



Cesar Chavez

Cesar Chavez was born in 1927 in Arizona to a Mexican American family. He attended school through the eighth grade, at which point he left to work full-time in agriculture with his family, who had become migrant workers after being forced to sell the farm they owned because of the Great Depression. As a migrant worker, Cesar moved around a lot, going wherever he could find work. He both witnessed and lived the hardships of this kind of work, and the unfair working conditions that went along with it.

Cesar enlisted in the Navy in 1946 and served until 1948, when he was dishonorably discharged. He went back to California and married Helen Fabela, a young woman he had met while doing agricultural work. He began working at the San Jose chapter of the Community Service Organization (CSO), a notable Latino civil rights group. He spent ten years at the CSO registering voters and promoting equal rights for Latinos.

Inspired by contemporary civil rights leaders like Mohandas Gandhi and Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr., Chavez thought that the techniques of peaceful non-violence could be used to improve the lives and working conditions of migrant farm workers. He left the CSO in 1962 and started a labor union called the National Farm Workers Association. He went into the fields and talked to the workers, urging them to join his union. However, many were reluctant, fearing that they would lose their jobs or get beat up if they stood up against the businesses that employed them. Little by little, though, membership in Cesar's union grew. He called his movement "La Causa", which means The Cause.

In 1965, the National Farm Workers Association organized a strike against grape farmers in California. Cesar and sixty-seven other farm workers began a 340-mile march to Sacramento, and they were joined by more and more people along the way until thousands reached their destination. The NFWA also organized a grape boycott. The battle with the grape growers lasted five years, but they eventually agreed to sign a contract with the union, giving in to many of the grape workers' demands. Cesar continued to fight for the rights of farm workers until he died peacefully in his sleep in 1993.

What is Cesar Chavez best known for? _____

