

Shared with CABE Corner in honor of César Chavez Day 2020...

Cesar Chavez 1993

By Lucia Marcela Villarreal Villarreal

Cesar,

I hear that soon they lay you down to rest
deep in our home, the Earth.

Your breath, gone.

Your look, tu mirada, gone.

Your smile, la sonrisa que debajo del sol ardiente nos dabas a todos.

GONE.

Your look, smile, breath, Cesar,

all gone.

But no!

I remember and I see.

You are NOT gone.

You continue with us. With me.

You are here.

For many days now I can't take you out of my mind.

I see you, I hear you, I remember!

Bien que recuerdo.

I remember.

Those days, long ago, when like a voice in the wilderness,

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you came to my family in the vineyards of Coachella.

And I, a girl, heard your words and marveled.

Marveled at the dark-skinned young man who dared.

YOU DARED!

Tú entre tantos machos miedosos, fuiste el único sin miedo.

Yet you were not well received in the fields by your own.

My father, the great man, el macho, refused to listen to you.

So we continued working, niños, mujeres y hombres

in the fields oppressed and poor.

But proud.

In those days we ate pride

and clothed ourselves with that same pride.

PINCHE FALSE PRIDE!

Pride that held us where we were, what we were,

VICTIMAS.

Accepting our victim role.

Refusing to complain.

Allowing music, laughter and time

to heal the wounds inflicted by patrones y mayordomos.

and ourselves.

as we picked and we picked and we picked,

the many crops along the spine of Highway 99.

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Our own brown men in the campos refused to listen to you.

Refused to hear your words, to allow them to enter

Consciousness.

Refused to really see the life forced on us

-VIDA DE PERROS.

-LOS DESGRACIADOS.

They did not dare see.

They did not dare unleash their anger at patrones.

No, our hombres, los machos, pitched their anger at their women

their children.

LOS CHINGADOS,

CHOREADOS Y MALTRATADOS.

Pizcando y pizcando y pizcando.

From south to north and back again.

In Coachella, you came and went

and left again, leaving those who would not listen.

Carried your message to other fields,

hoping that somewhere your voice of esperanza would be welcomed.

And I, the young migrant campesina, continued in my slumber.

Deep sleep.

Numb state of oppression.

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Your voice was heard in other places. Where you carried

Your cry: "Si se puede!"

We heard echoes and rumors in our fields.

While some campesinos cursed you as trouble maker,

others listened and welcomed your message.

A MESSAGE OF HOPE and

DIGNITY.

De esperanza y dignidad.

Then, I began to stir from my sleep.

Your words of a nonviolent HUELGA woke me.

Could it be I could question life?

Could it be I could dare dream a life with dignity?

Could it be I was free to create my own life?

Could it be I could enter into dialogue with others?

Con mi gente, the workers, and allies . . . and even the oppressors?

What an awakening!

What a challenge!

What responsibility!

Now in my awakened state

I was both glad and afraid.

I smiled yet trembled.

And waited. . .

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Then you returned to Coachella.

Seeing you again spreading your words in our fields,

I found myself, the awakened maiden,

working the grape vines, wanting to join La Lucha.

Drawn to the struggle

wanting the promise of freedom,

la lucha hacia la libertad.

But first-steps towards freedom

had to be taken at home.

My father, my first oppressor, forbade me to believe in your words.

Words that told us

to rise up nonviolently

for better wages,

for descanso,

for baños,

and water in the fields.

My awakening brought bitter arguments,

daughter standing up to the father,

I cringing at falta de respeto,

and aching for approval from him,

yet ready to break the chains:

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-Mira, muchacha, el dólar de antes ya no es!

El patron ahora nos paga más-

The dollar of yesteryear is now \$1.25.

25 cents more for added survival power!

I, the obedient daughter, countered,

-Mire, papá, con el dólar de antes

sólo la uva cortábamos y a la caja la echábamos.

Ahora cortamos y EMPACAMOS,

Más dinero, sí, pero doble trabajo-

Labor the partrón once got from two paid workers

el pizcador y el empacador,

he now gets from one grape picker for only \$1.25.

Por un poquito más dinero, mucho más gana el patrón.

-CALLATE! Callate, muchacha!

My oppressed, used-and-abused father,

silencing his daughter again

Growing tired of our heated battles,

I left towards nowhere

away from home.

Away from fields and strikes

Toward boycott picket lines,

Drawn now to LA CAUSA with others

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I learned a lesson from you, Cesar,
that a belief in FREEDOM
had to be followed with ACCION.

Many of us took that action
creating divisions with our families and friends . . .
and learning, as we followed your footsteps,
that personal freedom
brought great personal pain.

TANTO DOLOR.

MALDITA SEA,
the lessons we had to learn!

If we had thought that life in the fields was brutal,
life in the picket line was now war:
Battling enemies that hated
our brown presence,
yet needing us for their mounting wealth.

Warring with patrones
Was like a war against ourselves.
How to battle those providing us livelihood?
Battling the hands that oppressed us

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felt like biting the hand that fed us.

How to break that umbilical cord?

Meetings with regional leaders

Pushing us to the front lines.

I, the fledgling college student,
rising out of the grape fields marching
in Safeway picket lines,
Yelling, "Boycott grapes!"

BOYCOTEO!

Carrying the picket sign was no burden.

Burden was carrying the shame of angry words.

Raging words that lashed out at us,
hearing angry words that questioned our very being.

Palabras de odio:

"Mexican trouble makers,

Wetbacks,

Spicks,

Greasers,

Beaners,

Go back to Mexico!"

I, the former virginal princess,

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was now the awakened whore.

questioning my being.

Who am I?

Why am I?

Answers were hard to come by.

In the midst of that shame and pain

I continued believing that

by the grace of God

there went I,

poor

migrant

MEXICAN

field laborer

campesina,

loathed for being.

Then, proudly being!

Blessed by the presence

of a WARRIOR

a humble Cesar

One of our own.

Who taught us that ¡SI SE PUEDE!

You, our Great Cesar, marching in Ghandi's footsteps,

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led us in protest marches

in pickets

in vigils

in prayer

in fasts

that eventually won for us better wages,

water, toilets, work breaks,

better conditions.

And, even better:

REAL PRIDE.

¡ORGULLO VERDADERO!

Y aún mejor,

Your great labor of love and direct action helped

to win over mi papá y mi mamá.

My mother, now a Chavista,

My father now stood proudly by her side.

my folks together in picket lines, striking,

carrying the BLACK EAGLE flag

both yelling out, "HUELGA!"

Both photographed in EL MALCRIADO.

Fighting the oppressor.

Hands interlocked with others,

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a human wall in the fields.

So good to see my elders, at last

helping to lead the fight.

Our machos turned into real man.

voting for LA UNION

Seeing them become, si se puede ser,

union card carriers and proud!

OUR PEOPLE TRANSFORMED.

And there for the grace of God

Went we, with so much hope for the future. . .

. . . today, Cesar,

soon they lay you to rest

deep in your home, the EARTH.

Nuestra Madre Tierra.

And from that Earth we will continue

taking sustenance

from Her

and from YOU

together

nourishing the life

the dream

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the vision
that you gave us.

I still see you,

I still hear you,

I still remember!

Bien que recuerdo.

I SEE.

I HEAR. ¡Si se puede!

!Siempre se Podrá!