

- Topic:** My Grandfather participated in marches for The National Farm Workers Association.
- Abstract:** Fieldworkers had many struggles with receiving better working conditions in California. When Cesar Chavez organized the organization known as The National Farm Workers Association, my grandfather decided to join, because he believed it would change the way how fieldworkers would be treated. With risking almost everything, he went on the march to Sacramento and was proud to make a change in his future for his family and him.
- Key Words:** Grandfather, working conditions, fieldwork, activist movement, Cesar Chaves, California, National Farm Workers Association

Cesar Chavez Supporter

My grandfather was born and raised in Watsonville, CA. At a very young age he started to work in the fields with his parents and four other siblings. Since an education didn't seem that important to his father, he took my grandfather out of school after graduating from eighth grade to continue working full-time in the fields. My grandfather didn't mind not finishing school, because work was the only option put into his mind by his father. Mostly all of his siblings, except the youngest, didn't graduate with a diploma from high school and were forced to continue working in the fields.

Eventually he moved to a small town known as Hollister, CA at the age of twenty-four. He worked as an honest and hard-working field worker in the apricot, garlic, and walnut orchards/fields in Hollister and Gilroy all year around for six days a week and worked over the eight hour limit per day trying to support himself. The pay was lower than the minimum wage at that time period, which was estimated at \$0.75 an hour and benefits were not given at that time from the land owners. Working conditions were terrible and dirty, because breaks were too short, they'd work in unbearable weather climates, and sometimes there was no restroom use available to the workers.

After working a few years, my grandfather found love and married my

grandmother. My grandmother came from Jerez, Zacatecas, Mexico. After getting her citizenship in America and she worked as a fieldworker as well in some of the same fields and orchards as my grandfather did. The wedding was very small, beautiful, and simple, but most of their family members were not there to celebrate their joyous occasion with them due to living out of the country. It was held at the Immaculate Conception Catholic Church in Tres Pinos, CA during the warm month of August.

Even with two full-time hard working people in one household, they still struggled a lot financially. Their paychecks were barely enough to pay rent on their tiny, brown, one bedroom house and basic necessities needed to live, but that was all they could afford and they could not even start a savings account yet. Times were tough on them and no improvements seemed to come up. Years later, my grandmother and grandfather had their first and only child. It was a young and healthy baby boy. Even though they were extremely happy about the new blessing, they still worried on how they were going to support all of each other with such a low salary that barely supported the two alone.

In 1965, my grandfather heard about an upcoming, popular activist movement that supported better working conditions for the Hispanic/ Latin community in California. Originally, the association started in 1962, but didn't become better known until 1965. The organization was called the National Farm Workers Association. They wanted to help field workers receive higher wages, less and reasonable working hours, and benefits, such as healthcare and social security

My grandfather thought this organization was a wonderful idea, because he wanted a proper lifestyle for his new family and for his son in the future to have a better

outlook in life. He thought it was very brave of this association to stand up for his culture and race. My grandfather hoped this would bring down discrimination on his race, because people shouldn't be humiliated and pushed away for the way they looked.

My grandmother wasn't so fond of the idea and defiantly not excited of the motive of my grandfather to join the organization. She didn't like the working conditions either, but she didn't want to see my grandfather get hurt or in trouble with the law. Even though my grandmother tried her hardest to prevent my grandfather to join, he told her everything will be alright, and he joined the organization any ways.

He found out the main leader of the association was a man by the name of Cesar Chavez, who came from Yuma, Arizona. He was a very pleasant fellow, who only wanted to see his culture be treated equally and with more respect. Cesar shared how he thought the system was injustice to the Hispanic/Latino community and wanted to change it. My grandfather had great admiration and respect for him the more he got to know him and his goals for the future.

Cesar Chavez decided to organize a march to strike for better working conditions. My grandfather was thrilled about the activist movement, but my grandmother didn't like it at all. She feared for his safety, but he kept reminding her that he wanted a better future, working conditions, and an equal education for their child.

Starting in September 1965, the National Farm Workers Association started a march at Delano, CA. My grandfather and a multitude of supporters met in front of the Lady of Guadalupe Catholic Church in the morning. The march seemed peaceful in the beginning. Sometimes during the march, the activist were purposely sprayed with poisons pesticides from really angry farm land owners. The supporters of Cesar Chavez were

upset by these awful and uncalled incidents, but were told to keep calm and act civilized, because they did not want other people turning around the story and making them look like the trouble makers.

During the march, my grandfather would carry signs like so many other supportive activists. The signs would read HUELGA (strike) and VIVA LA CAUSA (Long live our cause). Also, the groups' symbol was an eagle that originated from the Aztecs, which the art work was designed by Richard Chavez. The eagle represented their pride and dignity.

The main purpose of this march was to have the government permit the field workers to organize unions. This march was nonviolent, because Cesar Chavez wanted to preserve the workers' dignity.

The march continued till 1966 and ended in Sacramento, CA, which was a long distance of a three hundred forty mile walk. My grandfather was proud of himself for being strong and supporting the cause that touched home base for him. Some of the goals were accomplished after the associations' long journey. One grape grower, the Schenley Vineyards negotiated with the National Farm Workers Association to allow unions for their field workers. This was actually one of the first official farmers' union agreements in the United States history. It was one of the organizations' first and biggest accomplishment in their running.

My grandmother was very happy to have her husband back and to have a big accomplishment that made their family really proud and honored. Even though the march was over, it didn't mean every thing was fine and dandy. There was still plenty of areas in California that did not have improved working conditions and unions for field

workers. The land owners still weren't willing to change their rules and regulations for the Hispanic/Latino community any time soon.

In 1968, Cesar Chavez began the La Causa. This event was to train his activist on boycotting in different cities nonviolently. The supporters were sometimes treated terribly in some cities and they sometimes wished they could pay them back with a violent movement. Cesar Chavez kept insisting to use nonviolence. He even fasted sometimes over these year for up to 36 days to show he would give up his life for the unions.

My grandfather wanted to be part of the La Causa, but his wife and son were his first priority. Still in any way, he would show his pride and support for the organization and tried to go to local boycotts in his area. He showed Cesar so much respect for his honorable duties and never regretted his involvement in the National Farm Workers Association.

These amazing experiences in my grandfather's life has molded the strong, supportive and prideful Hispanic/Latino man he is today. My grandfather learned that simple and small movements can change the course of the future and give it a better outlook for the newcomers. He is very proud for standing up for what he believed in and to see the rest of the new generation that came from him prosper in the changed and improved society we all live in today.