Interview with Rosalinda Guillen
Interviewed by Sharon Walker and Sarah Laslett
Bellingham, Washington
March 12, 2004

My first knowledge of the United Farm Workers of America was from Rainbow Coalition organizing in the early '90s, as an organizer for the Rainbow Coalition of Washington State, turning out the vote for Jesse Jackson's presidential campaign. Before that—I was 38, 39 years old when that happened, not a young woman—I had never registered to vote, had never been involved at all in any kind of activism. A Rainbow Coalition organizer knocked on my door, her name is Ann Atkeson. She organized me into being a precinct captain for Jesse Jackson and I became increasingly more involved in the campaign. It was an exciting campaign. I became a founding member of the Whatcom County Rainbow Coalition, and then a founding member of the Statewide Rainbow Coalition. I got involved with a wonderful group of people that are still very involved in many ways, like Larry Gossett and Sally Soriano, Mike Lowry, Damani Johnson, Maury Foisy, Cindy Domingo.

It was the Rainbow Coalition organizers that, as I became more involved, began to teach me about the United Farm Workers. I had never heard of Cesar Chavez. I'd never heard of unions. They taught me about that. Some farm workers came in 1990 and asked to meet with the Rainbow Coalition members here in Bellingham. They asked for our support of their boycott against Chateau Ste. Michelle. They laid out the fact that they wanted a union contract and all the abuses that were going on. We of course supported it and decided to take a stronger role in that support. I volunteered to head up a committee to begin organizing a corporate campaign against the company in support of the farm workers in eastern Washington. I did that from 1991, '92 and the Rainbow took up the call quite well because we had a structure that we had developed for the Jesse Jackson campaign. We had 10 pretty well formed chapters across the state, and all the chapters took up the boycott and began organizing the boycott in their areas , which created an incredible momentum. We had 10 statewide boycott committees, each one coming off of an organized Rainbow Coalition. Each one of those boycott campaigns had its own structure of a campaign coordinator and members of that committee that held meetings deciding strategy in a collective manner.

In eastern Washington at that time was a young man from Yale—his name is Kurt Peterson—who was a fellow from some department in Yale who had volunteered to come out to advocate for farm workers in eastern Washington. To his credit, he had begun researching and found where the UFW had begun organizing in the '60s and '70s, and there was an independent group called the United Farm Workers of Washington State that still existed. Kurt Peterson came from Yale, to Granger, Washington and began to introduce himself. He was doing his own research about who was involved and what the issues

were.

The workers came to us at the Rainbow Coalition, we met Kurt, we met with them, and together with Kurt Peterson we developed a Corporate Campaign. We just hit the entire state for a good two and a half years. It was a good campaign. The profile of the campaign went way up. We were giving the company a really hard time.

Kurt was an amazing researcher. Chateau Ste. Michelle was owned by US Tobacco, and he was researching the vulnerabilities of the company itself. We zeroed in on the CEO, Alan Shoup, where he worked, where he went to church, what his beliefs were, we knew everything. We picketed all of their concerts at Woodinville. They had this "Galloping Gourmet" sort of person that was on TV on a cooking show and he promoted the wines. He was a prime target for us. We tried to get him to talk about the labor struggle, but he refused and was totally anti-union. We dogged him. We dogged everybody that had anything to do with the wines that was not supporting the unionization effort. We leafleted everywhere the wine was. It was your regular corporate campaign.

We went to their shareholders meetings on the east coast. We raised money to send a worker's committee with signs and banners. Kurt and some others bought shares so they could get in, and each one would take a worker. Every year for about 4 years we created a scene at that shareholders meeting. They were getting frantic. We got the ferry system to take the wines off the ferries. We got support from the flight attendants union from several airlines. They couldn't boycott the wines, but they never served it. It's at the stewardess's discretion what wine was served. They wouldn't even take it on the plane. That had a huge impact. We did some international work with the Chateau Ste. Michelle campaign. We found out that the wine was big in the British market and also had a market somewhere else in Europe, so we called the UI, the international workers union and they boycotted. The longshoreman refused to unload it at the docks in Europe. That was huge. We got it publicized in international newspapers where unions are much more powerful. We tried to cover everything we could. It became a very intense corporate campaign. The Evergreen State College Labor Center helped to develop a very strong support committee in Olympia. Helen Lee, Sheila, Paul Ortiz, so many people helping out.

Picket lines were going on all the time across the state, at restaurants, at the winery itself, at events where the wine was going to be featured. The winery had a dinner train, that was a very popular tourist attraction, that went from the winery to, I don't remember where, and you would have a fancy dinner and music and serve the wine. We picketed the train. The last year of the campaign, we really escalated the corporate campaign. We decided we were

going to block the train. We let it be known we were going to be doing that. Helen Chavez and the UFW women did that with the grape boycott, we were going to block this train. They found out we were going to do that and they canceled all of the trains. Just like that. No more trains. It was costing them money. We had a friend who was sending us the minutes of the wine commission meetings, and they were becoming very agitated. [The refusal to negotiate] was giving [Chateau Ste. Michelle] a bad name.

It was all grassroots. The workers were going back and forth to Seattle to different events. We had to get them to agree to go and speak for themselves. It was difficult because some of them would have to miss work, and spend a lot of weekends traveling. It was really difficult for them. We raised money so they could eat right and get the gas. It was a very intense campaign all the way around.

The problem was that the union itself that existed in Granger had no infrastructure. The membership was totally disconnected from the core board itself, the Chateau Ste. Michelle workers were disconnected from the core board also. Kurt tried to pull it together and he couldn't so he got very frustrated. The corporate campaign was taking off very well, but what was needed was more grass roots development of the union membership, and most of all, the Chateau Ste. Michelle workers, it was over 200 workers, to really begin to pull together the campaign at the workplace. He became very frustrated and came at odds with the board, and in fact the independent union board threatened to fire Kurt and so he quit. The workers called me and said, "We can't have him quit. We've never had this much activity. We've never gotten to this level with our campaign. We need him." Kurt called me and told me he was quitting, he was leaving, and so we had a long discussion.

At that time I was working at Skagit State Bank, here in Burlington. I was a bank officer, actually, in charge of data processing operations. All of this work I was doing with the Rainbow and the boycott was all on my extra time—weekends and evenings. I was working 24/7 basically, because I loved what I was doing, but there was also my job—I'd been there for 16 years. There came a time when all of this had happened with Kurt, and I had met with all of the workers, which is an incredible group of people, and they were very honorable men and women, very serious about what they wanted and they were very unhappy with how the campaign had been run up to the moment that Kurt stepped in. They asked me to come and help them in Sunnyside. Kurt said that the only way he would stay is if I went to Sunnyside and took on the role of grassroots organizer with the workers, and then he would continue leading the corporate campaign. So we agreed to that.

I quit my job at Skagit State Bank. All of this happened between February 1993

and April of 1993. We [Rainbow Coalition] were so engaged as an organization into the boycott that we're going, "what do we do?" and I said, "I have to go to Sunnyside." The Rainbow leadership didn't want me to go, but they said, "You're the farm worker, you have to go." We had an informal agreement with the leadership that I would go for a couple of years; try to win the union contract, and then return. I went to Sunnyside in August . In March I decided to quit my job. I gave notice that I would work until the end of May. They were flabbergasted—I'd been there for 16 years—four more years and I would have reached my retirement. My parents were going nuts, my family was threatening to take me to a psychiatrist. But I didn't see any other choice because we had reached a peak with the campaign.

The farm workers working at the company were such excellent people—very serious. There was a connection to me with that because I grew up as a farm worker in Skagit County. I started working in the fields in Skagit County picking strawberries when I was 10. My father had been a farm worker since he was 10 years old, working all over the country, the migrant circuit. Everybody I knew in my life in my family were farm workers. We had all struggled to move out of that and do well. All of my sisters and brothers had all done very well for themselves. My sister Angelica is the chair of the English department at Skagit Valley College, one of my brothers is a stock broker, another one of my brothers owns a cleaning supply store and is a very successful artist, another one owns his own graphics shop and is also a good artist, I have a sister who is a phlebotomist at a medical clinic and runs that whole department, I have a sister who is a police woman. We've done well for ourselves. I was working at the bank and my mom was very pleased. My sons and everyone were like, "What are you doing?" I don't think you folks realize that nothing has changed for farm workers, I told them. We were working in the '60s in the fields and here are these men and women now, who are coming to me with the same problems and the same issues. Nothing's changed and somebody's got to do something. My family was saying, "Why you? Let someone else do it." It was quite a lot of turmoil, but I had my mind made up. I had just recently remarried in April and he was shocked, Joseph was one of the Rainbow organizers. Ballot heat and street heat, that is what Joseph had taught me and we had really done well with the Rainbow Coalition and he thought we were doing our piece for justice here. I said, "If these workers are going to get a union contract, I think I can help. I think I can go to eastern Washington and really build something there and get this union contract." I made up my mind and quit my job. I left the bank at the end of May. I moved my husband and my 12-year-old sun to Sunnyside and I was in Sunnyside by August 18, 1993.

Kurt, bless his heart, we were like a team. We were so fired up to get this union contract. We moved in with him and his wife - he was newly married - for about a year. This was a mission. We were going to get this contract. The

minute I hit the ground in Sunnyside we started a grassroots campaign with the union membership and the Chateau Ste. Michelle workers. We went by the book. I'd never worked with the UFW. I'd read some books, Peter Matthiason's *Sal Si Se Puedes*, *Conquering Goliath* and Jacques Levy's biography of Cesar Chavez. In those three books there are sections where Cesar talks about how to organize and how he organized. Kurt and I went through that and cut the pieces and ran the campaign by the book, literally. That's how we did it.

When we met with the Chateau Ste. Michelle workers, there were only four who originally started the committee and they said, "OK, Rosalinda, how are we going to do this?" and I said, "Well, I've got these books here. Cesar's going to tell us and we're going to do it one step at a time." The union constitution, the UFW constitution from California, has a lot in there that helped us develop the structure of how you organize committees and how committees take leadership and how that leadership moves a campaign forward. The decision making process was very transparent, very democratic, from the grassroots. The workers decided how to run the campaign, who the spokesperson was going to be and the whole bit. It was a great experience for myself, for the workers and everybody involved.

It took from fall 1993 and the union contract was signed December 5th, 1995. It was a very short period of time, and it only cost approximately $130,000. It didn't cost very much money because the workers did the work and we had a lot of support from the farm worker community that was so excited about the possibility of getting this union contract and then once getting this contract at Chateau Ste. Michelle having it move out to other industries, the apple, asparagus, the hops. We had a lot of support from the local farm worker community which is needed in every campaign. With the corporate campaign hitting really hard with the Rainbow, it really helped to coalesce the pressure on the company so they would sit down and negotiate. We had a thriving, vibrant office in Sunnyside, we had a membership. People paid $60 a year to become members of the United Farm Workers of Washington State.

At that time, the United Farm Workers of Washington State was a separate organization from the national UFW. It was separate because Cesar told the farm worker leaders of the '60s and '70s, to go on without him, because he didn't have the resources or time to pay attention to anything outside of California. "I'm leaving it up to you to do what you can." That's exactly what happened. They formed their own organization. Cesar allowed them to do it. Their other campaigns never reached a union contract, until Chateau Ste. Michelle.

It was quite a controversial campaign at the grassroots. First of all, I wasn't from the area. I was from the coast, I'm a woman, and I hadn't been involved. I

wasn't part of the old guard. I had a very close tie with the workers, and it's amazing how so few people believed the transparency of the process we developed for strategic operations. Everything that we did, the workers were involved. I don't think to this day that people believe that. That's the disheartening part of the whole thing. Farm workers can do that. Cesar did it. We did it at Chateau Ste. Michelle. A farm worker that can't read and write, can lead a campaign. The fact that I can [read and write] doesn't disqualify me from it. I came under attack many times for not being enough of a farm worker—I don't have an accent, I can read and write, I'm not—I don't know how to say it—mousey and quiet. We took leadership and moved the campaign forward the way the workers felt it needed to move forward. It had never happened before. It was a difficult time. Our cars were vandalized. We spent two weeks without vehicles because someone had vandalized all of our vehicles. Sugar in the engines, my gas tank, somebody had poked holes in it. A lot of things happened in our campaign and we just continued pushing forward. We couldn't have done it without the help of the organized structure of the corporate campaign that the Rainbow Coalition was carrying on. Joseph and I were in Sunnyside and Kurt was in Sunnyside, and they were in Seattle and Tacoma and Spokane all of these places the campaign was active.

While the corporate campaign was going on, the conditions at the winery were incredibly intense. They brought in three union busters. The first two we wiped out. One of the union busters they brought in lasted like 3 months. The workers made his life miserable and so he quit and went back to California. When I was in California as the legislative director for the union working on water issues, he now works for the metropolitan water district based out of LA, the largest water district in California and he's their Latino outreach guy, Adan Ortega, and he was so apologetic, "That was just a job. I was a Human Resource person." I said, "You were a bad boy. Your name is really bad in certain circles because you were a union buster." We had long discussions on it. He said, "Well, I've learned my lesson," and I said, "Well, I hope so, 'cause man, we've got your name." They brought in union busters and their job is to divide and conquer and get workers fighting with each other—we're talking closed meetings, individual meetings and harassment. A lot of people got fired, we got them reinstated. At the same time we were upping the pressure on the company they were upping the pressure at the workplace. We needed to be able to put pressure on the company in eastern Washington. We put picket lines there. We took access. There is no labor relations law in Washington State. We went in the fields and we acted like we had every right to be there. We went in with our clipboards and met with our committees and talked to the workers. The supervisors and managers were furious, saying we were trespassing. The vineyards are sloping and you could see the trucks coming down, all of these trucks heading our way. Their security guards

escorted us out and we were walking out yelling “Si Se Puedes!” I’m a woman, and very short, so when they would start getting nasty and hard, they’d have to talk to me, I’m the leader here. Everyone would say I was in charge. All of these men coming at me in front of the workers and it’s like, “What are you going to do to me? Beat me up?” They would always back off. “You just need to get out of here.” And I would say, “We’re leaving.” It was an amazing time. We did all sorts of things like that. What that does is put the company on notice that the workers have power and they gotta be careful of what they’re doing. We had meetings right outside the gate with 60-70 workers at a time—men and women. We did house meetings. I visited the workers at least once a week. I was doing the rounds, “How are you doing? What’s happening?” and then keeping notes. We kept track of everything that was going on inside the company.

It was a very stable workforce. The majority of them had been there at least 10 years already. They had gone through a lot. The reason that the campaign was so strong was because with all of the exploitation at that company, the workers had maintained unity. In spite of everything that had been going on—the sexual harassment at that company was really bad. That’s what pushed the campaign. There were some supervisors there that took blatant advantage of women. They had a barn, a shop, that the supervisors, in the morning, the women would come into work, and [the supervisors] would say, “I want you [pointing] over there at 3 o’clock. I want you [pointing] at 4’oclock,” and they would force them to have sex with them. Things went on like that. Kurt, at some point, found a little article in the newspaper out there—sometime in the ’80s, one of the workers had shot one of the supervisors when he was attempting to rape his wife. He shot him at work. He fled—him and his wife--they were never seen again. That’s besides the bad wages and other things. That’s the thing that they told me about that most stuck in my mind. The tenacity of these people. That they had stuck it out this long and were still willing to continue with this fight. I told them, “As long as you are, so will I.” And we did that, me, Joseph and Kurt, “We’re going to take this to the end.” It was a very good campaign.

The other thing that came out of that campaign was the growth of the workers in terms of accepting women leadership. Because I was a woman and I brought in a lot of the women in the company and organized them to be able to take leadership within the campaign. They were spokespeople and committee leaders and all of that. They took very strong leadership. There was a group of women that were just fantastic. They were just great. On election day - it was so beautiful - on election day they plastered themselves with stickers, buttons—they were like walking billboards for the campaign. It was beautiful! We carried on a secret ballot election; we couldn’t be near the workers, we could only be near the workers when the ballots were being counted, and so

they let the workers out early, to their credit, to sit and watch the ballots be counted. We're sitting there waiting for the workers to come in and it was the most beautiful sight when the women all came in! And they're all like, "Yeah! We won! We know we won!" They had all of these bumpers stickers, stuck all over their clothes. They all came and sat by me and we all sat there together and watched the ballot counting. Of course we won. It was just fantastic. It was just great. It was the most wonderful feeling in the world.

It's a good contract. What we did, is we negotiated an election agreement that included the contract itself. We said, "If we win the election then we will negotiate a contract and if after 75 days we haven't come to agreement on a contract, then an arbitrator will come in and impose a contract on both sides. So we wrote binding arbitration into the election agreement. So we had our contract even before we negotiated. We were so sure we were going to win that election. They were so sure we were going to lose that they signed off on it. They kept their word. We started negotiating June 1st, or some time in June 1995, and we had a contract by December. The union, the UFW in its history, has had contracts that had been negotiated for 20 years. That's why, one of my main jobs in California and main accomplishments was that I was instrumental in passing and amending the Agriculture Labor Relations act in California to include binding arbitration, or binding mediation, which is basically the same thing. Now, the UFW in California has that same kind of binding mediation, so contract negotiations don't go on forever. That bill was passed in 2002. It's the first amendment to the Agriculture Labor Relations Act that was passed in 1975. It's the first amendment to it, and I'm very proud of that. It took a lot of work. It took a 160 mile march in the heat of summer. It took incredible political power for us to do it. I was heading up the team and coordinating the project and we did it. It works. That binding arbitration and binding mediation are needed. I saw how it worked at Chateau Ste. Michelle. What it does is bring peace to the workplace. The contract is signed, the war's over. Now you've got to work together. The contract at Chateau Ste. Michelle is a good contract. It's continued to be a good contract. The company actually likes the contract. Their HR department is doing so much better because the committee takes care of human resource problems, basically. Arbitration, grievances, nobody wants the problem, so the committee has to take leadership in dealing with the members when issues come up. They have medical, a pension plan, a pesticide committee, some of the best wages, I think, that farm workers are earning anywhere. It's a very good contract.

Division within the farm worker community - farm worker leadership that had been there since the '60s, they felt that I was an outsider, that I was there to cause problems. Tomás [Villanueva] was a great supporter of the work I was doing, but there were others there that were very much against the organizing that we were doing. We don't know who put sugar in our engines, but

somebody did that. And we don't think it was the company.

Roberto Maestas, the company hired him as a union buster and brought him in on a private jet to talk to the workers, to vote against the union contract. He spent a couple of days out there to try and convince the workers. That was amazing to me. I couldn't believe that. He's the head of El Centro de la Raza in Seattle. He was a union buster for Chateau Ste. Michelle. I'm sure he was paid. I don't know, I can't prove that, but he spent a couple of days in the vineyards, talking to workers, talking to them against voting for the union. His argument was that "This union doesn't really represent your interests. Rosalinda's only here to serve her own interest, not yours. This isn't good for you. You ought to sit down and talk to the company without the union. They'll help you, I'll help you, I'll work with you." He came in like a month before the election, so the workers already knew how to deal with the union busters, so they were very like, "What can you tell us? Oh Gosh! We didn't know! What more can you tell us? Do you have a card so we can call you?" Right afterwards it was, "Who is this guy?! We gotta go after him! He says he's a Mexican!" They called him "the worm." I think they still do. They were so angry with him. They saw the jet come in and land, they have a landing field out there at Columbia Crest Winery, it's a big tourist attraction, they saw it come in, they saw the cars from the company go out, they saw people come out of the jet, get into the cars and head out to the vineyards to them. Roberto Maestas came in on a private jet to union bust at Chateau Ste. Michelle. I'll tell it to the world. It happened, it's the truth. He confronted me on it. I said, "I know you're not for unions. I know you're not for this union, and I know you're not for me. I don't really want to talk to you. Keep doing whatever you're doing and we're going to win our campaign."

The other thing that happened is that Margarita Prentice, helped to finance the company union, because the company formed a little core group, about 10 workers, that said they were, the independent union, the real union of the workers, they tried to get the workers to vote for their independent union. Margarita Prentice helped to finance that. She bought their buttons and somewhere in the archives we have the proof of that. And that was disgraceful for her. The only Latina elected representative financed a company union. It was shocking. COPE always endorsed her, the labor council always endorsed her, I brought in the Chateau Ste. Michelle committee at the next COPE convention and we opposed her endorsement. She was furious. A lot of labor was furious that we did that too. "So she opposed your campaign—she's done a lot for this other union!" We said, "Hey, you know what? She opposed our campaign. We're farm workers. She's a Mexican, so are we, and we're urging not to endorse Margarita Prentice." We did a campaign and she didn't get the endorsement that year. People forget about this stuff.

I left Sunnyside because in order for us to negotiate the contract with Chateau Ste. Michelle, we had to affiliate our independent union with the United Farm Workers of America in California. We did that just shortly before we started negotiations in 1994. We had to be part of the AFL-CIO.

The other big piece here that I haven't mentioned is that the Farm Labor Organizing Committee, which is FLOC, Valdemer Valasquez, tried to raid our campaign also. He came in and tried to negotiate with the company for the contract under the auspices of FLOC. [This was] early 1994, before we had affiliated with the United Farm Workers of America. When we out-organized him, basically, and sent him back to Ohio, he then went to the AFL-CIO and talked to the AFL-CIO and said, "You have a renegade union over here that's negotiating a contract that should be under the AFL-CIO." So it caused all sorts of problems with the Washington State Labor Council who was supporting us, because the AFL-CIO called them. The AFL-CIO asked Rick Bender to pull the Washington State Labor Council, to pull the support that they were giving us for that campaign because we weren't AFL. They staved that off a lot and continued to support us, but finally it was "You've got to affiliate, Rosalinda and Kurt. You guys have to affiliate with an AFL union." Valdemer Valasquez was in DC pushing, pushing, pushing. He wanted this contract. So we decided to affiliate with the United Farm Workers of America. Which a lot of people weren't happy with—because the UFW had no resources, we should have affiliated with a union that had more power, Teamsters, SEIU, UFCW. The workers said, "No, we want a Mexican union. We want our own union, so that's the only one there is other than FLOC, which has shown that's not what we want." So we affiliated with the United Farm Workers of America. Then I became an employee, me and Kurt both became employees of the United Farm Workers of America. We continued negotiations, they sent out a representative, David Martinez to sit at the negotiation table. We negotiated the contract and they signed off on it. They came out for the last two weeks of the election—Dolores Huerta came out, Arturo Rodriguez came out, various members of the leadership came out. We had the votes but they came out. It gave us a lot of publicity. It was fine. It was a great victory.

Kurt decided to leave because his wife was from California, so he decided to leave and go back to California. I stayed on, I was in the process of developing an organizing committee in the apple industry, and then I was asked to go help out the organizing campaign in Watsonville. So I left Sunnyside to go help out. I don't know, maybe that was a mistake that I left Washington State. Because I was then the Northwest regional director for the United Farm Workers of America, and was administrating the contract with Chateau Ste. Michelle and we were in the process of developing the committee to the level where it was my goal to have them run the union office as a worker's center. Then from there they begin to organize in more industries, and they take the leadership in

showing the workers. But we didn't get that far. I left in the summer of 1996 to go to Watsonville, and I got back in February of 2003. Things are very stalled. It's disappointing. I've been talking to the committee at Chateau Ste. Michelle. There's a lot that they can do, should have been doing, I think Martin Rios is the leader, as agreed to take a position as organizer for the United Farm Workers of America, so hopefully that will create a change. But right now, the only staff people are going to be him and Eric Nicholson, and Eric Nicholson is in Tacoma. That leaves Martin by himself in Sunnyside. Martin has the training, the ability, the heart and the leadership that if he really focuses on it, he can build a union. So we'll see what he does.

I'm not sure how many times the contract has been renegotiated. I think three times since 1995. It's a good contract. It's one of the best that the union has. I know because I've seen all their contracts now. I was on the Executive Board. I'm proud of it. I'm very proud of it. It's like giving birth to a child! The committee and I have always sworn to each other that we're never going to let anything happen to that contract, and we'll come together when needed no matter what to do what we need to do to make sure that it continues. You're talking over 200 families, and in Sunnyside, Washington, that's a lot of stable working people in a region that has third world conditions for farm workers. And it's honorable work, it's good work and it was won under some very difficult conditions and won in a very honorable way. I think it deserves a lot more credit than it's been given—the contract itself. We'll see. Hopefully now, Martin, can start taking more leadership.

Frankly, we didn't get the support that we needed. We asked for it. Tomás is the only one that supported us, and Lupe Gamboa, who was working with Evergreen Legal Services at the time. They weren't part of the core team. They weren't part of the strategic team that came in and out. What they helped to do was sedate some of the other guys [from the United Farm Workers of Washington State]. We had no connection with the United Farm Workers of California until we were ready to affiliate in 1994, when we had brought the company to the table and we needed them to help negotiate. What ended up happening, I'll never forget this: The company calls and their ready to sit down and negotiate. So we're sitting there and Kurt says, "Who here knows how to negotiate a contract?" Martin goes, "Chingow. One thing after another." Kurt goes, "We'll figure it out, one way or another." It happened so fast and we were so into the campaign and making it happen. The UFW knew how to negotiate contracts and brought somebody in and negotiated the contract. We all sat at the table, me and Kurt , Joseph and the workers. That was an exciting time. It wasn't as much fun as what went on before. It was drudgery of language and documents and documents. Trying to keep from choking the other guy and all that kind of stuff.

There's a lot of sexism within our culture that just exists anyway. This had never been done at this level in Eastern Washington, and I wasn't from the area. I am who I am and I just do what I do. Somebody said, "You didn't follow protocol by coming to us first," and it's like, "OK, so what? Am I going to say I'm sorry? We're doing a campaign here, folks, for a union contract." I always told them the only people I answer to is my committee, and here they are. The committee itself began with Pastor Mejia, Martin Rios, Estela Ferrer, Reynaldo Cruz and Benito Martinez and Gerardo Rios. Then later on we got more women, but this was the committee that came to me. So when these guys who were like the official leaders of the community—they literally called a meeting at the Radio Cadena office, where they all came and sat at the table and wanted to know what I was doing, what's going on, all this stuff. Kurt, Joseph and I went with Lupe and Tomás, and I brought the committee, the workers came with us. The only people I am accountable to is my committee, and I introduced them all. They said, "We're the organizing committee of Chateau Ste. Michelle." "We didn't know there was a committee at Chateau Ste. Michelle" they said. I told that I was doing what the committee needs done.

Kurt had a fellowship he got to do the work, so part of that fellowship he used to pay himself and me. We got some grants, used some of that grant money to pay expenses. Talking about salaries—sometimes we got paid, sometimes we didn't. Like I said, my family and I lived with Kurt for a year. Then we finally moved out and got our own little place. I think at one point Kurt mortgaged his house to get money for us to continue working. We got donations from people. Beth Burrows, Helen Lee helped out. A lot of people helped out. The Rainbow Coalition sent us money. As we did our campaign throughout the state we got checks. Five-hundred, one-thousand—it was enough to keep us going.

I think it's the most beautiful, ideal grassroots campaign. It worked out that way. It's the way it should be and it's the way it can be, if people want to put their time and their effort into it. The thing is that's what you've got to do. I didn't do anything but that. My father died in September of 1994, right in the height of the campaign, he became ill with cancer, right in the height of the campaign. I saw him maybe twice before he died, by the time my family called me he was at Mt. Vernon hospital in a coma and I didn't get to talk to him. It was extremely difficult. I couldn't leave the campaign, it was the most critical time. Kurt, Joseph and I were like that. I mean, his wife was pregnant, all sorts of things were happening, but our priority was the campaign. That was the decision we made. The workers knew that was what it was for us, they recognized that. Because we were doing it, they were doing it, and because they were doing it , so were we. It was a total team effort. We made do with whatever we could.