

## Jessie de la Cruz

TAPE 58, CR 68, SR 32, TC 6:00

06:00:10     Talk about what it was like growing up here during the 1930's, depression being a farmworker then.

06:00:19     Well in 1933 we came up north from Watts, and it was terrible. I even hate to think back to it. We lived on tents that didn't have a floor, just dirt, mud I would say. And we went cold and hungry during winter, because there was no work. We survived by going out on the ditch banks and picking mustard greens and my brothers would go out getting fish from the canals, and we had to wait until we started working or rather my brothers found work. It was very sad. We didn't know what Christmas was. We didn't know what birthday was. We sometimes had, didn't even have any sweaters. Our blankets were always damp, because when it rained the water would come from under, get under the tent, and we had to keep our blankets on top of boxes.

06:01:26     We had no tables. Our stove and heater was an oil drum that my brothers tore a hole in the side, a square hole, and then a round hole in the back where they put a stove pipe through the lap of the tent. But sometimes we didn't even have any wood to burn. So it was very hard, and then as soon as my brothers started working, we were able to get beans and whatever else we needed, but mostly beans and potatoes. As long as we had salt and sugar. And that's what our diet consisted of.

You were telling my that sometimes (chatter with cameraman, take two, starting over with the air conditioning on)

06:02:21 Jesse, let's actually start the story again. Let's start it when your parents died in Watts and you and your brothers decided to come up to the fields. Tell me that story.

06:02:29 Yes, we were in Watts at the time, 1930, with the Depression on. We had no food to eat. My husband...My mother would make...My grandmother would make menudo and she would go with my brother house to house selling menudo, and that's how we survived for a few months, and then my brothers, who couldn't find any work, decided if we could all come up north, we could go pick fruit or cotton or whatever, so we came up north, about three families, and we picked the wrong time, because we just caught the tail end of cotton picking, and then winter set in and there was nothing to do.

06:03:10 So we lived in Mendota (sp??) in a tent without a floor and our clothing and bedding was always wet, because there was no floor on the tent. Mud inside because the water would seep under the tent and you had to walk stooped over, because if you touched the canvas on the tent, you would start a leak, so it was very hard. Our stove and heater consisted of an oil drum, where my brothers cut a square hole in the front and a round hole in the back and they put in a stove pipe so one of the flaps in the tent. But it was very hard, with hardly any food we, sometimes we had to eat beans without salt, because we didn't have any salt.

06:04:00 My grandmother would get us together, and she'd cry with us, because there was nothing to eat, and it's a very sad childhood to look back to. We knew nothing about Christmas, no gifts, no birthdays, nothing, but we were a close family. My grandmother was very loving and she always talked to us about things that happened and why they had happened, but that did us no good, because she did a lot of reading. And she would talk to us about what was happening in Germany and all over. We didn't understand. We were just little kids.

06:04:40 You also told me the story about your brothers not having shoes and crying.

06:04:45 Yes. Actually he's my brother, he's my uncle. He's my mother's brother, but he's almost my age, and when he was about eight or nine years old, he didn't have any shoes, and he would cry. He says, why did you...

06:05:00 Let's start over again and say "when my uncle was eight or nine years old."

06:05:02 Uh, huh. When my uncle was about eight or nine years old, he cried because he had no shoes, and he says, 'why didn't you ever teach me to walk bare-footed, so I wouldn't need any shoes?' But until my grandmother was able to raise a little money to buy him a pair of tennies, he had to go bare-footed.

06:05:21 And then finally when you started, when the crops came in and you started working in the fields, tell me what it was like working in the fields then.

06:05:28 Well, I was about thirteen...

06:05:31 Sorry, start over again...I'm sorry to interrupt. I was thirteen.

06:05:36 I was thirteen years old and we lived in Dos Palos, which is in Fresno County, and we started cleaning cotton, or chopping, whatever you call it, and we were payed ten cents an hour. We would work about twelve hours, and all the money, whatever little money we earned, we turned over to my grandmother who was in charge of buying the food and all of that, so. And then my husband, at that time I knew him. He was about the same age as I was, and he was irrigating. He was getting I think two dollars for twelve hours of work. It was miserable pay, and a lot of hard work, and not a lot to buy food and things that we needed.

06:06:22 Now around that time, things were tough and you got to chop cotton, and you find out that there's a strike. Is this the first time you ever see what a strike is?'

06:06:30 No, this happened in, yes, it was...

06:06:33 In '33.

06:06:34 In '33, see cotton starts about later in the valley than it does in Bakersfield, so my brothers, my two older brothers decided we should go out to Bakersfield and pick a little cotton before it started out here. So we went out there, and we were out picking cotton, when we saw all these cars and trucks just honking and calling, 'Strike! Strike!' So we walked out and we just followed the caravan. I didn't know anything about a strike. [laughs] So we just followed the caravan, and then my brother says, well, we might as well go back home, and we came back to Farville (sp??) to Dos Palos, out there with my grandmother, who had been left behind with the younger children...

06:07:13 During that period, when you went out, and you were in the fields, and when you met the people in the strike. Who were the people? Were they Anglos or were they Mexicanos? Who was working in the fields?

06:07:23 Mexicanos.

06:07:24 Who were the people in the strike?

06:07:26 Well, they were mixed. Mexicanos...Mexican-Americans and Anglos.

06:07:31 I need a complete sentence. So you have to tell me the people on strike.

06:07:34 The people on strike were Anglos and Mexicans, mostly. A few blacks, but hardly any. But there was this big strike, so we just came back

home. And out here, we lived isolated. We never had a newspaper or a radio or nothing, so we didn't know whether there was a strike...whether the strike had spread out this way or not. We were just kept ignorant.

06:07:59 The farmers or the, they chose to keep us out there so we that wouldn't find out anything. Not until I read a book later on, I found out that the big cotton growers and all those sat on a board where they set the price to our work, which was just pennies.

06:08:18 Now around the middle of the decade, you started seeing some new people coming to California in old cars. Do you remember when the Oakies arrived, what that was like?

06:08:25 Yes, yes. We were working together with them when we lived...

06:08:30 Yes, around...

06:08:31 Around 1933, '34, no it was 1934. We started picking cotton in Arvin, in the Arvin area, and we lived in this camp, a tent camp, where we had, I think about three Anglos, Americans that came in from Oklahoma. They didn't like us. They wouldn't even talk to us. We were all the same age, but they wouldn't talk to us. We were out in the fields picking, doing the same work, and living under the same conditions, but they thought they were better than we were. They wouldn't talk to us.

06:09:12 And then more and more came.

06:09:13 Yes, there were so many of them that they, we got paid less than we had been paid before. So that made it harder. And they lived the same way we did. But I don't know why they felt they were better.

06:09:29 The other thing that happened in the middle of the decade was that they started forcing Mexicans to go back into Mexico. Did you know people who were deported?

06:09:36 Yes.

06:09:38 I'm sorry, I'm sorry are we still on?

06:09:41 Yes, I know many families who went back to Mexico. They were deported. Well, they were volunteered. They asked, 'Do you want to go back to Mexico.' Of course they were forced to go, because there was no work and they were hungry, so we knew, we had many friends who went to Mexico, but then later their children grew up and they came back. They were American citizens, and lots of them still live here.

06:10:07 Did you know people who came back as braceros, too?

06:10:10 Yes. Not citizens from here, but I know the braceros. We lived in Cantua Creek, which is around the Tranquility area here in Fresno County, and there were braceros out there in the camp. And they...they were mistreated. They worked hard, and if they.. We heard, well we talked to some of them. Because we lived in the same labor camp. They would tell us they were ill, their stomach was upset or something, yet they still had to go

work, because if they complained they said, 'Okay, you go to work or you go back to Mexico.' The labor contractor would tell them this.

06:10:50 So they had to go to work. They needed to work. So, it was hard. And their food consisted of stew. A very cheap stew and for lunch, they would get two slices of bread, put a slice of bologna in the center, sometimes just macaroni or spaghetti between the two slices of bread. And they said, 'This is no food for us.' And they would throw it away. They wouldn't eat it. And we felt sorry for them. Sometimes we would feed them.

CR 69, SR 32

06:11:21 This is take three. Tell me the thing about your mother and your grandmother dying in Watts and...

06:11:27 Yes. My mother and my grandfather died when we lived in Watts, so my grandmother and my older brother were in charge of the family, so they talked it over, and they decided it was better for us, since there was no work out there, it was better for us to come up north, pick the crops like prunes, fruit, and cotton. So that 's how we ended up in...

06:11:50 Okay, that's it. Now let's go on. We talked about the '30s. Did you keep on working in the fields all through the '40s and the '50s or did you go out to work in defense plants or did you stay here.

06:12:01 No, I worked the fields all my life.



06:12:04 But then towards the end of the 1950s and into the '60s, something new starts happening. When did you first hear that there might be a chance to make things better for farmworkers?

06:12:13 Well, as a child, I always thought, 'If there was somebody who would help," you know. There was strikes, but they were what we call huelgas locas, because there was no leadership. But then in 1962 I believe, we started talking about a union for farmworkers, and that's when Cesar and two other men came to our house in Parleer (sp??) and they started talking to my husband about joining the union. So we became members...I became a member on May the first of 1962 for a United Farm Workers organizing committee. Then about two years later I was made an organizer.

06:12:55 But before that I had been out in the fields talking to people about, you know, people that were working with me. I would talk to them about the union. I wasn't an organizer, but I would talk to them about the union, and that it would be good for farmworkers, because we needed representation. And so I was organizing by that time. So later I was made an organizer, so then I did go speaking you know to groups.

06:13:27 But when you first met Cesar, this idea surfaced. I know you always thought it was possible.

06:13:43 So, that first night in Parleer, when Cesar and some other people came to the house, what were some of your impressions of Cesar, how did he strike you?

He started...

Wait a minute. Take a pause.

06:13:59 When Cesar came that night to our house, in Parleer, he talked to us about forming a union for farmworkers. He sounded very sincere, and when we asked questions of him, he looked you right in the face and told you. He didn't just ... no ... We got direct answers, and I felt that was a good future for farmworkers.

06:14:23 Did Fred Ross come to that first meeting? Do you remember?

06:14:30 Not the first one. Yes, he used to come to my house in Parleer when we had house meetings. Or when I had meetings at my house and people would come and we had Fred Ross come in.

06:14:42 And what did you think about this guy who was obviously not a farmworker, he was an Anglo...

06:14:47 We needed all kinds of help. To us, he was fantastic, because he told us how to go about doing things, without getting arrested.

06:15:00 So then you start having house meetings and learning how to organize.

06:15:05 Yes, the AFL/CIO sent a man to teach us how to organize, and he was from New York. And he was with us out there, and we would sit

down and have meetings with him, and that's how I learned to organize. It sounded very good to me, because we never had anything like that for farmworkers, and I felt that for the first time here was good news for farmworkers.

06:15:37 Did you think it was going to be easy, though?

06:15:38 Of course I didn't think it was going to be easy, because I'd been through it before, and we would talk to people. Some would respond. Others would say, 'Oh, you're crazy. We're going back to Mexico and we don't care what happens to you after we leave.'

06:15:54 But then I would point out, you know, when you come back, then you have better working conditions and higher wages. And so I get a lot of them to come to the meetings. Some of the men wouldn't bring their wives. They said, 'Oh, she had to stay home and take care of the children.' And I said, 'Well, who took care of the children while they were working out during the day?' I said, 'Besides, you can bring the children to the meetings.'

06:16:19 And many of those children, that were little at that time, they're grown up and there working...I mean they're helping the union.

06:16:26 Now apart from people being skeptical and thinking it wouldn't work, did you get the sense that a lot of farmworkers were afraid, that they felt weak?

06:16:35 Yes, they were afraid. They would say, 'No, if I have a meeting at my house, my house is going to be bombed.' And I said, 'It won't. Mine hasn't been bombed, and I'm having meetings out here all the time. So don't be scared.' That's one of the things that's against us, being scared. You have to come out and be brave and fight for what you believe in and for your rights.

06:16:59 Did anyone tell you, 'Well, you shouldn't listen to Cesar, because, well, they're Communists and they're outsiders. We know what's best for you, listen to us?'

06:17:07 No, as a matter of fact, lately, not too long ago, I heard about Cesar being, what do call it. They were watching him to see if he was involved with the Communists. And I recall one time when I had the hiring hall in Parleer, three Anglos came to the office, and they started asking me about the union. And they asked me, well, what does Cesar Chavez tell you to do.

06:17:38 I said, 'Well, he tells us to tel the people the truth, not to lie to them. Tell them the truth and to organize them into the union. And he talks to us about a better future for us.' And that's all they got out of me, because I don't even know what it takes to be a Communist. I don't know. 06:17:59

It set me to thinking. Maybe it was somebody that was trying to get something on us. We couldn't organize those that didn't have...those that weren't legally here.

06:18:15 Because we knew, or Cesar told us, you know, the growers, the farmers, they're just waiting for just one little thing against us to go after the union. So for the time being we're not going to make members of those that don't have any papers, for a time we didn't. But then we kept thinking that, well, the government allows to come them out here. The grower wants them out here. So why shouldn't they be represented by a union? So that's when we started at a big meeting in Delano. It was voted on that yes, we would organize those that. We wouldn't ask if they were legally here or not.

06:18:54 So, tell me a little bit about 1965 now. You started doing house meetings and you became an organizer. What did you think would happen when the grape strike started and how did that strike you?

06:19:06 Well, it was very good, because before that we had been working picking grapes, wine grapes on gondolas, and we would fill them all the way to the top. And they were pulled by a tractor throughout rough ground, so by the time they got to where they were dumped, they said 'half a ton.' And we knew there was over a ton of grapes in that gondola. Or it would be two tons and they would say "One and a half tons.'

06:18:37 So that's why when we had our union contract in Reedley, our first contract there, we asked for a scale. And that's how we found out how much money had been taken from us through this process of where the grapes settle down and the labor contractor would tell us, when it was two tons, he would say, 'ton and a half.'

06:20:02 See, I want to talk to you about 1965. You were here in Fresno, working the grapes, and you've become a member. And then the strike starts in Delano. Did people hope the strike would come here. how did they think about what was happening?

06:20:13 Yes, we wanted that around here, because we needed it. But all of us would go out there to Delano and help the strikers out ther, not only with being out on the picket lines, but by donating food and clothing for those strikers that were not working. So that's how the union has been able to survive, through donations. Because if it had been just us, the farm workers, we wouldn't have made it, so we're...I still think, and I still say, if it hadn't been for people out in the cities, we wouldn't have made it. Not on our own.

06:20:49 Well, see the growers would say, 'Well, we're signing because of the boycott, but that's because they're putting pressure on us, and the farnworkers don't really want to join. You're forcing them to join.'

06:21:02 Of course they would say that. Same thing as they might say we don't need higher wages, but we do. Put them in our shoes, and they'll know if we need a union or not

TAPE 59, CR 70, SR 32, TC 6:30

06:30:07 So the Delano strike started in 1965 and the Delano strike is really known focusing on table grapes, one of the first targets was Christian

Brothers, where you were working. Tell me about how the process worked at Christian Brothers.

06:30:36 I was in the hiring hall, I was not working, and people started talking about going out to picket or strike Christian Brothers, and so we got the people together, and we decided it would be around three o'clock in the morning where we would go out there to the entrance and try to stop as many people as we could, but then we didn't have to go through all that. We had groups that were making coffee, that were making food everything for during the day for the strikers, but we didn't have to go through that. We got a contract. The strike was off, so they negotiated a contract and we got it.

06:31:17 Were you involved in negotiating a contract?

06:31:19 Yes, I went with Dolores Huerta with the Ranch committee to San Francisco to negotiate the contract.

06:31:29 What did that feel like, sitting down with the bosses and having them listen to you?

06:31:35 It felt good to tell them off.

06:31:40 It felt good to tell the bosses off.

06:31:44 It took us about three trips out there before we got the contract, which was very good. It was a very good contract. Everything, all the clauses and everything was voted on and we got it.

06:32:03 And then what did that feel like to have a contract?

06:32:06 It was good. That was the first time I ever worked under a union contract. I was working at the office, and I had a list of workers who had been working there before the contract and after the contract. People that registered to work, and we went down the list. We wouldn't pick friends or relatives. We just went down the list, and we'd dispatch people out there. But we had a little problem, because they would call on a Friday night that they needed maybe fifty workers on Monday. And Saturday or Sunday, you're not going to find the workers at home if they are not working. So I said why couldn't they let us know ahead of time, so I could, so Monday came around and I didn't work the workers.

06:32:55 So they complained to Delano that the workers hadn't been sent. So that's when I told them. There's a clause in the contract that says, you have to let us know ahead of time at least seventy-two hours. With a letter. And I just received a telephone call asking for these people over the weekend. I couldn't find them. So after that every time they needed new workers, they would send a letter. And we always had enough workers.

06:33:24 How did that feel, the process of actually running a hiring hall as opposed to going out and organizing. Was it hard to switch gears and adjust?

06:33:32 No, because I had meetings there in the office, out in the front yard. And those that were not members would become members then, they



heard everything that the union was doing, so they became members. Before that oh my God, they would call me all kinds of dirty names out in the fields. 'You should stay home and take care of the kids, instead of being out here,' they would yell at me. And I said, 'Well, it takes a woman to organize you, so I'm doing it.'

06:34:07 Do you think, most of the farmworkers are Mexican and fairly traditional people. Was it difficult for them to deal with women who were organizers?

06:34:24 At first it was very hard to organize those that believed that women should stay home and do the washing and the cooking. But they never stopped to think about them working out in the fields. So why shouldn't they attend meetings and be involved in the union? It got to a point to where most of the people out in the picket lines were women. Men were working to help support the family, of course, at other places where we were not striking. But then it got to where they recognized women, you know, and gave us a rightful place out in the field.

06:35:01 Now part of being involved in the union strike is getting your family involved, You were telling me that you used to send Malcriados ... to Vietnam to Bobby, tell me that's right.

06:35:10 Yes, when my youngest son, Roberto, was in Vietnam, I was involved in the union. And I would get newspaper clippings and El Malcriado, and I would send copies to him out to Vietnam, and he came and he told me he was never very interested. You know he would pass them out

to some of the other boys there, or men, and then when he came home, he started going to Fresno City, Fresno City College, and when we were picketing, in Kingsburg. They fed him at the cafeteria, they had these ice creams or something with a cherry on top. And he doesn't eat sweets, so he started toying around with it, you know with his fork, and he broke it open. He says, 'Oh, this is not a cherry, this is a grape. It's just been dyed!'

06:36:03 So he said, 'You know, my mom and many of the farmworkers were out there under the sun a hundred and ten and we're in here being fed grapes. Let's walk out of the cafeteria.' And he got all of them to walk out, until they removed the grapes. So that's when he got involved. And he's still at it.

06:36:24 Having to overcome barriers as a woman, confidence, Senate hearings, George Murphy

06:36:40 Yes, well, we're talking about getting the confidence. Well, I had to organize my husband first. Well, of course he was a union member and he believed in everything the union stood for, and he never told me you can't go here or you can't go there, but I still had to ask him can I go. It got to a point where I would leave him a note. I went to so and so's house, or I went at this meeting and all that.

06:37:07 And then, I think it was 1968, Senator, at that time, Senator George Murphy came out to the Delano area and we knew he was there. We picketed him when he came to Fresno, and I read in the newspaper where he said, 'It's great for farmworkers. They have a...' how did he say it? 'Picnic

atmosphere at noon, at lunchtime with all the family gathered together eating their food under the vines.' (Laughs)

06:37:43 He didn't see...Didn't he see the mud streaking down their faces and all the mosquitoes they have to eat, and the dirt and everything? No, of course not, because he had a red carpet by the big growers out there and the best motel, everything, he just came out to the fields and just looked around and then he came out saying that...another time he said that stoop labor was good for farmworkers because, for Mexicans because Mexicans were built short, closer to the ground.

06:38:13 That's a very racist thing to say besides a dumb thing to say. I don't see how he made it senator.

06:38:22 Part of being close to the ground was the growers would hand you a hoe.

06:38:26 A short-handled hoe.

06:38:27 Did you have to use it?

06:38:28 Yes, I did? Among all the work that I did out in the fields, the short-handled hoe was the worst. Even right now, I can't sit up straight. I have to sit leaning to one side or at a certain angle so that my back can rest, because the short handle is very bad. I worked at it and it was banned once. Then they tried to bring it back again, and that's when I testified here in Fresno. They had this big hearing, and they wanted to bring back...I brought

a long-handled hoe and a short-handled hoe, and I demonstrated to them how we could work with a long-handled hoe and do a good job, and the short-handled hoe how you had to work stooped over for so many hours.

06:39:21 And then I asked those that came in from Washington, I told them, I'm not asking you to go out to the field. Just stand up hold the tips of your shoes and walk up and down on this room and see how many times you can do it. And that will give you an idea of what we have to go through out in the fields with a short-handled hoe. Well, it didn't come back.

06:39:45 The first time you had to go and make a testimonial speech you were nervous, you didn't know if you could do it.

06:39:59 Yes, I remember it was for minimum wage for women. Out here in Fresno, at Fresno high school there was a hearing and that was the first time I came as a speaker, and there were all these people from the fast food places and growers and businessmen who were opposed to the minimum wage for women , and they said, no we can't afford it.

06:40:27 And I got before them, and I told them, you know, how we at those wages that we were being payed had to help our husbands, and so many people had to be on welfare, because they didn't earn enough. But if they gave us a living wage, the welfare doors could close forever. And then they started you know, oh my god the idea, but just among themselves. But after that, for three days, I had a pain...

CR 71, SR 32

06:41:13 Why do you think people who run farms were so violently, bitterly opposed to what you were trying to do?

06:41:38 I think the growers and those people that hire workers are opposed to a union, especially the farmworker union, because it's Mexicans. And I've seen so much racism out here. If it had been an Anglo leader, we would have gotten everything. You know, but being Mexicans, the union is composed mostly of Mexican farmworkers, American citizens and legal, those that are legally here. And that's why I feel that is why.

06:42:12 They fought very hard and bitterly against us, and they talk about violence out in the fields. When have you ever heard about a farmer being shot or a farmer being kicked or any of his sons or daughters, anyone in the family being killed. All of them have been farmworkers, so where is the violence coming from? From the growers, from their hachichincles what we called, you know, crew leaders and all that.

06:42:42 Because they really felt very strongly. It was irrational.

06:42:46 Yes. And at first they were not afraid. They would say, 'Oh, these crazy people. They're crazy people. Leave them alone. They're crazy.' But then they found out that we were really atrong and that when we said something, we stood up to it.

06:43:03 Later instead of just the growers, you had to fight the teamsters union, too. Leaflet story.

06:43:17 During, when was it, the early '70s or late '60s, I was in San Francisco leafleting and telling people about you know the boycott, to gather support for the farmworkers union. And I went from house to house, and I came to a man who that was fixing a big truck in front of his front yard, and I gave him one of the leaflets and he says, 'No thank you. I'm teamster.'

06:43:45 And I said, 'Fine. All unions are good.' I said, 'But farmworkers union need their own union.' I said 'How would you feel if I came in and tried to be a leader to your union, teamster union?' I said, 'Oh you would tell me oh, you know nothing about trucks.'

06:44:07 And it's the same thing we're saying. Teamsters know nothing about farmwork. Besides, they signed with the growers without consulting the farmworkers. They signed contracts behind our backs. That's the only way they could do it.

06:44:25 Do you think the teamsters were sincere about wanting to organize farmworkers?

06:44:29 Why hadn't they ever done it before until we were organized. That's when they came in, because the growers called them in?

06:44:38 And then what happened when you finally got elections?

06:44:41 Well, we lost a few contracts to the teamsters, and many of the workers tell me that that union is no good. The only thing they do is come

out there once in a while to pick up the dues. And that's it. They don't have nobody to complain to. Nothing.

06:45:14 1964. How did you feel when Cesar asked you to be an organizer?

06:45:25 Cuando Cesar asked me. No, he didn't ask me. The people, the members are the ones that said I should be an organizer. We had a general organizer out here by the name of Crescencio Mendoza who passed away long time ago, and he talked to Cesar about me, how I could relate to people and talk to them the same language they spoke, and so I was made an organizer.

06:45:54 How did you feel about that?

06:45:55 Great. I felt great. Like I was really part of the movement, of la Causa.

06:46:07 Looking back over 30 years, apart from what you helped other people do, what did you get out of the experience. How did it change your life?

06:46:19 I felt good about it. It changed...being involved with people and talking to people about something good makes me feel good. It makes me that I did something in this world besides eat and sleep. And it makes me feel good to be able to help others. I've been involved in many organizations where I always tried to help.

06:46:45     Apart from main involvement with UFW, you also worked with George Bellis

06:46:56     Since I was an organizer, we heard about the 1902 Reclamation Land Act, and we decided why not go into farming. We've been the farmers all the time except we didn't own the land. So we heard about this law where after so many years, those that were getting subsidized water were supposed to sell to small farmers, so we got a large group of people attending our meetings, so then George Bellis (sp?) came along and he talked to me about forming an organization, which became National Land for People. And I would talk to people about owning the land instead of working for somebody else, and a committee was set up, and I was part of that committee, so they named me one of the people to go talk to one of the big landowners in the westlands.

06:47:50     We went to his office. We had worked for him for many years. His name was Russell Giffen. He passed away now, and I was the one who was bilingual, so I talked to him about buying some of the excess land, and he turned around and he looked at me, and he said, 'Do you have a half a million dollars down-payment?'

06:48:14     And I said, 'My god, Mr. Giffen. The highest you ever payed us was seventy-five cents an hour. How can we have half a million dollars down-payment?'



06:48:25 You know, so we knew the answer was no. So I went back to the group and I told them what had happened. And so a lot of them became discouraged. I told Mr. Giffen, I said, 'I feel like I measured your land by the inch, because I had the short-handled hoe working out there and a long-handled hoe working out in the fields ten hours a day.' And I could say I measured his land by the inch. And yeah, we didn't get any of that land. And then yeah we still had six families left.

06:48:58 And we got together, and we got a loan from an organization here in Fresno, and we rented some land, six acres for six families. And we started farming this land, and on the second year, we were able to save enough money to give a down-payment on our own land, but it was not in the westlands, because we couldn't get any water, any land from the westlands.

06:49:27 Martin Luther King said applies to farmworkers union.

06:49:40 We used to attend all the meetings in Delano, and all the ones at La Paz, and every time we had a meeting, Cesar would tell u, he said 'We don't want the same thing to happen to the union as it did Martin Luther King. After he died, everything went. And I want you to know that when I die, I want this to keep on. If the top figure is gone, you move up from the staff, you know, move up a step. And those in charge should see to it that the work keeps going on for the union. Because if this dies, that means all the work that I did through all these years was in vain.

06:50:26 And we still have that. We have it in our hearts that he said that to us and this is why we feel so strong about the union. We're not going to let it die. We're going to fight for our union as long...I'm old now, and I'll fight to the last.

06:50:44 Because it wasn't just Cesar it was everybody.

06:50:46 It was everybody. Like people would tell us. Cesar's union. I would say it's not Cesar's union. It's a farmworkers union. Cesar is the leader. He tells us how to go about it, and we get to vote, if we get to agree on it at the conventions. Cesar is not...he doesn't say, 'You do this.' He puts it up to a vote. And it was voted on, so that's how we went about it. And it's still being done.

06:51:19 How did you feel when you heard that he had passed away?

06:51:22 Oh, I felt like a member of my family was gone. I had gotten really close to him and his family. And I knew him quite well, and I felt, I just felt bad. 'Cause I remember how caring he was about all of us. I remember when my husband passed away. Cesar was there. Dolores was there. They were a big support to me when my husband died. So. The union is one big family, and we care for one another.