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**Title of Series:** National Farm Worker Ministry 2011 Documentary Project

**Interviewer:** Ryan Nilsen, NFWM-NC Summer Intern through Duke Divinity School

**Interviewee:** Olgha Sandman, NFWM board member representing Church Women United of IL

**Date and time:** 1:20PM on August 24, 2011

**Location:** Sandman house in Chicago, IL

**Length of Interview:** 81 minutes and 52 seconds

**Length of Transcription:** 16 pages

**Transcriber:** Suzanne Edwards, ed. Ryan Nilsen

**Name Abbreviations:**

R = Ryan Nilsen

O = Olgha Sandman

NFWM = National Farm Worker Ministry

YAYA = Youth and Young Adults

UFW = United Farm Workers

**Interview Summary:** In this interview, Ryan Nilsen asks Olgha Sandman, former Migrant Ministry staff person and current NFWM board member, about how she got involved with NFWM, how her beliefs and values have affected her involvement, how she has been impacted by her involvement, and what she would say to people who might be thinking about becoming involved. In her responses, Olgha discusses

the early history and work of Migrant Ministries from the 1950s, the formation of NFWM in 1971, the importance of both charity and justice work, working with the Cesar Chavez and the United Farm Workers on their historic grape boycott as well as Baldemar Velazquez and the Farm Labor Organizing Committee on their Campbell's campaign. She also comments on her education, her Christian faith, receiving an honorary PhD from Chicago Theological Seminary, and tells a number of stories from her involvement with the farm worker movement over the last half century.

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R: This is Ryan Nilsen sitting with Olgha Sandman. It is August 24 about 1:20 pm. We are in Chicago at Olgha's house. So we will get started. Olgha, How did you first get involved with the National Farm Worker Ministry?

O: It was in 1951 and I was a student. I had come from Mexico to Women's College for getting my degree in Religious Education and Missionary Work. And during those years another student who happened to me from Guatemala, introduced me to the opportunity of doing summer work for the migrant ministry. And this was in Illinois, south of Chicago, about eight hundred miles. It was the first time that I worked among the families that had come from Texas to work in the harvest. And an interesting point that some people might not know is that at that time they camps would be large, 200, 300 people or more, many children. And the migrant families were housed in former prisoners of war camps. During the war that ended late 30s and early 40s, they built these camps with barbed wire fences around it where they held people that were detained because they were German in this part of the country. And later on, the vegetable companies bought those camps to house the migrant workers there.

R: So you did this first internship working for the summer. How did you get involved past there?

O: Well, you know, first of all, the fact that I was Mexican, that I came from Mexico, brought me to very close identity with the people. I came from a metropolitan area and from a family that valued education very much. All my siblings had gone to college and all of that. So we didn't have a lot of opportunity to meet workers like this and to realize that that they were considered less. There was a lot of discrimination then, and that they were considered less valued because they were poor and because they didn't have an education. That was a jolt. And so, as you can see, there was a lot of learning for me and appreciation for the work that these families did, and trying to advocate for them the way that we knew how to do then. There was no other organizing other than that we served the people and the ministry served as a cushion between them, the workers, and the employers. And these were big companies that grew vegetables and then canned them. Not only they harvested them in the fields, but they canned and they packed the vegetables.

The ministry at that time was called Migrant Ministry, and it was national. It was related to the National Council of Churches Home Missions Department. And then every state constituted a state ministry, usually supported in finance by the state council of churches. And, in the summer, seminary students, college students would work in it. We would get with training before going to work and being assigned in teams of about 3 people per community. Illinois then had 20-25 decent communities where the staff from the Migrant Ministry would work and then the local churches were a lot of help and support. It was at that time that the Migrant Ministry was very well received and supported and backed by the local churches in an ecumenical way and by the Church Women United. The name was the same words, United Church Women, but it was the same group of ecumenical women that volunteered, coming to help us because the programs that we directed in behalf of the ministry, and for the families, for children, like day care, and tutorial remedial school work and recreation, sports. With the families, we had Family Nights. We'd interpret. We had sewing circles with the women. We had translating, driving them to the doctors and so forth. So we tried to accommodate to the needs of the families in the camp, and I would say that if you give a rating sheet to the families, they would say "They have an A+". The ministry was very well received. The churches also recognized them and appreciated much the work that we were doing. And that was during the 50s when I came into this work. I graduated the

next year, and instead of going home, I obtained an extension to my Student Visa to work for the 2<sup>nd</sup> summer.

So that was my introduction to it. I couldn't get out of my mind the fact that these people who came such a long distance, close in their little houses in the valley to work so hard and to get low salaries and all that would be treated with so much disregard by most of the population, of course except for the churches and the people that came to help in the camps. So that was my introduction to it, you know.

And when I graduated I went back to Mexico and work among the churches in my state. It was actually 3 states that form an association, and I worked in there. But I had met Bob, my husband, during those years when I worked in the Migrant Ministry. He graduated from seminary, was ordained, and committed himself to 5 years working with the Migrant Ministry. And became the supervisor or director of the work in Illinois, and then in the winter in Texas and New Mexico. So during those 5 years that he was committed to work with the ministry, we married, and romantically I came back to it. And together we worked like in Texas in the panhandle of Texas where there was a concentration of families that had been working in Minnesota, in Ohio, in Wisconsin, in Michigan, you know, all the Great Lakes states. They would concentrate in that part of Texas together with *braceros*. And the *braceros* were the men that came hired from Mexico, on a contract between the two governments. They came to work there. They were men alone. And we worked among those families in west Texas. When the 2<sup>nd</sup> winter that we went to west Texas, we had our first child. And our son was still a baby, you know, younger than 1 year old, and we would take him to the camp. And mainly the men, the *braceros*, would be so delighted to see the baby because they had left their families at home in Mexico, and they were homesick for them, I'm sure.

In the summer Bob and I would work in Michigan and it's the same thing you know. Any state, any ministry that you work in at that time, it was the same conditions, very substandard housing, poor pay, a lot of misunderstanding and discrimination and separation of the people from the town. For instance, one of the towns here in Illinois, where they would come, would have a headline on the local newspaper reminding people that next week is the beginning of migrant work. Make sure to lock your door and don't leave anything in the front yard. You know, put your things secure inside the house. And that was, to me, that was a tremendous insult to the people who had not come to the town to rob or to do anything illegal, but to work hard. And the economy of those towns depended on the work that they did. And again, I repeat to you, that was in the 50s. In the late 50s, Bob and I were working together. And in 1957, he completed 5 years of work with the ministry, and took a church in Ohio. So we left the ministry. But I continued through Church Women United. I continued my interest and my support for the migrant ministry.

I think one thing that I want to tell you, Ryan, that I consider very crucial to me is that the work that the ministry was doing all those years, it began in 1920, and in the 50s and in the 60s, was the work that motivated by love of the people, motivated by compassion, motivated by the faith, and simply by the example of Jesus Christ who was among the poor, who cared for them, and who tried to answer to their needs, and left with us that commandment that we take care of the needs of the poor. Often in the circles even of the present day ministry, I hear people talk about the charity of the ministry, but the

inflection of that sentence and what I suspect is behind their motivation of saying that we have moved from charity to justice is that charity was wrong. And it cannot be wrong. In the theology of the Christians, it is not wrong. Charity is a virtue for the Christians. And if we were playing games with the children, and if we were helping them with tutorial work or bringing boxes of toys or of clothes to the camps that the churches would send, it's because that was what we knew what to do and because it was acceptable. We didn't have any movement for organizing people among us, you know. So I think that we have to be careful on saying it was a progression and evolution of the ministry, in that it wasn't us. I don't think the ministry can take credit for saying that we are now a ministry of justice. The door was opened to us by the farm workers. The challenge came from the farm workers. The ones that were organizing. They called, you know the tugging on your sleeve. "Join us. We need you." came from them. And we had no way to turn around because that was very powerful, you know. We had already met the people, we had already loved the people, and worked with the people, so to me personally it was just a natural thing to get involved with what they were doing when they began organizing.

R: You are saying that the call or the tug of the farm workers -- how exactly did that take place? Who asked you to be involved with the more justice-oriented future?

O: Well I have it very clear in my mind that ... one time there was a meeting in Columbus Ohio, we lived in Ohio, a meeting of the Church Women United, a state meeting. And in those meetings, you know you have two or three hundred women that meet and they had a very good couple days of programs and workshops and speeches and so forth. And as you entered the church, there was a woman behind the table, and that table was full of literature, buttons, you know, lapel buttons, bumper stickers, and all kind of things, and flags, and it called my attention. It was a colorful table. So I came to talk to her. Her name was Irene Chandler, and I said "What is this all about?" And she was a farm worker from California, at the time when Cesar had sent people around the country to talk to churches and unions and schools and anybody who would listen about the struggle and what was happening in California. And that was my very first introduction, you know, I had so many things to ask her and I picked one of each kind of things that she had on the table and I felt like I could have missed the rest of the meeting and stayed talking to her, you know, because she was a women who had been in the fields and was part of the union, and was now traveling around the country to tell people about what was happening in California. And it was news to me that the newspapers and radio and television were not spreading the word at that time. So that was my big first introduction. And at the same time in Ohio, about that time the Ohio council of churches had discontinued all migrant ministry. And had discontinued for several reasons : because the government now, the Federal government, with the War on Poverty and some other national programs had instituted state programs like state migrant education, migrant health, and migrant day care, and so forth and channeled the money into the state to run these programs. Now when the public funds were opening daycare centers, the ones that we had had in a basement of a church did not qualify anymore because we did not have the required specifications that the programs include now. And we had women from the churches coming to take care of the children, but now they had to be certified child care people. And, one by one, the programs that the ministry was doing were discontinued.

At the same time, California, because each one of the migrant ministries operated by a state, and the California migrant ministry, the staff had become involved in support of the strike, and involved with what Chavez was doing and that, you know, I think it has to be God's hand into all of this, you know. God working through his strength, through economic changes and through public programs and funds and all of that. And so that's how that woman came to a meeting in Ohio. And not everybody stopped to talk to her. She was not given the platform to speak. She just had a table. But I was one, and I'm sure there were others, that was touched by her and by her message. And that was the beginning in Ohio then, the council of churches had taken the money that was in the treasury for the migrant ministry which had been discontinued and gave it to a group of Latino people, and I was one. I was invited to be in that group to begin some kind of program that would help the migrants because the migrants were still coming into Ohio, but there was no migrant ministry now. OK? And so that was another way of continuing that because that money and the board that we form. And we called ourselves La Raza Unida de Ohio. And we were operating trying to figure how you know, like any other new group, you spend some time spinning your wheels trying to figure what are we going to do, and how are we going to do it, and when are we going to do it?

At the same time, in Ohio by then, at least 5 years of Baldemar Velasquez and FLOC had been, you know, operating. We hadn't heard of Baldemar. I had never met him. And the reports that would come to me were not very favorable. Because when Cesar in California and Baldemar in Ohio began organizing there are more people against it than people for it. And so the rumors begin. Oh. You know. They are Communist and they are trying to put the growers out of work, etc. And so I remember being in that group Las Raza Unida de Ohio when we were not relating to Baldemar. And he, a scientist then, didn't think much about us either. However, that was the year, and I'm talking now about 1970, when in the national level, the National Council of Churches, that in a way had been the father or mother organization that started the migrant ministry.... The National Council of Churches, the National Church Women United organization, and the few other denominations at that level, at the national level, the disciples and United Church of Christ, and perhaps the Presbyterian and Methodists were having a 2-year consultation because they knew what was happening in California and they wanted to find out more and they had organized then delegations to go into southern Texas to see what organizing was being dealt there along the border. And then they had come to Atlanta, in 1970, for a 2 day or 3 day consultation among themselves what direction were they going to take as a national migrant ministry. I was invited because they invited the Raza de Unida de Ohio to send two delegates, two visitors you know. We were not members of anything with them. And so we came. David Hernandez, who happened to be the director of that group, the executive director, and I came to Atlanta to see, to listen, and to observe. And one of the things that happened is that Cesar Chavez was there. Chris Hartmire, then director of the California migrant ministry, the ones that had already gotten involved with Cesar and his movement brought Cesar with them. And the deliberation was to the depths of, you know, do we continue playing games with the children, or do we put our resources in supporting Cesar Chavez and the changes that his organization is going to bring for the improvement of the conditions -- living and working conditions of the workers. And at the end of the first day, word came to some of us that Cesar wanted to meet with the Latino people, and we were invited to come to his hotel room. And I have to say that is when I met him. I had never met him before. And we sat with him around his bed

where he was resting -- He had back problems -- and sat with him for hours. It was probably 1:00 in the morning when we finally said good night and went to our rooms. And I'm not sure whether this is true or it is a myth within me, but I think I was the one who asked more moral questions than anybody else. I had so many questions for him. He talked to us about the strike. He talked to us about the families, and what was the sacrifice it was costing to them. He talked to us about the marches they were having. He talked to us about how the growers resisted with all their might and all their power and all their dollars, the change that they wanted to bring. They wanted to have contracts. They wanted to give some security to the workers, you know, and some benefits that would bring them, not only better pay, but some health program and pension and the right to have a break during the day, to have clean water to drink. The basic things that they had never had, they wanted. And seniority was very important too because there were people working there that were working them until they could no longer move. Instead of having a retirement or pension and so forth. So to me, all of those things were fascinating. And down deep in my heart, wishing that sometime eventually would come to the rest of the country. And Cesar would speak in those terms. He said this is going to be a national union, and our movement is going to be like the fire on the wild prairie, he used to say. It's going to spread. Well unfortunately, the resistance and the opposition was stronger than to make it happen. But that was a very crucial time for me. I say that is something that I want to be part of. That was 1970. The decision at that time from the group, the ones that could vote, was to discontinue the programs that the migrant ministry had had for 50 years and to put all the resources and effort on supporting Cesar Chavez. Baldemar was present and Baldemar advocated that he would be also supported with FLOC. You know he was working hard on the Northwest Ohio with the tomato growers and he himself had run in the migrant family you know coming from Texas. But the group decided that there were not enough means of supporting more than one of the two movements and they decided to give it to Cesar. Besides that, the California part of the ministry was already involved with Cesar and that had a great pulling to do it that way.

R: At that point, did you support that decision? Not necessarily the decision to just support the UFW in California, but the decision to end the Migrant Ministries. You were saying earlier that you didn't want to under appreciate the charity work, or the earlier work of the migrant ministries. Did you think it was...

O: No. First of all, by 1970, when I went to that meeting and I was in Ohio, so I had to talk on that context, the migrant ministry did not exist anymore. Remember they had used the leftover funds to help this group that we called the Rasa Unida de Ohio to do some work among the migrants. So there was no other way but to say yeah if we are going to support. I personally feel very attracted to the idea that the workers themselves were going to bring the change. I did not invent that idea, but I was very attracted to it. It spoke to me very ... and even until now, all these years. I have been in the farm worker ministry for more than 40 years, and it still speaks to me with a very clear voice. In other words, if you can use this as an allegory: To have a group of church people sitting around a table you know every church has these rectangular tables. And we would sit around the table like that, reviewing how many migrants come in the state? Where are the areas where they come? What do they work on, what kind of crops do they work on? Where are they coming from, what part of the country are they coming from? What are their needs? And the whole thing was conceived and then executed by the group of

people from the churches that sat around the table. Now, without using these words, what the farm workers were saying is that you don't need to do that. You don't need to sit around a table and plan for us. We are going to plan it. And it made a lot of sense to me because they knew better than I did what their needs were. And there were needs that were much more deeper and serious and changing, life-changing, than the ones that we had perceived. We said they need the children to catch up in the schools, they need for the children to have a place to play ball, etc. They were saying what we need is to be paid the right wages so that nobody has to bring me their old shoes, but I can buy the clothes for my child. We need the right wages so that I can buy the food for my family, without somebody having to give me some food. And that is a very different concept and I love it. I like it. It attracted me. There were many that had been attracted by that. People in the California migrant ministry when they said these strikes were not to make trouble with the growers, but they are to change the way it has been done: the way they are paid, the way they are treated, the type of housing in which they lived. In Illinois, the housing in some places has them in old prisoner of war camps in some places of Illinois. Baldemar used to tell the story of how the tomato growers in the winter would house their hogs in these buildings and then in the spring they got the hogs out and then they brought the water hose to clean the place and that is where they put the workers. That has got to change. That is treating people sub-humanly.

So it spoke to me very loudly and I know it has done the same to thousands of people in this country. Not only from the church but people from... the students, the young people in this generation in this time of life, the students are perhaps more open because even the children, they know what is fair and what is not fair. Like the YAYA people, you know? They know what is fair and what is not fair. They may not get into big discourses about justice and theology and all of that but they say that isn't fair that these people are treated like that. It isn't fair. And they said we'll do something about it.

So that was my first introduction, OK. In 1971, as I remember it was May 1971, the new board of the National Farm Worker Ministry, because in that meeting in Atlanta, the name of the ministry changed. And I remember, I didn't have the vote, but I had a voice, and I remember advocating for the change to be Farm Worker Ministry to be more aligned with what they called themselves, the United Farm Workers. They didn't call themselves United Migrant Workers. United Farm Workers. And you know the funniest thing is that through all the years that we were close to Cesar Chavez before his death he always called those the Migrant Ministry. He never changed to say the Farm Worker Ministry. The Migrant Ministry because that is the way he had known [them]. That is the way he knew the group: the Migrant Ministry.

And so the year after the Atlanta meeting, they convoked the board of the National Farm Worker ministry in La Paz, which is the headquarters in California, close to Tehachope and Bakersfield, the headquarters of the United Farm Workers. And we got it there. One of the buildings was a hospital that had been a hospital and grounds for tuberculosis patients. And of course it was cleaned up. It had been empty for many years before the UFW moved there. And we slept there and we got there for the first meeting. And at that time I was representing the Rasa Unida de Ohio. But since it wasn't an organization well constituted, then I came in more like a member at large. The new constitution, the

new bylaws were formed in those years, and then later on I was representing the Ohio Council of Churches.

The focus of the ministry, and it still is, was to be as close physically as close as we could where the workers were doing something. And it was California, of course, and some in Florida because the United Farm Workers were in those years organizing the workers in the citrus, that would harvest the oranges that were processed into juice and it belonged to Coca Cola. So they were looking for a contract with Coco Cola, and they got it. They got it. And so we would go to Florida too in the 70s. But most of the meetings were in California. And so going to the meetings where the workers were doing something, we had the opportunity, and since I am talking for myself, I had the opportunity to be in some of the marches that they would have, to be at their conventions, you know, the conventions and to be at meetings they had, the workers with Cesar. And it was very impressive to see the way that they communicated with each other. Cesar would give priority to talking to the workers that wanted to talk to him than to talk to visitors that were representing denominations or government people or anything like that. To me, one time I heard him say that hard times were our best times. The hard times when the opposition was so strong. The public was being fed the image of a man who was a Communist and he used to say "But I don't know why they want to give the Communists the credit for doing all the good that we are doing." It was a revelation to see as he built that union and the way that the workers would come into the union to him and to the union because there was a board, a national board of the union, asking we want to be organized too.

And of course, this work began with the grapes. With the strike with the grapes in Delano, California. In the valley there are many different crops and different groups of workers that were anxious to be organized. And for many years the emphasis was on the grape workers, but they also had contracts in some other crops. And after his death, I think, there was more openness to go in different directions and organize because they went through three boycotts of grapes. And to us that went out in the different parts of the country you know, not only Ohio, where I worked so hard to build support and to gather support to boycotting in front of the stores. We were boycotting grapes and then lettuce and Gallo wine, you know. We would do it. I was a recruiter for much of it in Dayton, Ohio, where we lived at that time. Of seminary students, church people, to go in front of the stores and leaflet, and to get reassigned. And I remember the first time I did it. I didn't want anybody to see me. I stood in front of a grocery store in my neighborhood, hoping that none of my neighbors would come by. Or that nobody from the church would come by and see me being in the picket line. That didn't last too long. That didn't last too long.

One of the good lessons I learned, and being involved with the farm worker ministry has been like a continuous going to school, you know, always learning. One of the good lessons I learned is that the public at large were very supportive. That nine out of ten people were very open to say "Tell me more about it. And yes, I won't buy grapes." And we would ask them to go to second step and tell the manager that they would not buy grapes and why. And occasionally somebody would come out and tell us to go back where you came from and so forth.

R: Do you think that has changed over the years?



O: It has changed to the point that ... many of the causes surge in American society. And, for instance, we worked so hard with the first boycott. And Cesar has sent people to the cities around the country to work on it and they did tremendous work. We would be helpers of what they were doing because they were farm workers themselves and they had come from the areas where they were organizing to convince people of what was happening us. And it was very successful. One time there were 17 million Americans boycotting the grapes. And things marched good because in that area where they got contracts, the pension plans were instituted, the health plan was instituted, and seniority was functioning. There were ranch committees that oversaw the contracts and so forth.

But then there came a time when the Teamsters intervened. And I don't think they intervened because they wanted to, but they were called by the growers to come and what's called, I forgot the term they used, but they "went to bed together" and they signed the contracts behind the workers. The workers did not vote to be represented by the Teamsters, but they gave the contracts to the teamsters. And of course, Cesar and the union would not strike again.

The second boycott of grapes and people like me that were in Ohio at that time found it a little harder to recruit people for the boycotts for the second time. It was like "well we already worked on that and it was won, and how come we are back into it?" and when it happened for the third time then at that time there was the Viet Nam war, and there was the anti-nuclear movement, and a lot of the young people that put time and effort into working on the boycott were not to be seen. On these other issues, mainly peace. They were very busy, and it was very hard to get the troops into it.

I think also the laws that were passed to counter the boycott were that they could not do secondary boycott. They were boycotting the product. They could not go in front in of a store that was not the owner of the product. And boycott in front of it, you know. They had many restrictions. That we could be outside the door of the store now was not allowed. You had to be on a public way like a sidewalk. And sometimes the sidewalk was far removed from a store that was in a shopping area. So some things and people, you could not hope for society to be 100 percent all the time. Things change through the years and all of that.

I think the support and the respect that people in the churches, like in my denomination, the United Church of Christ, for the legacy that Cesar left is real, is true, is strong. In 2003, we celebrated 30 years that the United Church of Christ being in General Synod, which is our national meetings, biennial, we received a call from Cesar saying we need you to send some people to be with us in the Coachella Valley where the Teamsters had taken the contracts and it was very, very difficult time and there were many in the church, who you know it is a representative body. All the state conferences had sent people to the Synod and the group was saying "Let take and offering and send them money. They need it to feed the people et cetera that are on a strike. And the answer from him was "we don't need money, we need people to come see what is happening to us. And eventually, the Synod agree to charter a plane and send 95 people from all the states in the country to Coachella. And they were there, kind of a 24-hour trip. And they saw the violence against the workers, and they saw the climate of harassment that the Teamsters had created in Coachella. They saw the suffering of the workers and they came back and witnessed to the gathering of the national church and we celebrated 30 years of that and we had all the

presidents of the unions there in our meeting in 2003. So that commitment is real, is true, and enduring, but the popular thing of gathering the people in the meetings has faded.

The only thing that I want to share with you is that there was a separation between FLOC and the United Farm Workers for a while, after that meeting in which FLOC in a way was rejected by the church. And Baldemar continued organizing. And then there was a time when Cesar himself made the overture towards FLOC of cooperating with each other and saying to send people to La Paz and we will help train them, people to work on a boycott. Because at that time Baldemar and FLOC had began a boycott of Campbell's Soup Company. And that was a tough one because Campbell's image was good, you know "Um Um Good" the soup. You look at the commercials of Campbell's is when the child is sick or when the husband is not feeling good, you give them soup, Campbell's soup, and then everything is fine. And Baldemar then instituted the third party organizing. It says not only the growers that grow the tomatoes but Campbell is dominating the whole industry of the tomato, and the growers themselves have very little power. And that boycott lasted 6 or 7 years and we worked so hard on it. And because I was in Ohio, I got involved very closely with Baldemar and with FLOC and I admire the work he has been persistent and faithful. And one of the things that in my life impressed me so deeply is the march that a hundred workers, men, women, and children from FLOC, made from Toledo, Ohio, to, what is the name of the town where Campbell is in NJ? It was across the mountains and into Philadelphia and I flew to Philadelphia when they had walked all of that length. It took them about a month and it was during the month of August. And they had a tremendous meeting by the Independence Hall. And then we marched with them across into Camden, NJ. That is the headquarters of Campbell's soup. The bishop in that diocese had told the priest not to get involved with this group because Campbells was a great contributor to the churches financially, but most of the priests disobeyed. And when we arrived with the workers, we arrived into the church where they were going to meet. The priests, there was about 12 of them, were waiting for the workers with their towels around their arms and a basin of water to wash their feet. And the rest of us were all singing De Colores and Ryan, there was not one dry eye in that church, that was standing room only. It was so powerful, so powerful. Just like Jesus had done it with the people in washing their feet. Now the priests were kneeling down washing their feet for those people who had to walk all that distance.

And eventually the boycott was won and a great agreement came about. And FLOC and Baldemar had done a great job of organizing and getting under contract all the pickle industry, and they are now working with the tobacco workers. To me it is kind of sad to see that in California where the big gains were done by the union including a law, the first and only Agricultural Labor Relations Act, that things have slipped back into what they were 40 and more years ago, you know. They are still suffering. Where workers that don't have water and then three digits and hot weather and had not a place a rest under the shade, and they get dehydrated. Some of them collapsed and died. There have been so many workers that have died. That is very sad to me. It is too hard a reality to accept that after all those years of organizing that things would still be that bad. And of course they need support, they need great support.

Now along on the horizon comes the Coalition of Immokalee Workers and for us people in the ministry down in Florida as you know and I think in the late 90s, our board was meeting in Tampa. And a group of

workers from the Coalition of Immokalee Workers which is in the southern part of Florida, they came to visit with us and to talk about their struggle. And I remember so clear that they were saying that what we are looking for is a dialogue with the growers. And these are corporate growers, big tomato growers. We wanted dialogue with the growers. And we want to ask them for one cent more per pound of tomatoes. There were some people in our board, I'm talking about the national farm worker ministry board, some people that came back to them by saying "Haven't you heard about Cesar Chavez? Don't you know you can have a boycott against those growers? And the boycott is the way that you can get some results. And to me it was like a stab on my heart. And I remember saying in that meetings, do we believe in self-determination or don't we? What do we get by telling them what to do? They have to find their own way and if they make a mistake they have to go over it and review it and determine, and look at the way it happened, you know? Because Florida is an anti-union state. They were not looking for a contract as a union. They were not looking for a boycott a year or two after they began work. They wanted to meet with the employers and those employers never give them the time of day. They eventually came up with something very similar to what Baldemar did, go to the third party who is buying the tomatoes and you know the story about the Taco Bell and then McDonalds, but when you have the fast food industry, one by one, have come to the table with them, that is not a small thing. I admire the coalition because for 10 to 15 years that they have been working, they have been persistent. They are so determined, and they are most of them are young. And they have a lot of vitality. That is the way I see them. They are spunky. Even the way they make signs. They don't make rectangular signs that says anything about it. They make it in the shape of a tomato. And when they were working against the Taco Bell, the sign might have the shape of the Chihuahua dog and so forth. They build a paper mache lady of liberty that was maybe about 12 feet high, and they used to carry that on the back of a truck where they marched from one town to another in Florida. The Smithsonian Institution caught sight of it, and they came and pleaded with them to let them take lady of liberty to the Smithsonian Institution in Washington, DC. But the coalition didn't want to part with it. But they eventually agreed that because they were told that this is an expression of how the immigrants want to be part of being a free people and find your way. And so, it is in Washington, DC.

R: That's great. I have a couple more questions that I want to ask and we don't have a whole lot more time. So I'm curious as to how your faith and your beliefs have informed and impacted your work. And you have talked a little bit about, with the earlier work of the ministry, how it seemed a direct ... it was about what Jesus would do. Bu you have also expressed this deep value for the self-determination and I don't know if it is more of an empowerment model or.

O: It is.

R: If you could just comment on how your beliefs and your faith have informed that perspective as well.

O: Right. You know I think our faith, the Christian faith, is like a multifaceted jewel -- that serving people directly is only one side of that jewel. And advocating for them to empower them is another side. Thinking that for them, not only for the work they do in the field, but for the things that we have learned from them is another side. And on and on I could go talking. I myself, find great value to the farm worker ministry to be in friendship with them. They have accepted us, they trust us, they have

shown in many ways that when they said, you know, Cesar did it, Baldemar will do it. Arturo Rodridrez said it too. The coalition... those people all of them I have heard them say on different occasions and in different ways, we could not have done it without you. Sometimes I wonder if that is giving us more credit than we deserve, but they do feel, they are grateful to the church involvement, to the people that come from the faith community in name of the faith of the community, and Ryan I want to tell you something. We are very apt to say that people of faith and that is you and I and the people in the ministry and I disagree with that. In fact I never use it to say that the people of faith are with you because the farm workers themselves are people of faith and they are sometimes strong than us. When we have problems, we have many avenues and networks to solve them. We can get on the phone or we may have some savings or we have friends that are in position to solve the problem that we have. The farm workers don't have those resources and so when they have a big problem they always turn to God and say "Oh God, help me". And the ones that are very Catholic to the virgin, or whatever expression they have. But their faith is alive within them and their trust to God. And to me, we that have watched that and witnessed to that faith. It helps me, if it is me, and I have always said that being involved in the farm worker ministry because I'm not in connection with the workers unless it was for the ministry, ok? Because our board always goes there. Some of them get a little closer you know. There are some that stay here in my house or there are many different ways in which we have identified with each other and love each other. But our richness to our life that has come from being part of the farm worker movement is because the ministry has opened the door. Has opened the door for people like me so that we are in contact with the workers. And that has fed my faith, you know, tremendously. I think I have one thing that we have learned is to not only to pray that the workers might be helped and blessed and they receive what they deserve, but to, Delores used to say, "Put faith in your prayers," you know? That walking the picket line, being on the march with them, going to where they are, that is a dynamic that comes back to me.

And you know one thing that you don't have to have to use some days, I'm going to say it but you can edit, is that about 10 years ago, I received an honorary doctorate degree from Chicago Theological Seminary. I never was a student at the seminary but I have been a student of life and faith and action and ecumenical work and translating God's love through me to the farm workers, and through God from the farm workers. And to me the seminary felt like they wanted to grant me that distinction. And I have said well you know some people go to the classroom for many years to learn. I have been involved with farm workers and that has been an education. That has been an education.

Now at present day I am 84, and I've lost the physical stamina is not the same you know. So I have to slow down in many ways. But I'm still active both in the ministry and with the farm workers whenever they need us. But at the same time, I am of the conviction, I'm not the only one, but I am of the conviction that we who have been in the movement for a long time can move a little to open the door for the young ones. And the hope is that some people like you, some people like the YAYAs you know, these people that in a way they are blessed because I think society has opened more to issues. They are not as radically against organizing, and if more people don't support things like the ministry and the organizing our workers, it is because they are too spread into so many other causes, all the financial resources don't go that far. But I think that there are a lot of people in this country that recognize that

what the farm workers have done is a non-violent war to defeat all of this injustice that the farm workers have lived with for so many years.

R: So what would you like to say to people who are interested or might be interested in getting involved with the NFWM today?

O: Well, I think this the talk that you and I have had so far is one way of saying. I think that the farm worker ministry together you know. One side is the farm worker ministry and the other side of the coin is the farm worker movement, has all of the elements to make a nice challenging and unique involvement in anybody's life. There's not only the working hard for something that is valuable and putting your principles, your values, your morality, your ethic, and your appreciation of human life all in the same niche of being involved with the farm workers and the farm worker ministry. I don't believe that most of the people that I talk to are going to take a job working in the fields, so the best is to get involved with the ministry, you know, and get close to what the workers are doing. That's one way of saying it. The other one is that if we as Christians, and this ministry, and I know that this ministry has wanted to be inter-faith, that means have the Jewish, and the Moslems, and everybody else of other faiths, but we have not been able to get to that point. I hope it is still an open question that will come in the future. Okay? Right now is basically a Christian ministry. Remember when I began telling you about the old Migrant Ministry? That was only Protestants. And then when we became the NFWM, we became inter-faith. We became Catholic and Protestant together. And I would say that as Christians we have two great lights to look to and to guide ourselves in that direction. One is Jesus Christ. Okay? The kind of man he was. I don't have to tell you. I don't have to tell anybody who is a Christian the kind of life that he said to live it like this. You know? That last shall be first. Don't try to be first. And, you know, love you enemy and give to the poor, and be with the ones that nobody else wants and all of that you know I don't have to preach a sermon. You know it Ryan, and anybody who says I'm a Christian should know it. If not go back to your Bible and start reading. And the second light that we have to follow is the prophets. You know the prophets, who were not Christian, but that was the basis in which Jesus built so much of his talk about justice about let justice roll down like waters said Micah and Amos and Jeremiah, and Isaiah. All of those prophets were for justice for the poor, for the people that somebody else was taking advantage of, they said that it is not right. And some things that the prophets did is that they pointed their finger at the ones that were in power whether they were government or they were religious authorities ,and they didn't care how important and how powerful they were, they pointed their finger at them. And they said, so says the Lord. You know this is what you are supposed to do. And the lord is saying that to you. If we take seriously our faith, and follow those two lights, then we have no choice but supporting the farm workers, joining the farm worker ministry. If you don't join it because you cannot be a member of the board, hopefully yes that they can bring their denomination or their group or whatever, but you can at least join it by supporting the farm worker ministry. Financially is a very important thing because financially is what will help the ministry to continue the work that they are doing. It's like being the representative of those that give. I will represent you with your financial assistance and the front line with the workers.

R: That's great. Is there anything else you would want to add? A story or comment that you would want to share with people?

O: You know, Ryan, I guess since you promise that you are going to edit because I'm probably giving you more than ... There are stories like when I was the chair of the support committee in Dayton, Ohio, and we have learned through the news that Senator Dole who was running for president and who was a good friend of Nixon and had made statements against the boycott and in favor of the grapes and so forth. He was going to come to a fundraiser dinner where it was like one hundred dollars a plate and at that time it was so much money. It was in the 70s. He was going to come to Dayton. So I got on the telephone and talked to people and organized the supporters and about 50 of us came and we had signs about the boycott of grapes and support of farm workers, and we had flags and we got in front of the hall where he was going to be speaking. The parking lot was huge and there was a wide lane in the parking lot in between two sides of cars that we could make our line in there along the cars on both sides. And when he came with his aides and all of that, he could see us. He could probably read the signs and saw us. We didn't get to talk to him but we were there witnessing in support of the workers and all of that. Shortly after he went into the hall, there comes the sheriff. The sheriff car with the light on, you know, and he came running between the two lines of protesters and he got out of the car and he was the typical big fat guy with a big hat and his big star saying "Sheriff" and his gun on the hip and all of that, you know, and he shouted, "Who is in charge of this?" And everybody said, "She is," and pointed at me. And then I was the chair of the local committee and there were ministers there, there were students from the Dayton University, there were office supporters, there were some labor people, but everybody said "She is." So he came over and he say "You get your group out of here and if you don't I'm going to arrest all of you." But he was shouting. He was not talking you know. And I said to him "Under the first amendment of the Constitution we have a right to be here and speak and demonstrate." And he shouted loud in my ear "I don't know anything about no Constitution. Don't you mention that to me, I'm the authority here." And right behind him with all that commotion, the press had come. They had just arrived. So a couple of reporters began taking pictures of the sheriff and said Sheriff Soandso, whatever his name was, would you mind repeating what you said about the Constitution? What is it that you said that it is not important, the Constitution, and that took the focus from us to him. And he was so upset and he was tongue tied and he just got in the car and drove away. So that is the story that I always remember. You know we weren't scared when that happened. It didn't happen that he would arrest us. He would take me and all of that if we didn't leave, but that's one thing.

There is another story when one of the early conventions in Fresno, California, Cesar had invited me to open the convention with a prayer, and that was a big privilege and honor so I was ready to say my prayer. He stood up at the beginning of the convention to open up the convention and it was supposed to be that he would call me to the microphone to give the opening prayer. He forgot. He never called me. So the convention started, and they started talking about different business and things and voting and then came the time for lunch. And at the lunch time usually, there was a group of maybe 30 or 40 people that get invited to go to a certain room to eat with him. And then they had a big dining hall for all the delegates. And Chris Hartmire said you know you forgot to call Olga for the prayer. "Oh my God," he said. "I'm sorry. I'm so sorry," he said to me. But you will open this afternoon with a prayer and I did, you know. So that was another memorable thing.

And then when he was having his third fast, a fast that lasted more than 30 days, and he was in Delano, and this is the cause he wanted the boycott again, of the grapes and it wasn't happening. I already talked to you about that. And he was in bed and he was very weak because he would not take even juice, just water, and the executive committee of the ministry met there and we were invited to the room to talk to him. And talked to him for a while and they had asked me that night. Every night of his fast the workers would come from an area in the evening after they came from the fields and they went home and showered and ate something, they would come for a mass or a service. And they had a big drop cloth in the back of the stage with little wooden crosses, one for every day that he had been fasting. And they had asked me to give the homily that night and again it was an honor and I had prepared for it, but then, unexpectedly, two of the Kennedy children came. Robert Kennedy came, and it was still before the service and we were out in front of the store to picket and they were with us chanting and holding signs and marching with those in front of the store. And when we came back into Forty Acres where Cesar was staying and the meeting was going to take place, they even in service, somebody said to me from the board: Olgha, would you mind if we give your time to the Kennedy children for one of them to speak instead of you? "Oh no, of course, not at all." And so that night, there were two, a boy and a girl, I forgot the names, spoke that night. And I was preempted, and that is OK but to see him so weak, almost to the near point of death. It was so sad.

And the last thing I'll tell you about Cesar is that in 1993, when he died, Bob and I were in Istanbul, Turkey, and it was the second year of our appointment there, so I had several phone calls. That was prior to email. That was when people were not using email. We did not even have a computer or laptop. So I had several calls from family members and from the ministry. Sr. Pat Drydyk, who was then the director of the ministry called me to tell me that he had died. So that was hard to describe feeling, you know, because we had hoped, wrong as it is, we had hoped that he was going to live forever and see the union being as strong and so forth. But he died. And several years later the ministry went to La Paz for the meeting and just to pray by his grave was very emotional, not only for me, There was another woman who was a member of the board who also worked for the UFW for a while in the 70s. That was emotional to be there.

And I have a friend here in the Chicago area who is a musician and he has written the music and the letters and the songs to a theatre musical called Let the Eagle Fly. And it the story of Cesar and the first boycott and the first strike and it is so beautiful. It is beautiful and it has been shown here in the Chicago area half a dozen times. And it has come to California and just was shown in Salinas where there was a lot of organizing there and it has been in San Jose where there are lot of family of Chavez. He was from that area. And it has been shown in San Diego, and in Texas in San Antonio, and in many other different places. And I would like to recommend to anybody that would listen to try to see that show, Let The Eagle Fly, and I am hoping that someday, when it is being shown somewhere and through my friend Julie, I know that it is going to be in a certain location, I contact members of the board of the National Farm Worker ministry who live close by, and say come, come see the show. And for one reason or another they all have given reasons for not going. I'm going to be somewhere else, and I regret it. I think they are losing something by not seeing that show. So I am hoping that the national ministry would be meeting where that show is. Because what we are talking about, those first years,

when they struggled so hard to build the union, and had the first strike and the boycott of grapes... that show and it is beautiful.

R: Let me know when it comes to North Carolina.

O: Yes I will. Well you know. Talk to anybody at Duke that might be in theatre or something like that and then they can send you the information and the video and all of that because often it is through the university and colleges. You know they had was called the Illinois Valley Community College, here in Illinois, west of Chicago but maybe a hundred miles. They had it there in the spring, I think. Is a college that does mainly Swedish people and other local Euro-American people. So when Julie went to see the first rehearsal. She said "What am I going to do? Everybody is blonde and blue eyes. It's about Cesar and all the farm workers. Did you know that when the time came to present the show, they all had dyed their hair black? All the students from the theatre department. I thought that was wonderful and they enjoyed it. They loved to be in the show, but all had dyed their hair black.

N: Well thank you for this time. Really good

O: Thank you for listening, Ryan. I know that it was rambling, but this has been a tremendous experience for me to be part of the ministry and part of the farm worker movement, so thank you for listening.