

ARC 75 TC 17:00:00

17:12:37 FRED ROSS JR.: So I, I benefited from that. And then I joined him in the Salinas Strike. And probably the day I was scarest in my whole life was the, the morning of the first day of the strike, it was about five thirty in the morning and I was with a bunch of boycotters and we were in a farm labor camp in Gonzalez and the alarm didn't go off. And I was gonna have to go in to that office and (imitates him giving the look). Yeah, the look. He didn't have to say anything. I just wanted to get in there and out as fast as I could. What my, which crew? Where do we go? I wasn't late after that. There's another actor that my father's been likened to by a family friend who I went to school with Henry Weinstein who wrote an article about my dad in 1976. He said my dad looked a little bit like Gary Cooper in High Noon. And I think that's kinda the way my dad approached life, ready to take on the biggest, baddest bully on any block, any state, any country, let's take 'em on and he never did it alone. He was a real romantic. We had lots of records of Pedro and Fante and Horeh Nagrate (?). He and my mom had a very special love. He loved to tell stories and he loved to hear 'em. Especially in the last few years of his life, he loved to hear 'em, they were tonic. He'd always ask well what's the latest on the campaign? And I'd tell him one or two stories he'd always say well give me some more, tell me some more. And you know he wasn't above uh, being interested in a little cheese mit bien(?). But we won't get in to that. That's gossip in Spanish. And he wasn't bashful about asking me whenever we'd run out of political talk and movies or music, he'd say well Fedirico, how's the love life? In his final days he gave us all a beautiful gift. After four and a half days of a semi-coma my dad rallied. My sister and I and Denise Briget, my friend were there in the room with him and Pete Segar was on the record player. My brother had a beautiful idea, let's bring his music to him and we did. Pete Segar

was singing Union Made and we were singing along with him and my dad's eyes were still shut. We came to that part where it says oh no you can't scare me I'm stickin' to the union, I'm stickin' to the union and all of the sudden my dad opened his eyes, he started to blink and it was like a little miracle and for the next two days he was alert. He tried, he sat up. He tried to eat and we got and I wanna thank all of you who were able to send him messages because every night we'd read him those messages 'cause that was the tonic that was keeping him going. He wanted to hear a few more good-byes. He loved music and the two last songs we were able to get folks to sing to him Brother Ed Dunn came in and sang Joe Hill and I won't forget that, my dad's favorite song and then Tim Sampson came in and sang his own version of Woody's Lullaby. My dad loved Woody Guthrie and all his music. My father died as he lived, with great courage and great dignity. He was surrounded by those who loved him so. And I know he's with us today. I was able to spend the morning with him because we buried his ashes, the family did on Mt. Tam under a beautiful Bay tree so he looks out over the Pacific Ocean which he loved so much. And whenever you go out to Ocean Beach you just look over towards Mt. Tam and you'll see my dad. There are words of consolation that came to me from El Salvador a few days ago from a Catholic sister by the name of Letitia Bordes who spent many years with the farmworkers and this is what she said, The words of St. Paul apply to Fred Sr. I have fought the good fight, I have finished the course, there lies for me now a crown of justice. I love you dad.

17:18:58 JERRY COHEN: The night that, the night that Fred Ross met Cesar he made an entry in his diary that was as usual understated, laconic and to the point. He said I think I finally found the guy I've been looking for. Now when I was thinking about this my thoughts went to the summer of 1973. That's the summer when the teamsters signed the "sweetheart" contracts with the whole damn grape

industry. And we had aligned against us the Neanderthal growers, Teamster goons, petty tyrants like District Attorney Al Letty of Kern County. You name it, cops beating on people but you know there's an axiom in that book that says, says this, to inspire hope you have to have hope yourself. Now the damn thing about our attitude that summer was that despite all those forces arrayed against us we thought we were gonna win. We were like water running down hill and that strength flowed right from the guts and courage and leadership of Cesar Chavez. And I don't think there's a man in this room or anywhere on the face of this earth more fit to give a eulogy to Fred Ross than the president of the United Farm Workers Organization Cesar Chavez.

17:20:48 CESAR CHAVEZ: Rob, Julie, Fred, friends. The first time I met Fred Ross, you'll have to excuse me with my cold, he was about the last person I wanted to see. Fred had come to San Jose in the spring of 1952 to organize a chapter of the Community Service Organization, the CSO. I was working around the avocado orchards outside of town and living with Helen and our then four children in a rough barrio called Salsequez (?) in east San Jose. In those days seemed to us that the only ones that came to Salsequez was the, were the annual students from Berkeley and Stanford who are writing their thesis and asking a lot of insulting questions like, why do Mexican Americans have so many kids? Well you see Fred look like a not a student like a professor so I thought he was one of these guys. But I wasn't quite sure because he drove around in an old car and had wrinkled clothes. I finally agreed to have a house meeting so Fred could talk to us about the CSO with a group of friends I invited to my home there at the barrio. I hatched a plan with some of my young pachuco (?) buddies to scare him away at a prearranged meeting signaled from me at the meeting they would start insulting him and then he would leave. We thought in fact then and then we would've, we

would've won. Fred found a cold reception in the house when he came in. After a while he started talking and right then and there my whole life changed. After a while and I bought beer for the friends to get 'em to come to the meeting of course. After a while one of the pachuco (?) buddies was waiting for a signal, he wasn't getting one from me so I interrupted Fred, pretty embarrassing at that time, I told him in pachuco congo (?) I said well I say (????) which means shut up or get out. What followed was a frantic forty days and nights as we registered four thousand new Chicano voters in Salsquez and around the county for the first time. Together Fred and I organized twenty-two CSO chapters in California in the fifties. Fred organized eight by himself. Fred used to say you can't take shortcuts because you'll pay for it later. He believed that society could be transformed from within by mobilizing individuals in communities. But he used to say you have to convert one person at a time time after time. Progress comes when people just plow ahead and do it. It takes a lot of patience. The concept is so simple yet most people miss it. Fred applied those principles during an organizing career that spanned almost six decades. I tagged along to every one of Fred's house meetings during that first campaign in San Jose sometimes two a night. I studied every word he spoke, every move he made and questioned him every evening repeatedly, how do those, they have house meetings get people to the meeting? When we have the founding meeting, the founding meeting he would say momento, pasensia (?). The organizing meeting at Medford school near San Jose was a huge success. I went outside to talk to some folks who were leaning around to come in and happened to have overheard something scandalous. Some Chicano established leaders were pretty upset. I thought everybody was happy about the meeting and they were saying, finding excuses why the meeting shouldn't be. And they said things like well there aren't any leaders there, they're all old folks. To me I thought what happened here? I went in and I told Fred those folks don't wanna come in. And he

said don't worry, (???????). At home that night I told Helen how it had happened that the meeting was pure magic and I said I'm gonna find how to do that magic. I'll find out, learn how to do it come what may and I wouldn't stop until I learned from him. For a long time I used to call Fred Mr. Ross, he'd turn around and he says Fred, just Fred. I still kept on calling him Mr. Ross. I'd go to the fields they'd day dreaming about that night, that evenings house meeting and wanting very badly to have the day off quickly so I can go to the house meeting. I would find any excuse to be with Fred I even started, I even tried to started to, to imitate him. He noticed that and he said one day Cesar you don't have to parrot me. You just follow simple rules you'll be successful. I was pretty embarrassed. The thing I liked most about Fred was there was no bullshit with him. No pretensions. No ego trips. Just plain hard work. And at times grinding work. Fred's accomplishments were even more amazing when you consider he had a lot to overcome. There was some reverse discrimination in those barrios that he worked in at times. Fred was angry, he was Protestant, he was middle class. I watched him at first very closely for any signs of materialism or superiority. I never ever, ever detected any of those signs. One evening after an executive board meeting of the San Jose CSO chapter at Jose Enblancovedes house Fred talked to us about the old age pension for non-citizens. He said it would be a great issue would help a lot of folks who didn't have any money or pensions and relieve a lot of pressure on those children. But he warned us that it would take a lot of work setting up the campaign and passing the law. It would take a long time. We would often get impatient if Fred would say calma, calma, it'll come just keep working. Have patience it'll come. He was telling us, telling us eight long years before that law was passed but it was a super victory. And I would sit there when lo, when it was first passed and I'd think what genius. This man is really truly magnificent. Look he knew he guaranteed me many times when I'd get all impatient that it was gonna

happen and it did happen. And you have no idea how that helped us. Helped me particularly, especially that lesson in time to come it was one of the greatest lessons that I ever learned. Then one day mid 1952 kind of suddenly Fred wanted me to, wanted to know if it was ok to talk to Salinisky to put me on the payroll. My heart sank to my knees. What followed were many occasions for self doubt, a lot of Fred's time for Fred spending time holding my hand and reassure me that I could do it. In Oakland organizing the first CSO chapter on my own I called Fred every night. Every night just to make sure that I was on track. He'd sit at the other end of the line late at night all the patience in the world just listen to my (Cesar makes the sign for talking with his hands). I called him right at the end of that meeting to report to him that we had had three hundred and twenty-six, seven people at All St. Mary's Church. I said Fred if you count the janitor and all the priests and the teachers and myself, three hundred and twenty-seven. I worked very hard for it and he said I knew it, I knew it, I knew it. I knew you could do it. I knew he was gonna say that. I was looking for my pat on the back. After organizing the chapter in Madera in 1954 the whole leadership turned against me. That was my first, my first experience. The Red bating campaign by Tony mentioned that Mr. Hammer immigration officer and the district attorney in Madera County had convinced all the leadership that I was a communist and should be turned out. Including some immigration (?????) because we're hurting them, we're doing free immigration work and we're hurting their income. Poor Fred had to leave his job and come hold my hand once more. He said Cesar listen you're stirring a hornets nest and some of them will come after you. (????????), he knew those Mexican niches to the tee. (???) had said for every negative there's a positive. The company of the teamsters were united against us during the cam, the Di Giorgio campaign in 1966 many of Fred's organizers volunteers who were totally against the Vietnam War and some of the others were in trade unions who

were totally for the War and Fred had to organize, keep those two sides from warring so he could help them organize and fight the Teamsters and fight the Di Giorgio Corporation. That night before the election I got home late turned on the T.V. news and bigger than life there was a story from Las Vegas that they had set the odds at six to ten against us. I immediately picked up the phone and called Fred. Fred said, we'll win don't worry. Get some rest you'll need it tomorrow because you'll have to celebrate. I hung up. He called a minute later and he said, Cesar remember there's only a battle, maybe a very small battle in the history of this union, the war is yet to be decided. I thought it over with that I went soundly to sleep. With 1967 the grape boycott was having severe problems because boycotted grape growers were switching labels on us, those that were not being boycotted. I was caught in a strange small dilemma, somehow I couldn't get myself to boycott growers who were not being struck even though some of them were giving their labels to the struck growers and the boycott wasn't going anyplace. Fred and Dolores in New York on the boycott argued that it could, it could be done but it had to be a generic boycott, we had to boycott all grapes. They finally made me see the light. We agreed on that and soon after that the boycott began to fight its way. Fred died of natural causes on September 27, he was 82. His deeds live on in hundreds he organized and trained and inspired. Not the least of them his son Fred Jr. who made his dad very proud. I have been thinking through how best to memorialize Fred's contribution to society. I have come to the conclusion that it'd best be, it'd be most meaning to focus around what I believe is his great contribution, developing the organizing of people for action in to an art form. That art form has to be preserved, has to be written aphorisms so that future organizers can learn, can learn and be trained from those lessons Fred taught us. While guarding this inheritance we must take pains to keep it clean and pure. God forbid that it be corrupted by some Ph.D.'s analysis and interpretations.

Two and a half years ago I had this wild dream one that Fred recognized. So Dolores and Artie and Rodias and David Martinez and myself and us got together and proposed that we're gonna get the Nobel Peace Prize for Fred. And after we, we, we called, we lined up some senators and some congressman and we got some uh, some bishops and a whole bunch of people. So I, they sent me to see Fred because it was gonna be tough and we go Fred and so I came to see him and I approached him as gently as I could. He looked at me, furled his eyebrow he said, don't you have more work to do than this stuff? I said. I said I know how you feel Fred but what about us? We'd like to have you get that prize. He said go on finish your work, that's not important. Do some important work, you know what to do. Fred Ross gave me and so many others a chance and that led to a lot of things but he did, he did more than discover and train some of us. The other day I was preparing for this material. I was reading through correspondence between Fred and myself from the early sixties that I, I had not seen in thirty years. Let me share that with you. We saw, we saw each other infrequently but we wrote as often as we could. Often long letters and Fred would usually include a modest contribution to help tide things over. Listen to just a few excerpts from some of our letters. May 2nd 1962: Dear Fred, sure happy to receive your letter and the check. Your letters will, your letters will give me that which I need so badly right now. Dolores Huerta was here I filled her in on all of the plans and asked her to join the parade. As you know she is all for it and it'll begin soon. We did some work deciding which towns to go organize in and Helen, Dolores and I decided to call the new union Farm Workers Association. I have in fact done some field work in the last few days driving grape stakes, shucking cotton and stocking vines. After about two hours out there I feel like I'm eighty, an eighty year old person. Luckily they come to CSO for pensions. We'll be moving to another home because lower rent on the fifteenth of May but for the time being keep your letters coming to this

address. I'm sorry to hear about the ulcer, if I'm gonna follow your footsteps I guess I'll have to get one myself. If I don't already have one or more. Seriously I hope it's not too bad. I'm expecting an income tax return any day now I hope. Also received the shirts you sent, muchos gracias. I don't have a telephone yet or money to get one but someday when, someday soon I hope to have one. Please write whenever you can. As ever Cesar. P.S. Bertie says to say hello to Fed Oss who couldn't sound the r's in those days. June 4th 1962 from Fred to me: Hello (???) This will be a short one because I've seen you recently and I wanted to get a little, that little propina that's the contribution in the mail. This time it will have to be a bill because Francis took off with the checkbook. Should have sent it yesterday but I got so busy putting the bite on others I forgot to bite myself. When I get to start it I'll (????) them too. Maybe start a buck a week club and assign one of them to collect the money and send it back to you ok? Well your the one with the news that should send my way. Your best, best Fred. July 9th 1962: Dear Cesar, Well I'm enclosing the usual and I hope to hear from you soon with some more marvelous stories. That one about Pauly was very cute. June 5th 1962 me to Fred: (SPANISH). Thank you very much for your generous donation. I have so many things to tell you I hardly know where to start. August 7th 1962 me to Fred: Well I'm up in Merced County now. Things have been going my way. After that failure in Modota I guess I got scared and really did some of my work. My meetings, excuse me, my meetings haven't missed and my pitch has finally developed so I don't have to be changing it every time I give it. On the Peace Corp. matter I called Rockefeller he says that they are looking, they're having difficulty getting good people for the community development. Wants me to send him names of people whom I feel are qualified to do this work. Do you, do you, do you know anyone we don't particularly want around California for the last two years? Gracias me. Thanks for the contribution. Your amigo, Cesar. October 3,

1962: Dear Cesar, Well mejo you've really done a great job. I know there's a lot, long way to go but with that miraculous mind of yours and judging by the glory I saw pouring from the eyes of the farmworkers sitting around that table all afternoon with luck you'll make it. I'm absolutely sure you'll make it. And I did because of that. Because of that. In the mean time keep your dream coming true and drop me a bit of news now and then. Fred. January 7th 1963: Dear Fred, Sure enough I had your letter upon my return. I don't know whether I mentioned that both Corcran and Heffer go, go, go. Your latest silent contribution is being applied to materials for latent. We'll see what happens as the drive progresses. Personally I think it will get better as time goes on. (SPANISH). I'd rather see you than write you. (SPANISH), Cesar. January 10th, January 10th 1963: Dear Cesar, I hope you'll forgive me for letting you down this once. I didn't prepare the introduction to the petitions. On the roses a couple pair of scarlet would be nice if you can get them for me. I am sending along (????) that's twenty-one dollar.....

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