

BEYOND “PESTICIDES AND BEYOND”

THE PARTNERSHIP OF CREATIVE WRITING AND SERVICE LEARNING
IN ENGENDERING AND PERPETUATING SOCIAL ACTIVISM

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DEDICATION

To my family and Kim.
You have all enriched my life beyond measure.

To my professors, for your teaching, wisdom and support.

To the millions of farmworkers who struggle daily to feed us all.

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It is also important to leave a legacy for the children and generations to come of the important history of farm workers who fought for dignity and won, [and] to not be ashamed of parents and grandparents who worked in the fields. Creative writing helps insure this legacy shines and is not buried in obscure academic documents that few people would have any interest in reading.

Mary Mecartney and Roberto Acuna
2002

Everyone wants to be acknowledged and respected as a decent person, even when you are covered with dirt.

Interviewee Sabino Lopez
The Fight in the Fields
Susan Ferriss and Ricardo Sandoval
1997

The environmental threat to farmworkers is not just rooted in class exploitation: it is also firmly grounded in a racist occupational segregation that powerfully shapes the nature of the farm labor force. . . . This racist pattern of occupational segregation has become a dominant feature of commercial agriculture in the United States.

Marion Moses
“Farmworkers and Pesticides”
Confronting Environmental Racism
Robert D. Bullard, ed.
1993

This paper is a direct offspring of work completed by myself and the other students in “Pesticides and Beyond: The Enduring Legacy,” the fall 2001 HCOM 432S service learning course. In “Pesticides and Beyond,” by means of class discussions, assigned readings and our own research, we examined farmworker issues, especially regarding their exposure to pesticides. During the service learning component of 432S, we visited and worked with local community partners that assist farmworkers. These partners included United Farm Workers (UFW), California Rural Legal Assistance (CRLA), *Clinica de Salud del Valle de Salinas* (Clinica),

CHAMACOS, and Watsonville Law Center.¹ During our visits, we participated in research, fieldwork, the production of patient-education material, and office work such as filing and data entry. We then used our service learning experiences, discussions, reading, and research to inform our writing. The result is a collection of social action art entitled *From Our Backs to Your Tables: Fruits of Injustice*. For my Capstone project, collaborator Claire Porter and I chose and edited selections from the collection. In addition, we will secure funding in order to publish in book form an anthology of the collection before Porter graduates in the fall of 2002.

In this paper I will examine how the partnering of service learning with creative writing produces and perpetuates social activism in connection with the issues of farmworkers. This examination begins with a personal creative nonfiction narrative that I use to explain how certain experiences can influence the way some of us think about—or ignore—farmworkers and their struggles. I then discuss the preparations made by students from the 432S course before placement at our service learning sites. These preparations included classroom discussions of the historical, social, cultural, political, and ideological foundations of farmworker issues, especially with respect to pesticide exposure as a form of environmental racism; critical cultural analyses of how the United States uses power, privilege, and prejudice to oppress farmworkers; and research each of us conducted on farmworker issues such as working and housing conditions, pesticides, immigration laws, labor policies, and access to health care. I will show how our discussions and research prepared us—most of us are White and therefore enjoy the attendant privileges—for entry into a world where the primary language is not English, where the dominant ideology is

¹ CHAMACOS, which means small children in Mexican Spanish, is the Center for the Health Assessment of Mothers and Children of Salinas. CHAMACOS conducts research on the exposure of children to pesticides. CHAMACOS is a partnership between several organizations, including the School of Public Health at University of California Berkeley, the South County Outreach Effort, Clinica de Salud del Valle Salinas, Natividad Medical Center, and the Monterey County Health Department (CHAMACOS). California Rural Legal Assistance provides poor rural Californians with no-cost legal services and a variety of community education and outreach programs (CRLA). *Clinica de Salud del Valle de Salinas* is a group of health clinics providing a variety of services for low-income people throughout the Salinas Valley (Clinica).

based largely on Catholicism, and where hard-working people of color, the vast majority of whom are Mexican or Mexican-American, struggle to overcome the institutionalized racism inherent in American society. I will explore the process by which we used our classroom discussions, research and service-learning experiences “to bring the voices and lived experiences of those affected by health care and farm labor practices and policies . . . into the center of the community, to use art to educate, to promote civic dialogue” (Garcia, “Pesticides and Beyond,” 1). Finally, I will argue that social action writing promotes social justice by naming and confronting social injustices, and by persuading others to become politicized and engaged in the struggle for a peaceful and egalitarian world for us all.

My roots lie deep in the Northern Plains, in the grain fields of North Dakota, where my mother and father grew up on family farms that produced wheat, barley, corn, oats and flax. The respective farms spread over the gently rolling hill country near Rugby, the geographical center of North America. My father, of Irish, Scottish and Mohawk descent, and my Norwegian and German mother, worked hard milking cows, feeding chickens, bringing in wood for the kitchen stove, and performing the many other chores necessary to maintain a farm.

After meeting in high school, my parents eventually married and had five children. As a family, we often visited the family farms of my parents where my siblings and I and our cousins were free to play hide and seek in haylofts and hay stacks, ride horses, drive tractors, and pick sweet peas and blackberries. We feasted on roast beef, ham, chicken, potatoes, gravy, pancakes, eggs, milk, chokecherry jelly on fresh-baked bread, vine-ripened vegetables and fruits right out of the garden, rhubarb tort, and, best of all, Grandma’s buns.

Some of the most vivid memories of my life as a boy in the Midwest are from the month

I lived on the farm of Uncle Johnny, my father's brother. Johnny and his wife, Auntie Edie, their two daughters, Linda and Kathy, and two sons, John Junior and Billy, were probably a typical North Dakota farm family. They butchered their own chickens and cattle, raised wheat, and tended animals and a vegetable garden. During the month that I lived there, I witnessed (and sometimes participated) in the hard work that serves as the bedrock of a small family farm. I also had a lot of fun playing with my cousins and visiting nearby relatives. However, because I was a child at the time, my notions of farm life developed in a specific way due to my status as a young, carefree, privileged White male.

Around that time, in 1962 when I was eight years old, our family had moved to an agricultural region in the Red River Valley near Glyndon, Minnesota. My father was a Lutheran minister who preached at three churches on revolving Sundays. One evening at dusk, as he drove to church, a ten-ton truck loaded with sugar beets plowed into his car and killed him. Viewing the scene of the accident the following morning, the sugar beets strewn throughout the intersection where my father died seared an enduring image into my mind. Only recently, when reading *Barefoot Heart*, a true account of a migrant farmworker family written by Elva Treviño Hart, did I learn that Mexican families tended the sugar beets that helped kill my father and that surrounded the parsonage where we lived.

My romanticized view of life on my relatives' farms and the fact that I was ignorant of the migrant farmworkers who surrounded my family in Minnesota are indicative of both the misconceptions many of us have of farm life and of the invisibility of the farmworkers of color that provide the bulk of the labor in the agricultural industry. Our misconceptions and lack of awareness allow us to enjoy the fruits of farmworker labor while we ignore the intrinsic injustices of our system of agriculture. We see the fruits and vegetables on the shelves of our

grocery stores without seeing the farmworkers who toil amidst deadly toxins in order to produce our food. We buy our produce without considering that a farmworker family earns only seven to ten thousand dollars each year (Martin and Taylor 1009). We often eat thoughtlessly, savoring our food but ignorant of the fact that farmworkers have many health conditions that are typical of those who lack proper nutrition (Villarejo 30-31).

After moving to the Salinas Valley in 1967 when I was thirteen, I slowly became aware of many of the issues facing farmworkers. During the lettuce strikes and grape boycotts of the 1960s and 1970s, I remember seeing farmworkers picketing grocery stores. I read Rachel Carson's *Silent Spring* while in high school, so I knew of the dangers of pesticides decades ago. During recent years I have read one or two local newspapers daily, so I learned more about the poor living and working conditions of farmworkers. For example, several times over the past fifteen years, I saw the photos and articles in local newspapers documenting farmworkers living in hand-hewn caves dug into hillsides. However, although I have been an anti-war and environmental activist for decades, I never got involved in local farmworker issues. I merely read about them and was one of thousands of commuters who watched farmworkers from a distance as I drove between jobs and homes in Salinas, Carmel Valley and the Monterey Peninsula. Finally, in "Pesticides and Beyond," forty years after my childhood experiences of living on a farm and amidst agricultural laborers I never saw, I had the opportunity to become involved in and write about the issues of farmworkers.

"Pesticides and Beyond: The Enduring Legacy" is an important course that allowed us to see more clearly into the world of farmworkers, where vibrant people struggle to live with dignity and pride. 432S shines a light into the dark corners of the agribusiness machinery, where human beings labor and live in inhuman conditions, replaceable cogs in a bottom-line

agricultural system that has little regard for those whose labor is both literally and figuratively the backbone of the industry. Because of its focus on social injustice, 432S helps to bring knowledge and understanding into the minds and hearts of those of us on the outside, we who see but do not act. The course also allows us to become involved in farmworker issues in practical ways. Ultimately, it provides a forum in which we share our feelings and knowledge with our communities and the world through social action art.

One important aspect of HCOM 432S is its focus on the underpinnings of farmworker issues: the power, privilege and oppression inherent in an American society that engenders favoritism toward those of a certain race, class, gender, and religion. These characteristics of our society, which many of us deny, take for granted, or ignore out of ignorance, form the cement in the foundation of our nation, a foundation that paved over the blood and bones of the Native Americans, African slaves, Mexicans, Hispanos and many others we sacrificed on the altar of “progress” as we built America. Upon this foundation we constructed institutions grounded in a persistent racism and classism used to justify imperialist ideologies such as Manifest Destiny. Such ideology allows elites with power and privilege to view people of color—or the masses of any nation, including the United States—as an ignorant and dangerous rabble that needs the benevolent guidance of its superiors (Chomsky 17-18). This ideology forms a twisted moral imperative that perpetuates vast intolerance and manifests in institutions and laws that favor Whites and crush people of color under a grindstone of poverty and limited opportunity.

In discussing power, oppression, prejudice and privilege, we looked at how elites who control our governmental, corporate, economic and ideologic institutions wield and hoard power. Elites use their power to oppress the masses through discriminatory laws and by using an obedient media as an efficient system of propaganda (Herman and Chomsky xi). Oppression

occurs because of prejudice, which we defined as bias against others based on characteristics such as race, religion, political persuasion, education, and class. Power, oppression and prejudice are the roots of privilege, which allows one access to social benefits and acceptance as “one of us” rather than “the other.” We agreed that in America, privilege—especially for those of us who are of European ancestry—offers the following benefits: greater access to health care, education, employment, housing, and political representation; use of the primary language; citizenship and residency; freedom, if one is White, from racist laws and penal systems; and being able to afford to spend more time with our families and on vacations.

In recognizing how power and prejudice operate in granting privilege, we understand that privilege is a form of oppression since it favors some sectors of society while penalizing others. In recognizing that we oppress others because of our privilege, we learn compassion. In learning compassion, we seek connections with others based on love, mutual respect, and a desire to build a better world together. However, we learned to be cautious so that our privilege does not twist our compassion into a need to “fix” problems for farmworkers. Farmworkers need our advocacy, but, like people everywhere, they are capable of helping themselves if empowered.

We were fortunate in our course to be able to watch *Common Man, Uncommon Vision: The Cesar Chavez Story*, a film that introduced us to the visionary, non-violent ideals that Cesar Chavez and Dolores Huerta used in establishing the United Farm Workers, the union that empowered thousands of farmworkers laboring in an abusive system of agricultural. Our introduction to Chávez included his essay “Farm Workers at Risk,” where he writes, “All my life, I have been driven by one dream, one goal, one vision: To overthrow a farm-labor system in this nation that treats farm workers as if we are not important human beings. Farm workers are

not agricultural implements or beasts of burden to be used and discarded” (Chavez 169). Without Chávez’s unwavering commitment to human rights for farmworkers, their lives today might be far worse than they are. For example, because of Chavez’s concern about pesticides, “it is of interest that the first ban on DDT in the U.S. was not by the EPA in 1972, but in a 1967 United Farm Workers’ union contract with a California grape grower” (Moses, “Pesticide-Related Problems,” 127).

Chavez’s essay is from *Confronting Environmental Racism*, in which editor and contributing author Robert D. Bullard writes that environmental racism has roots in the imperial ethics and values surrounding the “conquest” of the land and its people and the glorification of the colonization process in our literature. Rather than listening to and learning from Native Americans, who cared for the land for centuries, European colonists chose to control, dominate, tame and develop the “wilderness” for their material comfort and profit [. . .]. (9)

The ethics of imperialism allow elites to view not only the “wilderness” but also its inhabitants (and people of color in general) as a resource to be conquered, subjugated and used in making elites rich and comfortable. Such ideology results in people of color bearing an unequal burden with respect to the nation’s pollution problem. For example, industrial corporations in collusion with government agencies target poor communities of color for toxic waste disposal and polluting industries (Bullard 3). Regarding farmworkers, American agriculture has always depended on both the importation of ethnic minorities and their exploitation as a source of cheap labor. In “Farmworkers and Pesticides,” Marion Moses writes, “In 1951, the U.S. Congress passed Public Law 78, giving the importation of Mexican nationals for the profit of private industry the sanction of federal law (1993, 164). The resulting *bracero* program, “operated by a

grower-government alliance, came to dominate the farm labor market” (London and Anderson 10). After the program ended in 1964, complicity between state and federal governments and agribusiness resulted in increased “institutionalization of illegal importation of unprotected migrant labor to be ruthlessly exploited and poisoned” (Moses, “Farmworkers and Pesticides,” 165). The continued exploitation of farmworkers and their disproportionate exposure to pesticides—a reality that exists partly because of the incestuous relationship between agribusiness and government agencies such as the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency and the U.S. Department of Agriculture—is environmental racism in its most insidious form.

In preparing to interact with our community partners, we discussed the cultural differences between privileged university students, and the Mexicans and Mexican Americans that work as employees of our partners and as farmworkers. We examined these differences in order to behave appropriately during our interactions, especially considering that we represented California State University Monterey Bay, the Service Learning Institute, and the Institute for Human Communication. Although some of us had no direct interactions with farmworkers, we would be in situations in which farmworkers were present.

Because our professor, Diana Garcia, grew up in a farmworker family, and some of the students in 432S had relatives who were farmworkers, we learned important “inside information” about the lives of farmworkers that assisted us in our preparations. We learned that, because we were university students, farmworkers might regard us with some suspicion because most of us are privileged Whites and therefore representative of United States bureaucracies—the Immigration and Naturalization Service and the Border Patrol, for example—that farmworkers mistrust. We also learned that farmworkers might regard us with some respect because of our status as university students. However, we would earn their respect only if we offered it in

return. We could show our respect, for example, by dressing conservatively and avoiding direct eye contact, behaviors that might appear disrespectful or aggressive.

We did encounter some problems with the service learning component of 432S. Most of us did not speak Spanish, or did not speak it fluently, so we could only assist our community partners with activities conducted in English. All of our partners operate within strict budget and staffing constraints, so it was often difficult to schedule meetings with busy staff members. Many 432S students are young, so employees of our partners might have perceived them as lacking the responsibility necessary for working with organizations where staff is dedicated and serious about its work. Some employees were uncertain of who we were and why we were there, and may have been suspicious of our intentions since we represented an institution associated with White privilege. Staff might have worried that we could learn something at their site that would be used against them in some way. Some of the employees worried about confidentiality issues regarding client information, since students at some sites were asked to handle client files containing medical records.

In addition to potential suspicions and uncertainties among the staff of our partners, our own insecurities and shyness may have been responsible for some of the difficulty encountered in placing us at service learning sites. Many of us were uncertain of our abilities to assist our partners in meaningful ways, so perhaps some of us were not assertive enough in pursuing placement. Some of this uncertainty could be related to youth and a lack of experience in dealing with people in new situations (The older students had fewer problems in developing working relationships with their partners.). For whatever reason, several students were not placed with a partner until the semester was well underway, making it difficult for them to accumulate the thirty hours required to fulfill their service learning contracts.

432S students experienced a variety of emotions regarding our placement at service learning sites. We were afraid that we would be shunned because of our skin color or inherent privilege, afraid that we might act in inappropriate ways out of ignorance, afraid and frustrated because of the language barrier, afraid that we would interfere with the established routines of our partners, afraid that we would be intruders who had to be tolerated because of a service learning agreement. Some of us were disappointed at the tasks our partners assigned to us. Filing documents or entering data into a computer database made some of us feel invisible, even under-appreciated. Many of us felt unsure that we could give voice to farmworkers in our creative writing. Some of us felt like outsiders, impostors. After all, most of us are privileged Whites attempting to re-create the world of farmworkers, a world that we can never fully understand.

Personally, I am a very sensitive and fearful person on many levels, and this makes me respond in certain ways in certain situations and with certain people. Much of what I perceive in the world around me is colored by these responses. Therefore, I often react (or overreact) to someone in a way that may have little to do with what she is actually feeling or thinking. For example, I usually can easily “read” someone, but in my own mind I may amplify what he is thinking or feeling so that it fits in with my fear and insecurity. Regarding my status as a privileged White male entering an Hispanic world, I perceive that there is often a lot of anger—repressed or overt—directed at me because I am one of the oppressors, one of those who used violence to wrest a vast amount of land from Mexico, one who thinks I am better, one who has more opportunity. I am a living symbol of much of the pain and suffering my culture has caused another.

Before we began our service-learning work, we visited some of our community partners. Our first visit was to the administrative office of Clinica where the CEO, Max Cuevas,

introduced us to the Board of Directors, all of them dressed in the conservative style found in most corporate boardrooms. I felt somewhat intimidated in this situation, since I was unaware that our visit would include our introduction during a board meeting of maybe twenty-five people conducting serious business. However, Cuevas made us feel welcome, and told us how Clinica provides health care to tens of thousands of farmworkers and other low-income families from Castroville to King City. He spoke of his interest in social justice, and we could see that Clinica is an institution that engages in social justice daily, helping those who our society ignores.

We also visited California Rural Legal Assistance. At the CRLA office in Salinas, attorney Mike Meuter and his staff spoke about their work in helping farmworkers and their families fight abuses in the agricultural industry. We watched a presentation consisting of recent slides showing farmworkers living in hand-hewn caves in eucalyptus groves; living in dilapidated housing with pesticide containers stored nearby; working in fields posted with ☠Danger Peligro☠ signs warning against entry due to pesticide applications; bent all the way over in order to weed by hand, nearly three decades after CRLA helped force the state to ban *el cortito*, the short-handled hoe; and working near tractors operating without drivers.

After viewing the CRLA slide show, many of us were appalled at the conditions in which farmworkers live and work. Some of us were outraged that so many hardworking laborers responsible for nearly \$30 billion of California's economy should be living in poverty (*The Bounty* 9). Some of us were filled with sadness and compassion, even horror, seeing other human beings treated like beasts of burden. Some of us fell into a cynical funk, realizing that, in spite of the gains made because of visionaries such as Cesar Chavez and Rachel Carson, there has been

so little fundamental change in our agricultural system and in the lives of those who struggle and suffer in order to feed our nation.

Working with our community partners gave us a greater understanding of the struggles of farmworkers, but also of the struggles of those committed to helping them. We witnessed the daily operations of understaffed and under-funded organizations that work tirelessly to provide needed services to a population that often falls through the cracks in a society that allows both massive state-funded “wealthfare” for the rich and an unraveling of the social welfare net that is protecting fewer of those who most need our help. Our service learning also allowed us to aid our partners in their efforts. Many of us performed what some would consider tedious tasks, but our work gave staff at our community partners a little more time to complete their important advocacy work. We probably all know the feeling of not having enough hours in a day, days in a week, weeks in a year, *et cetera*. Fortunately, for many of us, the feeling is transitory. For advocacy groups, the feeling is often the norm. For advocates, time is a precious commodity. By helping to provide a little more of this commodity, we felt gratified and useful, knowing we had made a difference, no matter how small.

The result of our learning about farmworker issues was uniform: we were roused and became engaged. Many 432S students reflected on a newfound desire to work for social justice for farmworkers. Jamie Escobar writes that it is “no longer an option” to remain unaware of the social injustices suffered by farmworkers. John Pomeroy writes, “it is now impossible for me to drive past a farm where workers are present, without looking for human rights violations,” and, “I found energy and determination to help in the effort to maximize human rights” (Pomeroy 2).

We realized that the daily choices we make can help farmworkers. Some of us were motivated to make “conscious” purchases of farm produce. For example, the UFW web site has a

page showing companies that use UFW union labor (UFW). Knowing that UFW workers enjoy better pay, benefits and working conditions than non-union employees makes it an easy choice to support the companies that use union labor. Many of us already purchase organic produce whenever possible, and it is possible that “buying organic” may help the transition to a more environmentally balanced and safe form of agriculture that will spare farmworkers from toiling amidst poisonous chemicals.

For our writing, we drew on all aspects of 432S: classroom discussions, our own research, our service learning experiences and our emotional reactions to the struggles of farmworkers. In writing our stories, poems and creative non-fiction, we tried to produce authentic voices and experiences that convey anger, compassion, sadness, horror, and, in some cases, hope. Infusing these emotions into works of social action writing creates the possibility of stirring these emotions in others, generating a common bond of awareness, a collective desire for social change and social justice, a dream of what all of us, together, will achieve if we reach down far enough into the wellspring of our common humanity to the center of life, to the love that always awaits us, even as we stumble over the greed, despair, hate, intolerance and violence that blind us to this truth.

“Social action writing is a form of critical inquiry and an act of social responsibility. It is writing that witnesses, that breaks silences, that transforms lives” (Garcia, “Pesticides and Beyond,” 1). Martín Espada states that social action writing promotes “political imagination [that] goes beyond protest to articulate an *artistry* of dissent” by which writers use “words that persuade by stirring the emotions, awakening the senses.” Referring specifically to poetry, Espada states, “A social horror is focused through the prism of the poet’s understanding, and the reader unfamiliar with the experience finds his or her *own* imagination engaged and politicized”

(*Poetry Like Bread* 17). In this way, “poetry has the capacity to create solidarity . . . and empathy [. . .]” (Espada, *Zapata’s Disciple* 10).

Social action writing is, then, a form of cultural activism promoting solidarity and empathy but also demanding change through envisioning a society without, for example, the fragmentation created by a class system. As Espada explains:

All of us write about class, not as abstraction, not with a capital C, but as a consequence of lived experience. As with any other poet, our poems are about family, friends, lovers, clients, community, self. The difference is that the people in these poems suffer from the class system rather than benefit from it.

. . . What do we want, finally, when we write from an awareness of class and its punishments? We want change, which, as Frederick Douglass pointed out, does not come without a demand. This is the poem as an act of political imagination, the poet not merely as prosecutor, but as visionary. (*Zapata’s Disciple* 11)

In describing cultural activism in a chapter in *Toxic Struggles* entitled “Cultural Activism and Environmental Justice,” Richard Hofrichter writes that cultural activists

dramatize and expose injustice to reinforce the voices of those subject to injustice, set new agendas, and sharpen understanding of alternative actions and their consequences. Their role is to clarify and expose power relations, transforming society by creating a common vision among diverse cultures. More important, many cultural activists involve the community in their work and place artistic imagination at the service of communities. (91-92)

For some authors, social action writing is a necessity. In discussing the process of writing

Barefoot Heart, Hart states, “I constantly had to write past the question ‘Why am I doing this?’ Would it matter if I wrote or not? Then I knew. If I didn’t write, I would die inside while my body was still alive” (Hart 236). Hart’s need to write to keep herself from dying spiritually illustrates the sustenance social action art provides to its creators. The souls of readers feed on this sustenance, too, and in this way, writers and readers share a common source of nourishment that maintains the solidarity, empathy and vision we all need as we strive for social justice.

Social action writing is self-sustaining because it also works by moving its readers to create new social action writing. CSUMB professor and poet Diana Garcia, who grew up living in farm labor camps, pays tribute to the authors who inspired her to create *When Living Was a Labor Camp*, in which she writes poetry about “the lives of women who made their way out of the camps, women whose histories left them ill-suited to succeed in the cities” (xiv). Garcia not only infuses her poetry with “political imagination” but also crafts a lush and sensual tapestry of the lives of farmworkers and their families. Her work in turn encourages many of us to create our own art. This process becomes a self-perpetuating cycle guaranteeing that new social activists will continue the tradition of spreading awareness of social injustice while demanding justice.

CSUMB plays an active role in sharing artistic imagination with surrounding communities. Capstone Festivals highlighting student works, public readings by students in Creative Writing and Social Action courses, CSUMB sponsorship of social action artists and cultural activists such as Martín Espada and collaborators Frances Payne Adler and Kira Carrillo Corser—these are some examples of how CSUMB promotes social justice locally, and internationally via the Internet.² “Pesticides and Beyond” reflects this tradition of support for and

² Examples of social action writing and cultural activism on the Internet at CSUMB: *Education as Emancipation: Women on Welfare Speak Out*, <http://hcom.csumb.edu/welfare/>; “A Matriot’s Dream: Healthcare for All,” <http://hcom.csumb.edu/matriot/exhibit/index.html>; E-zines (electronic magazines) of student work, <http://hcom.csumb.edu/showcase/ezines/index.html>.

promotion of cultural activism, and the course inspired many of us to carry on the tradition beyond our stay at CSUMB, to make the struggles of farmworkers and all oppressed peoples a permanent part of our lives.

In responding to the creative writing produced in 432S, Angie Tran, Assistant Professor of Political Economy and Director of the Pacific Rim Studies Institute at CSUMB, suggests that social action writing promotes cultural activism and social justice in our world while helping CSUMB “work towards the realization of [its] Vision Statement.” Tran writes,

First of all, based on vivid, real-life materials and sources, [creative writing] elaborates the daily plights and struggles of workers in general, and farm workers in particular, in detailed, personable and effective ways that most conventional scholarly writing could not do as well. Second, given the rich, innovative, succinct and often moving ways of delivering the messages, it conveys the most pertinent insights from the perspectives of workers themselves. I believe these valuable insights do not only inform but also inspire people to engage in practical actions to better the working and living conditions of the workers. A poem speaks volumes!

Roberto Acuna and Mary Mecartney are veteran activists who understand the importance of social action writing. Acuna participated in the California lettuce strikes during the 1970s, and Mecartney is a long-time UFW staff member. During a recent conversation, they discussed the importance of creative writing in documenting the struggles of farmworkers as part of the movement for social justice:

If struggles are not documented, they get repeated as the lessons learned are forgotten. If the farm worker story is not told, only the growers’ story will be

heard, and there will be no evidence of the struggle, suffering and sacrifice it took to non-violently make changes. It is also important to leave a legacy for the children and generations to come of the important history of farm workers who fought for dignity and won, and to not be ashamed of parents and grandparents who worked in the fields. Creative writing helps insure this legacy shines and is not buried in obscure academic documents that few people would have any interest in reading.

In writing about the dawning awareness in people confronted with social action art inspired by the struggles of single mothers and women on Welfare, Carol Amelia Lasquade tells us, “you will begin to understand that their intelligence, creativity and life force must not be suppressed. They must be allowed to move forward with hope for a brighter future for themselves and their children” (*Education as Emancipation* 3). This is the promise of creative writing as social action, that it will move us, profoundly, so that we no longer accept or ignore the injustices that surround us, but become engaged in creating a peaceful and equitable world wherein everyone has adequate food, shelter, education, health care, and income. We can create this world only if we can imagine it. Social action writing stimulates our imagination of this world and fuels the passion we need to create and sustain it.

“Pesticides and Beyond: The Enduring Legacy” provided its students with a unique blend of classroom learning and the kind of “real life” education that one learns only while outside the walls of educational institutions. Classroom discussions and research gave us knowledge of the historical, social, cultural, political, and ideological foundations of farmworker issues. Working on-site with our community partners allowed us to participate directly in assisting those who help farmworkers. Although some of us felt underutilized while performing office work such as filing

and data entry, all of us realized that our assistance allowed our partners greater freedom to use their expertise to conduct their advocacy work.

Some of us had experiences that brought us in direct contact with farmworkers and the conditions in which they live and work. However, even those of us who had no direct contact were able to transform our learning and experiences into social action art that we hope motivates others to engage in efforts to counter the enormous injustices suffered by the nation's farmworkers and their families. In addition, for the first time, many of us feel connected and committed to the fight for social and environmental justice for farmworkers. For me personally, every time I ride my bike or drive past fields full of hard-working farmworkers, or march again, as we did on April 7, 2002, in honor of Cesar Chavez and his legacy, or donate money to organizations such as the UFW or Pesticide Action Network, I will know that I make a difference, if only a small one. I can think of no better testament to the ability of 432S to enhance tendencies towards social justice in our world than to state this simple fact.

I believe the most important aspect of a service learning experience is that it allows us the opportunity to feel that we can make a difference in the lives of others and in ourselves. I believe making a difference in the lives of others—helping one another—is the reason we are here on this planet. The fulfillment that comes from making life easier for another is what fuels the efforts of many of us who want to make this a better world by making it better for everyone, not just for people of a certain class, color or nationality.

Porter and I, and the students from 432S represented in the collection that follows, hope that our writing increases your awareness of farmworkers and their issues, and gives wings to your imagination and passion for a better world.

APPENDIX

Some Facts about Farmworkers and Pesticides

- ✎ There are 3 to 6 million farmworkers in America today. Children and adolescents make up about 20-25%—up to 1.5 million—of that number (Mann).
- ✎ “In 1995, 90% of all migrant and seasonal farmworkers in the United States were Latino, and 70% of all U.S. farmworkers were born in Mexico” (Arcury, Quandt, and Dearry 430).
- ✎ Typical family income for farmworkers is between 7 and 10 thousand dollars. Therefore, “Over 60% of farm workers live in poverty” (McCurdy and Carroll 465).
- ✎ Farmworkers in Santa Cruz and Monterey County have the lowest annual income of any other occupational group (“Farmworker Housing” 23).
- ✎ Farmworkers in Santa Cruz and Monterey County live in housing that is “generally unaffordable to them” and which may be substandard (“Farmworker Housing” 24).
- ✎ Farmworkers in Santa Cruz and Monterey County live in housing with an average number of occupants nearly twice the state average (“Farmworker Housing” 17).
- ✎ Over 40% of farmworkers in Santa Cruz and Monterey County live in housing units that contain more than one family (Farmworker Housing” 16).
- ✎ Farmworkers account for nearly \$30 billion of the \$100 billion generated by agricultural production and related economic activity in California (*The Bounty* 2, 9).
- ✎ The “agriculture industry has one of the highest injury and fatality rates of all industries—second only to mining [. . .]” (Grieshop, Stiles and Villanueva 25).
- ✎ According to the data released by California Department of Pesticide Regulation (DPR), “Monterey County had more pesticide-related illnesses and injuries than any other California county in 2001” (Duman).

- ✎ “There are few published data on the workplace pesticide safety and sanitation conditions for farmworkers. . . . [Studies] strongly suggest that workplace safety and sanitation conditions are inadequate to protect workers” (Arcury *et al* 488).
- ✎ Farmworkers are “plagued by nagging health problems and [are] at high risk for serious diseases like heart disease, hypertension, stroke and diabetes” (Davison).
- ✎ Farmworkers are “at excess risk for cancers of the stomach, prostate, testes, and multiple myeloma. They also appeared to be at excess risk for cancers of the [mouth] and pharynx, lung, liver, and cervix” (Zahm 487).
- ✎ “Widely used pest-killing chemicals, in amounts routinely found in the environment in farm areas, seem to be capable of skewing thyroid hormones, which control how the brain of a fetus or young child develops. . . . [According to Wayne Porter], ‘Data suggest that we may be raising a generation of children with learning disabilities and hyperaggression’” (Cone).
- ✎ It is possible that “exposure to herbicides increases the probability of contracting Parkinson’s disease by a factor of five” (Porter).
- ✎ Acute pesticide poisoning “causes abdominal pain, nausea, dizziness, vomiting, headaches, and skin or eye problems. Chronic health outcomes include dermatitis, fatigue, sleep and memory disorders, anxiety . . . and birth defects” (Elmore 153).
- ✎ “Health effects of pesticide exposure . . . may include . . . disorientation, shock, respiratory failure, coma, and, in severe cases, death” (Arcury 430).
- ✎ “70 percent of [California’s agricultural] workers lack any form of health insurance and government-funded insurance programs, such as Healthy Families; Medi-Cal covers only 7 percent of these workers” (*The Bounty* 9).

- ✎ Pesticides include insecticides, herbicides, fungicides, rodenticides, nematocides, acaricides, molluscicides, piscicides, and avicides.
- ✎ Organophosphate pesticides were “Initially developed for use as biological weapons during World War II [. . .]” (Gordon).
- ✎ Approximately 890 active ingredients are registered as pesticides (“Pesticide Industry”).
- ✎ “In the U.S. in a typical year, about 4.5 billion pounds of chemicals are used as pesticides (measured on the basis of active ingredient)” (“Pesticide Industry”).
- ✎ There are approximately 90,000 pesticide products (About).
- ✎ Of the \$11.9 billion spent annually on pesticides, 70%—\$8.3 billion—was for use in agriculture (“Pesticide Industry”).
- ✎ All reports of spending on pesticides are based on estimates. “There is no national pesticide use reporting system in place in the U.S. [and] There is no program at EPA, nor at any other agency, devoted specifically to estimation of the overall pesticide market in quantitative and dollar terms each year.” (“Pesticide Industry”).
- ✎ The failure of the U.S. government in understanding the complexities of human exposure to pesticides has left it “in the insupportable position of claiming the safety of our food, water, air, and workplaces without the evidence to demonstrate these reassurances. [Therefore, the registration of pesticides by the government] was and continues to be an act of human experimentation” (Wargo 291).
- ✎ In 1995, 25 years after DDT was banned in the U.S., “researchers were still able to find it in the fatty tissues and blood of nearly 100% of humans” (Osburn, 13).

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CAPSTONE PROSPECTUS

Paul David Tuff

HCOM 475

Professor Paul Mason Fotsch

Adviser: Professor Diana Garcia

Section One

Working Title and Project Description

The working title of the Capstone project is “From Our Backs to Your Tables: Fruits of Injustice.” The project will be a collection of the social action writing we produced in the fall 2001 HCOM 432S course, “Pesticides and Beyond: The Enduring Legacy.” HCOM 432S gave us the opportunity to assist farmworker advocacy groups such as United Farm Workers, California Rural Legal Assistance, and *Clinica de Salud del Valle de Salinas*. Our work with these community partners raised our awareness of the many social issues—health, economic, labor, environmental, public policy—involving farmworkers and pesticides, especially in California. Our experiences with our partners, the research we conducted to learn more about the issues, as well as our reading of material such as *Silent Spring* and *Our Children’s Toxic Legacy*, provided fertile soil for the poems, stories, creative non-fiction, and images we created.

My Capstone project is a collaboration between Integrated Studies major Claire Porter and me. Claire and I will organize and edit the collection of student work, contribute our own work, write an introduction and possibly a foreword or afterword, seek funding, and find a publisher to print the collection in book form. The goal is to get the book published by May 24, 2002, the day of the Capstone Festival. However, if we are unable to get the book published by May, we will introduce the collection as a PowerPoint presentation, or in bound and printed form, or both. An alternative publication date is the fall of 2002 when Claire graduates. A later

publication date will allow us to refine the collection of material and secure more funding, which could translate into more copies to distribute.

Pesticides include insecticides, herbicides, fungicides, miticides, and rodenticides. Pesticides are ubiquitous, especially in the lives of farmworkers and their families. Studies suggest that farmworkers are “at excess risk for cancers of the stomach, prostate, testes, and multiple myeloma. They also appeared to be at excess risk for cancers of the buccal cavity and pharynx, lung, liver, and cervix.”³ “Acute poisoning causes abdominal pain, nausea, dizziness, vomiting, headaches, and skin or eye problems. Chronic health outcomes include dermatitis, fatigue, sleep and memory disorders, anxiety . . . and birth defects.”⁴ In addition, agricultural workers are “plagued by nagging health problems and [are] at high risk for serious diseases like heart disease, hypertension, stroke and diabetes.”⁵ Moreover, “Widely used pest-killing chemicals, in amounts routinely found in the environment in farm areas, seem to be capable of skewing thyroid hormones, which control how the brain of a fetus or young child develops ‘Data suggest that we may be raising a generation of children with learning disabilities and hyperaggression.’”⁶

The purpose of our Capstone project is to illuminate farmworker issues by disseminating social action art. With our art, we hope to provide a medium through which the voices and experiences of farmworkers, their communities and advocates emanate in order to engender awareness of farmworker issues. Ultimately, we hope that our work will contribute to stimulating

³ Shelia Hoar Zahm and Aaron Blair, “Assessing the Feasibility of Epidemiologic Research on Migrant and Seasonal Farmworkers: An Overview,” *American Journal of Industrial Medicine* 40. (2001): 487.

⁴ Rebecca C. Elmore and Thomas A. Arcury, “Pesticide Exposure Beliefs Among Latino Farmworkers in North Carolina’s Christmas Tree Industry,” *American Journal of Industrial Medicine* 40. (2001): 153.

⁵ Anna Davison, “Farmworkers ‘suffering in silence,’” *The Monterey County Herald*, November 22, 2000.

⁶ Marla Cone, “Studies: Pesticides stunt kids, produce more aggression,” *The Monterey County Herald*, March 15, 1999.

dialogue and assisting voters and politicians enact public policies that provide social and environmental justice for farmworkers and for us all.

Section Two

Learning Outcomes

Our Capstone project will incorporate MLOs 2 (Research Skills), 7 (Historical Analysis) and 8 (Creative Writing and Social Action) [MLO 5 (Critical Cultural Analysis) included in final Capstone paper].

MLO 2—Research Skills—forms an integral component of our capstone project. Although the book is a collection of stories and poems, HCOM 432S students grounded these works in the research and analysis of primary and secondary sources related to farmworker issues. Our research aided the development of themes by providing material we used in our compositions. In addition, the introduction (and foreword or afterword) will draw on the extensive research I have been conducting on the effects of pesticides on farmworkers, their families, communities and the environment.

MLO 7 – Historical Analysis. My contributions to the book—the introduction (and foreword or afterword) and my fiction and poem, are rooted in the history of pesticides—especially regarding their uses in agriculture—and the economic, political, cultural, social and technologic issues that evolved during this history. In examining this history, I am gaining knowledge of historical events, issues, interests and processes; expanding my ability to interpret historical narratives while differentiating between facts and interpretations; and responding analytically to historical issues as they relate to class, ethnicity, race and gender.

MLO 8 – Creative Writing and Social Action. MLO 8 allows me to synthesize research skills, historical analysis and creative writing in order to produce social action writing that is empowering, compelling, artful, and a form of critical inquiry. This synthesis will allow me to effectively combine my desire to respond to social, cultural, political and environmental injustice with work that is based on facts and steeped in history and that adds another voice to those seeking to improve the working conditions of farmworkers and their families, our communities and our world.

Section Three

Research Questions

1. How does the history and use of pesticides reflect the cultural, social and racial prejudices that farmworkers face?
2. What are some of the moral objections raised in defense of farmworkers exposed to the toxic chemicals used in pesticides?
3. Why is it important for society as a whole to raise these objections?
4. What are some of the philosophical and economic arguments governments and corporations use to justify the use of chemicals that harm farmworkers, their families and the environment?
5. What are the weaknesses of these philosophical and economic arguments?
6. How is the use of pesticides a form of biological warfare against farmworkers and consumers?
7. Why is it important to document the pesticide-related issues of farmworkers in the context of creative writing and social action?

8. How does writing about pesticides and farmworkers promote social justice in our communities?
9. How can social action art help focus attention on farmworkers and further the goals of their advocates?

Section Four

Bibliography

See Works Consulted in final Capstone paper.

Section Five

Research Plan

After beginning HCOM 432S during fall 2001, I collected dozens of medical studies documenting possible links between pesticides and health problems in animals and humans. I collected many publications by non-governmental organizations—such as Physicians for Social Responsibility, Californians for Pesticide Reform, Natural Resources Defense Council, and Environmental Working Group—documenting the dangers of pesticides and offering solutions that will protect farmworkers, our children and our planet. I found dozens of Internet sites—from those of state and federal agencies to many published by non-governmental organizations devoted to environmental and social justice—highlighting the uses, abuses and dangers of pesticides and containing links to many published works on-line.

My meeting with librarian Steve Watkins helped me broaden my research. Mr. Watkins directed me to databases as diverse as Contemporary Women's Issues and CQ Library. He showed me some useful Library of Congress subject headings such as “environmental ethics,”

and using his advice I found some useful material in the Gender Watch database, which has links to the Ethnic News Watch database. After our meeting, I scoured the CSUMB library and found dozens of books I can use, including some that treat farmworker issues as issues of environmental justice and environmental racism.

My research plan is to look at the extensive material I have, organize it, decide what I can use, and possibly seek additional material, perhaps on the political and philosophical justifications for the use of toxic chemicals, and the moral arguments opposing them. I believe the databases I already used for previous research will yield any additional material I need, especially given the broadened perspective Mr. Watkins provided me.

Section Six

Capstone Presentation

We plan to present our Capstone project in book form. As stated previously, the goal is to get the book published by May 24, 2002. However, if we are unable to get the book published in time, we will introduce the collection as a PowerPoint presentation or in a printed form or both.

FROM OUR BACKS TO YOUR TABLES: FRUITS OF INJUSTICE

AN ANTHOLOGY OF SOCIAL ACTION WRITING
INSPIRED BY THE FALL 2001 HCOM 432S COURSE
“PESTICIDES AND BEYOND: THE ENDURING LEGACY”
TAUGHT BY PROFESSOR DIANA GARCIA

EDITED BY
CLAIRE PORTER AND PAUL DAVID TUFF

Pañoletas used for images provided by Rafael Albarran

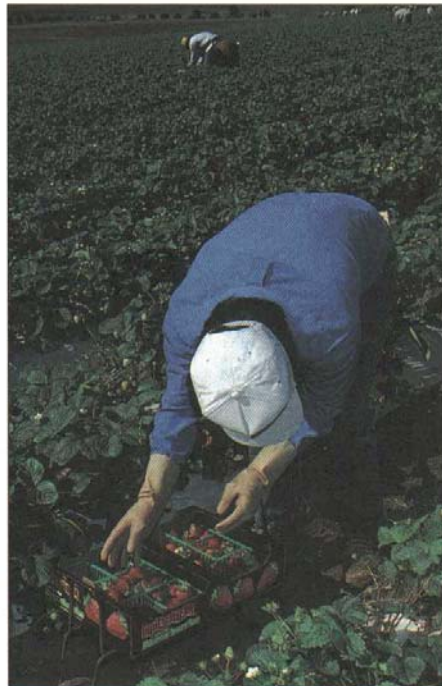


Figure 4. The small, wheeled cart keeps the crate clean and at a convenient height for packing the fruit.

Image and caption from *Handling Strawberries for Fresh Market*.
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Photograph by Jack Kelly Clark

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Photograph and effects by Paul David Tuff



FRESH EXPRESS

Rafael Albarran

Because I was
a seed planted deep
in Salinas Valley soil,
watered,
cultivated,
and harvested,

I look upon endless fields,
forming patches on a quilt:
romaine, red leaf, iceberg lettuce,
waiting patiently to be turned
into a gourmet salad.

Like the lettuce
conveyed from belt
to washer to truck,
I wait my turn
for shipping: a college campus
thirty miles from my
hometown. My parents
wait for my return.

Economic heart of the region,
lettuce is like
the heart of the family:
children leave home
for a better return.

WITH KNEES TO THE GROUND

Rafael Albarran

Primer misterio:

Praise the farm workers
Rising to the noise of crickets
and the day's first train.
*Y luego plantan, riegan,
piscan/cortan, empacan
hasta que el semai hace su ultimo viaje.*

Segundo misterio:

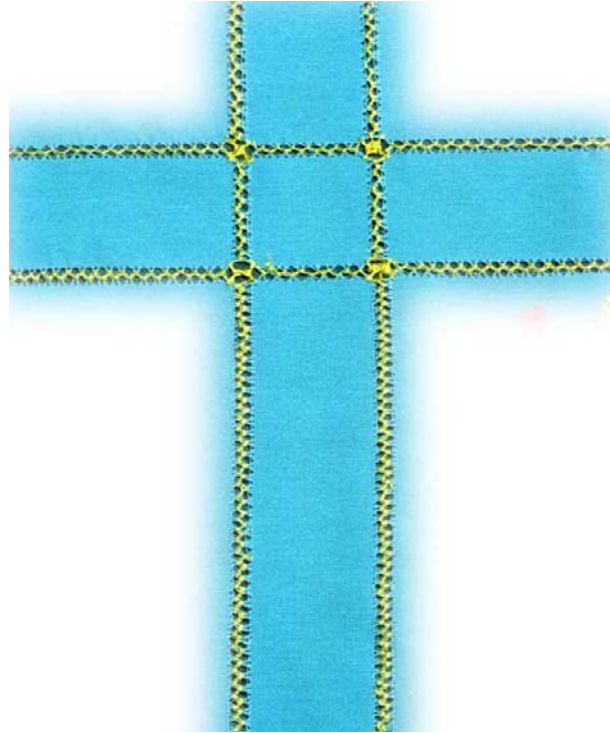
Beware the rancher spraying pesticides
up and down, left and right.
The women with *pañoletas*
and the men in face masks
turn their heads away
from methyl bromide and DDT.

Tercer misterio:

Listen to the sick children
coughing and sneezing
throughout the night,
covered in their mothers *rebosos*,
slowly digging
their own graves.
From stillborn to infertile,
syndromes to cancer.



Cuarto misterio:



Follow *la peregrinación de la gente*.
Harvesting the lettuce
back and forth,
Salinas to Huron to Yuma.
Shoved into labor camps,
like head lettuce in a box.

Quinto misterio:

Condemn the ignorance of the public,
never denied the right to water,
the right to a toilet
the right to a break
year after year.

Virgen inmaculada

Ruega por ellos...

Estrella del cielo

Ruega por ellos...

Salud de los enfermos

Ruega por ellos...

Puerta del cielo

Ruega por ellos...

Ruega por ellos...

Ruega por ellos...

ROCKING THE CRADLE

Aimee Kerr

The brisk breeze dances through the thick coastal pines and over the mountain passes of Monterey County. Gaining momentum, it descends upon the smooth golden foothills and races along the endless rows of earth and growth in the Salinas Valley. The breeze cools a lone farmworker walking through a field.

Guadalupe walks slowly along the artichoke row. The Saturday sun casts its six o'clock shadows. A piercing pain begins to well up inside of her. Her knees wobble as she attempts to withstand the surging pain. Clenched fists cross her hard bulging belly as her right shoulder brunts the fall. The force inside intensifies, stealing her breath, and then just as quickly subsides. Guadalupe rolls onto her back, grasping for a deep breath as the dark, soft dirt cushions her head. A hawk soaring overhead focuses her attention. Her eyes trail his flight through the green artichoke limbs. Her pupils dilate; she can feel her stomach muscles tighten up into little balls as the pain returns. Never has the silence of the fields been so deafening. Grappling for something to clasp, she musters a prayer in her native Oaxacan language: "*Chian shsan shivhun hband.*" Please, Precious Jesus, allow this child to live!

Rocks shoot like popping corn kernels into the undercarriage of a Ford pickup and fly into deep ditches as the wheels spin over a gravel road. Soft lavender hues caress the far off hills and paint highlights along the clouds. Harry reaches over to turn up the volume, admiring the sound of the bass speakers recently installed in his prized F350 SuperCab. Thoughts of a hot meal, cold beer and relaxing evening on his Lazy Boy watching the 49ers cause him to ease his grip on the wheel and exhale. It's been a hard day managing the harvest.

Something appears from amongst the plants. "What on earth could that be?" Harry's question hovers as the truck rushes down the road. His squinting eyes make out what appears to be a woman staggering across the dusty road. A long, loud honk agitates the quiet evening air. Slowly her feet turn her body towards him and she waits. Harry directs all his confusion through a continual blasting of his horn. "Move, damn it!" he stammers to himself. The woman remains in place, ignoring the horn.

She appears to be slightly bent over. Harry leans forward, closer to the dashboard, as if that will give him a clearer view. "Is she injured?" There is something visible between her arms. His safety belt tugs on his shoulder as he leans closer to the window, squinting. The back wheels fishtail and he skids forward, slamming on the brakes. Dust swarms over the black truck and blurs his vision of the woman only two feet before him holding a bloody baby.

Stunned, they peer at each other. Exhausted but frantic, Guadalupe approaches the vehicle, holding her three-hour son with a mixture of pride and anxiety. This one has lived this far. The second of five! Silently the truck window falls. Guadalupe pleads with the man. "*Veni-xud-chian h-van shiwhvn-nawhun shava casayho.*" Please, sir, please, help me! Help my son!

Guadalupe has toiled on American soil for ten years now, migrating between Texas, Arizona and California, as the harvest calls her, her husband, daughter and thousands of fellow

workers. She has yearned to learn English but food and rent are her family's first priorities. She and her husband count pennies to buy aspirin while sitting at the splintered wooden table he found abandoned five blocks down the street. Besides, her body aches each morning from the years of 12-hour days bent over strawberries, broccoli, celery, and lettuce. As she walks through her front door each evening, she still has dinner to prepare for two families of five plus her own. Guadalupe wishes she could ask the lady with the sweet smile behind the 7-Eleven counter about her family; wishes she could read the labels of the food she buys for her family; wishes she could make a phone call and talk with a doctor; wishes she could be understood by this man blankly staring back at her. She's desperate for this child. "*Na chada-stu shivhun gati!*" I refuse to allow another son to die!

It takes a few moments for the chaos of Harry's mind to clear. The last time he saw a baby in such a condition it was in a sterile white delivery room at Natividad Hospital. He remembers stepping around a forest of doctors as he attempted to catch on video the first scream from his third daughter's tulip lips. That was ten years ago. Now there is a frantic woman before him holding up a naked crying infant stained by his mother's blood.

Harry stares at her. He wishes she'd look up at him just for a few seconds. Only he knows better. Few of his Mexican workers ever make much eye contact with him. Jack of Meyer's Farms said it was something to do with respect but Harry figures they're more of a sheepish people, not really sure of themselves. It suddenly hits him, like hot air on a foggy car window. He knows what the woman wants.

"Look lady, I'm not buying your child."

Guadalupe sinks in confusion. The man's stern ice-cold eyes cut through her. She can tell by the tone of his voice that he doesn't understand. Lifting her son closer to the towering man's face, hoping he'll be moved by compassion, Guadalupe persists, "*Venn-yud-chian guni ladu spital-venn-yud venn yud.*" Please sir, take us to the hospital. Please, sir, please. We need help.

Harry winces with disgust. How could anyone sell her child? "No! No! I won't buy your kid!"

Startled, Guadalupe steps back and pulls her precious son close to her heart and covers him with her muddied brown shirt as the man abruptly opens his door and stomps around the back searching in his stainless steel box. He walks about the humming engine carrying a gray and green stripped woolen blanket and covers his seat. Motioning her to follow his steps, he opens the passenger door and points for her to jump in.

"*Ghistiosso chian-Shtena!*" Thank you Gracious Lord! Guadalupe leans down and caresses the soft velvety forehead of her nestled son. Rows of artichokes turn into mulched celery, then freshly plowed strawberry fields and houses vaguely begin to sprout in the distance. The driver veers right and Guadalupe glances up for an instant, not wanting to take her eyes off her son. He's not taking her to the hospital. "*Spital! Spital!*" she attempts to explain. Harry doesn't know what to think of her erratic outburst. The wheels stop at the main entrance of the labor camp, a worn, rickety compound waiting for fresh running water and new outhouses. With softened eyes, Harry looks down at the boy and then motions with his chin for her to step out. Guadalupe cradles her sleeping son as she shuffles along the path and takes an extra long step to miss the dead rat rotting beside the slab of cement that marks her home. She gently places the boy in his father's proud hands and collapses upon the mattress.

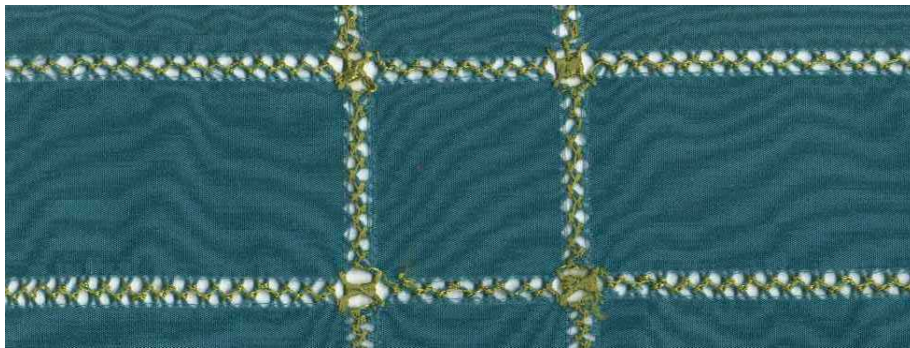
A quick determined tap knocks through the rickety wooden door. Guadalupe leaves her beans on the stove and opens the door to two well-dressed men and a woman wearing bright red lipstick.

“Hello, are you Guadalupe Hieraro?”

“*Sace tae tol.*” Yes.

“We are from the social services of Monterey County. We’ve come to ahh...see your son.”

Guadalupe doesn’t know what to think of these people. Every muscle stiffens as she stands in the doorway and firmly holds the door frame. Their words are foreign to her. The woman with bright red lipstick nervously stumbles over her words as she asks to come in. She walks directly over to Hillario and picks up the three-week-old boy with such awkwardness she could never have been a mother. Guadalupe rushes toward her son, horrified by the woman’s audacity. The woman pulls him in towards her chest and runs out the door, the men on either side of her. Shouting out of desperation, Guadalupe trails after her only living son. The room hushes as a wisp of vanilla musk lingers over the rocking yellow cradle.



NO LOVE BEADS, ONLY JUSTICE

Courtney Kuhn

The black plastic bag that covers the broken window billows and rustles in the wind as Jose navigates in and out of the maze of early lunch traffic. Mildew and humidity from the recent rain overpower the air in the car. I listen as Jose explains the goal of our visit to the well-known grocery store. My mind wanders and instantly I am fighting to swim through my fears of what I have been asked to do. Like hippies, I think we should have on love beads and bell-bottoms for our protest, but Jose and I are wearing neither. Only the red baseball hat with the United Farm Workers eagle symbol that Jose wears may announce our intent upon walking through the automatic doors.

“Last weekend the UFW sent delegations across the nation to Safeway stores,” Jose explains. “We heard a rumor they were going to go back to purchasing mushrooms from Pictsweet and we are trying to apply some pressure on them.”

“There are not many Safeways in the Monterey area, are there?” I ask.

“No, but Safeway also includes Ralphs and Vons grocery stores, they are all the same company,” he replies knowingly. I am surprised at the number of stores in the Safeway empire and wonder if consumers are as ignorant of the fact as I was.

Jose continues to explain the long and hard work the UFW has been doing in relation to the mushroom company Pictsweet. He repeats a lot of what had already been explained to me on the phone by Linda, our supervisor, before we left the office. He speaks quickly. I wonder if it is because what he is saying is like a script he memorized for an acting role or because he is nervous. I listen, fearing that I might open my mouth only to have nothing to say, still filled with my uncertainties about my role in the delegation.

My stomach begins to turn as the aged red and white sign comes into eyesight. “So what am I supposed to do once we get there?” I ask, hoping he says I can sit in the car but knowing I will not hear the answer I am looking for.

“Usually we do delegations with larger groups of people, but Linda just wanted you to get a feel for what they are. You just have to come in and support me.”

“So I won’t have to say or do anything?” I ask, hoping again that my role will not be more than that of a warm body.

The car jerks as it moves over the curb into the parking lot. All too soon, Jose has maneuvered into a vacant spot and is opening his door. I mimic his every move, still unsure of what I should be doing. My legs are wobbly, as if I were an hour-old calf trying to take its first step. I move towards the back of the car where Jose has already opened the trunk and is removing things from it. He hands me one of two wooden garden stakes that are in his hands.

The stake is rough and splintering in my hands as I begin to unroll the material that is on one end. The fabric is a deep red as I imagine the stained hands of strawberry pickers would look. With its black-stenciled eagle, the makeshift flag represents the hopes of thousands of farmworkers. Now it’s in my hands. I feel like an impostor.



Jose leads the way to the store entrance, walking briskly with the flag waving over his shoulder. He warned me in the car that people are usually embarrassed their first time at a delegation. I had not heeded his warning. Soon my cheeks begin to flush. Carrying the flag, I try my best not to stick out. The automatic doors open before us as if an invisible butler were inviting us into a large, white pillared home. No warm welcoming awaits us from our hosts.

Jose immediately heads to the produce department to scout out the manager, but we see nobody. "Well, let's first see what kind of mushrooms they have on the shelf," he says as he walks towards the cooler section where the pre-wrapped mushrooms sit. Within the blue Styrofoam boxes tightly wrapped in clear plastic are both whole and sliced mushrooms. Black labels designed with Cypress trees and yellow script that read "Monterey Mushrooms" are centered on the clear wrapping. I remember how many times I have picked up a similar package of mushrooms thinking of how good they would taste on my spaghetti or hamburger. Not until a few months ago would the thought have crossed my mind of who picked them and for what price.

"Most of the stores on the peninsula sell Monterey Mushrooms," Jose explains. "They are cheaper because they are grown locally." He talks as he walks towards the checkout lines. The long aisles pass by me like the rows of crops that I saw earlier on my way to Salinas. Above the aisles hang large signs dictating what is located on every shelf. I follow Jose to the nearest register with a waiting cashier. "May we speak to the produce manager or general manager?" he asks politely.

"The produce manager should be in the produce section," the cashier replies, her red apron reminding me of the flag I still carried in my hands.

"We did not see her but we will check again," he says as he turns once more towards the produce section. I again follow him, like a baby chick following its mother.

"Is this a strike?" asks a gray-haired lady, her cart waiting to be filled. Jose stops long enough to explain that we are visiting the store to pressure them not to purchase Pictsweet mushrooms because the company is exploiting their workers and refusing to negotiate with the UFW.

Jose and I return to the produce section to find no one in the familiar red apron with the embroidered Safeway logo. We turn back to the registers walking side by side, our flags propped on our shoulders, like the color guard leading the high school marching band in the Thanksgiving Day parade. But there are no crowds cheering us on and we return once again to the checkout.

"We could not find the manager. Can you please call her up here?" Jose asks once again.

The cashier picks the receiver up in one hand while pushing buttons with the other. She speaks slowly into the phone, her voice echoing over the loud speaker. "One of the managers should be here in a minute," she reassures us. I can see that she is as uncomfortable as I am. She turns to the other cashiers for assistance and I turn to Jose.

A blond-haired woman slowly makes her way to where we stand. Her uniform resembles that of the other employees but underneath her apron she wears a dress shirt and tie. "Hello, can I help you?" she asks, unsure of our purpose but fully aware of the flags we carry.

Jose begins his appeal. "We are here to ask you not to return to purchasing Pictsweet...." His accent is thicker than usual, maybe because he is nervous or because he is talking too fast. His words seem to run into each other, like hockey players on the ice competing for the puck.

I stand there silent watching as Jose gives his speech that I have now heard several times this morning. I make eye contact with the manager. She seems confused about the presence of a white woman in a UFW delegation. Her arms are behind her back and she smiles, as if she is

unaware of the seriousness of our visit. Jose finishes talking and we wait to hear her response. “Well I do not even know what Pigsfeet is...” she remarks, seemingly dismissing us.

Jose quickly tries to correct the miscommunication caused by his accent. “P-I-C-T-S-W-E-E-T,” he repeats sounding out each letter to prevent anymore confusion, “is a mushroom producer and we are simply asking that you let your produce manager know that we visited and asked that you not buy their products.”

Jose barely gets his sentence out before the manager responds with a quick, “Thanks for coming, good-bye.” She then turns to head back to the tasks she had left undone to talk to us.

I follow Jose to the exit door, our flags still propped on our shoulders. At the car, he opens the trunk and we place the rolled up flags inside. He unlocks the doors, commenting on the fact that the window is broken and locked doors would not prevent an intruder. I climb into the car and my nostrils are again overpowered by the mildew.

Jose navigates the car through the heavy lunch traffic. He’s as quiet as am I, still unsure of how to process what just happened in the store moments ago. “The managers are not very aware of what is going on in their stores, are they?” I ask trying to break the silence.

“Well, the produce managers are usually more knowledgeable,” he begins, but a new thought seems to come to his mind. “I used to work for the mushroom growers,” he says. “There are people working twenty-four hours a day on the farms.”

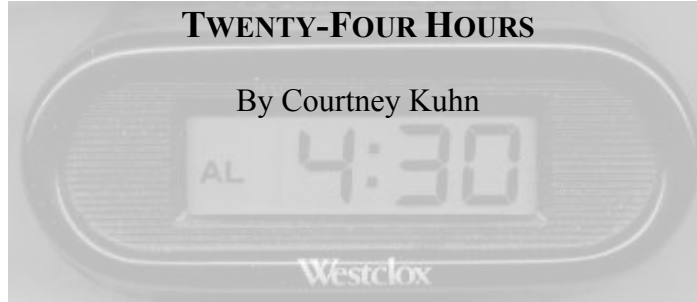
As we drive he explains how mushrooms are grown in almost black rooms stacked in trays that often stand eight feet tall. He describes how they are harvested, the workers cutting them with sharp knives in the darkness. He stresses the extreme caution that they must use when moving throughout the dark rooms because of the slippery ground. The car jerks as we drive over the curb into the UFW parking lot and Jose parks the car. I open the door and step out, our mission complete but I am still unsure if our goal was met.

I do not follow Jose towards the UFW office’s back entrance. I say good-bye and get into my own car parked across the small lot. My service hours are over for the day and I must return to campus. As I drive the familiar roads towards Seaside, I process the events of the past hour. I think of all the things I could have done differently: walked with confidence, held my flag high and proud, or spoke up during our encounter with the manager. My checks flush once again not with embarrassment but anger, because I did nothing to aid the farmworkers’ fight for justice. I just stood there.



TWENTY-FOUR HOURS

By Courtney Kuhn



4:30 am

Beep! Beep! Beep! Beep! Ana turns toward the familiar sound of the alarm clock. Switching the button off she begins her day. She rises slowly, her body still haunted with tenderness and pain from yesterday's work. She places her feet on the cold cement flooring of her home, and a chill runs through her body. She looks around in anguish at the place she calls home and someone else calls a garage rental. She lives here in Soledad with her husband, her four children and often the family of her husband's brother.

She turns to her husband and roughly shakes him awake; he has slept through the beeping of the alarm. He moans but stumbles out of bed slowly. She can tell he is in pain by the way he walks holding his back with his left arm. He heads to the makeshift bathroom to wash-up before she wakes the children.

5:00 am

"Wake up my children," Ana says in Spanish, as she gently shakes awake each of her sleepy children, who are all crowded into one bed.

"I am too tired," her oldest daughter Carla says in a quiet voice.

"You must get up, I have to go to work and you have to be ready for Rosa," Ana says, responding tenderly to her young child's exhaustion. Ana pays her sister Rosa a little money each month to watch her children while she and her husband work in the fields. Rosa, whose hand was caught in a piece of farm equipment and injured badly, cannot work. "Hurry," Ana says raising her voice. "You must get up. I can not be late for work again or I will be fired and then what will we do? Get up and get your brother and sisters up too." Ana walks away from the bed trusting her 12 year-old daughter once again to be a mother to her younger siblings.

In the kitchen, a hot plate and old icebox, Ana makes the children's breakfast of warmed tortillas and beans. She knows that they will be hungry again before lunch because they have eaten so early. "Hurry," Ana repeats as her children move in slow motion from the bed to the bathroom, the baby carried by Carla. After preparing the children's breakfast Ana makes her and her husband's lunch for the day, also tortillas and beans. She knows that by the time they get a chance to eat their burritos will be cold and hard.

6:00am

Ana has already walked the children to Rosa's where they will remain for the day and well into the evening. The two oldest will head off to school in a few hours. She waits impatiently outside the house for her ride, hoping her coworker Maria will be on time today. She hears a car approaching and sees it is Maria. The car barely stops before Ana climbs in and Maria accelerates.

"Sorry," Maria begins, "my boy is sick so I had to take him to my mother's."

"Oh, what is wrong with him, a flu, cold?" Ana asks, sympathizing with another mother.

“He has had a fever for two days now but the clinic was closed by the time I got home last night. I do not know what to do. He is not getting better.”

Ana understands. Without a car herself it is very difficult to get her children to the doctors when they are sick. Once when Carla was a baby she was very sick and vomiting everywhere. She lost a lot of weight. But Ana had no way to get her to the doctors and no way to pay for it. She thanks God for watching out for her baby and making her well.

Maria drives for twenty minutes before they arrive at the edge of the strawberry field. Late, they both hurry out of the car to where the other workers are waiting for directions from the foreman. “Ladies, if you can not get here on time you will not have a job,” the foreman hollers over the voices of the workers. Although nobody is working and directions have yet to be given, Ana and Maria nod their heads in agreement and try to blend in with the others. Ana and the workers wait around for half an hour before the foreman gives them the OK to move into the fields. A half an hour that they are expected to spend on the job site and yet none of them will be paid for their time. Ana, Maria, and the others quickly make their way into the field ready to begin a day’s work bent over picking strawberries.

7:00am

Ana enters the field and quickly feels the cold moisture seep through her worn clothing and into her bones. She pulls the hood of her sweatshirt over her head and tightens the strings around her neck, leaving only a small portion of her face revealed to the frigid air. Out of her pocket she pulls a pair of oversized, red-stained gloves that she slips onto her petite hands. She moves to her spot in the row and bends down to start filling her box with strawberries. She can already feel the ache in her back return before she has even picked one plump berry.

9:30 am

Eyeing the nearby port-a-potty, Ana can no longer ignore the strain of her filled bladder. She went to the bathroom only once since she got up and that was at 4:30. She stops in her spot and slowly begins to stand up. The pain in her back is intense. Pain shoots like an electric shock throughout her back.

Before she has even gained her balance the foreman is yelling, “What is the problem? Get back to work! We do not pay you to stand around!”

“I need to use the rest room,” Ana replies in a meek voice. She looks at the ground avoiding eye contact with the overpowering foreman who stands at least a foot taller than Ana.

“You women are all the same, always needing something,” he replies in his gruff voice. “You have two minutes!”

Ana hurries to the port-a-potty on the edge of the field, her cheeks flushed with embarrassment although she should be used to the foreman’s comments after working in the fields for so many years.

She enters the port-a-potty, repulsed by the smell of the almost over-flowing barrel. She straddles the toilet, careful not to let any part of it touch her skin. She tries to avoid using the toilets but some days she just cannot stand to wait. Not only are they dirty but she has noticed that all over the protecting walls of the women’s toilet are little holes, which make her feel exposed to the rest of the world outside. Ana hurries, trying not to take up her two minutes of allotted time. She tries to hurry back to her spot in the field unnoticed but fails.

“Did everything come out all right?” smirks the foreman. Ana nods her head with embarrassment wishing she could keep some of her dignity safe from the foreman.

2:00pm

The foreman directs the workers to take their thirty-minute lunch break. Ana and Maria hurry over to her car where they have left their lunches. Ana is exhausted from picking strawberries for the past seven hours and ten years. She has been working in the fields since she was fifteen, after her father left and she had to go to work to help her mother. She quickly unwraps the now-hard and cold tortillas. She takes large bites to make sure she gets it all in her stomach before the foreman begins yelling at the workers to get back in the fields.

Maria begins to talk about the meeting she is going to attend tonight, asking Ana if she is going to go too. But Ana's mind is somewhere else and does little to acknowledge Maria's question. She can hear the foreman begin to yell, "Back to work! Back to work!" adding his occasional swearword to identify and belittle the workers. Ana and Maria throw the remainder of their lunches back into the car and return to their spots in the field, making sure their yellow ID tags are visible.

6:00pm

"Go home you," the foreman yells, adding a few cuss words to finish his demand. Ana does her best to stand up and move out of the field, but the pain in her back is indescribable and now shoots down her legs. She moves slowly to Maria's car where Maria is waiting. They both get into the car slowly, both in pain from the long workday. Before Maria drops Ana off at home she must stop by her mother's to pick up her sick son. As Maria drives, she tells Ana about the meeting of farmworkers she will attend tonight. Ana knows she should be supportive since she too is a worker and wants to see better conditions. She is simply too exhausted and thinks she should get home to her family.

After stopping by Maria's mother's to pick up her son, Ana is finally dropped off at a quarter to seven. She enters the garage through the side door in the yard. She can see that Carla is already in the kitchen making something to eat for the children. Ana is saddened by the fact that her youngest children barely know her. They look towards Carla, a twelve-year-old child, as their mother. Carla cares for them most of the day, except when she is in school. She gets them up in the morning and puts them to bed at night. Why wouldn't they think of Carla as their mother?

Ana does not see her husband or any sign that he has already returned home and left again. She and the children eat their dinner quickly, starved from the lack of food throughout the day. After dinner Carla naturally turns to the children and directs them to get ready for bed. They leave the table, Carla carrying the baby in her arms, and retreat to their room, a bed surrounded by four sheets hanging from the ceiling. Ana turns to the mess on the table and slowly clears it, throwing the garbage away and putting the dishes in the washbasin.

9:00pm

Ana walks to the children's room, entering through the curtain wall. She sees all four of her children already asleep closely snuggled up to each other's bodies for warmth. She kisses each one of them good night and leaves the room to return to her own tent room. She removes her dirty clothes carefully and heads to the bathroom to wash up before she goes to sleep. She has still not seen her husband and begins to worry, not for his safety, really, but because she fears he may be out with the boys wasting their food and rent money. She returns to her room and climbs into the worn bed and drifts in and out of a restless sleep. She awakens a few hours later

by the sound of her husband coming through the side door and staggering to bed. She passes it off and returns to her sleep, a sleep that lacks the dreams she used to have as a child.

4:30 am

Beep! Beep! Beep! Beep! Ana turns toward the familiar sound of the alarm clock. Switching the button off, she begins another day.



WHAT EVERYONE SHOULD BE USED TO

Debbie Mead

Doing my service learning at Clinica de Salud seemed like a natural pairing given my background. After all, I've been working for doctors and healthcare providers for over 17 years. I know the problems of insurance companies, patient education, patient compliance, and the general structure of a medical office. But at Clinica, things seem more basic and less fancy than the medical setting that I am used to.

I'm used to upholstered chairs that match the carpet, walls, and artwork of the room's décor. In the offices I come from, English is spoken unless a clear need for Spanish arises. Then an additional office member steps in for translation purposes. I'm used to a variety of magazines to read in the waiting room and racks of professionally published, bilingual patient educational materials near the nurses' station.

At Clinica, faded chairs sit atop worn carpet, with dinged walls surrounding them. There I hear nothing but Spanish, unless I speak or someone speaks to me. When I approach the check-in desk, the receptionist greets me with, "*¿Puedo ayudarte?*"

"*Sí. Muy bien.*"

Clinica's waiting room contains only a wall-mounted television showing Spanish language programming in one location, and health information questions and answers, alternating in English and Spanish, in another. The printed patient information consists mostly of bilingual, photocopied, typewritten pages, with general information on certain health problems. I see no educational material that addresses the chronic health condition of asthma.

Asthma is part of the reason why I am there. Prior to my visit, I'd been given the assignment of assisting the eight clinics throughout California's Salinas Valley in their asthma education efforts, both for the medical personnel and for the patients. I would need to find material to help the medical care providers streamline their treatment efforts and information, and a way to present it to patients so that they could take a more active role in the care and prevention of their asthma.

The Internet offered a variety of informational sites on the subject, but seemingly not the right type of information or not presented in the right way. One site presented a 22-page asthma "pocket guide" for physicians, with charts for reference and forms to fill out, to be used for each and every asthma patient. Not something a busy doctor would have time for on a regular basis.

Seeking patient educational information was especially challenging. Most Internet sites did not offer Spanish translations of their information and included complicated explanations of the disease and its treatments. I might have found more Spanish patient information if I had searched in Spanish, but, with my limited Spanish, I wouldn't have been able to determine the quality of that information. One pamphlet from an allergist's office (in English only) included a discussion of when the condition of asthma might induce a sufferer to move to a different location to help alleviate his/her symptoms. Who can afford to move because of health problems? Not me, and certainly not the people who go to Clinica for help.

As I understand, the people who seek help from Clinica are mainly low-income farmworkers and their families. They have limited educational experiences, resulting in decreased reading and writing skills, even in their native languages—mainly Spanish. Furthermore, Clinica's non-profit status still does not make it a free service. If patients do not

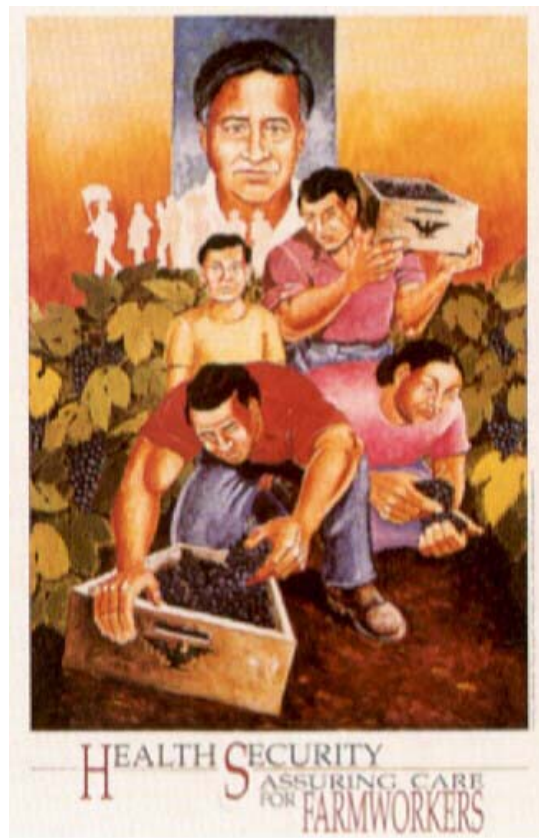
have insurance or Medi-Cal (which often require patient co-payments), they are asked to pay for services based on a sliding scale determined by income. Therefore, people considering a visit to Clinica still need to take into account their financial situation before scheduling an appointment, as well as any hardships caused by taking time off from work for the medical consultation—time that might cause a deduction in their wages. It appeared to me that, in proposing an asthma education plan, I should provide material suitable for people who need basic information, presented simply, and delivered by a health care provider short on both time and educational materials. No problem.

My visits to Clinica confirm my previous conclusions about patients who utilize their services. In the waiting rooms, the Clinica patients seem quiet and reserved, tolerating a long wait as if resigned to its necessity. Everyone dresses simply and I smell no cologne or perfume. When the Clinica personnel allow me to read a 13-year-old asthma patient's chart, the patient's history and record of medical visits, I notice a copy of a Medi-Cal card. I also notice the shaky, block style printing of his mother's signature on the Permission for Treatment form. The chart tells me that the boy's family seeks treatment only after he has an attack, and it shows no documentation that preventative measures are taken in the home. He also misses follow-up appointments. The physician's notes on the chart do not mention any discussion with the patient or his family about preventative measures they can take to control asthma, and I see no indication that the patient has received any educational materials. Is this where I can help?

And I want to help. My son, an asthma sufferer since he was a toddler, had been attack-free for a couple of years by the time he was 13 years old. The difference between my son and the Clinica patient seems obvious. My son has a family with better access to healthcare and more resources to provide the help he needs. He has literate parents who can communicate with health care providers, insurance to help cover the costs of medical intervention, and parents with the financial resources to scrape together the initial consultation fee for the allergist, which for us was \$200. There are also co-payments on allergy shots and periodic re-mixing of antigen, the serum—prepared specifically for each patient based on his/her particular types of allergies—that is then given as shots. Change one or two circumstances about our lives, and my son could be the one still suffering asthma attacks, continuing to approach the disease from an after-the-fact manner instead of preventively. So, I have an idea what this 13 year-old Clinica patient and his family are going through.

In putting together an asthma resource book for Clinica I was continually frustrated by the complicated format of the information available. Both Clinica doctors and patients need concise, basic educational materials that transmit the most important information simply. Despite visiting many asthma-related web sites and obtaining pamphlet samples from three companies, I still was unable to find an informational handout that I felt would suit the needs of Clinica. So, I made my own. I used basic information that healthcare professionals had been presenting to our family in dealing with my son's asthma over the years. Then I added a picture of healthy, open and clear bronchial tubes and unhealthy, narrowed, mucus-filled bronchial tubes included spaces for patients to make notes, and put in lines where patients can personalize their pamphlets. The handout also includes suggestions for ways patients can conduct their own asthma research. The goal is for patients to become more involved in the prevention and treatment of his/her disease, less a victim of the disease, and more a partner with his/her healthcare provider in managing this difficult illness. I put forth my best effort. I can only hope that I understood the needs of the clinics and their patients well enough to provide them with a helpful resource.

My Service Learning experience at Clinica has shown me that there are some who have, and some who have not. I'm used to patients receiving whatever help they need regardless of their families' fixed socioeconomic status. I'm used to people having access to, and resources for, any medical consultations they need. I'm used to keeping my loved ones and myself healthy. What I'm use to, everyone should be used to.



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<http://www.ncfh.org/images/94saldna.jpg>



DANCE OF THE FIELD

Debbie Mead

View the backdrop.

Low, rolling hills,
green and brown, curve
against a white and blue sky.

Set the stage.

Rich, fertile soil,
dark dirt and emerald rows
stretch back to the foothills.

Picture the attire.

Tennis shoes and long sleeves,
bright bandanas
shield the sun and wind.

Hear the rhythm.

Workers hoe lettuce lines
with perfect motion
of unison and counterpoint.

Visualize the choreography.

Step, bend,
hoe, up, stoop,
pick, repeat.

See the dancers

crooked backs,
chapped hands,
tomato-colored faces.

Feel the dancers

screaming stomachs
bursting bladders,
waiting for the porta-potty and a break.

Lungs fill with silt,

mildew and pesticides.
Bodies bathe in a perfume
of fertilizer.



Nagging ailments,
aches and pains
headaches,
numbness in fingers and toes.

Nagging problems.
No health insurance.
No medication.
No time off to go to the clinic.
No money.

Watch for instruction!
Do the steps!
Keep dancing!

Dance the steps that yield
bins of plenty,
and no one applauds.

NIGHT CALL

Debbie Mead

Deep in sleep, Juana dreamed her favorite dream—the one about her daughter, Margarita, playing during recess, jumping rope with all the other girls. Margarita's turn came. She smiled brightly as she ducked and entered under the swinging rope. Her skinned knees bent every time she rose up, and her scuffed shoes sounded with a clack at each landing. Her arms rose to chest level at her sides, her hands in a grasp-a-ball form that stayed that way whether up or down. Her silky dark brown hair flipped open like bird wings, shining its auburn highlights, and fell back into place with a snap at each jump. The smile never left Margarita's face.

After the tenth jump, Margarita began the chant:

"My name is Margarita and I come from Mexico.

"I want to be a teacher and I like melons."

"No" the other girls wailed before she could continue. "You can't be a teacher; it doesn't start with an 'M.'"

"But that's what I want to be," she argued.

"It doesn't matter. It's not for reals; it's just for the song," the other girls explained. Juana could tell by Margarita's stiffened back that she hated the strictness of the rules. She knew Margarita would wonder why she should lie about what she wanted to be just for the chant. She wouldn't say she wanted to be a maid and clean up after other people. Margarita wouldn't want to be a mechanic either—too greasy!

"Do it again and make it right this time," the other girls told Margarita. "Or you lose your next turn." They were very strict.

Margarita started again, making it to ten quickly as the rope handlers turned faster.

"My name is Margarita and I come from Mexico.

"I want to be a *maestra* and I like melons."

She finished the chant without further interruption. No one questioned the "maestra" part. The girls didn't care if they understood the song just as long as it followed the rules.

Juana woke from tonight's dream with a start, only to hear the familiar sounds—raspy coughing and frantic attempts to catch a breath—sounds of Margarita having another asthma attack. Juana rose swiftly, slipping nimbly out from the covers so as not to wake Carlos, her sleeping husband. She stumbled a few steps, not feeling fully awake, but knew that it wouldn't matter. She just had to do the usual.

Juana turned on the light to Margarita and Emilia's room, saying, "*Está bien, Mi'ja. Aquí vengo,*" in a soothing voice. She didn't feel fine. She always felt a churning in her stomach, like a bad meal topped with sour milk. But the words were for her daughter, as she tried to relay a calmness she didn't feel. Through her blurred eyes Juana saw the usual sight: Margarita's chest heaving up and down in jerks, gasping for air, her large wide eyes transmitting fear and a plea to Juana. "Help me," the eyes always said.

In the kitchen she switched on the light, grabbed the bottle of Albuterol and a tablespoon, and returned to her daughters' bedroom. Already in a sitting position, Margarita opened her mouth automatically, as she'd done so many times before, and accepted the tablespoon. She swallowed quickly before another cough came and made her lose her medicine. On the way back to the kitchen, Juana touched the lump in the bed that would be Emilia's foot.

“*Ayuúdame, mi reina*. Rub her back and talk quietly to her.” Juana had never called Emilia *princesa*; Emilia had never been that young.

Back in the kitchen, Juana began putting together the pieces of Margarita’s nebulizer, her breathing machine, which had been drip-drying since her before-bed treatment. Juana checked the filter. A little brown. She’d change it after this treatment. She shook as much water out of the parts as she could, using the cleanest towel she could find.

Hook the plastic hose to the machine, the small medicine cup to the hose, break open an ampule of Proventil prescription medication into the cup, screw the top on the cup, attach the clear piece that looked like a squatty, fat “I,” and push the opposite end of the mouth piece into the “T.” Newer machines existed, Juana knew, but they were lucky to get this one cheap at *La Segunda*. Juana just had to remember to peel off the old tape and reapply a new piece over the tiny hole in the tubing. There’s always a reason for cheap, she thought, every time she did this.

Margarita’s breathing was slightly better by the time Juana returned, though it had only been two minutes. Emilia rubbed circles on Margarita’s back and hummed a made-up tune sleepily in her ear.

“*Gracias, mi reina*,” Juana dismissed Emilia, motioning for her to return to bed. Emilia would be tired at school tomorrow—again.

Juana plugged in the machine, switched it on and handed the mouthpiece to Margarita. Like before, Margarita’s already open mouth accepted the plastic gadget and she began the treatment. Suck in, puff out. Steam in, steam out. The machine rumbled like a slow-moving, driverless tractor with nowhere to go.

“Slowly, *Mi’ja*. Re-laaaaax,” Juana soothed, rubbing her back. She glanced down at Margarita’s hand-me-down shoes perched by the bed like a runner at the starting line. Emilia had polished them a glowing brown before passing them along to her sister two months ago. The brown still glowed. No new scuffs on those shoes, Juana thought. They’d hardly been worn and now were too small for her younger daughter.

How many times had they done this? They followed all the instructions the doctors at the clinics told them, even though sometimes different doctors told tell them different things—yes, hot cloths on her chest would help; no they wouldn’t—go ahead and try some herbs, it couldn’t hurt; don’t mess with herbs, they could be dangerous. At least all the *curanderas* said the same thing—fried onions on her chest. Make her sit in the kitchen when you fry them so she can breathe in the healing powers of the onion. That helped when Margarita had pneumonia, but only then.

When the same doctors saw Margarita over and over for the same problem, they started asking Juana questions. Does anyone at your home smoke around Margarita? Juana laughed. With their budget, if anyone bought cigarettes they’d have to sew the tobacco leaves together to wear and eat the filter tips. But she just answered, “No.”

They asked about her pregnancy with Margarita. Did she smoke? Same answer. Had she delivered Margarita early? Yes. In the family’s move from state to state to follow the crop, she hadn’t qualified for disability benefits, so out of necessity she kept working. During those times, Carlos worked near her to help her with anything heavy, but the foreman caught on and told them that if they were both going to get paid, then they’d both have to work.

Carlos had stayed close at the beginning too. After four pregnancies and two babies born, he knew how Juana’s pregnant body acted. One whiff of the early morning fertilizer and Juana’s head would be down in the field. Carlos would distract the foreman, then later he would bury the vomit. He did that to keep the foreman from thinking that they drank on the job and to keep him

from sending Juana home, making her lose a day's wages.

More recently, when Margarita's asthma got worse, the clinic doctors started paying more attention to her. Their questions to Juana became more prying: How long during your pregnancy did you work in the fields? Did you ever see a dusty substance on the plants? Did your skin touch it? Did you breathe it in? Did you ever work in a field posted with a "Danger/Peligro" sign after pesticide spraying? Juana told them she had worked as long as she could—until she delivered Margarita, a month early. And yes, she had done all of those other things; they were part of her job. If she hadn't done them, she wouldn't have had a job. After a while, Juana felt as if these doctors were trying to blame her for Margarita's illness, so she became less willing to answer their questions. She just wanted them to make her daughter well and leave her alone. They didn't seem to be able to do either.

Margarita's chest began relaxing and she breathed more regularly. Her eyes, no longer fearful and pleading, looked weary and tired. She would not be able to go to school tomorrow; maybe the day after with an inhaler if she didn't have another attack, thought Juana. How soon before the school would hold her back a grade? November 5 and Margarita had already missed a month of school. At ten she could barely read or write and had never jumped rope. What would become of her daughter?

The final drips of Proventil gurgled their way through the nebulizer and Juana shut off the machine. Hearing the slightly raspy but regular breaths of her daughter, Juana knew that for now, this was the best she could hope for. She tucked her daughter into bed, kissed her forehead, and gathered the machine and all its attachments. She leaned over Emilia, who, through all the noise, had somehow managed to fall back asleep, and kissed her cheek. Before she switched the light off, Juana glanced at the hall clock. 4:04 a.m. She thought about coaxing some hot water from the water heater to clean and sterilize the nebulizer pieces or waiting for the kettle to boil. To do that she'd be up for at least another half hour. A huge yawn made her decision. Juana promised herself to take care of the machine first thing in the morning. She needed to get some sleep before a new workday began.

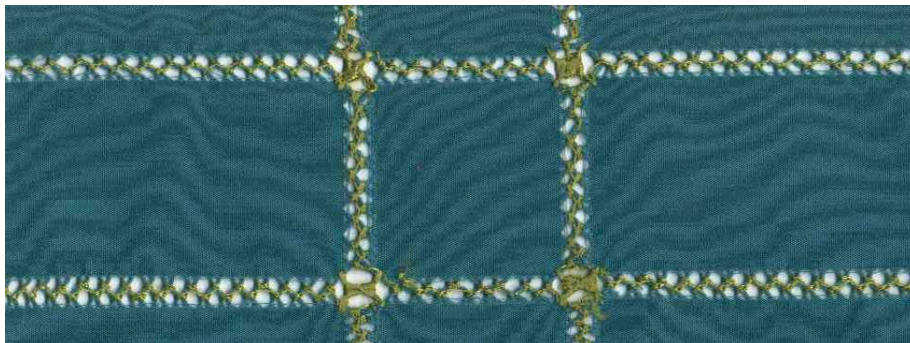
Juana crept quietly into her bedroom and slipped under the covers. Snuggling close to Carlos, trying to warm her cold body against his, he groaned a question with no words.

"Margarita," Juana answered.

"¿Otra vez?" he asked.

"Sí," she said, knowing that it wouldn't be the last time.

Juana rolled over and took a deep breath. She closed her eyes and tried to drift off to sleep, wanting desperately to return to scenes of her favorite dream.



A KITTEN FOR GLORIA

Lisa Ockerman

I frequently visit Rosa's Coffee Shop in Castroville when traveling between my home near Monterey Bay and Northern California. Hot coffee, served with a smile, and fresh pan dulce are my standard order. Two blocks from this café where locals meet is a row of trailer homes on the edge of a strawberry field—a migrant farmworker housing complex. These trailers are barely visible from busy Highway 156, and few people driving by pay any attention to them. However, many Central Coast residents consider these abodes an eyesore. I read in the local newspaper once about how some Carmel residents resented the sight of these housing units and wanted them "removed." I guess these protesters never considered who lived there. After all, I'm sure they eat strawberries and would prefer someone else to do the backbreaking work of picking them.

One cold and rainy November morning, bound for San Francisco to visit friends, I decided to stop at Rosa's for coffee, pan dulce and perhaps an egg or two rather than my usual order to go. The café was warm and full of the farmers, brokers and other cogs in the local produce machinery that are the bulk of Rosa's customers. I hung my drenched coat on the rack, navigated the Caution Wet Floor sign and headed for the counter. There was only one seat left in a row of middle-aged bulky men dressed in cowboy boots, jeans, long-sleeve cotton shirts and baseball or cowboy hats. I couldn't help but listen in on the conversation taking place between the two men seated at my right.

"Yep, his kid is real sick. He had to take two days off work even," the man in the thick black glasses, red plaid shirt and wide-brimmed cowboy hat mumbled between bites of his eggs over easy.

"What's wrong with the kid?" asked the younger man, wearing wire-rimmed glasses and dressed head to toe in denim.

"Don't know, but some time later I got a letter from an attorney." The first man shook his head as he shoveled more eggs into his mouth.

"Attorney? What for? Ain't your fault, Jack."

"Well, this renegade lawyer thinks I am to blame, here. The kid's dad worked in one of my fields and sometimes brought the kid with him. A little girl, twelve years old. They live in the trailers by my fields. She worked hard too, you know, to help out after school and on weekends. Anyway, she started getting sick."

"You like breakfast today?" a kind voice asked in broken English from behind the counter.

"Yes, that would be lovely. I'll have the special with eggs scrambled, wheat toast, orange juice and coffee. Thank you," I replied.

The men to my left departed and one of them left a newspaper behind. I took a section of the paper and pretended to read the local news, intrigued by the conversation taking place to my right.

"She's in the hospital, and they say it's real bad," the older man spoke before scraping his last bit of food from the plate.

"She gonna get better?"

“Don’t know. Hey, you done there? We should see what the rains have done to our crops.”

“Yep.” The younger man slurped the last of his coffee. “This one’s on me,” he said, grabbing the check and leaving the counter.

“Coffee and juice,” the waitress said, placing my beverages before me.

“Thank you.”

As I ate, I tried to read the newspaper, but I couldn’t let go of the conversation I overheard. *Why is she sick? Will she get better? How could these barnyard bozos be so cold?* As a mother and a catholic, I offered up a silent prayer for this child, who was not much older than my own. I thought of my daughter, on court-approved visitation for the day with her hopefully reformed and recovered father. At least she is healthy. As the waitress placed the check in front of me, I recalled that I needed to mail a check to my attorney.

A couple of weeks later, I returned to Rosa’s for my usual order-to-go. The place was empty except for a balding, tattooed cook and an elderly waitress. I had never seen them there before, and I was baffled by the lack of customers.

“A cup of coffee, cream no sugar and a pan dulce, please,” I said.

“No pan dulce today. Would you like a muffin? We got blueberry or apple-walnut.”

“Blueberry, I guess. Thank you.”

Disappointed due to the lack of pan dulce, I began to wonder if Rosa’s was under new ownership. The feeling here was different: cold and somber. Where were all the patrons that made this place a center of Castroville culture?

The waitress returned with my coffee and muffin. “That’ll be three dollars and twenty-seven cents,” she said in an unemotional voice.

“Wow, this is the first time this place has ever been empty,” I said lightly.

“Funeral,” the woman replied solemnly looking down at the floor.

“I am sorry to hear of the loss. One of the people who worked here?”

“Nope, a girl who lived in the trailers out there. Just twelve too, real sad.” The woman gestured to a coffee can with a photograph of a young Hispanic girl on it. She had big brown eyes and an optimistic smile. There was also a sign on the can—in both English and Spanish—asking for donations for funeral expenses. I took a five-dollar bill out of my wallet and placed it in the can.

Hector and Maria Hernandez lived with their five children in one of several run-down trailers that sat next to the strawberry fields along Route 156. Telephone wires dangled in front of cracked windowpanes and baby clothes hung drying on one of several clotheslines. A row of rusted cars, some without doors or windows and covered with mud, shielded the trailers from the highway. Nearby, a helicopter sprayed strawberry fields, the sun casting a rainbow over the lush red-dotted landscape.

The Hernandez trailer had no heat or running water, and electrical outages were frequent. Inside, there were three living areas. The large main room, where the family spent most of its time, included a six-foot long kitchenette and eating table. A small bedroom in the middle of the trailer contained two beds with only inches between them. The door to the small bathroom at the back of the trailer had a large “out of order” sign taped to the door.

Thanksgiving morning at breakfast was busy and vocal in the Hernandez household. The children were laughing while huddled in front of a twelve-inch television viewing Macy’s

Thanksgiving Day Parade, live from New York and dubbed in Spanish. Maria got out the corn flakes and juice, and the kids migrated towards the “kitchen.” Centered on the eating table was a large box full of food donated by a local church and delivered just moments earlier. In this humble environment, the Hernandez family overflowed with gratitude.

Before their Thanksgiving meal, Maria gave each of her children a piece of paper and asked them to choose a crayon from a cup on the table.

“Write what you’re most grateful for and read them out loud,” Maria asked as she smiled.

“I’m happy to be with Papa again,” exclaimed Ana, who had stayed with friends in Yuma so she could finish elementary school before following her family back to California.

“I’m grateful for Pokemon shoes,” added Juan, pointing out his second hand shoes.

“I’m grateful for all the food!” shouted Pablo, reaching out in curiosity for a bag of shelled nuts.

“I’m grateful for friends,” proclaimed Tina, peering outside at her friends playing on the muddy road in front of their temporary home.

Gloria was too sick to talk. At twelve years old, she was a withering fifty-eight pounds, often unable to hold her head up or keep her eyes open. She sat with her oxygen tank beside her and her plastic mask on the table in front of her. Rather than talk, she drew with a shaky hand a crude stick figure drawing of her family. Hector and Maria stood in the middle of the picture, the boys alongside their papa and Ana and Tina next to their mama, with Gloria sitting on the floor holding a kitten. They all smiled as they passed the picture around.

“We don’t have a kitten, silly.”

“Be quiet, Juan. Gloria wants a kitten.”

“You always take her side, Ana.”

“Yes, I do.”

“Enough you two,” interrupted Maria. “Ana, Gloria, I need your help with dinner, please.”

The Hernandez family could probably cover the costs of feeding a cat, but dared not bring an animal into a home with a child too sick to talk. As Maria and her daughters prepared the holiday meal, careful not to bump into each other, Gloria sat at the table uninterested in anything but her picture. Her brother and sisters made sure she was comfortable and tried to entertain her by drawing pictures with the crayons.

“Here’s a kitten for you, Gloria,” Ana said as she placed a picture of an orange kitten with long whiskers in her sister’s hand. Gloria smiled at Ana with love in her eyes.

Hector entered the trailer, soaked and muddy from working in the fields. Because it was raining hard the night before, he and some of the other farmworkers were in the fields harvesting broccoli well before dawn. The labor contractor ordered them into the fields because the rain would ruin the crop if they didn’t get it harvested quickly.

As Hector looked at Gloria, Maria knew that there were tears mixed with the rain dripping down his face. Maria motioned to her husband with a sad smile, knowing he felt guilty about Gloria’s condition. Gloria used to accompany her parents to work when not in school. It was common and often necessary for older children to work alongside their parents in the fields in order to supplement the family income. No one thought twice about it. That’s the way it was done. But Gloria had been sick ever since the day the spray from a helicopter drifted over from an adjacent field and covered her in a sticky goo.

As the meal preparations continued, Gloria gazed lovingly at her mother and struggled to hold out the picture of the kitten. Maria saw the longing look in Gloria’s eyes.

“It’s a lovely kitten, but we can’t have a kitten, dear. I’m sorry”

A tear ran down Gloria’s face onto the picture. She began to cough and wheeze, her breath coming in shallow gasps. Her eyes widened and she began to pound the table in frustration. Ana helped Maria put the oxygen mask over Gloria’s mouth and nose. They encouraged her to breathe deeply and calmly.

“I’ll get her medicine,” said Ana as she turned to the cabinet over the sink.

“Breathe in, dear,” coached her mother.

After ten minutes of oxygen, Gloria breathed in the medicine from her inhaler. She closed her eyes and her head started nodding as her mother removed the oxygen tank from her side. The picture of the kitten remained in her hand as she slipped into a slouch and began to fall asleep. Hector walked slowly across the room with a wet face, picked up his ill daughter effortlessly and carried her into the bedroom where she peacefully went to rest.

Just north of Route 156, alongside Highway 1 near Moss Landing, there is a cemetery where many migrant souls end their journeys. In the far left corner as you enter this restful place, several small plaques, flowers, and other tokens lay on the ground above the remains of a departed loved one. Among the plaques there is one engraved with the words, “Our Gloria.” This lush and restful place is dotted with a few red silk roses and a plush orange toy kitten.



SACRIFICE

Erin Marie Soos

A cool breeze creeps up Juanita's arms as the afternoon fog spreads into Salinas. She relishes the chill after bending over the strawberries all day beneath an angry red sun. Brushing back stray hairs from her face with her red-stained fingers, Juanita looks across Blanco Road where cars dart by like tin cans on a conveyor belt. Her husband, Julio, cautiously drives the tractor in the neighboring broccoli field. They are fortunate for this change. Last season, the landowner did not want to give any man wages just for driving a tractor, so the tractors ran by themselves, the field workers scurrying to keep pace. Six months ago, as one of the tractors reached the end of a row, Oscar Muñoz slipped, trying to jump on the tractor in order to change its direction. His right hand was crushed under the tread. It was amputated that same day.

Only a few hours left. Juanita leans forward once again to continue picking the strawberries. A small kick to her bladder causes Juanita to clutch her pregnant belly in pain.

"*Ay, pobrecito,*" Juanita sighs, rubbing her swollen stomach.

This pain is welcome to her, unlike the constant ache between her shoulders and the throbbing in her lower back. Juanita knows the baby is as uncomfortable as she is. The ten-hour workdays feel longer now, and kicking is a reminder to her of why she is still working. Soon the baby will be born and she will need money to pay for the added expenses.

Juanita wonders what the baby will be like. Will he be like her, small, but strong-willed and rebellious, or will he be like Julio, short and hefty, but handsome, kind, and a little shy? Maybe he will have her almond-dark, native skin with Julio's thick black hair.

Juanita shifts her weight and shuffles farther down the row of strawberries. *No matter what he's like, I know his abuelos would be proud.* Juanita's throat feels tight as she thinks of her parents who worked so hard to come to the United States for better opportunities. It has been three years since they died, and she misses them so much.

Juanita hears her name and looks up. Her friend, Marisol, is smiling at her. "*Mira su caja de cartón.*" Juanita looks down at her box of strawberries. The fresh fruit is falling off the sides. "Looks like you need a new box," Marisol laughs. "Let me take that full one for you."

"Oh, *gracias*, Mari. I wasn't paying attention."

"*De nada.* I remember what it is like to pick up heavy things when you are eight months pregnant." She picks up Juanita's box. "Tino was 20 pounds and still wanted to be picked up when I was pregnant with Marlene."

"I hope my baby is that way too," Juanita replies, as Marisol uses her foot to push an empty box toward her. Marisol walks down the row, and Juanita wishes her mother were here.

Juanita remembers the night that went on forever. Her mother was in the hospital, unconscious. They said it was a second stroke. She was only forty-four. Juanita, nineteen, sat with her newlywed husband and her four younger sisters in the hospital waiting room. The small couches, fake blue velvet with wooden armrests, were of little comfort. The family was too tired and afraid to speak to one another. Even the youngest sister Niná, seven years old, forgot to ask her usual countless questions. Their Papá had died seven months earlier, at the age of 50. Cancer ate his liver. Juanita knew that her mother's stroke was because of her father's death. The doctor's had been able to save her the first time, but it did not look good this time.

The doctor finally gave them a choice. They could keep her alive with the machines or they could shut them off and see if she would breathe on her own. Juanita knew her mother was already home with her husband. The machines were shut off.

Juanita notices a small strawberry, still white, hard, unripe. *I was once like this strawberry. Before Mamá and Papá died, I was innocent, yet hard in my convictions, not yet ripe with pain and knowledge.* It was with regret that Juanita let her younger sisters go to live with their aunt Lourdes in Colorado. She and Julio could not afford to take care of them. She misses the loud voices in the kitchen, the smell of fresh tortillas cooking on the stove.

Late in the evening, after leftover tamales and cold showers, Juanita and Julio lie in their springy bed, too tired for lovemaking, feeling the days, weeks, months of work built up in their muscles.

“Oh, Julio, turn on the light,” Juanita cries suddenly, a giggle in her voice.

“¿Qué pasa?” Julio asks, his voice quiet with weariness. He leans over and turns the switch on the small black lamp.

“Mira,” Juanita smiles, pointing to her naked brown belly. “He’s saying ‘*Hola, papi.*’”

A grin stretches across Julio’s face as he sees the imprint of his son’s tiny fist on his young wife’s belly. Gently, he places his larger hand over the small imprint.

“*M’ijo bonito,*” Julio whispers, laying his head down on the pillow.

Juanita takes his hand off her belly and brings it to her lips. They fall asleep, dreaming of their expected firstborn son.

Three weeks later, Juanita enters a strawberry field recently injected with methyl bromide. The reflecting tarps are already coming up and it is time to start sowing the next crop. The early morning is warm in the glare of the sun. Juanita is unusually tired today, her legs weak and shaky. Julio had urged her to stay home and rest; the baby is due at any time. Juanita had shaken her head and replied, “No, we cannot spare a day.” The determination in her face told Julio that there was no point in arguing.

Juanita walks through the dark mounds of dirt, following the men and women in front of her, and she feels heavy, her belly hard as a rock. Sharp pains stab her abdomen and Juanita falls to her knees; her hands splayed out in the dirt. The smell of manure is overwhelming in the fertile soil.

Juanita does not recognize the hands that touch her. The loud wailing all around her does not sound like the baby she wants to hear.

Hush, m’ijo, hush. I’m here. Juanita tries to bring her hand to her round belly and finds that it is strapped down. *What is going on?*

“She’s reviving,” says a woman’s voice loud beside Juanita, her hands on Juanita’s left shoulder. “Ma’am, don’t try to move. We’re almost to the hospital.”

Juanita realizes that they are moving. She must be in an ambulance.

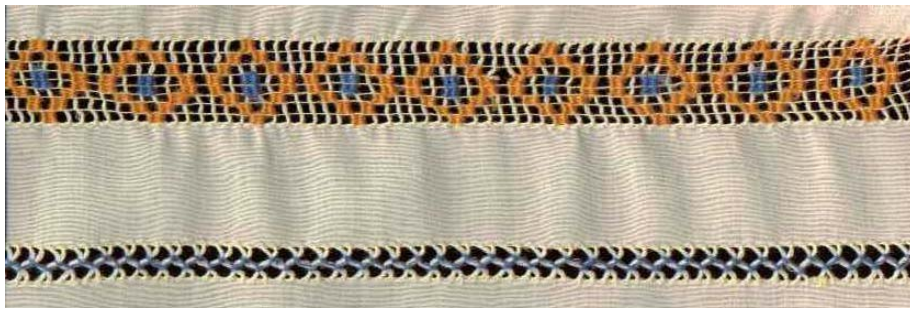
“My baby?” she manages to ask. She turns her head to look at the woman next to her.

“Don’t worry,” the woman in blue says. Her eyes meet Juanita’s but she looks away quickly. “We’re doing all we can.”

Jaunita hears a male voice say, “Just try to breathe, you’re going to make it.”

Juanita lies on her back in the small hospital bed. The IV in the back of her hand slowly drips saline into her body. Despite the morphine that the nurse injected into Juanita to keep her from feeling pain, Juanita can feel her blood pumping to the cut across her belly, now stitched up. Julio is at her side, holding the hand without the IV. Silently, he strokes the back of it, looking down at the soil in her fingernails. A wetness falls quietly from Juanita’s shut eyes, down her temples, into the crevices of her ears.

Three days later, a nurse stamps *COPY* on Juanita’s hospital form, covering the scrawled handwritten word, “Stillborn.”



POISON RAIN

Paul David Tuff

Who are the children whose people have worked in poisoned fields
for generations,
the children whose grandparents toiled in clouds of dust and fog
that burned eyes, skin, lungs?
Who are the children whose parents breathe deadly gas
they can't see or smell?

Who are the children who float in a toxic tide
in their mothers' bellies,
who suck poison
from their mothers' breasts,
whose bodies and behavior are altered
forever?

Who are the children who play in the poison that rains
on their playgrounds,
whose laughter spills from schoolyards
into the killing fields,
who cannot laugh but gasp and cough
from toxins all around?
Who are the children whose health our leaders ignore
in favor of a healthy economy?

Who are the children?



RED LETTUCE

Paul David Tuff

Clouds of heavy fog billowed across the road in the early-morning breeze. I filled my lungs with the cold, moist air, inhaling and then exhaling in a cycle that matched the even rhythm of the pedals turning at eighty-five revolutions per minute. I emptied my mind and became one with the ride, heart, lungs, muscles pumping with a synergy as efficient as the precision machine that bore me.

I could barely make out Mike ahead of me, looking like a pale ghost melting into gray nothingness. I rode after him reveling in the fog, the buffeting wind, the tires throwing up spray from wet pavement, the chain quietly gripping the gears. I felt the chill wetness seep through my jacket. My hands grew numb inside my gloves. My sweat mingled with the drizzle dripping off my nose.

A loud explosion roused me from my meditation. My front tire started wobbling and I immediately began to slow.

“Blowout!” I yelled. “I’ll meet you back at the car!”

I stopped, picked up my bike and carried it off the pavement and down a short embankment. At the bottom, parked cars, trucks and vans lined a dirt road, so I headed to the lee side to get out of the blustery late-autumn wind. I could hear muffled sounds of machinery and music coming from a field next to the vehicles. I peered into the fog and saw a crew of farmworkers cutting lettuce under lights mounted on a harvesting machine. I stood there a moment, enjoying the smell of fresh lettuce and the musty aroma of damp earth.

“David!”

I looked up and saw Mike riding through a river of fog that was spilling over the embankment and pouring down onto the field.

“Down here!” I called.

Mike saw me and scrambled down with his bike.

“Man! It’s nice to get out of that wind for a while.”

“Definitely. And since you’re here, maybe you can help me. I don’t know if I can change that tube myself. My hands are so stiff I can hardly get my gloves off.”

After removing my gloves, I rubbed my hands together briskly to try to stimulate some blood flow. When I could move my fingers again, Mike held my bike while I levered the tire off the wheel.

“Damn! Check this out.” A three-inch section of the tube was shredded. “I just changed this last week. I must have left a twist in the tube when I remounted it.”

“Yeah, or you got the tube caught between the tire and the rim and it got pinched until it blew.”

“Well, I’ve got a spare. It’ll only take me a few minutes to change it.”

While I installed the tube, Mike watched the crew work its way through the lettuce. The workers repeatedly bent, cut, and trimmed, littering the field with the discarded outer leaves. After I remounted the wheel, I joined him at the edge of the field.

“Damn! They’re really moving! My back hurts just watching them. My brother picked lettuce for a while one summer, but he’s six-four, and his back gave out after two months.”

"It's definitely back-breaking work," said Mike. "My chiropractor sees a lot of injured farmworkers in his office. All that repetitive motion really takes its toll."

"Not to mention the pesticides," I added as I pulled my gloves back on. "They must get poisoned on a daily basis. They probably bring the shit home to their families on their clothes. It makes me wonder how it affects them all over the long-term."

"That's a scary thought. I've read that kids can get exposed at school, too. Pesticides drift into some playgrounds from nearby fields. Man. I'm sure glad my kids don't go to one of those schools."

"Yeah, and I'm glad I don't have to work in the fields," I answered, nodding to the workers.

"Yeah, it sucks," said Mike as he adjusted the strap on his helmet. "They work harder than most of us but make barely enough to survive. Some of them live in hovels we wouldn't put our pets in. Many can't afford doctors or dentists. It's despicable that the billions made in this county from produce every year don't help the people who make it all happen."

"Yeah," I answered, "but when has helping people been as important as the bottom line?"

"I wish I knew," said Mike, shaking his head.

We watched the workers through a curtain of mist, hustling to fill the cardboard boxes propped up on the machine moving in front of them. Then a gust of wind blew away the fog for a moment. I saw a young man reach out with a bare hand to put a head of lettuce in a box. I wondered how he was cutting lettuce in that cold foggy weather without gloves. Then he stumbled somehow and fell towards the machine. He reflexively reached out with both hands and as he did, his knife flew out of his hand, hit the machine, bounced up, and hovered for a moment. As he scrambled at the machine to keep from falling, one hand closed on the falling blade, and I heard a muted scream.

I flinched. "*Shit!* Did you see that?"

"What? I heard somebody scream. What happened?"

"That guy there holding his hand just sliced it open with his knife. He needs something to stop the bleeding."

I instinctively reached into a pocket, pulled out a handkerchief and started to run out into the field. Mike grabbed my arm and jerked me to a stop.

"*Whoa*. Wait a minute. I think they have it under control. That gal next to him is wrapping his hand with something."

"Maybe so. But it's probably gonna take stitches to fix that hand. He needs to see a doctor. Shit, that cut was probably deep enough to slice tendons."

I remembered my brother's lettuce knife. It had a wooden handle about four inches long, with an eight-inch long razor-sharp double-edged blade, hooked near the end. I could have shaved with that knife it was so sharp.

Staring out into the fog, I took a big breath to calm myself down. I felt an overpowering urge to be a good Samaritan, but I realized that probably no one out there in the field wanted help from some over-excited gringo who had rudimentary Spanish-speaking skills and nothing more than a bandanna to stanch the blood flow from a serious wound.

The harvesting machine still inched along the field. Few of the workers seemed to have missed cutting a head of lettuce. Two of them were helping the injured man wrap something else around his hand. I could see that his blood had already soaked through the makeshift bandage to drip on the uncut heads of lettuce left in the field. Another guy, I guess it was the foreman, gestured at one of the workers, and she returned to her labors. The foreman spoke briefly with

the other worker and he and the injured man started to walk quickly towards the cars where Mike and I stood.

“Let’s go, David. They’ve got it handled. They’re probably taking him to a hospital.”

“Yeah. I hope so.”

I saw the foreman jump onto the harvesting machine and pull out a cell phone. I wondered who he was calling. The labor contractor? The grower? Maybe 911. I hoped it was the latter. That worker needed some medical attention, and fast. I just hoped he got to the hospital half as fast as they found someone to replace him in the field. I wondered, though. After all, he was merely one of the millions of legal and illegal immigrants eager for jobs in the massive agribusiness machine fueled by their labor.

“OK. Let’s go,” I said reluctantly.

We climbed up the embankment and mounted our bikes in the roiling wind. As we rode away, I looked down into the field and saw the crew vanishing in the fog. Then, pedaling hard, I sought the calm place where mind, body, machine and nature merge into oneness, but there was no unity in my world at that moment. People were struggling all around me, and I was riding an expensive bike right through the middle of it. It was a sobering thought and a revelation as well. I couldn’t just ride or drive past the problem any more. I knew that if I did, I’d be forever haunted by visions of a farmworker fertilizing fields of lettuce with his own blood.



Photograph by Paul David Tuff



COLLATERAL DAMAGE

Paul David Tuff

I.

Squadrons of chemicals
invaded the breasts
of my mother.
They are fat seeking missiles.
From her I sucked
pesticides,
an unwitting initiate
in the cult of self-poisoners.

II.

Planes fly low overhead.
Spray nozzles atomize
microscopic paratroopers.
They drift for three blocks,
are carried on dust particles
infiltrate my sister's yard
assault the skin of my niece
jumping rope in her driveway.

III.

Molecules of methyl bromide
slip from under plastic tarps,
carpet bomb the fields.
They search and destroy,
steal breath from a boy
standing stiff and wide-eyed
beside his mother.
She stoops over the strawberries,
clutches her pregnant belly
with red-stained hands.