

JUAN DE LA CRUZ

1913-1973

His Life

Juan de la Cruz came to the state of New Mexico, from his native Mexico, under the bracero program. Later he brought his family to the U.S. and they traveled from place to place as migrants searching for work.

They finally found year-round employment in Arvin where Juan worked at Roberts Farms for fourteen years before his death.

His wife describes working at the Roberts Farms in the 60's, prior to the UFW's involvement: "Field work then was tough. There were no toilet facilities and no drinking water. The grower told us to pick faster and if we didn't speed up we were fired. They paid us one dollar an hour."

Juan de la Cruz joined the UFW when organizing started in his area in 1965. Mrs. De La Cruz talks about some of the changes that followed: "It is better now with the union. We have better wages and everything. We have a medical plan and insurance, paper cups and drinking water, toilets in the fields and twenty minute rest periods during the day!"

His Death

Juan de la Cruz, age 60 was shot and killed on a United Farm Worker's picket line on August 17, 1973, two days after the death of Nagi Daifallah.

Juan and his wife were walking a picket line along the highway between Arvin and Weedpatch, California. As a caravan of non-union workers drove out of the fields, five shots were fired from one of the pick-up trucks. Juan de la Cruz saved his wife, shoving her to the ground, but was himself struck by a twenty-two caliber semi-automatic rifle slug just below his heart.

On the night of August 20, a candle-light procession was held in the city of Arvin, winding through the streets and ending at the Arvin City Park where the wake was held. On the following day, thousands of workers and supporters marched in a procession to the cemetery, following a funeral mass in the park.

Bayani Advencula, a 20 year old Filipino worker, was identified as the pick-up truck passenger who fired the twenty-two caliber semi-automatic rifle into the picket line on August 17. He was later arrested by Sherrif's deputies, charged with murder and then freed on \$1,500 bail. Advencula was later acquitted of all charges by a Kern County jury. The county paid for the cost of his trial.

Drawn from Document
Produced by NFWM 1977

EULOGY FOR JUAN DE LA CRUZ*

DELIVERED BY CESAR CHAVEZ, AUGUST 21, 1973, ARVIN, CA.

We are here to honor the life of Juan de la Cruz. On behalf of his wife, his son and his family, we speak to all those who mourn here and throughout the country. Juan de la Cruz was a simple and a good man. He is gone and we miss him and yet he is alive in our respect and love for his life. He was a humble farm worker and yet in his dying thousands of people have come to pay honor to his life. What is it about the life of our brother, Juan, that produces such a response in us?

Last night as we walked in a candlelight procession through Arvin I was thinking about the earliest days of our union. I remember with strong feelings the families who joined our movement and paid dues long before there was any hope of winning contracts. Sometimes, fathers and mothers would take money out of their meager food budgets just because they believed that farm workers could and must build their own union. I remember thinking then that with spirit like that...we had to win. No force on earth could stop us.

Juan de la Cruz is part of that spirit. He joined the union in its earliest days. He could have held back. He could have waited to see which side was going to win. Instead he threw himself into our struggle with DiGiorgio Corp. He picketed. He worked on the boycott. He went to jail. He did not hold back. He gave himself completely so that all farm workers might some day be free.

It is hard to turn your back on such a person. His example of service and sacrifice reaches the spirit of each one of us. His life and his deeds of love pull on our best instincts and cause us to want to give something of ourselves.

Juan has not only given himself in life — but he has now given his only life on this earth for us, for his children and for all farm workers who suffer and who go hungry in this land of plenty. We are here because his spirit of service and sacrifice has touched and moved our lives. The force that is generated by that spirit of love is more powerful than any force on earth. It cannot be stopped.

We live in the midst of people who hate and fear us. They have worked hard to keep us in our place. They will spend millions more to destroy our union. But we do not have to make ourselves small by hating and fearing them in return. There is enough love and goodwill in our movement to give energy to our struggle and still have plenty left over to break down and change the climate of hate and fear around us.

We are going to win. It is just a matter of time. And when we win there will be a strong and vital service center and hiring hall and field office in the Lamont-Arvin area. It seems only fitting and proper that our union office here be named in honor of Juan de la Cruz.

Juan de la Cruz has not given his life in vain. He will not be forgotten. His spirit will live in each one of us who decides to join the struggle and who gives love and strength to others. Juan is a martyr in a just cause. We will give purpose and memory to his life and death by what we do. The more we sacrifice, the harder we work, the more life we give to the spirit of our brother, Juan de la Cruz.

*Señor de la Cruz was shot and killed on a United Farm Worker picket line, August 17, 1973. He was 60 years old.

(EXERPT FROM STATEMENT BY CESAR CHAVEZ)

"We live in the midst of people who hate and fear us. They have worked hard to keep us in our place. They will spend millions more to destroy our union. But we do not have to make ourselves small by hating and fearing them in return. There is enough love and good will in our movement to give energy to our struggle and still have plenty left over to breakdown and change the climate of hate and fear around us.

Juan de la Cruz has not given his life in vain. He will not be forgotten. His spirit will live in each one of us who decides to join the struggle and who gives love and strength to others. Juan is a martyr in a just cause. We will give purpose and memory to his life and death by what we do. The more we sacrifice, the harder we work, the more life we give to the spirit of our brother, Juan de la Cruz."

RUFINO CONTRERAS — MARTYR FOR JUSTICE

"...We are here today to say that true wealth is not measured in money or status or power. It is measured in the legacy that we leave behind for those we love and those we inspire. In that sense Rufino is not dead. Wherever farm workers organize, stand up for their rights and strike for justice, Rufino Contreras is with them..." —Cesar Chavez, 2/14/79

On February 10, 1979 Rufino Contreras, a 28 year old lettuce worker entered the fields of the Mario Saikhon Company to talk with strikebreakers. He and the workers with him were fired at from three directions. Rufino was hit in the face and fell to the ground while the others took cover. When his fellow workers, including his brother, realized that Rufino was wounded, they tried to go to his assistance but were pinned down by more gunfire. Rufino lay in the field, unaided for more than an hour. He died before an ambulance could reach him.

Rufino, his father and brother had worked for a total of 20 years for Mario Saikhon. They were known as excellent workers. Rufino's wife, Maximina Rosa, was in the hospital recovering from severe burns at the time of her husband's murder. Rufino leaves behind two young children, Julio Cesar, age 5 and Nancy Berenice, age 4.

Rufino Contreras was a husky man, known for his gentleness and thoughtfulness. His brother Fortunato said: "He was a very exceptional person. In a sense he was better than us...He never had any fights with anyone. He got along with everybody...and had lots of friends among his fellow workers." Rosa says of her husband: "He was so good, he never threatened me or scolded me.... and he loved his children so much." —L.A. TIMES, 2/15/79



Maximina Contreras & Son at Funeral

—Kathy Murphy Photo

On February 15, 1979, a foreman and two other Mario Saikhon employees were indicted for the murder of Rufino Contreras. Despite the indictments, farm workers worry a lot about justice in their grower-dominated valley. Rufino's father says: "There has been an injustice done. Now they have released these men on very low bail and I don't know what is going to happen...If we don't have justice, what is going to happen to the workers?" —L.A. TIMES, 2/15/79 *N.B. All charges were dropped April 24, after a four day preliminary hearing. Judge Lenhardt refused to speak w/ reporters. He did claim that there was 'insufficient evidence'! This despite the fact that over a dozen farm workers witnessed the event.*

Independent Investigation Follows Death of Striker

Following the death of Rufino Contreras, Cesar Chavez invited a group of religious, labor and community leaders to come to the Imperial Valley to investigate the events which led to Rufino's murder. The group worked for two days and spoke with all the parties involved except the growers, who refused to meet. Msgr. George Higgins of the U.S. Catholic Conference spoke for the special task force and cited several factors which contribute to tension in the strike: the use of dogs and armed guards by the growers, the importation of strikebreakers, the inability of strikers to talk with strikebreakers, harassment of various types by union and grower representatives and high unemployment in the valley.

The task force recommended a "structured system of access" to the strikebreakers by union representatives and the elimination of all firearms in the fields. Other members of this investigating task force were: Rabbi Joseph Glaser, Executive Vice President, Central Conference of American Rabbis, New York City; W.E. Roehl, Ass't. Director, Dept. of Organization & Field Services, AFL-CIO, Washington, D.C.; Mary Warner, Voter Education & Research Action, Inc. in Sacramento and Domingo Rodriguez, member of the Board of Fire Commissioners, L. A. County Fire Department.

Death Of UFW Member In Kern Row Is Accident

The death of United Farm Workers Union member Nagi Daifullah, 24, outside a Lamont bar Aug. 14 after a scuffle with a Kern County sheriff's deputy was an accident, a Kern County coroner's jury ruled.

The decision came Wednesday about 5 p.m., 30 minutes after the five-man, four-woman panel began its deliberations.

Before the ruling, UFW officials had contended that Daifullah died of injuries suffered when he was struck on the head with a flashlight by deputy Gilbert Cooper.

But the coroner's jury, after hearing 23 witnesses, found otherwise.

In his testimony, Cooper said he was trying to get a crowd to disperse from in front of the Smoke House bar in Lamont when he was struck on the left cheek by a bottle.

Several other witnesses testified that Daifullah threw the bottle, while some said it did not hit Cooper.

Daifullah ran down the street and Cooper swung at him once with a flashlight and missed. He swung again and hit Daifullah on the right shoulder with the flashlight, according to Cooper's testimony.

When Daifullah reached the curb, he went down, striking his head on the pavement, Cooper testified.

Kern County Coroner Richard Gervais, who presided over the proceedings, said neurosurgeon Dr. Robert Raskind testified that "he was very positive that a flashlight in no way could have caused" the kind of injury that Daifullah died of.

The fractures on the left side of Daifullah's head were linear fractures. "Had he been hit with a flashlight, this would have caused de-

pressed fractures," Gervais said.

He added that pathologist, Dr. Dominick Ambrosecchi, confirmed the type of injuries Daifullah suffered. At the time, Daifullah was taken to the Kern General Hospital and died after brain surgery.

According to Gervais, no witnesses testified that Daifullah was hit on the left side of the head where the fractures occurred. "They all said he was hit on the top or the right side," the coroner said.

A group of 10 to 12 UFW witnesses who saw the incident but did not cooperate with Kern investigators said Daifullah was struck on the back of the head, Gervais said.

"Other witnesses, those who were also bystanders, said he was hit on the right shoulder," the coroner added.

"There was no evidence whatsoever from the doctors that there were any blows to the back of the head or top," Gervais said, though there was a bruise on Daifullah's right shoulder.

The death of Daifullah, a green card worker from Yemen, is still being investigated by the Federal Bureau of Investigation, but its report has not been made public.

UFW attorney Jerry Cohen called the decision a "bad verdict." He added, "There's no way you could call that an accident. Clearly it was death at the hands of another."

He said the union plans to take the matter to the FBI and the Kern County district attorney to seek an indictment against Cooper. "There's just as much justice in Kern County as there was for civil rights workers in the South," he said.

3/12/79

TELEGRAM

HONORABLE GRIFFIN BELL
ATTORNEY GENERAL OF THE
UNITED STATES
DEPARTMENT OF JUSTICE
WASHINGTON, D.C.

THE UNITED FARM WORKERS OF AMERICA, AFL-CIO CALLS ON THE JUSTICE DEPARTMENT TO LAUNCH AN IMMEDIATE INVESTIGATION INTO THE BRUTAL MURDER FEBRUARY 10, 1979 OF UFW STRIKER RUFINO CONTRERAS. EXTENSIVE INTERVIEWS WITH EYEWITNESSES TO THE SLAYING AND OTHER FARM WORKERS HAVE RAISED SERIOUS QUESTIONS AS TO WHETHER LAST MONTH'S INCIDENT WAS THE RESULT OF A CONSPIRACY AND WHETHER THAT CONSPIRACY DEPRIVED BROTHER CONTRERAS OF HIS CIVIL RIGHTS UNDER THE U.S. CONSTITUTION. IT IS OUR HOPE THAT A FEDERAL INVESTIGATION WILL DETERMINE WHETHER A CONSPIRACY EXISTED

BETWEEN MARIO SAIKHON, THE WESTERN GROWERS ASSN., THE IMPERIAL VALLEY SHERIFF GROWERS ASSN., IMPERIAL COUNTY/OREN FOX, SAIKHON'S IMPORTED STRIKEBREAKERS AND THE THREE SAIKHON AGENTS FORMALLY CHARGED WITH MURDER IN THE DEATH OF RUFINO CONTRERAS. IF SUCH AN INVESTIGATION IS BEGUN, OUR UNION WILL COOPERATE WITH APPROPRIATE JUSTICE DEPT. INVESTIGATORS. WE LOOK FORWARD TO YOUR RESPONSE.

CESAR E. CHAVEZ, PRESIDENT
UNITED FARM WORKERS OF AMERICA, AFL-CIO
LA PAZ, KEENE, CA 93531
Additional Points:

- Witnesses agree that three Saikhon agents fired in concert; it was an organized act.
- After Rufino Contreras was hit in the face with a .38 caliber bullet, Saikhon's men continued to fire on the retreating farm workers; continuing gunfire kept strikers and family members from going to Rufino's aid for more than an hour after he was shot.
- Saikhon told sheriff's department day before (February 9) shooting that there would be no harvesting that day at field where muder took place. No sheriff's deputies on the scene day of shooting.
- Saikhon foreman San Diego known to sheriff's dept. to have brandished weapons and shot at strikers within few days before killing.

Victi Lopez



RENE LOPEZ (1962 - 1983)

On September 21, 1983, Rene Lopez, a worker at Sikkema Dairy near Fresno, was shot to death at point blank range by company goons hired to harass the strikers who were attempting to bring in the UFW to represent them.

A few weeks earlier, Rene's co-workers had asked the 21 year old native of Nuevo Leon, to be their spokesperson, since he was bilingual, having graduated from Carruthers High School in Fresno County. Rene, reported by his high school classmates as a gentle person who didn't get into fights, respectfully told the dairy owner that below minimum wage for 60 hour workweeks was unacceptable and he requested a modest increase.

Fred Sikkema's cruel response was that he intended to fire some of the workers and force the remaining workers to do fires' job as well as their own...for the same pay. Dismayed, Rene and a committee approached the

UFW to ask how to proceed. Roberto Escutia in the UFW's Horticulture Division was assigned to help.

He advised the workers to file for a union representation election, so that retaliation the company would take against them, for concerted activity, could be proven to be unfair labor practices for supporting the UFW.

Since the company threatened to fire some of the workers, they decided to strike while at the same time petitioning the ALRB to conduct an election for union representation.

Sikkema's response to the strike was to hire goons, including Dietmar Ahsmann, his brother-in-law, and Donato Estrada, a Mexican known to be involved with drugs.

On the day of the election, minutes after Rene had cast his ballot for the UFW, Ahsmann and Estrada drove by on their way to meet with Sikkema in one of the dairy buildings. Five minutes later they drove back in the car to where the strikers were gathered and they motioned to Rene to come over to the car.

Quietly Rene walked over to the passenger side of the car being driven by Ahsmann. When he was within three feet of the car, Estrada pulled a gun and shot Rene "a quemar-ropa," at point blank range, in the face.

Estrada then began to aim his gun at the other strikers and one of those strikers told me he heard Rene's last words after being shot, "No los mates!" ("Don't kill them!") Even mortally wounded, Rene was still advocating for his fellow workers.

Ahsmann was acquitted for his part and Estrada was sentenced to 7 years in prison. The DA, however, refused to charge Fred Sikkema for his role in hiring and directing the killers.

Dolores Lopez, Rene's mother tells us that Rene was very proud of his association with the union. When he was still in his mid-teens in high school, he had travelled to Stockton to support a big UFW tomato strike, as well as to learn more about the UFW.

During the first days of the election campaign, Dolores says that her young son came in with a big smile, saying proudly but with sincerity, "Today I am a man. Today I signed a UFW authorization card to become a member of the United Farm Workers."

Hundreds of workers and supporters joined the Lopez family in Fresno. There were flower baskets and funeral wreaths bearing names of UFW committees from throughout California, from Delano, Coachella, Napa, Salinas, and Calexico from vegetable, citrus, grape, poultry, and other workers.

There was one small wreath that said "Querido Novio." ("Beloved Sweetheart"). They were supposed to have been married the weekend he was murdered.

STATEMENT BY CESAR E. CHAVEZ

On behalf of all of us here, we extend our deepest sympathies to Rene's family - his mother Dolores, his father Francisco, his brother Efren, his sister Lupe, his sister Rebecca, his sister Yolanda, his brother Juan Francisco, and his sisters Iliana (and Grace), and grandparents Fernando and Tomasa Lopez and Ignacio and Virginia Robles.

Thanks be to God, Rene's mother, father, brothers and sisters, whom he loved so much, were able to be with him at this bedside during his final hours. Rene left them a beautiful heritage of courage and father...a heritage that, please God, will sustain them, come what may, until they meet him again in paradise.

Rene Lopez's good deeds are known to all of you and, especially, to the members of his family....good deeds, above all of charity and kindness and human compassion. These good deeds go with him and live after him....and for that reason, his funeral this morning is an occasion not for gloom, much less for despair, but rather an opportunity to celebrate, in a spirit of Christian joy, Rene's life and the goodness and the mercy of God.

The Book of Wisdom tells us: "Length of days is not what makes age honorable, nor number of years the true measure of life. Understanding, this is a man's grey hairs. The virtuous man, though he died before his time, will find rest".

All who knew Rene Lopez as a personal friend or more immediately as a member of the family, can vouch for the fact that he had understanding. By this I mean that he had the gift of faith, the gift of knowing what is truly important in his life.

It was not possible for Rene to shut his eyes to situations of distress and of poverty which cry out to God, or to keep silent in the face of injustice. He was the kind of a man.

Rene was young, but he was wise beyond his years. He died in the prime of life, but the number of his years was not the true measure of his life. For this reason...regardless of the number of his days or the length of his years...he will find rest, for grace and mercy awaits the Chosen of the Creator, and protection awaits God's Holy Ones.

Rene was young, but he had already felt the call to social justice. His mother, Dolores, said that he came home one day with the stub of his union authorization card, showed it to her, and said, "Here is my first union card, now I am important, now I am a man."

But Rene's first union card was also his last...He will never enjoy the blessings of youth... He will fulfill all the promise others saw in him...He will never pass on his great love to his own sons and daughters.

Rene has been taken away from us in the prime of his life..., before he could share the full measure of his talents and goodness with the world about him.

Rene is gone because he dared to hope and because he dared to live out his hopes.

Rarely do men and women choose to die in the midst of their quest for freedom. They wish to be truly free and to live more fully in this life.

But death comes to all of us and we do not get to choose the time or the circumstances of our dying. The hardest thing of all is to die rightly. Rene Lopez died rightly; he is a martyr for justice.

Rene is at peace with God. He has given all that he can give.

But how many more farm workers must fall? How many more tears must be shed? How many more martyrs must there be before we can be free? When will the day come when the joy becomes great and the grief becomes small?

The answer, my brothers and sisters, is in our hands. The answer is in our hands.

We who live must now walk an extra mile because Rene has lived and died for his and our dreams. We who keep on struggling for justice for farm workers must carry in our hearts his sacrifice.

We must try to live as he lived...We must keep alive his hopes...and fulfill, with our own sacrifices, his dreams. We must take Rene into our hearts and promise that we will never forget his sacrifice.

Rene's father, Francisco, looking down on his fallen son, said these words: "When he was born, I received him with a kiss, and...now I give him back to God with a kiss."

"Happy are those who died in the Lord: let them rest from their labor for their good deeds go with them."
Amen.

Young farmworker's life ends at 12:45 p.m.



Dolores Lopez caresses her son Rene's cheek after doctors determined he was killed by a shot.

Chavez claims 'conspiracy' in Lopez death

by DIANNE SOLIS

see staff writer

Fresno Bee 9

United Farm Workers President Chavez and the general counsel of the farm labor board traded charges Thursday. Young Caruthers dairy worker was dead after a shooting at a farm labor el

Chavez charged that dairy owner Jikkema conspired with two other men to kill 1-year-old Rene Lopez who had just won UFW representation election.

"It's a conspiracy from the word go," Chavez, surrounded by activists from the Fresno County Chicano community,

Lopez

Continued from Page A1

employees, said state farm labor agency officials. Ahsmann is the brother-in-law of Sikkema.

Tension continues to mount around the first shooting death during a farm labor election in the history of the ALRA — a law designed to bring peace to the fields. Among the developments:

• Workers at another Sikkema dairy in Delano, the site of an August UFW election, stayed off the job Thursday saying they feared more violence. Late Thursday night, they sought an injunction forbidding the carrying of guns by management agents.

• Top ALRB officials, including the chief of the ALRB's unfair labor practices division, stepped up their investigation of events surrounding the election and the murder by going directly to Caruthers.

• Chavez demanded that elections no longer be held on management property saying workers were "at their mercy." Chavez also asked for police protection during those elections.

• Leaders in Fresno County's largest Hispanic organization joined Chavez in denouncing the shooting as an "atrocious" and said "there seems to be a conspiracy."

"It is a sad fact," Chavez said, "that 21 years after we began organizing our union and eight years after the Agricultural Labor Relations Act was enacted, farm workers still have to be shot because they dare to organize and stand up for their rights."

It is not better wages and better working conditions that growers "fear," Chavez said. "These growers fear the union because they will not deal with an organization led by and composed of Mexicans."

Venancio Gaona of El Concilio de Fresno, an umbrella organization of Hispanic groups, said the Hispanic community would not "tolerate or accept the murder of innocent human beings."

In Sacramento, the five-member ALRB and Stirling expressed "deep regret over the deplorable tragedy."

But the statement issued by the board and general counsel, who have frequently been at odds this year, was careful to note that it has not been determined if the worker was shot because of union activities.

Chavez said again Thursday that there was no doubt in his mind that the shooting was labor-related.

General counsel Stirling said additional agents have been assigned "to determine if the shooting had anything to do with the election."

If it did, Stirling said, "There's no question it could have a chilling effect [on other elections], but you've got to establish that the grower had something to do with it."

Stirling added it will be "pretty hard to link the shooting to the election very quickly."

About 15 Delano workers from a Sikkema dairy came to the Fresno ALRB's office Thursday afternoon to give declarations designed to support a Superior Court request for an injunction against company employees carrying weapons.

The UFW won an election there in August but the company has challenged the results. The workers said since the election, foremen at the Delano dairy began carrying guns. Three workers have been fired since the election, they said, while security guards carrying guns have been hired.

In a pre-election conference Wednesday night involving an election at the Papagni Fruit Co. of Clovis, UFW organizers requested that the election be held on neutral ground.

"When we go to grower's property, we are at their mercy," Chavez said. "We are usually isolated from civilization."

Chavez also said the UFW wants police protection at the upcoming election. "We don't want this thing to happen again. How would you like to have a city election and think you might be shot at?"

ALRB officials said they are looking for a neutral location for the election. They said they expect to have 10 agents conducting the election Saturday involving nearly 500 workers at Papagni.

At a UFW decertification election Saturday in Lathrop, the ALRB's regional office plans to send four agents. The election involves about 50 workers.

Chavez has charged that the ALRB did not have enough staff to conduct the election. There were 25 voters involved and two ALRB agents.

Stirling denied charges made by the United Farm Workers that budget cuts by the Deukmejian administration resulted in fewer board agents conducting the election.

"Two is what we normally would have assigned for an election with 20 people voting," Stirling said.

UFW officials prepared their version of events leading up to the shooting. Sikkema's version differed dramatically.

The UFW said the company announced they planned to layoff workers and cut wages on Sept. 13. Company foremen allegedly told workers anyone who tried to bring in a union would be fired immediately.

Sikkema denied all three counts. He said he sold about 300 of his cows and had 500 left. He said he told workers that there would be less work and that they would have to bring the cows to their milking stalls themselves.

Workers struck on the 15th. Sikkema said workers "walked off" their jobs.

Sikkema said he had to get "temporary help" because the dairy cows were full of milk.

And Sikkema described Rene Lopez as a "friend of ours."

"I considered him pro-management. We had pretty strong indications he was going to vote for us." But Sikkema added "Spanish people do stick together" and that Lopez told him he would be beaten up by the others if he voted for no union.

UFW officials say Lopez was a leader in the drive for union representation. And Lopez' name is one of eight names listed as strikers filed in connection with an election petition at the ALRB's Fresno office.