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Dolores Huerta

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THE UNIVERSITY OF TEXAS AT EL PASO INSTITUTE OF ORAL HISTORY

Interviewee: Dolores Huerta

Interviewer: Steve Velasquez, Harry Rubenstein and Peter Liebhold

Project: Bracero Oral History Project

Location: Washington, D.C.

Date of Interview: September 27, 2005

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Dolores Huerta was born in Dawson, New Mexico, but she was raised in Stockton, California; her father was a migrant worker, and she often accompanied him when she was young; later, she and her brothers also labored in the fields picking various crops; as an adult, she began working with braceros through the Community Service Organization (CSO); such efforts led to her involvement with the Agricultural Workers Organizing Committee (AWOC), and ultimately with the United Farm Workers (UFW). Ms. Huerta briefly talks about her parents and what her life was like growing up; as an adult, she began working with braceros as part of the Community Service Organization (CSO); she would often go to the bracero labor camps to help them when they were injured, which included obtaining doctors and/or lawyers when necessary; her mother owned a hotel at the time, where the braceros often stayed; she cared for them, giving them curfews and making sure they did not drink too much; she even invited them to local dances and encouraged them to get involved in the community; many braceros eventually married local women and settled in Stockton, California; although the braceros did become a part of the community, at times there was tension, because locals were too expensive to hire in comparison to braceros; moreover, braceros were often taken advantage of by growers; sometimes, they would get twice the number of workers they needed and rent out half of them as hired labor for profit; other times, the braceros would work in small groups only four hours a day; in addition to the money growers were given to feed each bracero, they would also turn a profit from the goods braceros purchased at the commissaries; these various tactics ensured that braceros did not earn very much; Dolores goes on to chronicle the different coalitions and labor groups she worked with, including the Agricultural Workers Organizing Committee (AWOC) and the United Farm Workers (UFW).

Length of Interview 78 minutes

Length of Transcript 33 pages

Name of interviewee: Dolores Huerta
Date of Interview: September 27, 2005
Name of Interviewer: Steve Velasquez

This is September 27, 2005. I am interviewing Dolores Huerta. My name's Steve Velasquez. Also in the room, Harry Rubenstein and Peter Leopold. We're doing the interviews for the Delano Grape Strike Program tonight on the 27th as part of the Bracero Overstreet Project. Ms. Huerta, could you tell me a little bit about yourself, where you were born, when you were born, and what your parents did?

DH: Well, I was born in a town called Dawson, New Mexico, which was a coal-mining town in northern New Mexico, at one time, I think, one of the largest mining towns, coal-mining towns in the United States of America. My parents were both – also born there, and my father worked in the coal mines, and he also worked as a farm worker, was a member of the state legislature of New Mexico and later went to California. He was in the service, both in World War II as a sea air patrolman and in the Korean War as a – in the Navy. He became an accountant, graduated from college in his 50s and worked as an accountant in later life. My mother was a very great cook.

She divorced my dad when I was 2, and so she worked in both the canneries and as a waitress. She was part of the 1938 strike in Stockton that George Mooney directed, interestingly enough, and – at the cannery workers' strike, and then she formed her own restaurant and later on had her business. During World War II she had – before World War II she had a restaurant. After World War II [inaudible] and she leased a hotel. When the Japanese were relocated into the concentration camps, she took over the business of one of her Japanese friends, and then she ran a 70-room hotel, and that's where we were raised until she passed away. She was an entrepreneur-minded individual, very community minded and community engaged.

SV: Uh huh. So you didn't actually work in the fields with your father or your mother at that time –

DH: When we were little and through my dad, he was a migrant worker. They used to go into Wyoming and to the Dakotas to do sugar beet work, and we traveled with him as little children. As a teenager, I worked in the packing sheds. My brothers worked in the fields, and then as an adult I worked in the fields and not to earn a living, but when I went out there, you know, doing work like picking

tomatoes and picking grapes, picking onions, cucumbers, and cherries.

SV: When you did do that work, did you work alongside the Braceros, the Mexican contract workers?

DH: Yes, I did, and I did a lot of work with the Braceros as part of the Community Service Organization, which I joined when I was like 25 years old, we were organizing, and that was one of our big projects was to get rid of Public Law 78, the Bracero Program, and going out in the fields, and it was really interesting how – I remember one time we were picking tomatoes, and the tomatoes that we were picking were all not very good. They had been, you know, they were not good to harvest. They were either green or had past harvest, so it was very difficult. We were all being paid a piece rate, all the local workers. Next to us was a field where the tomatoes were all even. They were all red, they needed to be picked, and they had the Braceros working in those fields, but they were paying them by the hourly rate, right, and all the local workers were being paid by the piece rate.

So I had a lot of involvement with the Mexican Braceros and the Community Service Organization. We set up a farm worker project, worked closely with [Ernesto Galarsa](#), then was going to state and senate these farm worker committees, and it sort of got started because there had been a group of Braceros that had been killed in an accident in Stockton. This is where I was raised, in Stockton, California, so we took that on as a project, and we would go out to the labor – I would go out to the labor camps and get the Braceros that were injured, and my mother had a hotel, so we were able to bring them to her hotel and keep them there.

Literally stole them from the labor camps where they were at and found doctors for them, and then they had passed a law that said – the Workers' Compensation Law in California has what they call a bunkhouse rule so if a worker gets injured on the way to work, coming home from work, or in the labor camp, they are covered under the workers' comp cases.

Well, there were a lot of the Braceros that they would put to do jobs like be a mechanic. There was one Bracero who they put to work on a car, a young man, and the car fell on him, so he was in the hospital for many months with all his broken bones, so we were able to get an attorney for him. And this is what we did, go in and around looking for Braceros to help get doctors for them or to get attorneys for them for their injuries. So we did a big job of

rescuing Braceros from the labor camps. It was really interesting, too, and right after – during World War II because that's when the Braceros were brought in, they had [inaudible] of war in Stockton at the naval supply center there, and they were all housed in nice little white cottages, and they would bring them to town to go to the movies, and when we by where they had the Braceros at the fairgrounds, they literally were like in an encampment.

People couldn't go in and see them. You had to get permission to, and you wondered who were the prisoners of war, whether it was the Mexican Braceros or the German and Italian prisoners of war. But they cheated them a lot, and, of course, it started like getting worse and worse. They would bring in twice the number of Braceros that they needed, and what the growers would do they would then rent them to other growers. Say, this grower was certified, and he would rent them to other growers, and they would charge.

So they would make money on these Braceros, get so much for each Bracero, and then they would bring in double the amount that they needed, and so they would have the workers work four hours – one would work four hours. They would, say, a couple of hundred to work four hours, bring them back to the labor camp and then send out the other group to work out, and the reason they did this is because these companies like **Calcagno** and the Spanos family, Alex Spanos who owns the Chargers, they would get so much money for each Bracero. I think it was \$1.75 per day that they got to feed them, and, of course, the food that they gave them was not very nourishing. It was, you know, oxtail soup and things of that nature.

Then, of course, anything that they bought from the commissary, then that was deducted from their checks, so you would see at the end of the week that you would have workers that would have checks of \$10.00 or \$15.00 after a two-week period of time. So we also went down to the association, to the Farm Bureau, and did – I guess it would – was it [inaudible]? I think it was the Farm Bureau, we would go down there and just fight with them almost because the Braceros would come and, "Look, they didn't pay us and they're sending us back to Mexico and we haven't gotten our paycheck," and, you know. So it was a constant fight down there with them.

SV:

Uh huh. One of the things that I've always been confused by because we've heard so many different stories in different ways is what the relationship between established Mexican American

communities and the Braceros were. Some people talk about a lot of tension between them, and others talk about how they were really invited into the community.

DH:

I think you had a little bit of both. I mean, in terms of our family, we had a lot of the Braceros that jumped ship because remember the first ones they brought in were from Mexico City. I remember one of the persons told me that they were told to look for calluses, and, of course, they looked for calluses on the fingers, and they were all just guitar players, and so a lot of the young Mexicans that came from Mexico City, they hadn't ever worked in the fields, you know.

They thought they were doing a patriotic duty to come to help the United States, and it was an adventure for them, and of course, once they put them out there on those farms and, you know, the work was brutal, absolutely brutal. So they all jumped ship, and they came into the cities, and at our hotel we had a lot of the ex-Braceros that were there, and they were all very young. They were like in their teens, 19, 20 years old.

My mother, she used to – she thought she was their mother, right, and so she'd give them curfews. They had to be in by a certain time, and she made sure they wouldn't drink too much, and she would take their checks away from them because [inaudible] went out to work in different jobs and then make sure that they sent money home, and she made sure to invite them to all of the local dances, and a lot of them ended up marrying local women and stayed on to become very productive citizens.

But there was a whole group of these ex-Braceros that kind of stayed in our hotel and that she introduced them into the local community. Where the tension was because the local farm workers, of course, the wages were going down, and as the program went on and on and on, the wages got so bad for the local farmer because then, of course, the growers wouldn't hire local workers, and that was the big fight that we had with Public Law 78, and so what we started doing then is taking that, having hearings.

We had – then Congressman Phillip Burton was just an assemblyman in the State of California, and he came down from Sacramento to Stockton and had hearing [inaudible]. Now he was just the Social Welfare Committee and did this whole unauthorized hearing. He had a fellow with him, Coblese, who was with the ACLU – now with the ACLU. He became a judge later, but they

had this hearing where they brought all these growers in, and the whole auditorium was full of growers, and then – so we went and testified and talked about discrimination where they wouldn't hire the local farmer workers. Now wages were then going down to like 50, 60 cents an hour, and we didn't have unemployment insurance.

We didn't have food stamps at that time, so farm workers were really having a hard time just eating, and that [inaudible] a group of workers had been discriminated, so we brought them in to testify. And Phil Burton said, "I want to go out to that labor camp where those Braceros are at," and then the growers would say, "No. We're really paying them like 70 cents an hour, 80 cents an hour," and Phil Burton went out to that labor camp, and all those workers got an instant raise, right, before he got – we went ahead of him, and sure enough they were over there cleaning up the camp and sweeping and trying to get rid of all the garbage and everything to make it presentable for the assembly person, but that was one of the hearings.

And, of course, there were other hearings, as you know, by **Harrison Williams** and many other people during that period of time, but many of those labor camps where the Braceros were just horrible. I mean, I remember going to one labor camp where what they had – what their wash basin was was like an oil tank that had been cut in half, and that was where they had to wash. That's the washing facilities that the workers had, and everybody was making money off the Braceros because you just put up a place to feed people, you could get money from the government to be feeding them.

So that whole program got out of hand, and many people became millionaires. If you go to Stockton, California now, many of these people – I remember there was one group, they had like a card room. That's how – we had a little card room, and people would go in and play cards, and then they started having the Braceros, they became very wealthy, and you see some of these people now that their names on universities, and the Spanos family, in particular, became very wealthy. They got then into real estate development, but that's how they got their start, feeding the Braceros.

And, of course, we worked very hard then to get rid of Public Law 78 that became – in the Community Service Organization we had two big issues that we were – well, several but one of the big issues was we could change the law so that people who were legal

residents would be able to get public assistance benefits, and we were able to change that law, and Phil Burton carried that bill for us in the state legislature. And later on when it came to the Congress he did the same thing here, and then the other one was to get rid of Public Law 78, and so that became our big cry, and I came to Washington. I think I first came to Washington was to testify against Public Law 78, and so we did a national campaign and were finally able to end it in 1963, '64.

SV: Who else was part of that group that worked to overturn the law?

DH: Well, it was primarily the Community Service Organization and, of course, some people in the AFL-CIO. At that time, also Jack **Henney** was the undersecretary of labor, and he was here in Washington. He was very close to Kennedy, you know, to John Kennedy, but we did a lot of work. That became our big issue.

Interviewer 2: I know that Fund for the Republic was one of the foundations that was supporting this. Were there other groups like that?

DH: I don't remember them, but there may have been other groups. We also formed coalitions with some of the – well, the labor groups and some of the – of the **[inaudible]** Labor Committee, and I'm going back and trying to remember just all the different groups, but we were kind of the ones that were at the head of all of the work that was done, the CSO at that time. That was before we started the UFW, but we did the lobbying and it was – I'll tell you a funny story about this because I went to see Congressman Jose Montoya from New Mexico, and their family were big cotton growers, and my father, as I said before, had been in the state assembly in New Mexico, and I went to see Montoya. Right away he said – well, I wasn't any longer from New Mexico, that I lived in California, but all of my relatives in New Mexico were very active politically.

So he asked me the names of my relatives, and I told him, well, my various cousins, and he knew who they were, and then said, "Oh, my father worked in the state assembly." My father was elected to the state legislature, and Mr. Montoya said, "Oh. What was his name," and I said, "Juan Fernandez." "I remember your father," so when I went back to California, I told my dad, "Hey, I saw Jose Montoya and he said he remembered you." He said, "He should, that dirty blank, blank." He said, "I knocked him out of the state legislature." My father was expelled from the state assembly because he punched out Jose Montoya. My dad had been a big union man, a volunteer for the United Mine Workers Union, and

this has been written because someone was doing a story on this, and they researched it, and, yes, it's there. It's recorded.

SV: Can you talk a little bit about your shift from the CSO into the United Farm Workers and your work with [inaudible].

DH: Uh huh. Well, in the CSO, of course, we had a large number of our members that were farm workers, both Imperial Valley and Salinas there on the coast and, of course, on the San Joaquin Valley, so this was, of course, the greater need that we had among the people that belonged to the organization, and we had formed these farm labor committees.

In fact, when we did the farm labor committees, I was in charge of the farm labor committee in Stockton, and Ernesto Galarsa had gotten some money from the butchers union then, and we organized a group of workers under the banner of CSO, and then we handed them over – it was about 150 people or so, to the meat cutters, and then after they had, like, their first or the second meeting, then they asked us not to come to their meeting anymore. And so what happens, it fell apart, and so then working with a priest, a Father McDonald in California.

Then we started another group called the Agricultural Workers Association, and that's where I recruited **Larry Egian**, who then became the head of AWOC, and so Larry then became a member of CSO, and we formed this group called the Agricultural Workers Association, and I would go out to the Black churches in south Stockton and preach about forming an organization and working with Larry and the Filipinos and then got a lot of the **Okies** from the east side of Stockton plus the Mexican farm workers that we had in CSO.

And so we were able to form a really, really good-sized group of several hundred people, and we had a big meeting in Saint Mary's Hall in Stockton, and the AFL-CIO sent somebody – actually what happened is Father McDonald, Father **McCullough** – did I say – the priest that we worked with in Stockton was Father McCullough. Father McDonald was from San Jose and had been a friend of Cesar's, and then another priest called Father **Dugan**. And so what they did is they – they were these priests that were involved in – they had an organization within the Catholic Church, it was something to do – it was like a rural – I think it's still there, but they primarily work with small growers, but then they worked with farm workers.

So they got into a van, drove all the way to Washington, D.C., and they met with George Mooney and Walter Luther, and he wanted them to start helping – to send somebody to organize farm workers. So they did start a project, so they sent representatives out from the national AFL-CIO, and we had this big meeting at Saint Mary's Hall in Stockton, and when they saw how many farm workers that we had organized and the fact that there were all these different ethnic groups together, they were very impressed, and so then they funded the Agricultural Workers Organizing Committee. That was the beginning of AWOC.

I worked with them, and I get them to hire Larry Egian and some of the organizers that we had from CSO and the organizers that we had in the African American community and the Okies, and so we had these real great meetings, and I was the executive secretary of the group. They had Ernesto Galarsa was one of the advisory members, of course, Father McCullough and a couple of other people.

Anyway, these meetings were wonderful. We had a lot of attendance at these meetings, and we were doing very well for a while, and then they had [Manny Loucranog](#), and then it kind of went in a different direction. First thing I was told was don't send out the notices anymore for people to come to meetings, and, well, I did anyway for one meeting and then got a lot of criticism because I did that, so then one day I walked into the office because we had a big office that they had set up, and there were all these labor contractors in the office.

And these are the people – but what they started doing, they started deducting dues from the workers, \$1.00 a day from each worker. Well, remember, farmers were only earning .50 cents an hour, and some of these Latino families would take out the whole family to go work, so they were getting like \$10.00 deducted from their pay when they were not earning very much money, maybe \$7.00, \$8.00 a day if that much, and so they rebelled, and they just were really angry about that. And I tried to say to them, "Look, these labor contractors are really not our friends," but they wouldn't change that policy.

So I left, and some of the other people left also. I decided to resign for personal reasons because I didn't want to, you know, whatever they might have been successful at. The man that they sent out to organize the farmers was a man named Norm Smith, who had been out of the United Auto Workers in the South. He was quite elderly and really didn't understand Mexican farm workers at all, but

Larry stayed. Larry Young stayed, and the whole thing is – and I don't know whether Andy Imutan talked about this or not, but the Filipinos had a whole system of – different way of working, and they – their crew leaders were like really leaders.

And what they would do is they would negotiate with the growers and usually get .10 cents more or a quarter more than the Mexican farm workers would. The other thing that they would do is they would negotiate the food because this is where everybody made money off the workers, too, you know, the labor contractors, and then they would set up their own kitchen. They all had their own cook that cooked for the crew and bought their own food so that they always made more money than the other workers did because they had this system and because they had the system and they could continue working under the setup that they were doing at AWOC.

Before I left, I tried to get AWOC have Cesar come out because Cesar was doing some very successful organizing in Oxnard, and what he was doing there is he actually got the Braceros to go on strike along with the other workers, and he was doing a big project with the Department of Labor to get them to see that the local farm workers were being discriminated. In fact, I don't know if you read the book *Conquering Goliath* –

SV:

Uh huh.

DH:

But he's got that whole story in there about how they did that, so I kept trying to get the local leadership to bring up Cesar so that he could tell us exactly what he was doing, and they wouldn't do it. And they wouldn't do it, and, in fact, it got to the point where Father McCullough and I, who had been very good friends working on these fights together, he told me, "Well, women don't belong doing this work anyway." I mean, this was after years of doing this, and then he tells me that. I was very hurt by that, of course, and it was at that point then when we saw that Cesar – and then Cesar, the group that he organized in Oxnard also, he turned it over to the Packing House Workers Union, and it fell apart.

So then we were going to do a project under the CSO. We had met with the leadership, and it seemed like everything was going to be okay. [Selinski](#), everybody, Fred [Glassa](#) was working with us, so Cesar was going to do this pilot project in Oxnard doing the house meetings, but he didn't want – he wanted the workers to pay dues immediately because he wanted them to own the organization, and

we thought that we had everybody's approval, but then we went to the convention in 1962.

Then they turned against us, and the reasons at that convention, Tony Rios was the president of CSO, and there was another man, J. J. Rodriguez, who was with the Food and Commercial Workers at that time. It was just the meat cutters then before they all merged, and they said, "No. This is dual unionism," because they all worked with the AFL-CIO. Tony Rios was with the IUE, I believe, and J. J. Rodriguez was with the meat cutters union. And so they talked against it at the convention, and they voted us down, and that's when Cesar stood up and said he was resigning, and he left.

But before that, just before that convention, Cesar had said, "Look, farm workers are never going to have a union unless you and I do it." And so we were already prepared that if they turned us down at the convention even though it seemed like we had met real leadership and everyone said, "Yeah, we're going to support this," that we had already decided that we were going to go ahead on our own, and that's what we did. But I do believe that had not the Bracero Program ended because we kept continuing to work and tend the Bracero Program, then it would have been very difficult for us to organize. I think the timing of the Bracero Program ending and then us starting the union made it possible.

The other thing that really helped us – and this is a very interesting, how should I say it, act – or fact, I guess, is that after the Bracero Program ended in '63, '64 that there was a massive legalization program of ex-Braceros where they were being able to legalize, and this was done without legislation, by the way. If you try to find the legislation, you won't find it because it's non-existent, but if you look at the numbers that came into the country from Mexico, you'll see that there was half a million, I believe.

Then initially they were just letting the men come in, and so I flew to Washington. I met with the Secretary of State's office, and I think it was Douglas McArthur, II or the III, said, "This is wrong. You're just letting the single man come in without their families," so they changed it so the families could come in.

And so it says as part of our organizing is that we immigrated a whole bunch of workers, you know, did their immigration papers. It was very simple then. All you needed was the affidavit of support, somebody that would say that they would be with this family, became a public charge that they would – so they would

not become a public charge, that they would support them, and a letter from an employer. And the letters from the employers could be a labor contract.

It was just very simple, just two pieces of paper, and that was it, and we were able to immigrate a lot of people. And all these different groups set up or people set up to immigrate, and of course some of them, they would charge them thousands of dollars or hundreds of dollars, and we, of course, didn't charge anything. We just did it for free, but doing services was one of the ways that we were able to get people to have faith in what we were doing.

Interviewer 2: Now, did your organization seek to increase the number of Mexican immigrants to legalize people – to work for and against you simultaneously?

DH: Well, I don't think we ever thought – I think the only position that the union really had was we were against people breaking the strike, you know. We weren't so much against people coming in, you know, but we wanted them to not break our strikes, but a lot of these ex-Braceros that were coming in, they needed help to fix their immigration papers, and they were the people that had been working. So we did that.

We just did a lot of immigration work to help them out, to get the legalization papers, and I would get entire pounds [inaudible], you know, and, of course, some of them were here and then we just needed to get their papers so they could bring in their wives and their children, you know, so that they wouldn't be here by themselves. But it was definitely a very important part of our organizing.

SV: Was that just in '65 and '66 or was it –

DH: Well, it actually started – because when we started the union in '62 some of this was already happening, so we were already working, you know, and as we were organizing, and you have a lot of people who had jumped ship, you know, that were ex-Braceros but – that had left their contracts. And I'd like to say that there's been a legalization program every 20 years, right, because there was the one in '64, and then we had the one in '84/'85, the big amnesty program, and we got the Seasonal Agricultural Workers Program as part of that, and then – now it's almost time for another one, but the interesting thing about when I was working on the **SAW** Program and I got Congressman Howard Berman to introduce that legislation for me that would make a special program for the farm

workers because under the '81 Legalization Program, people who had to have stayed in the United States and only left for maybe emergency purposes or whatever they had to have a continuous residence from 1981.

Well, the farm workers go back to Mexico every year or twice a year, so none of them would have qualified under the '81 Legalization Program. So when the bill got out of the House and the Senate, it only had the Bracero Program in it, but we got Howard Berman to submit this special Seasonal Agricultural Workers Program with a special provision where they only had to have worked 90 days, I think, in two or three consecutive years, and then they could get their legalization, and to justify this I told them about what happened after the program ended in '64/'65. Sure enough they did the research on it, and they couldn't find any legislation, but when you looked at the numbers, it was there. So it was kind of a little fix between Ag and Justice, I believe, whoever did that so those people could come in.

SV: I've never really – I mean, there hasn't been a lot of historical writing on that sort of period of the National Farm Workers –

DH: Association?

SV: Association. I mean, everybody talks about the union, but how did that operate? Was it really operating as a union –

DH: Oh, yes. Yeah. I know that – because Andy Imutan and we were doing the thing in Delano, he said we were a credit union. Sure, we were a credit union, but from the very, very beginning, I mean, even in all of our house meetings that we had we were talking about building a union, but what our plan had been to do organizing for three – excuse me, for three years, from '62 – no, for five years. We were going to organize from '62 to '67 before we tried to do any kind of a major action in the Valley because we wanted to try to get the whole San Joaquin Valley –

SV: Uh huh.

DH: At the same time. Very ambitious, but we had committees set up all over the San Joaquin Valley. That was our organizing. I did the four counties in the north, and Cesar did the four counties in the south, and we organized through the house meetings, which we had learned to do in CSO under Fred [Ross](#)' tutelage, and we did house meetings, and then once we got a thousand people – farm workers that had signed on to strike the union, then we had a

convention, and we had a convention in Fresno. We started organizing the 5th of May. That was our official starting date of '62. We had our first convention on September 30th of that year, and then at that convention then we set out or program, the things – unemployment insurance, you know, the right to organize, credit unions, and we had a whole agenda, had radio stations –

SV: Uh huh.

DH: Then we set up our whole agenda at that convention. Then we had temporary officers elected, and then we had our first constitutional convention in January of '63. And in the meantime, we set up the Farm Workers Credit Union, which was the first one in the country. And we had a little co-op store where we sold oil, and we did service work. We did income taxes, helped people with their immigration papers and any other services that we could help them with.

SV: Did you have any sort of affiliation with any of the labor unions within the state at that point?

DH: No, I mean, they were pretty much against us. We were an independent group, you know, and we were pretty much underground, also. We were constantly organizing farm workers. Once the strike broke out, of course, everything changed because then right away – because we were an independent union we didn't get any help from the AFL-CIO initially, but we got help from the autoworkers who had been pulled out of the AFL. We got help from the longshoreman's union, you know, and one of the other unions that helped us from the very beginning were the printers for some reason. But then once we started working together with AWOC – and Larry Young and I always kept our relationship because I had organized him initially –

SV: Uh huh.

DH: And so he and I always communicated. When he'd come to Delano, he'd call me and we always talked to each other, and he was still in Stockton, and all my family was still in Stockton. So when I'd go back to Stockton, I'd look Larry up, and so when the Filipinos had their meeting that they were going to do their strike in Delano – they started their strike in the Coachella Valley, first of all, and the Coachella Valley is – it's a very short season. I mean, it only goes like six weeks, and that's it –

SV: Uh huh.

DH: So when they had their strike there and they got their wage increase, then they came to Delano, and then Larry told me that they were going to have a strike meeting and invited me to come to the meeting. So I discussed it with Cesar, and I went to the meeting, and they voted to go on strike. We thought, well, we'll wait a little while to see whether it's going to be just a work stoppage or a real strike, and so when they went on strike and they had all this brutality against the Filipinos, you know, they – what they did, they – in some of the labor camps they shut off the lights, the gas, and the water so that they wouldn't be able to cook or anything, and these labor camps were out of town. They weren't in the city.

SV: Uh huh.

DH: And a lot of them got beaten up, so that's when we had our big strike vote on the 15th – 16th of September, we voted to go on strike and support the Filipino workers.

SV: Uh huh.

DH: Then later on, there was a lot of animosity towards NFWA, especially from the director then, Al Green, who took over for Norman Smith, and he really disliked us, really disliked us. I remember when we started doing our first organizing he called me, and he said, "You know you can't be organizing farm workers" and blah, blah, blah, and then I told him, "You don't have the pink slip on them. We can continue to organize," and we did, but then something else happened that was rather momentous at that time. Bill Kurtcher was hired to be the director of organizing for the AFL. He had been out of the UAW initially, and so they sent him down – Mooney sent him down to see what was going on and to see what he could do to get the groups together, and right away when Kurtcher came he saw who were the leaders in the strike, that it was the UFW, so he started working on getting us together.

Interviewer 2: Did you only organize in San Joaquin or other areas in California?

DH: Well, when we initially started, it was just the San Joaquin Valley, uh huh.

Interviewer 2: Did you eventually expand into other grape areas like –

DH: I shouldn't say that because we also organized – before the Delano strikes started, we actually were organizing also on the coast in the

Watsonville area and Gilroy area. We had big meetings there with farm workers there. Yeah, so we did some stuff there on the coast and in the Valley.

Interviewer 2: How did you pick your industries, the different areas?

DH: Well, the workers – I mean, we were organizing workers. We weren't organizing by industry. We were just organizing workers, you know? In fact, our first strike that we had was actually in the roses before the Delano Grape Strike –

SV: Really?

DH: Yeah, that was our very first strike that we had, and the workers – it was a group of Puerto Rican workers and workers from [Michoacán](#), and it was at this company called Mount Arbor, and the workers were on strike, and then it was really interesting because they all swore they wouldn't break the strike, but then the Mexican workers broke the strike, and the Puerto Rican workers were very angry at them, so – but we had a non-violence, and so then Cesar met with them and said, "You need to all go back in to work together," so we didn't get a contract. They did get a wage increase, but that was our very first strike that we had.

Interviewer 2: One of the things that **[inaudible]** this is a little bit of a tangent, but just talking about California and thinking about grapes is you hear so much about Napa and Sonoma in terms of fancy wines, but who actually works in that area? I mean, is there migrant labor that –

DH: Oh, yeah. Definitely.

Interviewer 2: That works in the fancy wine industry?

DH: Uh huh. In fact, those were our first contracts that we got were in the wine companies. Our first contracts were – because when we had the strike it was like everything. The whole area went on strike in the Kern County, Tulare County area, and our very first contract that we got was with a company called [Shinley](#). See, after the second – the strike on September '65, and in March of 1966 we did a march to Sacramento, and during – it was during Lent, and we were then – said to everybody, "Boycott Shinley." There was an attorney that worked with us named [Stew Weinberg](#).

He was a volunteer attorney, and we were sitting there in Delano office – in the meantime, they're taking us to jail. They were

getting injunctions against us saying you can only have five workers to these big thousand-acre fields, which was very dangerous for the workers because you were always getting rifles get pulled on us and growers trying to drive us down with their cars and people getting beat up and so it was very dangerous for us to be out there.

So we knew we had to do something, and then also by that time we had big caravans, of course, of people who would bring us food and clothes from United Autoworkers, students that were coming in from all of the different colleges to come and help us on the picket lines. So it was a very, very vibrant movement. Of course, Luis Valdez was there with the **Capacompassino**, and every Friday night we had a Friday night meeting, and people would give reports, and people would bring in money and food, and it was just very exciting time that was going on, but also by that time started to kind of wear off a little bit, and so people were forgetting about the farm workers being on strike.

And so we knew we had to do something, so we had a retreat, and at that retreat they came up with the idea of doing this march to Sacramento, and so that's what happened. We marched to Sacramento. On the march it was "Boycott Shinleys" signs that we carried. By the time we got to Sacramento – there were 60-something farm workers that left Sacramento – or 69, something like that. By the time they got to Sacramento, there were 10,000 people, and before we got to Sacramento half way there the Shinley Company wanted to negotiate, so Cesar had to leave the march to sit down with a guy named **Sidney Corshack** and talk about setting up meetings.

And then he called me – well, right after the march, when we finished the march I came down, and I did the negotiations with the company, so for the first contract that we had. And then we boycotted this **DeGeorgia Company**. That's our first confrontation with the Teamsters was then in 1967 because then they got involved. In the meantime, after Shinley we got wine companies. We got the Christian Brothers that was up in the Napa Valley, and we got another – we got Christian Brothers. We got the **Novishiat**, which is also up there, and Los Gatos, by San Jose. Then we were able to get – we had about nine companies that we had under contract, different ones – **Francian**, and we got several wine companies.

SV:

It seems like most of the companies, unless I'm – were fairly large companies that you were getting contracts with.

DH: Uh huh. California growers are large.

SV: So there weren't very many small ones to –

DH: But there's not very many small farms in California.

SV: Uh huh.

DH: The small farms in [inaudible] California are often owned by doctors or lawyers or accountants, and they'll just buy some acreage as sort of a tax write off.

SV: Uh huh.

DH: And then they'll bring in labor contractors or bring in somebody to go around and do all the work that's done on those farms, but if you look at the numbers, it looks like there's a lot of small farms, but there really aren't. I remember Nader did an investigation on this way back in the '70s, and it was like 4 percent of the California growers own like 97 percent of the land or something like that, you know, so you don't have a lot of small farmers. They're pretty big.

Interviewer 2: Is that different than other parts of the country in terms of agriculture?

DH: I think it's probably going that way. I think before in the Midwest you had small farms, but now – up in the Napa Valley now, though, you do have like a lot of entertainment people that have bought little wineries and things of that nature, you know. I think there's some others for the [inaudible]. The guy who did *Apocalypse Now* –

Interviewer 2: Francis Ford Coppola.

DH: He's got a winery up there.

SV: Uh huh.

DH: But for the most part they're – like the Gallo Wine Company's very big, Kendall Jackson and all those, they're very big companies.

SV: Uh huh. So would there be any companies, any farmers that you would have considered friends of the workers about that time?

DH:

When we did the strike and then the boycott went on, there was one farmer in Mavis, and Pete said he passed away, **Royce Mets**, and he was so cute. He came to our office, and he said he wanted a signed contract with the union. We told him, "You can't do that without your workers," you know, and so he said, "Oh, do they have to sign, too?" I told him, "No. They've got to sign that they want the union. You just can't come – like the Teamsters did, right?" And so we went to his company and, of course, all of his workers signed cards, and he was just a really wonderful person. He had a very – lived in a very modest home, made sure his workers were well taken care of, and he got his cousin to sign a contract also.

He was up there in Tulare County. He had peaches and grapes, but he died because he was out there spraying [inaudible] on his tractor, and he died young, and he was just a really great human being.

Then we have another company that we now have a contract with called Bear Creek, which was actually a Japanese company in Japan that owns it, but they're managed out of Oregon, and that company after we had an election there after the ARB was passed, that company has been very decent. They came in and told – fired most of their management, told the management that they had to learn how to work with the workers and work with the union. They had to learn how to speak Spanish.

They actually set up Spanish classes for their management and set up English classes for the workers, and we formed teams with the management and the company to make the company more productive and they had actually been losing money – it's the biggest rose company, by the way, in the United States. It's the Armstrong Roses and Jackson and Perkins Roses, and they were losing money, like, they had lost money seven years in a row, and after we got that contract they made \$715 million dollars profit, so. I'm sorry, \$750,000.00, but – almost a million dollars in profit, yeah.

SV:

How was the industry – I mean, I know it's such a diverse kind of change since the time of the Delano strike to today. I mean, if you're going to talk about the nature of farm labor and how it's changed or work relationships and how they change, I mean, is it – obviously conditions change in the political, but is there major changes that you've seen over the years?

DH: You have the bigger companies like Dole that have come in, and they came in out of Hawaii, and they bought up large tracts of land. They probably have about 20,000 workers in California, and what they're doing mostly is holding onto the land for development, very anti-union and really don't care very much about the workers. So they've got Castle and Cook, which is their real estate arm of Dole, and that's basically what they're doing.

I mean, you have these other companies like – it's interesting if you look at the **Salyer and Bosell** companies, these are the cotton companies in Corcoran and these companies would get money every year from the government, like half a million dollars a year not to grow cotton, and then they would go to Australia and get money to grow cotton, right? So they're some of the biggest recipients of subsidies from the US Government. I think in one hearing they found that they were getting money not to grow cotton on the airport – on the little airstrip that they had for their airplanes, for their private airplanes, but they've come in now to the vegetable companies.

So a lot of these companies have actually gotten bigger. A lot of these **Slovenians**, like in the grape area, some of them are dying out, and they're selling the land for development, for real estate, but they still have very big companies – **Jamar**, which is the biggest grape grower, has something close to 3,000 workers, so these companies are huge. Then you have the big carrot companies in there. Greenway Farms probably has about 700 – so I don't know, Consolidated had actually gotten bigger.

SV: When you say that they have 3,000 workers, are these 3,000 full-time workers or is the role, now that they've gotten bigger, these sort of temporary migrant workers less important or, I mean –

[Crosstalk]

DH: No, these are not – they're 3,000 at peak, you know, 3,000 at peak. When they have their peak, they always cut down. During the harvest season, that's how many workers they would have.

SV: Uh huh.

DH: And then during the off season, they would go down to maybe 400 or 500, uh huh.

Interviewer 2: We were in Salinas fairly recently, and I met with the president of the Salinas Growers and Shippers Association, and he made this

very careful distinction about how – I made a mistake and said something about farmers, and he didn't want to be called a farmer. He was – told me they were growers and shippers and that there was something about other people own the land, and they just grow things on them.

DH:

Well, that's exactly what they did to get out from under the Agricultural Labor Relations Act, especially during the time after Jerry Brown left office, and you know, the thing happened in 1973 when the Teamsters came in, they said we got contracts with the growers, and that's when we had farm workers that were killed, and what they did is these companies, they – what they do is they lease the land and have somebody else do the farming, and then they do the shipping, you know what I mean?

So they kind of split it up. It's still the same people, and we actually had been certified to [inaudible] these companies versus one of the companies was **Oshia Brothers**, and I think they changed their name to Oshia Produce or something like that. Same company, same equipment, same workers – well, actually what they did is they fired all of the workers and then they brought in labor contractors and brought in new workers, right, and it was pretty much of a devastation, but that all went on during the Wilson and [inaudible] Republican Administration, so that many of the contracts that we had gotten back after the big fight with the Teamsters then we ended up losing because they were not enforcing the law. So that's exactly why – it's a legal distinction, and that's why they say that.

SV:

Huh. So growers aren't covered under any labor?

DH:

Yeah. They are covered under the Agricultural Labor Relations Act, but they've got to be – they've got to have the land to be – ARB is for farmers and farm workers, right? It's not for – and then what they do is that they'll – what they'll do is, I'll give you an example. Although now that the United Farm Workers has changed they're actually under – going back a little bit in history, in the '30s when they passed the National Labor Relations Act, they left out farm workers, right, because they said except agricultural workers, and this is how farm workers got so far behind.

And by the way, we asked the – local reporters asked a representative of the Farm Bureau Federation, I think his name was **Jack Angel**, he'd been a past president or something, and they asked him why were the farm workers left out of the law. He said

because they were Coloreds and Mexicans. That was his answer, but what happened because we were not part of the national law that gave us a tool that other unions had taken away from them in the Taft Harley Law in 1952, and that was the tool of the secondary boycott.

So the reason that our boycotts were successful is because we could say to people, "Boycott safely," right, or "Boycott ANP" or "Boycott **Mamoms**. Don't shop at this store because they're carrying grapes." Instead of a primary boycott you would say just, "Don't buy the grapes," but we could do this because they'd boycott the store because it was a secondary boycott, and we could do that because we were not covered under the LRB. Now in today's world we wouldn't be able to do that because United Farm Workers is now – represents workers that are covered under the National Labor Relations Act.

They've actually organized some companies that make portable classrooms, so we can no longer do that. **[Inaudible]** can no longer do that, and what they do also when they say they're a grower and shipper, again to get out from – at that time to prevent UFW from going in there because it was an LRB company. Instead of just shipping their product they would invite their neighbor, "Okay. Let me ship some of your stuff, too. So even if I ship a little bit of your produce along with my produce, then that makes me under the National Labor Relations Act."

SV: I had the feeling I was being snookered by –

Interviewer 2: Now we've heard from other people, not the same people, but that in the boutique Napa and Sonoma, Santa Barbara County vineyards there's no worker exploitation because it's much more skilled and so all the workers are paid well and treated well. Is that true or –

DH: Well, I doubt it. I mean, I've never met a grower that doesn't say he treats his workers well and he knows the name of every one of his workers, right? Of course, they never do. I'm not saying that none of them do, but I would be very surprised if all of them do, you know.

SV: Has the union – I mean, this seems like an area where the union hasn't really penetrated, up in Sonoma. Is that true or –

DH: Oh, no. At one time we had – oh, we had many contracts up there in that area. We had the Mondavies, **Scenic Supri** –

SV: Uh huh.

DH: Yeah. We had several contracts up there. We lost some of those again during the – some of those companies have been negotiating an appeal for like 10, 15 years, you know, but I think we still have Scenic Supri, which is a wine company. Christian Brothers kind – they kind of did the same – We had Almaden. We had Christian Brothers. We have Paul Mason. All of those companies were under contract.

They did the same thing, the grower/shipper thing. Now they don't do the farming, you know. They just get the wine after it's picked and then put it into their labels. So we have to go back and organize all over again, and the union – well, there's a company called **Shyde** down in the – by the Simi Valley, and that's one of those companies. Now their wine goes into – they have their own label [inaudible]. Some of the grapes go into making the Paul Mason wines and the Almaden wines. They do all these maneuvers to get out from under the Farm Workers Union.

Interviewer 2: One of the things that we actually talked to Andy a little bit about and I'm curious how you explain it is what is the work in grapes itself? How much of it is peak harvest migrant labor and how much of it is folks who live in the community and work consistently for the same grower?

DH: Well, in the grape industry, actually there's – and I'm going to qualify this a little bit because they have taken out some of the hand methods, but the grape workers could actually get almost nine months out of work because they do the pruning, and they used to do a lot of hand work. They have to do the thinning of the grapes, and then they would pull the leaves so that the grapes can get the right amount of sun, and so starting like in probably about June or maybe even April or May, and then they could go all the way through to the season like in October, you know, so that's a long stretch.

And then you have the pruning, and that happens in the wintertime after a little break there when it gets cold. Then they do the pruning, and then they tie the vines, right, where a lot of it has been mechanized as the wine grape because a lot of the work that they used to do has now been picked by harvesters, but they have these – they have the grape picking machines, and a lot of the wine grapes is picked by machine, but in the northern California area, like in the Napa Valley and Sonoma County they still do a lot of

that horticultural work by hand because they don't want to damage the vines.

They're too expensive, and the grapes are too expensive, but in California no worker should ever be ever out of work, and in fact, when we had our union contracts because we had the contracts all over the state is one job was finishing, for instance, as the grape harvest was finishing, the winter work in the roses was starting –

SV: Uh huh.

DH: You know? And so we had our hiring halls, and I ran the hiring halls, and we were able – and in our contracts and negotiations, we would make it so that worker could volunteer to leave without losing their seniority, and then they could go into the grape harvest – I mean to the rose harvest, from the grapes to the roses, and then they could also go from the grapes to the dates – I mean, the olives, to go to the olive picking or that they would start the early citrus that would start like in October, November, you know? So a worker could literally work almost all year, maybe ten months out of the year in the San Joaquin Valley alone, and then, of course, when all of the work in the Valley ends, then the harvest work starts in the Salinas area. The lettuce starts in there, so a worker can work all year around. There's no reason why any farmer ever has to be unemployed.

SV: When you were sort of constructing that, was there a way – the hiring for most farm workers through the union was still, obviously, by the company as opposed to by contractors?

DH: Well, when we got our first contracts after the first grape boycott, then we had the hiring hall, and that's when we could do so much in terms of the workforce, you know, to make sure that they – because the growers would always ask for twice as many people as they needed because they themselves didn't know. They'd turn it over to labor contractors. They didn't even know how many workers they had, and, of course, the labor contractor's always putting a lot of names of people that didn't exist, right, because that was extra money for themselves, and so we were able to – so we'd sit down and negotiate. The grower would say, "Well, I need 1,200 workers."

Well, when you came right down to it, they needed 800 workers, right, because they didn't have a clue often how many workers they really needed, and also when you have it organized and people are treated well and you're not – the labor contractors

would fire people to bring in their relatives or people from their hometown in Mexico or whatever, but when you couldn't do that, you couldn't fire workers unless they had a reasonable cause, then you had a stabilized workforce, and then people worked at a reasonable pace where they weren't killing their bodies in doing so.

And it became a very, very good work situation for the workers, and, of course, you wanted them to work a lot of hours so they could get their vacations and they would qualify for the medical plan, right, and so it was a great stability for the growers and the workers.

It was very good for all, and usually the growers ended up not paying as much money as they thought they had to pay because they didn't have to pay that middle man, that labor contractor, and there was no cheating, right, of the grower or the worker. So it was a very good situation, and the other thing we were able to do with the hiring halls, we were able to get Black farm workers hired because the growers – great discrimination. They won't hire Black workers, and when they [inaudible] the cotton-picking machines into the South in the '50s, you had a lot of Black farm workers that went to California.

The growers hired security guards with guns to keep them out of the fields, and when we would be negotiating, they'd say, "Well, we don't want any Black farm workers." "Why not?" "We don't want any Blacks to pick our grapes." "Why not?" "Because their fingers are too fat." Yes, that's the excuse that they used, but in the hiring hall they couldn't say no. They had to take whoever we dispatched, and so we got jobs for hundreds of Black farm workers from the Bakersfield area to go work. There was one company, **Pearly Minetti**, we had these crews that actually drove 30 miles and [inaudible] any of the crews in that one winery, but once – after we got – after we had the big invasion of the Teamsters, then we lost the hiring halls and – well, we lost the contracts, and then pretty much what we did then is under the Agricultural Labor Relations Law, then we just had to take whatever work force the company had, and then that was kind of the end of the hiring hall.

We had a few contracts left where we could – the joint hiring hall with the growers, but it was a very good way to be able to not only stabilize the labor force but also the workers because the worker, you don't get that out of line, not so much with the union but even with the company. You knew that they were in jeopardy of getting dispatched, so it made it very good, but now, I mean, that's

almost – that’s really past history now. We just, you know, take whatever workers the employer has.

SV: There’s no effort to try to re-establish the hiring hall system?

DH: Well, they’re really opposed to it. The growers are very opposed to it, and some of the contracts we have like a joint –

SV: Uh huh.

DH: Hiring hall. I think there might be a couple of contracts where it’s left, but I’m sure that most places that was given up.

Interviewer 2: Why are they opposed to it?

DH: Power, control, and they don’t know the workers in the first place. I mean, and they hire a labor contractor who brings in workers, and they don’t know any of the workers, right, but they just don’t want the union to have that authority over who’s going to work for them.

Interviewer 2: Do you want to change tape?

Male Voice: Yes.

Interviewer 2: We’ll pause for that.

SV: Dolores Huerta, September 27, Tape No. 2. Actually, I wanted to jump back just a little bit. During the Filipino, the initial contact you had with the Filipino workers in ’65, what were some of the discussions you guys were having because I know you said you wanted to continue trying to organize some more before you did any big strikes. What were some of the discussions you had, and then who was involved with the voting? Was it a big block of people or sort of just the core team of people?

DH: Well, we had an executive board that was elected at that convention, at that constitutional convention, and so these were the people that pretty much made the decisions at that point, you know, in the National Farm Workers Association and this was all before the strikes started, and that’s when we started our credit union. We also worked on legislation. We were able to pass a bill that I lobbied through the legislature representing both NFWA and the CSO because I continued working with the CSO in Sacramento as the lobbyist for a year after – well, we left CSO, and that bill was aiding the children of dependant families, the unemployed or

the underemployed, and that was really good for us because the farm workers didn't earn enough money, so they were in poverty. So one of our organizing methods were to get people to go down to the welfare department and sign up for these subsistence checks, and so that's another way that we used to organize the workers.

So that was pretty much – our focus was just in organizing. We started our newspaper called *El Mateado*, and then – but the decisions were pretty much made by the executive board, so that was myself and most of the members and [inaudible] included in our decision making.

In fact, I love to tell the story when after the Filipino workers went on strike and we all met and we had to make the decision whether we were going to support the strike or not, and of course, the Mexican workers were the majority, and there were a lot of Puerto Rican farm workers out there, also, and as we were going around the table and Cesar was getting everybody's opinion, when he came to Helen Chavez, she said, "Well, we're union, aren't we? What's there to talk about?" It was just great, and that was a very important voice because Cesar at that time had eight children. I had seven kids at the time, and so we're talking about going on strike with no money, so it was a very momentous decision and totally based on faith.

SV: Yeah. The short-handled hoe has sort of become the symbol for farm workers and oppression. What is the myth and the reality of – what is the story of that? Can you lay it out for us?

DH: Well, it had always been a very strong, emotional point with farm workers, you know, because why should they have to bend over with their nose to the ground? Even my own father who worked in the sugar beets, they always had to use a short-handled hoe and when people could do the same exact work with a long-handled hoe. And so that kind of became kind of a battle cry. We had, like, a couple of things.

One – and I should mention this one because when you say to people they almost can't believe it, but one was a short-handled hoe. The other one was no water in the fields, no drinking water, and no toilets for workers, and those were things that we got in our first contract, toilets and drinking water. Then we kept fighting the battle to get rid of the short-handled hoe, and a lot of the farmer workers had back problems, and Cesar was one of those workers. So whenever Cesar would talk in public, he would talk about the short-handled hoe and how we had to get rid of it, and eventually

the lawsuit was filed by **Sierra Wade**, and **Mulcher Dane** was part of that lawsuit to get rid of it.

Interviewer 2: Was the short-handled hoe only in California or was it in all areas?

DH: No, it was all over the country, but I think we only got rid of it in California. I don't think it's a national – I would not doubt that there's still – of course, they don't do a lot of that – see, the sugar beet thinning isn't done a lot anymore because it's all – now they have plants – they don't have that many weeds as they used to have. But just recently in California there's been a big fine. I think they just passed the legislature, I think last session, maybe this session, against pulling the weeds by hand because now they're saying, "Well, you've got to do it by hand, and it's not the hoe, so it's legal," and the Farm Workers Union worked to pass that bill, and I think the governor signed it so that they couldn't weed by hand either, and we had a fight with the organic growers. We could have gotten the bill passed a couple of years ago, but the organic growers are the ones that are opposing that bill because the two **[inaudible]** allies.

SV: Is there a cultivation with grapes or are the – how are weights controlled in –

DH: Well, in grapes it's not so much of an issue, but you have your other plants, many other plants that – you have your spinach and your bell peppers and all of these other – onions and all these other plants.

SV: The row crops?

DH: Right. Uh huh. You have a lot of weeds in the grapes also. The reason you have to get rid of the grapes and the weeds is when people go in there the weeds can tangle around their ankles, and they could fall, but they can usually get rid of those with a long-handled hoe. Well, now everybody – the cotton, too, was a big operation they used to use the short-handled hoe in.

Interviewer 2: Now one of the things – I'm actually old enough I can remember the battles over the restroom facilities, and one of the explanations I've always heard about was along gender lines that as there were more men and women working together in the fields this became an increasingly important issue. Is that really true or is that just a rumor –

DH: No, it's always been. Women have always worked in the fields. Women have always worked in the fields. I worked in the fields, you know. Women always worked in the fields, so it was, I believe, on the part of the growers just – part of their racism, probably part of making people feel like they're less human. If you don't give a human being a place to go to the toilet in, I mean, you know, that person, then, is almost like an animal, right, and it was a big fight. I was on the first [inaudible] Commission.

That issue was first raised back in 1960, I believe it was, and I remember this peach grower who was a woman, and they were making fun of the fact that you should have – workers should have a toilet. She even said, "Well, the growers can come to my house anytime and use my bathroom." I remember her making that statement. There was a Senator Colvey from Merced County who actually did an editorial in the *Fresno Bee* making fun of the fact that they had to build toilets in the fields, so it was a very, very big issue, and we got that into our contracts before it became a law in California, and California, it became a law under the Industrial Welfare Commission, which is really an act for women, and we got – and our contract, we got it for both men and women, and they had to have separate toilets.

In the law, it was only for women and children initially, but then when they got the equal rights for men and women, then they had to also provide them for men, and that was in the '70s, I believe, in California. Nationally we did not get the law passed that farm workers had to have toilets in the fields until 1985, and the farm girl opposed it, and that's a record.

SV: What's been the relationship between the East Coast union organizations and the West Coast?

DH: Well, from the very beginning, we were collaborating. In fact, we financed a group called **CATA** in New York City – I mean, New York State to organize, and we actually funded them. It's just a group of Puerto Rican – young Puerto Ricans that were organizing farm workers, and we funded them for a few years, but then they were kind of more interested in being in the City than they were out in the fields in Upstate New York to work with that, and so we finally stopped funding them.

But now they have a new group called CITA, and I was up there recently with them and the march where they were trying to get better improvements and insurance and trying to get Sunday off of work so that they could have one day off of work. We also

collaborated with the **Amocoli** workers and gone down there from time to time over the years. At one time we had a big operation in Florida. We had, like, 2,000 workers under contract in Florida with Coca Cola, but then they moved their operations, I believe, to Brazil or China or someplace, and so – in fact, one time we had like, I think, two other companies in Florida. The Farm Workers only has one now, and that's in Quincy, they have a mushroom company there in Florida. But there has been collaboration with the Amocoli workers, with **Lucas Bonitez** and the people that are working down there on the Taco Bell boycott –

SV: Uh huh.

DH: And also with the workers in Ohio, **FLOG**, and **Pecun** in Oregon.

SV: Why was the decision made not to just be a national union?

DH: We do want to be a national union.

SV: But it seems as if – or tell me if I was wrong, that your larger concentration had always been California and Arizona and Texas, but –

DH: Well, let me explain. First of all, that first meeting that we had when Cesar said, "Farm workers will never have a union unless you and I do it," and in his next breath he said, "But we will not see a national union in our lifetime because the growers are too rich, too powerful, and too racist," right, and he was right. When we had the contracts before the Teamsters came in in '73, we had workers under contract in New Mexico, in Texas, and Arizona, in those states, okay, because the same growers that grew in California also worked in these other states.

Now the reason that we work in California is because you've got, I think it's 65 percent of all of your fresh produce comes out of California, you know, fruits and vegetables, and then I think the next two states are Washington State and I believe Arizona and then Florida. That's it. And that's like 90 percent of your fresh produce of the whole country because most of the Midwest is mostly wheat and grains and things of that nature.

They're all mechanized now, but we started in Delano – I mean, southern California was the place to start because Fresno alone, Fresno County, I think, is like 50 percent of the fruit of the country, fruit and vegetables, so – and there might be even more now because they're now growing vegetables down in the

Coachella Valley where before it was mostly just grapes and dates and oranges, and now you have a lot of vegetables that are being grown down there because the vegetable consumption in the country has risen, but it's because of the climate in California. California has this wonderful climate, and – but I mean there was never a reason not to.

In fact, like I said before, we had an organizing in Florida. We actually had an organizing campaign in the Carolinas at one point, you know, just before the Teamsters moved in, and we had organizers – we still have offices in Washington State and a contract in Washington State –

SV: Uh huh.

DH: And we worked very closely with the group in Oregon, Pecun, so –

Interviewer 2: I have like a really dumb question.

DH: Uh huh. No questions are dumb.

Interviewer 2: This is probably pretty – I never quite understood it. I've been looking a lot at sort of the law and assuming that laws get written largely because the industry encourages people to pass those laws, but I don't really quite understand who – the mechanism of why growers and farmers or whatever you want to call them are so powerful and whether it – is it a small – is it the 5 percent that are farming 90 percent of the land or is it all of them?

DH: It's all of them.

Interviewer 2: So it's both the big farmers and the little farmers?

DH: Oh, yeah. I mean, it's like – I mean the only thing you can compare with is the slavery in the South, you know, no respect for the workers at all, and even some of the – I remember meeting once at the Democratic Convention with some small farmers, and they said, "Yeah, it isn't that we disagree with you, but if we tried to cooperate with you the other growers would really get us." So it's a whole mentality that's out there. Yeah, it's a whole mentality that's out there.

Interviewer 2: So when you had these associations, like this association in Salinas, there are clearly some of the members are working a couple hundred acres, and others have thousands of acres. They really all are part of the whole thing?

DH: Oh, yeah. Yeah. Once in a while you'll find a grower like some names that I've talked about, you know, [inaudible] or Bear Creek, and Bear Creek, I think one of the reasons is because their manager that they had at the time we signed the contract had worked for Nordstroms. He'd come out of the retail business before he became a manager of that company, and he's gone now, so I don't know – I think it's still pretty good because just recently I was at an event, and some of the management was there, and what they did – they upgraded a lot of their farm worker management, made crew leaders into management, but you don't work a lot together with the union, so – but those companies are very rare.

We had one grape company, Steinberg, who was the first one to sign a contract with the union and kept that contract even through all of the Teamsters stuff and everything. He has since passed away, Lionel Steinberg. He was our first table grape contract, but he was a really decent human being.

Interviewer 2: Now, have you found whether there is really much mobility in terms of farm workers – workers in the fields to sort of mid-level management in farms and eventually into owners?

DH: There's a large number now of farm owners, and I think that the Department of Agriculture has statistics on that. There are quite a number of – but they were labor contractors mostly but then bought land, you know, but, yeah, there's a good number of them now, and I think that probably some of the smaller farmers. I don't think some of them – they're not very big. Yeah.

In terms of promoting them to middle management, most of them of the people who were labor contractors are foremen, and then they get put up to middle management – they're not very much better because the problem is that the growers don't understand relationships in terms of management, in terms of people and they kind of have the old Bracero Program mentality is that you just drive people as hard as you can, you know, squeeze as much work out of them as you can, and that's why farm working becomes such brutal work. It doesn't have to be like that.

People can work, like in our contracts, work at a reasonable pace. You get your rest period, 15 minutes in the morning, 15 minutes in the afternoon. Now we do have a law that there's a 10-minute rest period, but you'd be surprised when the union isn't there just recently, and we had some marches in California, and the workers,

you know, growers weren't giving them their rest periods. They weren't giving them water to drink. They wouldn't let them go to the bathroom. I mean, they're just very abusive, and especially with the undocumented workers.

Workers that were earning \$25.00 a day working all day long, you know. So it's just this idea that – it's kind of this whole greedy profit motive that you can just make as much money as you can regardless of what the workers suffer, and you don't care about how they live and you do everything you can to keep them from getting any kind of political power. It's still a very big – a big, big fight. It's really an uphill struggle for the union, and not just for farm workers but I think for all unions.

Interviewer 2: I think just because of the time in this program that we should probably wrap this up. We could probably go on –

DH: Yeah, for another –

Interviewer 2: Well, right. I know I could go on for hours. I don't know about you, but – I mean, there's lots of questions.

DH: Well, you know, we had the farm workers that were killed during the strike. We had our first person, and I do want to mention the martyr's name, **Friedman**, a young Jewish girl that came from Boston that was killed in a sugar workers' strike in Florida, when we were organizing in Florida, and then we had during the – when the Teamsters came in, we had **Nagy Dipala**, an Arab worker, was our second martyr. Juan de la Cruz was our third martyr, 50-year-old man.

Our fourth martyr was killed in Imperial Valley during the strike down there when he was met with a hail of bullets, and then our last martyr was **Rene Lopez**, only 21-year-old farm worker who organized his company to vote for the union after the ALRB was passed, and after the election the owner's brother-in-law called him up to the car and said, "I want to talk to you." He put his head to the window. They pulled out a gun and shot him in the temple, and the owner's brother-in-law didn't – never went to jail for that. In fact, the ALRB wouldn't file a charge against the company. That's when **[inaudible]** was in charge of the ALRB, and the guy who pulled the trigger did go to jail.

I don't know for how long, but he's the first person that ever went to jail for killing farm workers, and there have been, I think, over a period of time something like a dozen farm workers that were

killed for union organizing, and the only one that's ever gone to jail.

SV: Well, thank you very much.

DH: Oh, you're welcome.

SV: I hope to do this again sometimes.

DH: I hope I was able to hit the points that you wanted to hit because I know I kind of went all over the place.

SV: Yeah. Absolutely.

Interviewer 2: Absolutely. Thank you.

DH: Um hm.

[End of Audio]

Duration: 77 minutes

DRAFT