Chavez, Dolores Huerta, Eliseo Medina, Al Rojas, Jessica Govea, Marshall Ganz, Jim Drake, and others is something that I'll cherish forever. And while some of our accomplishments proved to be temporary, many others have survived the passage of time to become historically significant.

I will remember 1975-1977 as a period when the UFW Organizing Committee seemingly could do no wrong, and everything we attempted seemed to always be right on the cutting edge. In addition, the presence of the ALRB gave us and everything we did or tried to do a certain feeling of legitimacy. For most workers who took part in an ALRB-sanctioned UFW election at their workplace, it was the first time they had ever dared to speak up or ask for better wages and safer working conditions. It was incredible to see and feel their sense of pride and accomplishment when they realized that they had won their election! And after savoring victory for the first time, they began to feel the strength that being organized had given them.

The UFW showed them that they belonged to a very essential workforce and that they were more than just chattel or some piece of machinery or a tool owned by their boss. Once a worker has gotten off his knees and conquered his fear of *El Patron*, there would be no going back. The organized worker will never go back to where they had once been. After tasting victory and their renewed sense of self-worth, there can never be any return to the way conditions had once been. The worker will teach this new sense of self-worth to his children, and in turn his child will grow up and instill it into his children. Someday, the descendents of those original valiant farmworkers will sing songs about how in 1975-1977, a group of determined UFW organizers helped right the future course of California farmworkers, and I will hear the song and know that I was there when it happened.