

David Stump 1973-74

I had known Chris Hartmire and Pat Hoffman from childhood through the church that my family attended, so I was aware of the United Farm Workers and the Migrant Ministry for as long as I can remember. My first direct contact with the union was a work party at La Paz in 1971 that I attended in high school with a couple of local church groups. Our biggest job that week was sanding a donated school bus that had been painted in hippie psychedelic colors. La Paz was still being developed, with several unoccupied buildings, but I remember that the Taller Grafico building was up and the swimming pool was operational.

I started volunteering for the LA boycott the next year while I attended UCLA. I would sell buttons and hand out leaflets at UCLA, and help picket Safeway after classes in the late afternoon in West LA and Santa Monica. We were frequently successful at turning people away, but I remember one woman at a Safeway in a wealthy area who was particularly hostile. I would approach her each week, and say “Please help the farmworkers by not shopping at Safeway.” She would always reply, “Go to hell.” I never stopped asking, however, I kept approaching her week after week. Finally, one week she stormed by as I was talking to some friendly people who turned out to be growers. They were telling me what crops they grew, and she turned around and yelled, “Yeah, well I grow grapes!” I did get mad at her one day, though, when I found out that she had cussed out a young woman farmworker who was picketing with me.

During the summer of 1973 I started working full time for the boycott, and although I wasn’t officially on staff (I didn’t get the \$5 a week!) I frequently ate and slept at the big boycott house on Hobart Blvd. We continued to boycott Safeway and would occasionally get out to the freeway entrances and busy intersections with billboards. When I went back to school in the fall I continued to volunteer. In March of 1974, I took a leave of absence from UCLA and officially joined the boycott staff full time. I went to the San Fernando Valley boycott, a huge house full of farmworkers and volunteers, that had just been set up under the direction of Andy Coe.

It seems like we were boycotting everything at the time—grapes, head lettuce, and Gallo wine. We continued the Safeway campaign but also targeted small liquor stores and the big drugstore chain Savon’s, trying to get them to remove Gallo wines from their shelves. I had my best day ever turning people away from a Savon’s, reaching the gold standard of triple digits (turning away more than 100 people). There was a Thrifty Drug right next door, and I found that if I said, “Please help the farmworkers by not shopping at Savon’s, there is a Thrifty right there!” people were quite willing to turn away. I learned a lot about psychology while picketing, and came away with a better opinion of the general public than I had had before. I found that if I offered people a concrete alternative and if they thought that it might make a difference, most people would be willing to help out.

I don’t remember the exact date, but the San Fernando house closed when many of my friends left the union or were reassigned. I was transferred back to the Hobart Blvd. house and worked in West LA again, this time under Jim Drake. We were given a crash course in community organizing by Fred Ross Sr. After a week or so, I was assigned to Santa Monica where I set up house meetings and worked with the local churches. The exact dates and

places and order of events are a blur now, but I know that we lived for a short while in an apartment in Lennox, under the flight path of LAX. We would recruit volunteers and raise money to keep the boycott going. At some point in the fall, it was time for a change. At that point I left, needing to get out of LA as much as anything else. I had left home to join the boycott, and now was leaving my hometown.

I did two more things with the union after my time as a full-time boycotter. Andy Coe convinced me to go to Santa Maria with him to work in organizing in the fields. I did some paralegal work, since most of the Anglos involved with that office were lawyers; I was kind of placed in that role. I only stayed a week or two and was sent to La Paz, where they could find me something to do. Amazingly, I had about a half hour long individual meeting with Cesar Chavez at that time. He seemed to be interested in finding people who could take on a leadership role and was interested in the things I had done in LA. As it turned out, however, they wanted a six month commitment, which I did not give them. So I left again to go back to finish college at UC Berkeley.

I also got involved in the Proposition 14 campaign in San Francisco, in 1976. I was given the task of helping to recreate the famous billboards that we had used in LA on the Proposition 22 campaign and after. I remembered the design—two sticks and two bolts, so that they can be folded down for transport, and raised to their full height (about 10 feet) when extended. It was a lot of work for a lot of people, but we got the signs built and got them out on the street.

I look back on my brief time with the UFW fondly and am still impressed with the work we accomplished and how many things I did. I met a wonderful assortment of people who were creating a movement for social justice, a struggle that still needs to be waged.