were clearly being discriminated against. With encouragement from SEIU International, Sanchez and Strawbridge undertook this new organizing effort.

It was my understanding that [SEIU] suggested [that] Alicia and Newman downplay the racist relations that the company was using to divide people...They [SEIU] said it would create more problems, it would be more divisive if [they] fought it. When racism at work is downplayed, [you lose] the ability to win over workers from different [racial] backgrounds [to unite] because of their common interests as workers. If the [organizers] play into [the racism], [they] play into the natural segregation...I think that is what happened...It was a pretty devastating loss, considering the time and energy that had been put in, and it had an effect on everything else, because if they had come back from Calistoga with a victory, it would have added to, not taken away from, what had happened in Sonoma County [with the organizing of SCIU]...It was demoralizing for the [PSGF and Calliope Designs] workers.9

The union lost the Calistoga Bottling election in August of 1990, which was devastating for SCIU.10 Workers from the other two companies already felt abandoned by their union, and by their two organizers.11 PSGF workers had signed a contract that did not contain significant improvements in working conditions or wage

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11 Celia Mendoza, interview by author, 20 October 1996, Santa Rosa, California,
increases. Calliope Designs workers had continued working without a contract, as they had not been successful in negotiations.

Strawbridge left the union at the end of 1991, and Sanchez faced several difficulties at that time. SEIU International unilaterally decided that she would no longer serve SCIU under the aegis of Local 707 in Sonoma County. SEIU assigned Sanchez to SEIU Local 87, the Janitors Local in San Francisco. The SCIU membership had no voice in the decision.

It was hard because Local 87 was in San Francisco, and they were Janitors. SCIU was put in a hard position. If SCIU wanted to have representation, its members had to go to San Francisco...After a year of working for Local 87, I resigned from my position in 1992. I think it was at that time that PSGF workers and Calliope Designs workers suffered, because Local 87 hired another Business Representative to come and service the SCIU workers...But, it was not the same because the workers, [by then], had been so used to having me as their union organizer, it was very difficult for them to work with this person...It was also very hard for me to leave Local 87 and SCIU. SCIU lasted probably one more year because the contract at PSGF was due for review and Calliope Designs had recently closed its doors.12

At the beginning of 1993, Calliope Designs closed its Santa Rosa plant and moved to Tijuana, Mexico, leaving the SCIU workers unemployed and without any compensation. PSGF was closed in

August of 1993. Workers in both plants were compelled to seek other employment. In August of 1993, SCIU ceased to exist. Three years later, most of the workers interviewed still worked in manufacturing, and very few were unionized.
Conclusion

When the workers of Calliope Designs and Point St. George Fisheries (PSGF) began their organizing process, they did not have union organizing experience, nor knowledge of United States labor laws. They did not have funds to support their struggles, and a large majority of them were not permanent residents in the United States. Yet, they overcame these obstacles to gain union representation at both sites.

The workers at Calliope Designs carried out and sustained a twelve-week strike and organized a consumer boycott of Calliope Designs ornaments. The PSGF workers endured a year of management-initiated court battles to gain union recognition. They also established regular picket-lines outside PSGF premises and a consumer boycott of PSGF products. They successfully initiated and won a lawsuit over the issue of protective gear and were able to sign a union contract in 1991. Workers at both plants organized numerous community rallies and marches, successfully building support for their struggle among other unions and peace and justice community groups.
The leadership and experience of Sanchez and Strawbridge was crucial to the development of SCIU. Without their assistance, it is highly unlikely that the workers could have mounted a union organizing effort of such magnitude. Sanchez and Strawbridge also utilized their contacts within the labor movement and the peace and justice community, and introduced the workers to both. However, their inexperience with contract negotiations proved to be a crucial weakness with a deleterious effect on the union.

The organizing progressed because the workers stood ready to take serious steps to remedy their working situation, and Sanchez and Strawbridge exhibited a willingness to donate countless hours without monetary compensation. Sanchez and Strawbridge guided the workers in a grass-roots union organizing in which other unions, the peace movement, the Catholic Church and Latino and Anglo activists supported them in their efforts.

Calliope Designs and PSGF workers formed strong connections with workers from other unions, especially with the members of the United Farm Workers (UFW) Union. Prior to 1988, the UFW did not have unionized workers in Sonoma or Napa counties. Soon after SCIU workers started their organizing, the UFW came to their
assistance with large amounts of food for the Calliope Designs workers on strike and for the PSGF workers who had been laid off. The UFW also supported the strikers on their picket lines with the presence of farm workers.

This relationship in turn benefited the UFW during the winery organizing drive they launched in Napa County in 1990. During the UFW organizing efforts, a large number of SCIU workers joined farmworkers on their picket lines and in their grape boycott in Sonoma and Napa Counties. Sanchez recalls how empowered SCIU workers became as a result of their contact with other workers experiencing similar work troubles. Sanchez also mentioned that the kinship among workers grew very strong:

Other unions and organizations [became] aware that this incredible group of Mexican workers were capable of being organized, capable of fighting, and were actually very militant and determined to better their working conditions...We helped other organizations and unions with leafleting, and picket lines because we became very good at picket line duty...We also had a political impact. Workers became more active in organizations. For example, the Faith Based Organizing Committee targets people working in the community politically. Some of our [union] members became members of that group and advanced themselves politically.\(^1\)

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\(^1\) Alicia Sanchez, interview by author, 6 November 1995, tape recording, Sebastopol, California, transcription, p. 8.
The formation of the union and the new relationships workers built with workers and community supporters exerted a tremendous influence on the lives of the workers and union organizers. Several of the workers emphasized that their union experience caused them to seek and obtain employment with better working conditions and wages. Furthermore, workers explained that because of their newly assertive behavior, the treatment they receive from their fellow workers and supervisors is more respectful.

The experience these workers gained has had repercussions in broader social and political issues. The Mexican community in Sonoma County became very active in 1994 against Proposition 187, and several of the SCIU members participated actively in the campaign against this Proposition. California Governor Pete Wilson strongly supported Proposition 187, which among other provisions would have prevented children of undocumented immigrants from receiving free education, health care and any other kind of social services. Thus, the original organizing efforts of SCIU have had a ripple effect reaching even into the electoral system.²

² Celia Mendoza, interview by author, 2 October 1996, Santa Rosa, California.
Sanchez, Strawbridge, and Edward Kehoe, an English as a Second Language (ESL) instructor, founded the "SCIU Labor School" in 1989 in response to the SCIU membership's expressed desire to learn English.  

Sanchez, Strawbridge and Kehoe established a school that provided language instruction to Mexican workers in a familiar environment. Enrollment quickly grew beyond the SCIU membership. Initially, SCIU hired Kehoe to teach one beginning ESL class at the Labor Center in Santa Rosa, where SCIU rented office space. Soon after, they approached California Human Development Corporation (CHDC) to fund SCIU's ESL Class.  

Kehoe stated that CHDC funded the class through the Immigration Reform and Control Act of 1986 (IRCA), the amnesty immigration program. To qualify for this program, people were required to study English for forty hours.  

CHDC paid Kehoe's salary and SCIU provided the space. As the number of students increased, SCIU's ESL classes rented space from the Carpenters Union. However, just as the classes increased in numbers, CHDC terminated its funding in 1992 due to the ending of the amnesty program. Sanchez and Kehoe saw how beneficial the

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3 Edward Kehoe, interview by author, 14 October 1996, Santa Rosa, California.
4 Kehoe, 14 October 1996.
5 Kehoe, 14 October 1996.
ESL classes were for the Mexican community, and they did not want to close the school. Therefore, Sanchez and Kehoe, the school director, presented a proposal to Santa Rosa Junior College to fund the ESL classes. The college readily agreed. During the period of SCIU's demise, the name of the school changed to *La Escuela del Centro de Trabajadores* (Workers' Center School). At present, beginning ESL classes at the Labor Center continue to be funded by the college.\(^6\) The program has two morning ESL classes and five evening ESL classes. Additionally, the school offers a General Education Diploma (GED) class in Spanish, which enables workers to obtain the equivalent of a high school diploma. These classes serve approximately three-hundred and fifty students who attend classes regularly.\(^7\)

According to Kehoe, *La Escuela del Centro de Trabajadores* is a lasting result of the organizing work that was done.\(^8\) The school is very popular in the Mexican community, and its enrollment grows every semester. The school consistently has a waiting list for these classes.

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6 Kehoe, 14 October 1996.
7 Edward Kehoe, interview by author, 15 October 1996, Santa Rosa, California.
8 Kehoe, 14 October 1996.
Some of these Mexican workers continued their education beyond the Workers School courses. Several women and a few men from SCIU began attending SRJC at the main campus, completing the ESL program and moving on to College English level courses. A few workers pursued vocational training.

Many workers who were not permanent residents in this country obtained permanent residency through IRCA, and many began actively seeking citizenship. They wanted to have political voice and power through gaining the right to vote.

Several of the women workers became active in their communities. Celia Mendoza and Susana Garcia, a PSGF worker, have been actively recruiting permanent residents to apply for their citizenship, resulting in many newly eligible voters for the 1996 presidential elections. Both women expressed that they would not have had the courage nor the political understanding to do this work prior to their union organizing experience. Garcia states that her new political awareness moved her to vote for the political candidates she felt would help the Latino community in Sonoma County.
I became a United States permanent resident, and later a citizen. I did it because I wanted to have the power to vote. In fact, I have been active in politics since I became a union member, regardless of my residency status, I could have been active even if I was undocumented. I am also involved in electoral politics because our people—Latino people—are becoming citizens, but they are not fully aware how our government works. I think it is important for our people to become educated in politics, so that they know what these people in power are doing for us, or against us.9

Francisca Bejar has become very vocal and active in the school district in which she resides. Bejar was instrumental in bringing after school child care to the elementary school her children attend. She acknowledged that Strawbridge and Sanchez were good role models for her and other Mexican women striving to better their lives for their future and their children.10

Sara Ochoa, who also became very militant as a result of the union organizing, stated:

One of the experiences I learned about was a union and a strike. Before [my own experience], I used to look at people being on strike, and I had no idea what it was all about. I thought to myself: "Those people are crazy, they are crazy because they do not want to work." Now when I see people on strike, I truly respect that strike because I know how much

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9 Susana Garcia, interview by author, 3 November 1996, Santa Rosa, California,

10 Francisca Bejar, interview by author, 5 October 1996, Santa Rosa, California,
those people are suffering. I support them morally, or I go to the picket line, because I know what they are fighting for...I will never cross a picket line.\footnote{Sara Ochoa, interview by author, 22 January, 1996, tape recording, Santa Rosa, California, transcription, p. 12-13.}

Paulina Martinez is an excellent example of the changes experienced by some of the Mexican women who participated in the union organizing. Her suffering during the strike and the strong cohesiveness of the strikers provided her with a firm belief that only a union keeps workers together in their struggle.

We did not achieve [with the strike] what we wanted. I do not think it was a victory. But, I do not think it was a defeat because we had proven that we, as Mexicans, also have rights, and that we can also do things in this country. So, if we unite ourselves, we could do it again. It [the union] gave me much more strength.

I learned a lot [from the union]. [The union] gave me much more strength. I, as a worker go to work, and it does not matter what kind of a patron I have. He can be a nice person, but it does not matter because they [patrones] always see the worker as that: simply a worker. Patrones see workers as money machines—that all we do is produce for them. When the worker cannot produce any more for the patron, they lay us off or fire us. Without any regard [of] how good we were or how much we produced for them. For that reason, I personally, in my job—the patron and her daughter; I do not care for them. If I feel like it, I greet them. Otherwise, I just keep on
working: Why? Because they are paying me for how much I can produce for them. They are not paying me for being nice to them. I realized that not everything is quite nice when the patron comes and says "Hi." I changed.
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SONOMA STATE UNIVERSITY
Protocol Summary Sheet
(Including Request for exemption from Review or Expedited Review)

Complete this sheet and respond to the questions listed on the reverse side. Re-type the questions and use as many sheets as necessary to respond fully. Submit to: Executive Secretary, CRHS, c/o Office of Sponsored Programs, N-130. PROPOSALS MUST BE SUBMITTED ONE MONTH BEFORE RESEARCH IS SCHEDULED TO BEGIN.

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Co-Investigator(s) If student, include faculty advisor

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Title of Project NEVADAN IMMIGRANT LABOR AND SITU

Briefly describe project purpose

PLEASE SEE ATTACHED PROPOSAL

FILL IN AS APPLICABLE

Subject Population NEVADAN WORKERS

Subject Source SAME AS ABOVE

Number of Subjects 100 How Contacted MAIL AND PHONE

Types of Instruments (e.g., tests, questionnaires, interview guides, etc.) ATTACH A COPY. IF NOT DEVELOPED, PROVIDE DRAFTS/SAMPLES, OUTLINES.

How administered: ☐ Phone ☐ Mail ☐ Face-to-Face

Setting SUBJECT HOME OR WORK PLACE

Length and Frequency of Procedure 1 HOUR

PLEASE NOTE: You must obtain CRHS approval before initiating any activity with the subjects. Literature search and other work not involving human subjects may be conducted prior to CRHS review.

Student investigators must obtain clearance from their department's human subjects committee. The faculty advisor can sit if the department does not have a committee.

DEPARTMENT CLEARANCE DATE Nov 9, 1994

THIS SPACE FOR CRHS USE ONLY:

This project:
☐ is exempt under category A
☐ is eligible for expedited review under category B
☐ requires CRHS review

Second Part

Calliope Designs workers

Hernandez, Adolfina
Jimenez, Martha and Mario
Martinez, Paulina
Ochoa, Sara
Pulido, Elena

Point St. George Fisheries

Bejar, Francisca and Salvador
Del Campo Martin, Julieta
Garcia, Susana
Gomez, Agueda
Mendoza, Celia

Union Organizers
Herring, Neil (Union lawyer)
Sanchez, Alicia
Strawbridge, Newman

Community Members
Briano, Christina
Kaplan, Paul
Kehoe, Edward
Mario and Martha Jimenez, workers
Calliope Designs

Q Where do you come from?

A: Martha: I am from Michoacan.
   Mario: I am from Nayarit, Mexico.

Q For how long have you been living in California?

A: Martha: 17 years.
   Mario: 16 years.

Q: Did you have union organizing experience in Mexico?

A: No. Mario: The town where I grew up was a very small town, I remember that when I was in school the total population was 13,000 people. Later on, we moved to another town, even smaller. There were no more than 80 houses, it was an agricultural area.
   Martha: I lived in a small town and I did not work.

Q: When you came to California, what was your first job?

A: Martha: I worked the night shift at a school for *chamacos rebeldes* (rebellious teens) that are taken to the youth correctional facility. I was just a *vigilante* (teen supervisor) at night time. [I found that job by] things of destiny.

Q How about you, Mario? What was your first job in California?

A: Well, picking apples. No unions or anything like that. Just work.

Q For how long had you worked at Calliope Designs?

A: Martha: I worked for approximately 10 years.
   Mario: I started working at Calliope Designs in 1981, 8 years.

Q When you started working there, was the company located at Tesconi Circle?
A: Martha: No, it was close to K-Mart, and it was a smaller factory.
      Mario: When I started working there it was already located at
      Tesconi Circle.

Q Did you start doing the *Monitos* (Ornaments) by piece rate?

A: Martha: We always worked by piece rate.
      Mario: There was a training period.
      Martha: They only paid you by the hour during the training. And when
      you did not work fast, they paid you the minimum wage.

Q For how long were you trained?

A: Mario: Two months.

Q How many workers were at Calliope Designs when you started
organizing the union?

A: Mario: I think 20 or 17.

Q What was the workers' racial breakdown?

A: Martha: When we started there were mostly Mexicans.
      Mario: No, there were lots of gueras (white women), there were one
      or two tables of gueros and there was only Doña Elena, Josefina, Sara,
      *Prieta* (Dark One -- (Consuelo Zavala).
      Martha: Then when we started the organizing efforts--we called it a
      union--we did not know, we just stopped working just like that on the
      spot.

Q Before we discuss the organizing efforts, what made you arrive at
the conclusion to stop working?

A: Martha: The real truth, the real truth. I never had the idea of how the
stoppage happened. I do not have any recollection of who had that idea.

Q How about you, Mario? Do you remember?
A: Martha: I only remember that they made an appointment at the California Rural Legal Assistance (CRLA) and then we were introduced to Alicia [Sanchez] and Newman [Strawbridge]. And that is how everything got started.

Q: But do you remember that before that, you [your group] decided not to work on a Monday? Because you had already several working problems, such as the boss reducing the piece rate pay?

A: Mario: Oh, yes, yes. Before Alicia and Newman there were some ornaments that were not made very frequently, only seasonally. Around July or August. When the harvest time was arriving, the grape picking. There were some ornaments that had young women riding them. Or Caballeros con Armadura.

Martha: They [the owners] took them to fairs.

Mario: Yes, to fairs. And then they had orders. So they paid for those ornaments up to $2.50.

Martha: The least paid to you was $1.50. And all of the sudden, we were paid eighty cents.

Q: Why? Do you remember when that happened?

A: Mario: I think we made those monitos for like 2 or 3 years. So one day a co-worker was told that--this co-worker used to talked to the patron [employer]. Maria, Dona Elena's [Dona is a term of respect given to, older women] daughter. She worked there. So, one day she told me: No, you know what? The patron said that it was time for the company to make money and not only the workers because he used to like to go to Mexico. I do not know if he still likes it. But, he used to go there for vacation. And often he would talk about his trips and what places he had visited. He did not like touristic places, but he liked to travel through little towns and villages. He liked to collect antiques and crafts.

Martha: Because his house is all decorated with antiques, his furniture is all antiques. You do not see a modern piece of furniture. They do not even have closets, they have roperotes [large armoirs] like ours.

Q: Did he invite you to parties at his house?

A: Martha: No! When he would travel to Mexico, he would ask Mario to water his plants, so since they did not have curtains, and you had to water
the plants all around the house, you could see inside very well.

Mario: His house had an alarm and was all secured.

Q What happened when he told Maria about the company making more money and not the workers?

A: Martha: Each year they would reduce from ten to twenty cents from each ornament.

Mario: So then, we would ask her to ask him—because she was bilingual and she could communicate with the *patron*, so through that way I gathered information about what was happening. Then I would talk with the others, just like any talk. So they did not like quite well what was happening. No, I just told them what Maria told me about the patron's plans. And I would always ask what their conversations were all about. And she would tell me: No, the *patron* says that he had enough about the workers making more money than the company. Now, it was the company's turn to make money. So he started reducing the pay. Ten cents, twenty cents each piece. So, can you imagine twenty cents multiplied by eighty, it was a lot. Your salary was reduced a lot.

Martha: What was even worse, was that at the end of the year, they would set a minimum wage and they would put the rest to turn it into company bonuses.

Q How was that? Can you explain?

A: Martha: For example, they set a salary for you, that you earn, lets say $5.00 an hour. Whatever was over $5.00 they put it as bonus. So they would give the bonus to the workers. And, they did not pay taxes for the money that you have earned. This is how they avoid paying taxes. If you made ornaments that cost $6.00, he would just pay you $5.00 and he kept the dollar left. At the end of the year they counted that money as bonus, a gift to the workers from the company. But that was not bonus! That was money the worker had earned, and they did not pay taxes. When we talked to the *patrona* [woman employer] about it, she would say that she did not know anything about it! In all jobs, the first ones to know everything are the employers.

Q So, what happened with the ornaments' reduction pay reductions? What motivated you to organize, to leave your work on Martin Luther King Day in 1988?
A: Mario: There were meetings. Sometimes he would have meetings, so we would talk to him, and Maria would translate for us. Or, sometimes we would just guess. So we asked him: What was that? Why was he reducing the ornaments so much since we killed ourselves to make a little bit more money than other people. We could even bring work to the house. During the night time you would make, for example, little presents. You would make them in your house, little balls, candy canes to decorate the Christmas trees, etc. In this way, you worked 2 to 3 hours in your house. Then, the next day, you could make more money. For example, there were some ornaments that were paid at ninety cents. It was a little Christmas tree with two presents, a ball and a little bear.

Martha: They used to control your salary. They would give you ornaments so that you could never make more than $12,000 or $13,000 a year. You never made more than that. They controlled your salary!

Mario: For example, there were times when you could make $100.00 a day working 2 to 3 hours in your house, making presents, little balls, stars, everything you needed to decorate your little tree. Then you just went to work the next morning and put it all together. So we were paid ninety cents for that little tree, and if you made 120, you made over $100. But the next day, they would give you ornaments of a different type from which you could make $25 or $30 a day.

Q: Could you decide what ornaments you wanted to make?

A: Mario: No, because they decided that the previous day. They would make a list of what ornaments each person was going to make. In this way, you knew what you were going to make the next day. That helped us when we made fancy ornaments because we took work to our house, and the next day we made over 120, 130 ornaments. But the following day you got one from which you only made $14 a day. The pay was paid by piece all the time. So we started getting very upset, and we told him not to do that. That he had good business, and his sales were increasing. And our salaries, instead of going up, were going down. We were not pleased. We tried to talk to him. We told him that everything in the store was very expensive, and it was not enough the money that we took home. And we had to pay rent that kept rising all the time. So he would say that there was lots of competition and that the ornaments' prices were very low, and that there was no money. However, this man always had enough money to travel. He liked to travel to Mexico, he likes the ruins. I think that he was
a hippie for a while, so he liked to travel...we worked okay there for a while, for example, when people in other jobs made less money. People in other jobs could make $150.00 a week, and we would make $500 in two weeks. So it was a lot. There were times that, together, we, [Martha and I] made over $1,000 for two weeks of work. Then it was good for the two of us. When he saw that, he decided that his workers were not going to make that much money any more. For example, Maria built a house with her salary in Mexico. It cost her $14,000, and in Mexico $14,000 is a fortune to invest in a house. He used to have an associate, his wife's sister. This woman was...I do not know what happened, but this woman left, and they kept the business. It was at that time when everything started changing. I think this woman lives now in San Francisco. This woman was always fair because we could talk to her about our situation, and she often decided in our favor. Not with this man. Everything started going downhill since she left, since she left the shop.

Q  Do you remember when that happened?

A: Martha: Mario did not meet the lady.
   Mario: Yes, I met her.
   Martha: She had left years before you came.

Q  Do you remember who organized the work stoppage that Monday?

A: Martha: That was the only thing. The people who decided that...they were not capable of enduring a work stoppage. They let their impulses guide them. They would say: "It is today, or never." So that is why Javier said, "we stop on Monday, or I do not participate any more." So all of us agreed. Okay, we stop working on Monday.

Q  This was before you met Alicia and Newman, right?

A: Martha: Look, that was decided when they already had met Alicia and Newman I...

Q  No, before you met Alicia and Newman. Do you remember? I understand that you stopped working on a Monday, on MLK day. And that you went to CRLA to seek help. At CRLA you requested Cristina Briano's [Mrs. Briano was a staff member at CRLA] advice.
A: Martha: Well, that was before the big paron (strike). Look, I do not have any idea. That was decided...we do not know how that happened. It is because new people were hired, and among those new people my comadre came. Angelica, Fina's sister. So at that time, Fina was also hired. Then, people say..."Well, I have heard from my sister, Doña Elena, that her [Angelica] told them: "Lets go, I do the talking." So, she investigated what to do and all that, and she made the appointment with Cristina. And it is when we got together. Then Cristina said that she could not help us but that she would introduce us to Alicia. And it was in that way that we met them. And, they started going out to eat [during lunch break] with us. We would go out to eat our lunch, and they would come and talk to us. That is how we got acquainted with them. But, in reality, I do not know who organized that.

Mario: Look...

Martha: First was Cristina, then el paron.

Mario: I remember that that day, just like that, without consulting anybody, without anything to protect us, we walked out of our jobs. We said: "We want the patron to come out and talk to us." He came, we talked and he did not want to raise our salaries. So we said: "Okay. Then we go home." So we went home. We did not work that day. But, somebody said, I do not remember who said, that what we had done was not okay...because el patron...they called us at our house to go back to work. And, we went back to work the next day. Somebody said that what we did was wrong. That we needed legal help, because doing it just like that, we risked our jobs, we could be fired without any protection.

Martha: But in reality, we were not seeking a union organizer. We were looking for someone to help us to better our salaries. The union's idea came from Alicia, and they brainwashed us about the union. Because we did not have the idea of forming a union.

Mario: What we wanted was to pressure the patron, so that he would agree to raise our salaries. Because, we realized that the company could not function. It takes a long time to train people to learn to make good ornaments.

Q: What tactics were you going to use to pressure the patron to give you what you wanted?

A: Mario: Stop working.

Martha: We just wanted to stop working so that he would raise our salary and, you know, organize ourselves in a better way to force him to
give us lunch breaks because we were not able to even do that. And, they
did not push us to take breaks. They let us work through the breaks. It
was okay with them. When somebody complained about physical pains,
they would just lay that person off. That is how they solved those
problems. The health insurance they gave us was bad and we had to pay
almost the whole quota. That is what we wanted to remedy.

Mario: We wanted a change in our health insurance, so that we did
not have to pay for it. The salaries were going down, and we had to pay
more for everything. We had to have health insurance because of the
children, my wife, and because it is important to have health insurance in
this country.

Q: When you walked out that Monday, you went to see Cristina, and she
told you that walking out like that was not okay. You went back to work.
When did you met with Newman and Alicia?

A: Mario: We met in an office that is across from Cocos, [Mexican
bakery]. There we got together. That was the first time that we got
together with Alicia and Newman. Then, they started going to our work to
eat lunch with us.

Q: What kind of information did they give you in terms of union
organizing?

A: Mario: Well, at the beginning, they told us that we were able to do
everything we wanted to do, see? But as the events moved on...

Martha: And that everything was fine. They told us that everything
was very easy and that they were going to investigate the patron's
business. That everything was just going to be fine! In reality they never
told us: "Look, there may be these kinds of problems or complications." They
never, never discussed that. For them everything was as the
American [American] says: "Piece of cake." If things were complicated,
they were not able to find solutions to anything, nothing. They were not
capable of saying, "Let's do this, or let's do that." What was even worse,
every time we had meetings, we always had somebody that would give us
the news, and we never knew who did it. It was until after the fact that
we knew who did it.

Q: What kind of news, who told what?
A: Martha: For example, we met, and decided on a strategy, let's say a work stoppage, slow the production down, or any other thing. Well, there was a couple that always went to these meetings and was always telling everything to the patron.

Q: Do you know who that couple was? Can you tell me?

A: Martha: Yes, it was Alicia and Uriel Caballero, they were husband and wife. We found out what they were doing very late because after all the compañeros were laid off one by one, like Josefina, whose hands were injured, and Sara too...

Q: Are you discussing the events that happened after the strike? Can we go back to the beginning and discuss how you formed the union?

A: Mario: Well look, this is what happened. When we went to those first meetings at Alicia and Newman's house. At the beginning of those meetings I told them: "You know what? I am leaving the company, I can help in whatever way I can, but I am looking for another job." The truth is that I hated to ask for unemployment at the end of the year because it was at that time...

Martha: Always, every year we stopped working after December 15, and we did not go back until they called us. That was also another way they had to regulate our salary.

Mario: You know, laying you off during the Christmas holidays? It is when you need more money, and it is when we were so broke.

Q: You were forced before Christmas to work very hard to supply all the orders and after that, you were laid off?

A: Mario: Yes, because December 15 was the deadline to supply all the orders all over the country. So I told my compañeros that the money I was making there was not enough to support my family. They said that it was fine for me to leave. We started going to the meetings and getting together to discuss the union. We had a union election, and we won the election.

Q: Based on what you were saying previously, when you voted for the union, were you fully aware of what you were doing?
A: Martha: Look, in reality they never told us. Well, I think that not even they had a notion. I am very sure that they did not have a notion, or experience, about union organizing. And, I am going to tell you why. They made us vote. They told us that everything was easy. And, that the results...when we were parados (on strike) ...If they would have had an idea of what they were doing, they would have told us: "Go collect unemployment." Because, supposedly there is a law...I learned about it later on when I was going to school. Now, after all that time. Since the strike. When you are on strike you have the right to ask for unemployment, disability, and things like that. So if they had any idea of what they were doing, they would have told us: "You know what? Go ask for unemployment and disability." In one way or another the money is going to come from the patron. Because the state would have pushed him in any way to pay us. Well, No! [mocking Newman and Alicia] "You cannot collect unemployment". I had to ask for disability, and the state did not deny it to me. Because it was my right. I wrote on the form that I was on strike, and even though they gave it to me [Martha was pregnant during the strike]. Later on, I read the unemployment papers, and it is possible to collect unemployment. Therefore, they did not have a clue of what they were doing. In other words, they just told us: "Organize yourselves and it is going to be very easy."

Q: Mario, do you think the same way as Martha?

A: Mario: Well look, how can I say it. During the time I was involved, I learned to know people. So, maybe during that time, I did not have experience about unions and those arguendas [deals] like people say. But I think they had some knowledge. After all, they led us to where we were. And everything was going okay because with much sacrifice and bad times with the patron we had control of the situation, because the patron had spent all his energy and money...because it took him approximately three year to open his Maquiladora [Sweat Shop] in Mexico. When the North American Free Trade Agreement (NAFTA) started happening, he opened a sweat shop in Mexico. He was doing in Mexico the same ornaments we were doing here. He even brought people from Mexico to train them here, and took people from here to train others there. But the people he brought did not know anything.
Q: What happened during the meeting in which you decided to go on strike? Did they [Newman and Alicia] explain to you the pros and cons of a strike? Can you discuss that meeting?

A: Martha: Newman and Alicia thought that everything was going to be solved overnight, the *companionos* were thinking in similar ways. That is why when I told you, after two weeks, everybody started looking for a job, there were even people who got good jobs, and they dropped them just to go back to work at Calliope Designs. But not because they did not like the other jobs. But because they thought that things were going to improve much more at Calliope Designs. Like Josefina--she found another job, and Sara, Javier, Rafael, and Consuelo. Everybody sought new jobs. The only ones who stayed behind were us. I could not look for another job, and he [Mario] did not want to abandon them in the strike. So, when we ended the strike, the most affected ones were Mario, Sara, Fina and Paulina.

Q: Why?

A: Mario: Well let me explain it to you. I was going to school, and I always knew more...

  Martha: Because they were the most aggressive ones, they always *pushaban* (pushed) the *patron*. Then, one day, he got mad, and Paulina was arrested.

Q: During the strike?

A: Martha: They wanted to arrest Sara, Mario, or Fina--any one of those four. The thing is that Paulina passed near the *vieja* [security woman]...then when we went back to work, they threw an ornament box on Fina's head. They wanted to kick Mario and Sara out. So they heavy-handed them. First, when they protested about Fina's accident. Mario, Sara, Javier, and Rafael were laid off off for one month without any salary.

Q: What did the union do to protect Fina and the others?

A: Martha: Nothing!

Q: Why?
A: Martha: That is what we ask ourselves.
Mario: There was some kind of legal action about Fina, but I do not know for sure.

Q: What actions did the Union take when you all were laid-off?

A: Mario: Nothing, we were just laid off for one month. A month after we went back to work, they sent us a paper informing us that we had to start working. Since then, they [employers] became heavier-handed with me.

Martha: They started giving the worst ornaments to Sara and Mario. Sara! She was a very good worker and due to the hardship of those ornaments, her hands started getting swollen. That is how she ruined her hands. That is how she started missing work because of her hands. So what happened? When they saw that! They purposely gave her even more of those ornaments, harder ones, just to fire her. They were giving to Mario very bad ornaments, so that he would barely make the minimum salary. Then finally one day, Mario grew tired and left the company. When Mario left, we became aware of who was telling the patron about our meetings and plans.

Q: How did you find out?

A: Martha: Because one day they started taking Lupe to Mexico to make masa [dough]. They also took Juan to do the finishing. But Juan did not tell us about his activities! [Lupe was the only Mexican in the company who was anti-union. She stayed working for the company throughout the strike. She also trained new "scabs". People think that because she stayed and did the important part of the production--dough making and training--the company survived for 13 weeks without the others' labor. Juan was a very active union member. He participated in several union activities and was always at the picket-line. That is probably why his coworkers were very surprised to see him cooperating with the company owner]. He never told us that he was going to Tijuana to work and train people. One day the patron called Manuel to his office and asked him to train people in Tijuana, he was told that they would pay whatever money he wanted. Manuel behaved correctly. He told them several excuses so that he definitely could not take that trip. It was not the salary, it was [his principles]. He immediately told us about it. When Alicia Caballero heard about it, she left what she was doing and immediately talked to the
*patron* and told him that she would be more than willing to go. Then she was told that Lupe was not going on that trip. Uriel, [Alicia's husband] said that he would want to go. And he went with the *patron*. Later on, Alicia and Lupe went together. So they continued going with Lupe and *el patron* back and forth. They [Alicia and Uriel] are the most backward people. We all ignore them.

**Q** What did you do when you became aware of all this. Did you talk to Alicia and Newman?

**Q** Martha: Yes, they knew, they always knew. However, if they were thinking of really hurting us [meaning Alicia and Newman]. Well they did hurt some people. Like Doña Elena because she was older. She could have stayed there until her retirement and some other people like Consuelo, who does not like to go to school and does not like to better herself.

Mario: They really hurt them.

Martha: They really hurt them. But us, and the others--they did us a favor. We were pushed to go out and look for better jobs, with better salaries and benefits. We get raises often times. As an example, the person who really has helped us the best, more so than Alicia and all the others has been Paulina Martinez. She saw in the paper that the place where her husband works was needing new people, and she told Mario about it. She also asked her husband to recommend Mario for the position. Later on, she talked to her supervisor about me and asked her to hire me. Paulina's supervisor requested me to talk and write some English. So, thanks to God, it has been good for me. And, it is the same for Mario. We have dental, eye and health insurance, and we do not have to pay that much money, and our salaries are even higher. I am making a third more than what I was making there, and Mario also makes a third more.

Mario: Look, I worked there several years, and I only made $5.00 an hour when I worked by the hour. But...in reality...that helped me...

Martha: And, I say, now we know what it really means to receive bonuses that come from the *patron*'s pocket, not from your salary. So that they tell you: "These are your bonuses, your Christmas money, and this is your salary. This is how much money we are giving you a year."

**Q** How did you view the negotiations when you were on strike? I understand that you Mario were part of the negotiations committee. Who was negotiating with the *Patrones* in addition to Newman and Alicia. Do you think they were representing you fairly?
Mario: I was the picket line captain. I sat at the negotiation table. In reality, we were the ones negotiating, and Newman and Alicia would translate what we were saying. I do not know if they had the experience or not. I think that they must since they were doing it. Later on, I learned that Alicia was an organizer at her university.

Martha: [talking to Mario] But you know very well that it is not the same to organize a protest as to organize a union. Because for example, for us to say, "you know what Laura? There is something happening here in the neighborhood, and we are organizing ourselves to protest about this or that, or to protest against the aggression against our Raza [people]." But it is very different to organize a protest and to organize a union because when you organize a union, the union has to have a base and a fund to protect everybody. The union has to be strong enough to defend the workers against the patrones. The union has to have a fund to help workers economically that have been fired unjustly. The union has to push the employers to hire the workers back, so that the workers get to be hired again. If the worker is not hired back by the company, the union has to help the worker financially.

Q Did you have the time to make a financial fund?

A: Martha: No. No.

Mario: Let me tell you something. Our salaries were not enough to make a union fund. You see, for us to pay the quotas to increment the fund was very difficult.

Q But if you did not have a fund, why did you decide to go on strike?

A: Mario: Because we were desperate. We did not care if we were fired or not. We would rather work in the fields where we would be paid $5.00. They would pay you the same and with better treatment. There, in the fields, it was better. At Calliope Designs, one, you had to be breathing the flour because it was all in the air. The dough was right there. They even mixed it there. The flour was all over the air. You had to be swallowing salt all day long. You work happier in the fields, in the open air, happy, relaxed.

Martha: This happened. How can I tell you? To make an analogy, when you live in Mexico, you see the people come back and forth from the United States to Mexico, and you think it is easy. I can also do it. But life,
it is not like that. When you come to this country you are faced with the fact that they do not even talk your same language. This is how it happened with the union. When we were all involved, the union was not ready to handle the problems or golpes [hits] that we had.

Q Some of you were also thinking that you were going to be on strike for only few days. Is that right?

A: Martha: All the people from Guanajuato were thinking that they were going to be on strike for only very few days. And, when they saw that it was not a few days, they looked for another job, and they left. They just dropped the struggle.

Q Who were the people from Guanajuato?

A: Martha: Rafael was one of them. Javier looked for a job and left. Josefina got disability immediately and left. The disability insurance gave her some training and she left. They quitearon [quit] immediately. They left, and only the ones who stayed had to cover for all.

Mario: Well, you know, the only consolation I have is that I did not give them [meaning the employer] the enjoyment to fire me. I went and told Stephanie, "My salary is not enough." And she told me: "look, think about all the time we have spent together," etc. etc. I told her, I need to have a raise. Are you going to give it to me..."

Q What happened to the other people, like Doña Elena? According to some, she was the most affected one. Did she stay to the end, when the factory moved down to Mexico?

A: Martha: Elena stayed to the end. When they closed the factory, I was only working part time, two days a week. That was all.

Q Who else was working?

A: Martha: Blanca, Consuelo Arellano, Alicia and Uriel Caballero, Manuel, Doña Elena and myself. They also did not tell us about closing. We just got to work on a Monday, and they gave us recommendation letters and our checks.

Mario: Look, we had an idea that they were going to close...
Martha: Yes we did, but they did not tell us when or how they were going to close.

Q: Did you contact the union to inform them of what was happening?

A: Martha: You know that Alicia and Newman were already separated. Alicia was working some place else. So she did not have any interest in the union because the fish [PSGF], that was another place that they organized, had closed the plant. She was already looking for another place to make money. Newman had already left. We did not have any contact with him.

Q: How about the legal services the union provided for you?

A: Martha: Neil Herring was a good lawyer, a good person, a person that when we needed him he supported us. Such as with Paulina's case. Thanks to him, her case was won. Paulina received her retroactive pay. I think that he supported us tremendously. He was always very honest with us. He told us, "I will help you all I can. I am a retired lawyer, I do not practice law right now, I only do special jobs." So, we were lucky to have him. He was a good person. That is all.
Martha and Mario Jimenez, workers, Calliope Designs

Q: Fina, could you tell me were you come from?
A: I come from the state of Michoacan, Mexico.

Q: How long have you been living in California?
A: I came in 1960; I was only 18 years old.

Q: When did you start working at Calliope Designs?
A: I started working at the monitos [ornaments --Calliope Designs] in 1985. My sister Angelica, helped me get a job in the shipping department. My starting wage was $ 3.75 an hour. [I was hired] because I spoke English. I could speak and read English [but] I did not know how to write [it]. However, not knowing how to write English was not a problem, I needed to read English at work not to write.

I worked in the back of the company, but I could go back and forth to the area were the other employees worked. I worked in the back of the company with my supervisor and my companeras [coworkers]. All of the people in the shipping department were white; there were no Mexicanos [Mexicans].

Q: How was the racial breakdown in the production area?

A: At the front [in the production area] were the ones who categorize the ornaments [by type and style], and often I had to pick the ornaments, of course, after they were maqueados (lacquered). All the supplies needed in the shipping department were stored in the front. Boxes, papers, etc. After I finished an order, I would take the completed invoices to the office. I usually saw the other workers and we talked about the working conditions. The racial breakdown was as [follows]: There were two American Indian women, Anglos were the supervisors, and the rest were all Mexicans. All of the people who did production were Mexicans.

I never had any problems with them [company owners] because when I started working there I was making monitos. But because of my doctor's orders I was assigned to the shipping department. Nevertheless, I did not work as hard in the shipping department, as I did in
It was better for me to make monitos because I was paid piece rate. But I could not continue [making monitos] because of the salt that was in the dough. I also got the habit of finishing my monitos with my tongue. I would lick them to give them the finishing touch. I used to go to my house with my tongue all weary.

Even though I [was transferred] to the shipping department, I continued having a friendship with the workers in production. All of a sudden, the problems started with the employer. He would say to the workers: 'We are going to reduce [the pay by] .10 cents because all the prices have gone high --salt, flour, everything. We are going to reduce .10 cents on some ornaments.'

Q: Do you remember when these changes started happening?
A: Yes, it was at the beginning of 1985. In one year they reduced the ornaments' pay by .10 cents. Then six months later, they told us that the building rent had gone up and they reduced .05 on two other ornaments. These changes in wages really did not affect me because my wage was the same; I was [paid by the hour]. But the other people working under the piece rate wage were very affected. So they would complain a lot during our lunch breaks, and we would discuss about ways and places where they could get help. I told them that the only place that could help them was California Rural Legal Assistance (CRLA).

That was at the beginning of 1988. See, three years had gone by since the patron [company owner] started reducing their wages. Finally I told them that they had to go and ask for help to remedy their working conditions. My sister Angelica, Consuelo --la Prieta [dark one]-- and Sara went to CRLA. I think that was it. I am not sure if Martha, Mario's wife went with them. We all agreed that they would go with Angelica. Dona [term of respect for mature people] Elena, the senior worker, did not want to be involved. Two months after the struggle started, Dona Elena was still not participating. I was worried about her because she was getting sicker and sicker and I would tell Her, 'Dona Elena all these things that they are doing to you [are not okay]. You are the one who has been working the longest, your hands are getting tired, and they [company owners] keep cutting your wages. What is going to happen to you when you cannot make any more ornaments? You have to defend yourself.' I encouraged her to participate.

Q: How was the treatment you received from the patrones?
A: The woman [wife] was not bad, but the man! He was rude and arrogant. The woman was nicer, but he was bad! There were times in which he came to work in a bad mood, and he would kick boxes and things. But to tell you the truth, he never offended me. He offended me when we were on strike. Then he offended me because he thought that I was [using] information from his business to help us in the strike. I thought that we would use that information to tell his customers about his labor malpractices. Because we were sending letters to his customers informing them about the strike, we wanted to boycott his business. The patron thought that I was the only one who had [access] to that information. However, I only took part on taking copies of the invoices, there were others doing it too. Once [during the strike] he saw in Juan car's trunk a box full of envelopes with the name and addresses of his buyers. At that time that he became very abusive, he was swearing at me and started pushing me to have a better view of the box, [because I was standing next to the car]. I had a picket line sign with me, and I tried immediately to cover the trunk with my sign. He even wanted to open the trunk by force, and I told him that he did not have any right to do that. He said [to me] that he wanted to see what was inside the trunk. I told him you have to ask the car owner, and he said this is my property, all of this is my property. I said, no, your property is the shop, it is true that this is the parking lot, but you have to still ask the car owner. From that time on, he never talked to me again. But I did not care.

Q: Let's go back to the time when you were doing your first organizing. When Sara, Consuelo and Angelica decided to go to CRLA to ask for help, what happened?

A: First, I think they talked to Christina Briano, then Christina spoke with Newman [Strawbridge], because Alicia [Sanchez] was not involved yet.

Q: Was it then that you decided to stop working for one day? How did you arrive at the conclusion to stop working? Was this before you went to CRLA, or after?

A: We all talked. We always talked about our working problems during our lunch break because we ate outside the shop. When we were eating, the other workers would tell me their problems and what was
happening to them. I clearly told them that what was happening to them was not okay. If everyone on an hourly wage basis got raises, the people working under piece rate should not have to take a wage cut. Why did the *patrones* not cut everybody's wage to be even? I told them, 'it is not fair because the legal thing is that if they are spending much money in the items they buy, they should reduce everybody's wages.'

The day when we all decided not to work, nobody went to work. We decided it was time to do something radical so that the *patron* would reconsider his idea of cutting our wages. We hoped for him to respond positively, and if he did not [respond positively], then we were ready to continue the struggle. But the decision was made by everybody. Sara Ochoa had the idea to leave work that day; I think it was her. Angelica and Sara were the most active ones. However, they never stop asking me for my advice, because they probably thought that I had more knowledge about the law, or [simply], because I spoke English, I knew more. When we decided [to stop working], when they asked my opinion, I told that I agreed to stop working one day. I told them that they should do it because if there was not action, we could not find solutions to anything. We had exhausted the talks with the *patron*. We had had meetings with him. Precisely, we just had had a meeting with him that weekend, and we had explained to him our situation. We had asked for a professional translator. I spoke to the *patrona* [woman employer] and requested a professional translator because the large majority of the people did not speak English. [They did not bring a translator to the meeting], so what did they gain to talk to us in English? Nothing, because nobody understood what the *patrones* were saying. As I told you, I told them to hire a bilingual person for the workers who did not speak English. The *patrones* said 'yes,' that they were going to have somebody for the next meeting. The next meeting came, we did not have a translator, and our demands were not taking into account.

Q: How about Lupe Farias? Did she speak English?

A: Lupe spoke very good English, but she said the opposite of what the workers wanted for her to say; she was always on the *patron's* side. She is a bad person! even though she is Mexican, she is bad! She treated the other Mexican workers bad. We did not have her support. That is why we had a hard time during the strike because she kept working for
the patron, she did not go on strike with us. In addition, she looked for people to work. She brought other Mexicans to work!

Q: Going back to the meeting where you were to have a translator, what happened at that meeting?

A: The meeting came, and the patrones did not have anybody to translate for us. Then, we stopped working the following Monday.

Q: Why did you choose that Martin Luther King (MLK) Monday?
A: It was an action that we had decided [to take] in case our demandas were not met. We did not plan our sit-down at work around MLK because it was a special day. Our Monday sit-down was a mere coincidence with MLK day. We got together early that morning outside the shop. We got together and, after we went in the shop, --all of us at once, did not work. We did not work because we wanted to wait for the patron to meet with us. After the sit-down, we talked to Newman or Christina Briano, I do not remember. I think it was only Christina. Christina advised us to go back to work the next day [because we could lose our jobs]. She also told us that a sit-down was not the best way to deal with labor problems. Therefore, we decided to go back to work the next day.

Q: What happened when you went back to work the next day?

A: The next day, I was kept from going inside the shop because somebody accused me of being the sit-down organizer. I think Lupe accused me. She said to the patron that I was the organizer. But let me tell you something. It was not the one who started all that organizing, but I was the one who never let the union die because I gave them the energy to keep struggling. Maybe people believed in me, I do not know. I told Lupe once, 'Lupe: Right now you are good friends with the patron, you obey him on everything, but you are going to lose your job [some day], he is going to kick you out.' When the shop was moved down to Mexico, he fired her.

Q: How was the working environment on Tuesday, the day after, when you went back to work?
A: Since I was in the back, I did not see what happened. I found out what was happening at lunch break when we went out. They told me that the *patron* had Lupe translating for him at their meeting, and he asked them why they did not want to work the day before. He said that he could have fired them. I do not remember if it was Mario or la *Prieta* who told him that if that was his choice, it was fine with them. The *patron* begged them in that meeting to wait for a solution, that everything was going to be okay.

Q: Nobody spoke English? Not even Mario or Angelica?

A: No. Only Lupe and myself. Everybody understood some English, but not sufficiently to talk to the *patron*. Even though workers could not speak English, they could understand some and that is how they knew Lupe was saying lies to them. I was not present at that meeting because I worked in a different department, so the meeting was with the other workers.

However, after the sit-down, Jones, my supervisor, was forced by the *patron* to give me a hard time, to push me to quit. She [confidentially] told me that it was in my best interest if I avoid going to the front and talking to the other workers. She asked me to understand her difficult situation. She said that she did not want to hurt me. Those were hard days. I even remember clearly that after the strike we went back to work, and I only worked a few days because the stress made me sick.

Q: What was your next action after the *patron* talked to your coworkers?

A: We decided not to take any actions without seeking proper assistance. Because we became aware of the [potential for] losing our jobs if we did more crazy things. It was then when Newman talked to us. I saw Newman the next week when he and Alicia came to visit us. We discussed with them what to do, what kinds of problems we had, and why we wanted changes in the workplace.

Q: What did you want? What were you demanding from the *patron*?
A: As I told you, I was not affected by the problems. But people wanted for the injustices at the workplace to stop. Not to cut their wage, because two years before they had lowered the workers' ornament's pay. One year after, the reduction was doubled. And it was not only one ornament, but two or three. They [the workers] wanted for things to be equal because the most affected workers were those working piece rate. [They wanted] the patron to stop cutting their wages. This was a company [in which] everyone was part of production. Why hurt those making the ornaments? I think that the bosses grew scared of the workers making to much money because they could work very fast, [therefore, they could make more money than others working hourly wage]. However, when they [the patrones] needed the orders, they wanted the workers to [work faster] so that the patrones could supply the orders immediately, and without having to pay [to workers] what was right for them. We also wanted to have paid holidays. We wanted for the patron to cover the health insurance benefits because we were paying seventy-five percent. We wanted to have health insurance three months after we started working there, and not six months after. We also wanted vacation and fair treatment. We wanted to be treated equal to white workers. There was a supervisor who mistreated workers very badly. She would return to the workers their ornaments to make them again, regardless if the ornaments were defective or not. That was time and money lost for the workers; it was not fair. I am sure she was hired to make the [workers'] life difficult because she was hired after we started our organizing efforts. So that was not convenient to the patron. Even my supervisor was fired. She was fired after the strike.

Q: Going back to your meetings with Alicia and Newman. Can you tell me how your union was organized?

A: They [Newman and Alicia] gave us lengthy information of what we should do to organize the union [what steps we should take]. We had elections, etc. Alicia and Newman told us what benefits we could [obtain] if we win the union. The patrones told us that, if they wanted, they could close the company. [Despite all obstacles], we decided to continue the organizing efforts. The patrones told us that if we organized a union, it was going to be bad business for the company --that they were going to lose profits. And as a result, they were going to be forced to
close or move the company. They [the *patrones*] threatened us, and
despite all of that, we continued our organizing efforts.

Q: Did you have in mind that you wanted to organize a union and
ultimately a strike?

A: That was very important. Before we met Alicia and Newman,
--when we talked to them-- we had in our minds that we wanted to
organize a union.

Q: Then Alicia and Newman helped you only to channel your
organizing actions?

A: Yes. They told us what could happen [to us] during our organizing
efforts. They explained everything to us. We did not go to those
meetings all ignorant because we knew exactly what we wanted. That is
why all voted to form a union. After we won the union elections we
started having legal meetings [contract negotiations] with the *patron*. 

Q During our last interview you discussed the negotiations with the patron (Company Owner or supervisor). For how long did you negotiate with him before the strike?

A: I think approximately six months, maybe more. Because we met with him once a month. The union representatives, Newman and Alicia were also present in these meetings. However, we always end up getting nowhere. They always said that they would have a response the following meeting. So the following meeting would either be cancelled or they would not agree with our petitions, so we went on for a long time, before we approved the strike.

Q How did you arrive at the decision of going on strike?

A: Because we had exhausted all avenues for a peaceful arrangement. Everything we asked for was denied. So that it is how we decided to go on strike. We had a meeting, we had a secret vote, and everybody vote in favor of going on strike. I think we had 21 or 22 members.

Q Fina, I understand that the company had a great demand of ornaments before the Christmas season. Did you consider that fact in your strike decision so that it would affect economically the patron even more?

A: I do not remember well. I think it was in July because it was very hot. We stayed on strike for 13 weeks. I had never been involved in strikes.

Q When you went on strike, were you aware of the consequences or benefits of a strike?

A: Look, we had an idea of what to expect because Newman and Alicia told us about it. But it is never the same to be told as to experience it because to live a strike experience was very difficult.
Q  How so?

A: Well, the first and most important aspect, at least for me, was the division among Mexican workers, our own Raza (Race). They treated us bad. To me that was the hardest to live with; there were those who supported the strike, and the ones who were anti-union. I felt horrible to see Mexicans going in to work for the patron while we were on strike. The second aspect was the fact that we had to be on the picket line everyday. That was a different experience from what I had lived. We had to be on the picket line outside the shop with our signs. From that time on, I understood why we were on strike. Before, I could never understand why people were on the picket line. After that, I always support workers who are on picket lines. Now that I see them, I feel like getting out of my car and walking with them. The third aspect was the financial burden. I had my husband's salary to count on. But, there were many couples working at Calliope Designs, and they did not have any money. Thank God, we were able to cover our expenses with my husband's salary.

Q  Since you did not have a union fund, what did you do to collect money?

A: We did many things, we even made cheese to sell it among friends. I even went to the flea-market in Napa with cans to ask people for donations. That means we were boteando [people put money in sealed cans that are taken to the union hall to be added to the general fund]. We also went to different businesses, like Food 4 Less and Lucky stores. At the beginning people looked at us weird, but later on we got used to it. We went to churches and, to different organizations. Stores gave us food.

Q  How did you feel when you were asking for food and money?

A: I felt very humiliated; I felt bad. But I got used to it. The strike was very difficult for me. I did not have any support here in my house. My husband was very anti-union. He would come home very moody and screamed at me for no reason. He would say that, instead of doing all those union things, I should stay home and clean. I was killing myself because wherever I was, I always came
home to cook and clean the house before he came. But he always found an excuse to fight. He argued that he had union experience and that the union was for lazy people who did not want to work. That is why he did not like me being involved. To tell you the truth, I never believed him because, if that was the case, why was he so awful about the union? I did not agree with his ideas, because I worked harder during the strike than any other time. After my daily things, I worked at night to help with the expenses. In this way I could be free to be on the picket line in the morning. Although I only worked six weeks before the strike ended. During the strike, other people worked; Prieta, --dark one-- (Consuelo) Paulina, Mario, Rafael, Juan, Javier, and Josefina.

Q: How were the daily activities on the picket line? Did you have support from the community?

A: Let me tell you. On one hand the strike was difficult. On the other, for me it was nice. I felt more united to my people. I saw them as my family. I truly understood it when I got very sick three days after we went back to work, and they supported me. The community supported us tremendously. Many people came from different places and organizations such as unions. They brought us sodas, food, etc., --a wonderful support.

Q: How did you feel when you saw the scabs going to work in your place?

A: We felt bad. We screamed at them. We told them things that would hurt them. I had never been in anything like that, but I learned to scream. I was very angry because we were struggling to improve the working conditions, and it was awful to see Latinas working there.

Q: What did you do when the patron hired more people, and the guards to work?

A: We saw him as our enemy. He told us things. He told us we were crazy, etc. That made us even more angry. Maybe in his mind we were not that, but he was afraid of us. He was trying to hide his fear.
Q: Do you think that your strike affected him financially?

A: Yes of course. His sales went down. He had cancellations because he did not supply on time. I got to see many cancellations from big stores.

Q: Do you think that, if Lupe would have supported you in the strike, you would had gone back to work in two weeks as you expected originally?

A: Lupe made the dough and was a key person in production. Nobody else knew how to make dough. If she would have gone on strike, the patron would have had nobody to do the dough.

Q: Who trained the new workers?

A: The new people made easy ornaments because the supervisor hardly knew how to make some. Lupe was teaching them. However, she also had a difficult time making them. When she started working there, she was trained to make ornaments. But because she made ugly ones, she was changed to dough making. An American Indian woman could only make some, but not the nice ones like Dona Elena or Sara. The American Indian woman never supported us. The married couple was a difficult ornament, and only Sara and Dona Elena could do it. When I went back to work, I received many returned orders. They were terribly made.

The new people made the bears, snowman--easy things--magnets, deer. We made all kinds of ornaments. The patron had customers all over the country, even in Canada. He went to many craft fairs and sold a lot.

Q: Do you remember how many times you sat to negotiate with the patron during the strike? Did you see any improvements in your relationship with him?

A: I was part of the negotiating team. We met approximately 15 times, in 13 weeks, so we were talking once a week. I tell you, I had never seen such a hard head as that man had. And also the woman. He was the one who did all the talking, of course through his lawyer because he always brought his lawyer. I think later on
he finally recognized us as a union, when he started being more afraid of us. This happened when we started sending letters to his costumers informing them about his labor malpractices. See, despite us being so ignorant, we figured out what to do. We waited for them to close and searched in the garbage cans for the envelops. I knew about them throwing the used mail in the garbage. Juan also knew because he picked the garbage. Before the strike, I started keeping a log of the patron's costumers and I had that log in my possession. We also had our goals. Once the patron saw the mailing in somebody's trunk. After that time he changed.

Q: Can you discuss what you won and what you lost when you went back to work?

A: We won paid holidays and salary--no more cuts in the ornament's pay--and health benefits. We did not win any sick days, nor union security. About work, the payment for the ornaments was not raised, but it was not going to be reduced. That was a victory because that was the beginning of our organizing. The so-called bonuses were also taken away because they would take .05 cents from each ornament a worker made, and at the end of the year they gave that money to the workers as a bonus. That was not a bonus. That was worker's money.

Q: You also went back to work without a union contract?

A: Yes, we did not have a contract. But, we continued negotiating.

Q: How did you feel when you went back to work? Proud, happy or like you failed? How was it for the workers to be sitting side by side working with the scabs?

A: On one side, we were happy because we won. We defeated the patron, and we had shown to him that we were not as stupid as he thought. On the other side we felt like being in war --the scabs and us. Since we did not win union security, the scabs were not forced to join the union. We had struggle so much to arrive at that
agreement, and they enjoyed the benefits of our struggle without fighting for it. They were even in a privileged position because they received better treatment than us.

Q: How many scabs stayed working?

A: All of them. There were about 15.

Q: How was your relationship with Lupe? It is my understanding that the union organize a rally in front of her house?

A: We even went to talk to her husband. Her husband got very mad because we went to her house in the mornings to protest. He stopped talking to us. We used to have a friendship because he is my cousin. I never talked to him after that. Lupe continued being our enemy. She was rude to us.

For me, the stress was so high. My supervisor had resigned her position. When I went back to work I had a new supervisor. He was a man, and he did not know his job. Since he did not know the shipping operations, I had to do his and my job. However, he was always returning my work. We always ended up in the supervisor's office because we could not agree. So Sally told him the orders were okay. He even gave me a hard time in regards to when and how I should take my lunch break. He prohibited me from taking my lunch at the same time as the others did. The goal was to break us apart—to demoralize us. I protested, and their excuse was that everything was new and different from before the strike. I took my lunch alone. The scabs took their lunch at another time, and the union members at another. We were never together. I received the harder treatment because the patron was sure that I was the union organizer. A few days after I went back to work I got sick. And the patron did not let me make a doctor's appointment during working hours. I had to leave against his will. The next day, I had a heart attack. I was out of work for six months. When I went back to work, I had an accident three days later. The supervisor and I were supplying orders. I needed one box from the higher shelves. There were three boxes piled together. I needed the box in the middle. Listen to this. Anyone could reason about what to do. He had to move the upper box someplace else in order to give me the box that was in the middle. Well, he just pulled the box in the
middle—I even told him, "Do not do that." He was on top of the ladder, and I was down. "Move one first and then the other." I said. He just pulled the box in the middle, and the box that was on top fell on my head. I had no room to move to. There was only space for the ladder and myself. The box weighed 40 pounds. So when it landed on me, I fell with my legs wide open. He could only say, "I am sorry." I was very angry. What he did was a criminal act. I got up very scared and upset. He was fully aware that I could not have any accidents in which I bled because I could bleed to death. When I went back to work he and the patron read the doctor’s instructions. I do have a hard time believing it was an accident. I left the room crying and was taken to the office. My compañeros were very upset and almost killed him. I was taken to the hospital, and he was removed from his job immediately. I did not have any broken bones, but my neck and waist hurt a lot. I did not go back to work. A week after, I had another stroke. I was hospitalized for a week. The union did a formal action against the company. I personally hired a lawyer to help me. The company’s insurance had to pay for my doctor and hospital’s bills. The supervisor was moved to New Mexico. After, all the National Labor Relations Board (NLRB) said that there was nothing to do because the supervisor was new and had no experience. "To remove a box?" I still think that he tried to kill me. I came to this conclusion by the way he behaved towards me and his way to work. He knew that in case of an accident, I would be hurt. To me, what he did was criminal. I think he was following the patron’s orders, he did not do it on his own. The patron manipulated him, he paid him to hurt me because he was a very ignorant supervisor. The patron paid him to hurt me because he knew that I was the only one that people followed. I believed this even more after I visited a cousin in Salinas. She told me that her brother in law was a union organizer in the lettuce, and the bosses let boxes fall on him, purposely. He was killed. At that time, I thanked God for not being killed.

When I got discharged from the hospital, I did not go back to work, because I was severely hurt in my waist. I could not be sitting or standing up. It was painful. I also had to wear a neck bracelet. I still wear it sometimes because I never recuperated fully physically. Two vertebrae were dislocated from the box’s impact. I received disability, and we went to court. They gave me $ 10,000.00.
What happened with the other workers? Did you keep in contact with them?

A: I went to their meetings and to visit them during their lunch breaks. They continued working, but they were very unhappy. Finally, one day, they told me that the patron informed them that he was moving his company down to Mexico. Alicia and Uriel Caballero were collaborating with the patron in terms of training workers in Tijuana. I told them that it was anti-union to do that. They trained people in Tijuana anyway. Lupe also did trained people there. But, it was not surprising about Lupe. She had always been anti-union. But Uriel and Alicia? I was mad. I told them that when the patron finished using them he was going to kick them out. And, it was true. A month after, the patron closed the company and kicked them out. The only one who continued working was Juan. They needed to bring the ornaments back to finish them. So, Juan did it. Well, that is all I want to say.
Paulina Martinez, worker,
Calliope Designs

Q: Paulina, where did you come from?
A: I am from Actopan, Hidalgo, Mexico.

Q: How long have you been in the United States?
A: Seventeen years.

Q: Had you worked in Mexico before you came to the United States?
A: Yes, I had a few jobs before I came. First, I worked for a lawyer during the day and at night I went to school to obtain a certificate in business. Then, I worked as a secretary in an auto parts store. I also worked at the Municipal Court as a secretary. Right before I came to the United States, I was to start working as a teacher in an elementary school.

Q: Did you have any union organizing experience in any of these jobs?
A: None.

Q: When did you start working at Calliope Designs?
A: I started working at Calliope Designs in 1980. I do not remember the month, I think it was February or March.

Q: What job did you have at the beginning?
A: Production.

Q: How were the working conditions when you started working at Calliope Designs? How were the workers treated? Did you work for piece rate?
A: To tell you the truth, for me the working conditions I experienced here in comparison to Mexico were very different. I did not feel good because first of all, we were paid by piece rate, and I was not used to it. For me, it was a hard job to have to work minute by minute. If we lost a minute, we thought it was lost money. And it was hard for me. In relation to, the working conditions, at that time, when I did not have any experience working here [the United States] they were good.

Q Did you ever compare your wages with other workers' wages, for example, to the cannery workers? Did you think that the working conditions and the wages were better or worse?

A: The wages were fine because, if we worked more, we made more money. I would heard that in other places people earned the minimum wage or a little bit more.

Q How much money did you make a week during that time?

A: I do not remember how much money I was making at that time. Maybe $500 every two weeks.

Q Do you remember in what year the patron (owner) started reducing the piece rate wage in the ornaments?

A: It was two years before we started organizing. It was like around 1986.

Q How did he let you know about it?

A: He never told us anything. We found out about it by coincidence. I do not remember him telling us about his plans to cut our wages. We found out when we started making the same ornament after he cut the prices.

Q How did you learn about it then?

A: We were paid differently for each ornament. The supervisors would tell us to make certain ornaments, and we asked them how
much they were going to pay. After they told us, we realized that they had cut our wages.

Q: What did you do when these things happened?

A: Well, I left the company because I was pregnant. I left around November of 1987, and I went back when all of them (meaning the workers) had already stopped working one day and were organizing the union.

Q: So, you were not working when they stopped working that Monday, January 1988?

A: No. I was not there. I went back to work in February. What happened is that Alicia and some workers came to talk to me. I do not remember who came.

Q: What did they tell you when they came to your house?

A: Well, they told me that they had stop working one day, and they were organizing a union, and asked me if I wanted to unite myself to them. So I said "yes."

Q: What motivated you to participate with them in the union?

A: The amount of money they were getting paid for the piece rate. The wages were going down. The more we worked, the less we made. Also the working conditions—At that time I realized how bad they were.

Q: In what ways?

A: In the first place: We did not have air conditioning, we did not have—we were all crowded on one table. We did not have the sufficient space to work. And also because while we were working—Look, while we were working, all the food was right there next to us.

Q: Did you have lockers?
A: No, we did not have lockers. We did not have a special place to eat.

Q: Where did you eat then?
A: Right there, working and eating.

Q: In terms of benefits, did the patron pay you health benefits?
A: Yes, he paid some type of health insurance.

Q: I understand that he paid only a percentage, and you paid the rest?
A: I am not sure about that. I never paid any attention to that because I had health insurance through my husband. I received benefits from my husband and from my work.

Q: Did you have paid vacation, sick days, and paid holidays?
A: We received some vacation days, but I do not remember if we got paid. Some holidays, and we did not receive sick days.

Q: How was the patron towards the workers? How was his treatment of you?
A: The patron was nice; he treated us decently. He never said bad things to us, and he conversed with us. The patrona was indifferent. The supervisors were good at the beginning. Well, at least for me.

Q: How was the ethnic breakdown in the company? Who did production? Who were the supervisors, etc.?
A: Well, ninety percent of the production workers were Mexicans. The other ten percent were: one American Indian, and some white people--one or two. The American Indian woman worked there for a long time; white people did not last more than a year.
Q: What was the racial background of the supervisors?
A: They were all white.

Q: Did you ever question why a supervisor’s position was never offered to any of you?
A: I think one of the reasons some workers were never offered a supervisor’s position was because they did not speak English. So even if they became supervisors, they could have only been able to communicate with the workers, but not with the patrones. I think the obstacle was the English.

Q: How did you decide to organize yourselves into a union and, furthermore, a strike?
A: Well for us the decision to go on strike was a hard one because some agreed and some did not. I think that the majority of the workers had no idea what a strike is all about. We did not know what a strike was. It seemed so easy to us, and many were, well, they wanted to have a strike immediately, and some others felt that we should wait.

Q: Who were the ones who did not want to go on strike immediately?
A: For example, those who had been working the longest like Doña Elena [Doña is a meaning of respect for mature women]. Some others were more indifferent.

Q: Did you feel fully prepared for the strike? Were you aware of the benefits and consequences of a strike?
A: I think we were fully informed about a strike. What I think happened--and we did not realize about this until after the strike--was that we did not choose the right time to go on strike.

Q: When would have been the right time to go on strike?
A: The time when they had much more work, which is during the months of September and October. We started the strike, I think in August [The strike started on July 14, 1988]. By August and September, people were already tired because they were not getting paid, they did not have money and all of that. That is why they decided to go back to work. When they decided to go back to work it, was exactly when there was much more work there.

Q When you discussed in your meetings the tactics of a strike, did Alicia and Newman [Strawbridge] suggested to you when the best time might be to go on strike. Did they explain to you the economic effects of a strike at the time of high production?

A: Well many workers were becoming upset because they wanted to have a strike. That is why we voted to see if we wanted to go on strike or not. Something like that—I do not remember very well. That is how we decided to go on strike at least a month in advance of when we should have done it.

Q How about you? Did you want to go on strike?

A: Yes, I did.

Q Can you tell me what happened when you were on strike? Were you part of the negotiating committee?

A: No, I was not.

Q Can you tell me what were you personal experiences during the strike?

A: Well, economically, a little bad. I do not complain a lot because my husband was working at that time and that helped me. It was bad for the workers when both of them worked there. Morale-wise, it was bad. [--silence-- She cried harder]

Q It still hurts you, right? [Paulina Martinez was the worker who was taken to jail because the owner accused her of hitting the woman guard with her picket-line sign. Paulina was afraid to tell
her husband, and she had people talking to him. She and her husband never discussed the problem ever again].

A: It is because I never had an experience like that. For me it has been the most terrible thing that happened in my life. Because, after all this time, when I decide to do or say something, it brings back those memories.

Q So, every time you hear the word "union," it brings you pain?

A: Yes, it is painful because I think that I was the one who paid the highest price in the strike. Some others did not suffer, but it [the strike] harmed me the most.

Q You were the most affected one?

A: And everything for what? To try to help the others, because some of the other workers were backing-out. Some others were already working elsewhere. Josefina was already working, and some others were working too. I saw that some people were backing-out. Someone had to continue the struggle because if one was to back-out--Like for example, if Sara would have back-out, who was going to continue in the struggle?

Q Who were continuing in the struggle?

A: Myself, Sara, Mario, sometimes Maria Garcia, Doña Elena and Consuelo? Well they came. Rafael, well, as I told they came but not always. Juan was there.

Q How was the incident--I know it is going to hurt you to talk about this, Paulina. But, unfortunately, we need to discuss it because it was the most important incident that happened during the strike. And at the same time, the most unjust one. Can you discuss the incident in which you were accused of hitting the woman guard?

A; Well, I did not know exactly how it happened. All I know is that we were standing up outside so that we would see the guards who were in and out looking at us in a suspicious way. We did not
even know why they were doing that. All of the sudden, the police arrived and that was it. They said, I had hit the woman guard with my picket line sign. I said; "No, I did not hit her." They said; "Yes, you hit her." What could I do?

Q: Who was there with you besides the strikers?

A: Only the workers, Maria Garcia and myself. They detained me and took me over there [Jail]. What hurt me the most was that they took me with handcuffs through the building. Inside, one of the supervisors--Susana, saw me, laughed, and turned around.

Q: How was that for you?

A: For me, at that moment, I was very humiliated because I was a hundred percent sure that I had not done anything. Since they [the employers] saw that I was the one who spent more time there. They needed to find ways to push me away. They probably felt that by pushing me away that way, I was going to be afraid, and I would not go to the picket-line any more. But I got so mad, because I said: "They humiliated me, I became very angry and now it is going to be worst on him because no one does that to me." I thought to myself: "I do not care if he is the patron or whoever, but he should have acted legally, not like that."

Q: What happened, Paulina? Did they take you to jail?

A: Yes, I called Sara because it was the only phone number I remember. I wanted for her to call Alicia because I did not know what to do. Sara called Alicia and later on they paid for the bail. When I got out, everybody was waiting for me outside. But, well--I was inside for a little time, like two hours, but it seemed like an eternity. We all hugged each other and cried together.

Q: What did you do when you left the detention center?

A: We went to the union hall and talked to all the workers and everything. But I was very afraid of what my husband was going to say. He did not know anything, and he had his own beliefs. He said that--he was never going to be in jail." Maybe that is what still
hurting a lot because he thought that way. He just said that he will never go to jail, and I did. I did go to jail and that was very hard.

Q: You were detained for something very different and unjust.

A: Yes, but it was something that I could have avoided.

Q: How could you have avoided it?

A: If I saw that the other workers were not going a whole lot, I should have done the same—just not go to the picket line.

Q: But your consciousness did not let you.

A: Well, it is true. But, I could have avoided all those problems.

Q: Did you tell your husband immediately?

A: No, I did not tell him. Alicia and Newman talked to me, and we agreed for them to come and talk to him. Paco, my husband, has never talked to me about it. He has never asked me exactly what happened. He just heard what Alicia told him and did not say anything. But he did not behave angrily at me. He just behaved indifferently like nothing had happened.

Q: Did you continue being active in the union?

A: Oh yes. I was at the picket-line the next day, with more conviction and anger. So, I was there all day. That same day he [the boss] came out and saw me. All our supporters were so angry at him. They were all holding picket-line signs, and they were screaming at him. He became so upset that he grabbed some picket-line signs and ripped one apart.

Q: Did you call the police?

A: No, I do not know why. There were many people from the community, and all the workers, and that is what he did. He also trewed all my things in a box into the street. I really did not care because I had no plans to return to work at that place.
Q: Do you remember when the incident happened?

A: No, I do not remember. I went back to the picket-line on August 13, 1988. So, it must had happened on August 12, 1988. The union used this incident to change the kind of strike. The workers were on an economic strike. Due to the incident, they changed the economic strike to an unfair labor practice strike. [Please see Neil Herring’s second interview, Page 13, for more information].

Q: Did you continue participating in the strike?

A: Yes, I continued.

Q: I understand that the patron gave you a termination check. How did it happen?

A: Yes, he threw it at me the same day he broke the picket line sign. I did not see how much money it was. I did not look at it. Later on, I was told to cash it, so I cashed it because I needed the money.

Q: How was your situation at home with your husband?

A: I did not have any problems with my husband because he always told me that if I wanted to continue, it was my choice. He said that he was working and that he could even work over time. My daughter was little and my sister-in-law who was living with us helped around the house and babysat for me.

Q: I also understand that the union sued the patron for firing you like that, do you remember?

A: Yes, months later, after people went back to work. The National Labor Relations Board (: NLRB) told the patron that he did not have the right to fire me. The union lawyer, Neil Herring, talked to me, and the NLRB representative interviewed me. We went to court and won the case.
Q: What were you doing while the case was in court? Did you find another job?

A: I started working part time in a hotel because we were going for vacation to México in December, and I did not want to find a permanent job. I had to wait until we came back from Mexico. I started working where I continued working in February.

Q: What did you do when you received the notification from the NLRB deciding in your favor to keep your job at Calliope Designs?

A: Around March [1989], Calliope Designs called me to let me know that my job was waiting for me. I did not want to leave my present job, and I did not want to go back to Calliope Designs. However, I just wanted to go back for two days to make a political statement. Since I was working the night shift in my new job, I worked in the morning those two days at Calliope Designs. The first day, I worked until 2pm. The next day, I stayed until 12 pm. I had already written a letter with Alicia and Newman resigning from my work at Calliope Designs. By the time they [parones] received my letter, I was picking my belongings up. I was very angry at Lupe Farias because despite the fact that she was Mexican, she was always against us. The patrones called me into the office and she came along, probably to translate for them. I became very angry at her, and treated her bad. She could not say anything because we were in the patrones’ office. They knew that they could not do anything to me because I could charge them again. Before I left, I gave a little speech to all the workers. I told them not to give up and to continue the struggle.

Q: How were the working conditions when you went back to work for those two days?

A: Well, I did not care about atmosphere. There was tension, maybe because I was returning to work. Nobody knew I was returning only for two days. Everybody was very happy. Some people gave me flowers and ballons. They all seemed very happy. However, there was lots of tension among the workers.

Q: How did you see the workers' morale?
A: I would not be able to tell you.

Q: Do you think that the strike was a victory, or a defeat, for the union?

A: I do not know how to answer that question because we did not achieve what we wanted. I do not think it was victory. But I do not think it was a defeat because we had proven that we, as Mexicans, also have rights, and that we can also do things in this country. So, if we unite ourselves, we could do it again.

Q: It was a victory that you as a Mexican group had the strength to fight for your rights. Do you think you were an example for other Mexicans working in factories?

A: Yes, you saw the Point St. George Fisheries (PSGF), how they organized themselves. They even won better things than we did. We were a motivation to them.

Q: How about other workers, like the Calistoga Water workers?

A: Yes.

Q: Since you left Calliope Designs, how did you keep in contact with the rest of the workers?

A: I would go to their meetings once in a while. I also continued signing checks for the union.

Q: Some workers had commented about two workers working for the patron, that they were spying on you and passing information on to the patron?

A: I do not know anything about it. We used to suspect Alicia and Uriel Caballero. They did not talk directly with the patron, but they had a close friendship with Lupe Farias. They both always seemed eager to have the patron on their side.
Q. Did Alicia and Uriel Caballero gain any benefits due to their behavior towards the *patrones*?

A: No that I know. The only thing they won was consideration from the *patrones* or the supervisors during working hours by receiving easy-to-make ornaments. So that helped them to make more money.

Q. How did you feel when the union started falling down?

A: Well, by that time I hardly went to the union hall. I did not know exactly how the union closed down. However, I think that it was due to a lack of commitment because everybody took different paths. After all we struggled together and all the things that happened, I think that we should have kept it alive. But no, nobody paid any attention to it. We all went different ways.

Q. What happened when you found out about the *patrones* opening a sweat-shop in Tijuana, Mexico? I know that by that time, you had been gone from the company for several years.

A: I was worried about my ex-coworkers. When Sara Ochoa told me about it, I worried about the workers who were old and who were injured because of the many years of working there. I wondered about Mario and Martha, so all I could do is help Rita get a job in the same company I was working for.

Q. Paulina, to conclude the interview, how do you feel about everything? What are the positive and not-so-positive experiences you drew from the union organizing?

A: I learned a lot. I, as a worker go to work, and it does not matter what kind of a *patron* I have. He can be a nice person, but it does not matter because they [the *patrones*] always see the worker as that: simply a worker. *Patrones* see workers as money machines --who all we do is produce for them. When the worker cannot produce any more for the patron, they lay us off or fire us. Without any regard for how good we were or how much we produced for them. For that reason, I personally, in my job --the *patron* and her daughter; I do not care for them. If I feel like it, I
greet them. Otherwise, I just keep on working. Why? Because they are paying me for how much I can produce for them. They are not paying me for being nice to them.

Q: So the union gave you moral strength?

A: Oh yes, it gave much more strength. I realized that not everything is quite nice when the patron comes and says "hi." I changed.
Elena Pulido, worker
Calliope Desings

Q Were did you come from?

A: Michoacan, Mexico

Q Before you came to California, did you have any union organizing experience?

A: No, never. I had never worked before in Mexico.

Q How old were you when you came to California?

A: I think I was 30 years old.

Q Was Calliope Designs your first job?

A: No, I had work before at Point St. George Fisheries (PSGF), I worked there for approximately 4 years.

Q What did you do there?

A: I worked cleaning crabs and peeling shrimp. Later on I worked at the salmon station and as a filetera (fileeing fish). My next job was in a nursery.

when I was working there I decided that I wanted to attend school, so I went to Windsor to California Human Development Corporation (CHDC). At CHDC they asked me if I wanted to work at CD. They paid me for the training. It was not a lot but it was something. I enrolled myself and I was told that there was the opportunity to obtain new skills at Calliope Designs. They showed me the monitos (ornaments) and asked me if I wanted to learn how to make them. In reality, I did not have the need to work but I said yes. So that is how I was sent to that place.

Q Do you remember the year you started working there?

Q: How were the working conditions at that time?

A: When I started, it was very good. We were few workers, not a lot. We were 6 or 7. At that time the real owner was the supervisor; there was not a boss. She was the one who helped us, who did things for us. Actually there were two women: the owner’s wife and her sister. Two sisters. The sister was the real owner. The wife was also nice. The Sir...Well they [the women] were the business owners. He just helped them sometimes with drawings; he had some experience. But they were the real bosses. They were the ones who paid us, and they were in charge of everything. But we worked very happily. There was a young woman who made the masa (dough) because, you know; we did not know anything [meaning English]. So she would make a little masa for each one of us. But we worked very happy. As the time went by, the business became more prosperous...

Q: Where was the company located when you were but a few workers?

A: We were near K-Mart. It was a small shop. But since we were few, it was okay.

Q: How was the racial breakdown?

A: Everybody was blanca (white), then one from Brazil and myself. The Brazilian woman spoke some Spanish but you know that Portuguese is very different from Spanish. So, without any understanding of the language, they gave me the job. I was the first Mexican working there. They paid half of my salary and CHDC paid the other half for three months. After three months, it was up to the employer if we stayed or not because he had to pay your full salary. Later on, a Mexican lady named Teresa starting working there. Later on more people came. But, I was the first Mexican. After that, the business started growing. They put one of the same Americanas (North-American women) as a supervisor. She was also nice. The only thing is that when we moved to Tesconi Circle, the business was bigger. They needed bookkeepers and many things because the business was bigger, and there were more workers. We lost all direct contact with the owners.
Q: Why if you worked for so long, did they not offer you a position as a supervisor?

A: It is not like I did not like the job. The reason is that a person did not know the language. I think it is hard for a person to take a job like that. I understand that even if a person has been working there for many years, this person cannot do that job for the simple reason of the language. And since there were people with two languages, it was hard to communicate with everyone. A person accepts that there are things that she cannot do because...why should I get mad because they did not give me the job? No, no, no, it is impossible.

Q: When did you start having problems? Were the supervisors becoming tough on you, or was it the fact that the patron was paying you less for the ornaments?

A: We started having problems with them [the employer] because...let's say...this is the beginning of the year. So when you started working, you saw a paper on the wall by the phone informing you that if a monitor was paid at a dollar the previous year, in January it was reduced to .90 cents. Others were reduced to .10 or .05 cents. We spent approximately two years working on that situation. Just as a cover up, they paid more for some so that we did not feel bad. The truth is that it was more; was they reduced that which they raised. We were losing; we had to work faster to make the same money. At that point, we started saying: "Well no! They [the owners] said they did not know what was happening. But we said how could you not know if you are the owners?". Many of the workers started thinking that it was the supervisors who were making these changes. They had meetings [supervisors], and they said: "Lets do this, lets do that". Because...they said...there were some nice supervisors, but some were not so nice.

Q: Did you have meetings with the patrones once in a while?
A: Well not that much. Well there were meetings...the very bad thing was that all of the sudden, we heard all English, so only those who knew a little could understand what they said. What did we know? That is why we should not blame them for everything. One herself is the responsible.

Q: Did you have somebody to translate for you during these meetings?

A: Almost at the end, when our problems were worst. Lupe the supervisor --it was she who said things and translated for us -- the little we understood. Sometimes she said the truth, sometimes she did not say the truth. She always said everything in the *patrone's* favor. So one believed only half, because she said what she wanted, and what she did not want, she did not say. Maybe she did not understand fully English. It is true that she did not speak English fluently. They did have their meetings over there...That is why the others [workers] said that they [the supervisors] were responsible for the changes in our salary. When she started working there, she started making *monitos*, then she took another position. Then she came back to make *monitos*. But it was not working for her because she was not good at making them. She was fully aware of what was happening on both sides, and that is why people blamed her and other supervisors for what was happening. I do not blame her, because sometimes we just imagine things without fully knowing.

Q: What year did they start paying you less for the ornaments?

A: Like two or three years before we organized the union. At that time my daughter Maria was working there.

Q: But she spoke English right?

A: Yes. The *patron* told her one time that the workers had made a lot of money, and it was his time to make money. And, it was then that they started paying less for our work. My daughter left the shop at that time. It was good for her to work there because she had little children, and she could leave whenever she needed.
Later on she found another job and she left...It was all of us who gave our opinion in terms of what to do. But, after that, it was not the same. People had different opinions as to what to do.

Q  How did you organize yourselves not to work that Monday?

A:  Well, we all talked. Since we worked together, we all took our lunch brake together. We discussed that it was not okay what was happening, and many thought that it was hard to do the ornaments. But, as we learned, others could do it, too. Our work was not so very difficult after all. But it takes time to learn. So we thought and said: "Since it takes a long time to learn, let's stop working. He has to pay us." We did not ask for much. We asked him to leave the pay for the ornaments the way they were before. We did not want a huge raise, only to pay what was right. We all made the decision to stop working.

Q  Who suggested to you to go to California Rural Legal Assistance (CRLA?)

A:  I do not remember. I only know that we were told that somebody could help us at that place.

Q  What happened when you went? did everybody go, or did you send a committee?

A:  We all went. From there, they referred us to Alicia [Sanchez]. We got together with Alicia, and from then on, everything started. We went back to work and the patron did not want to pay what we deserved. I felt we were caught in the middle. On one side was the wife; on the other the sir--because they could not agree on anything...I understand that his business had many expenses, but it was not a lot that we were asking them for. We just wanted to be paid the same, no more no less.

Q  After you met with Alicia [Sanchez] and Newman [Strawbridge] and decided to form the union. You walked in the shop the same day with your home made buttons saying --I want a union. (Quiero un Sindicato.) What was the patron's reaction?
A: From that time on, he never talked to us again. He was mad. He said many things, but I do not know because I do not speak English. But, he was mad. And, he was right; it was his business.

He was losing money. Why should I tell you the contrary? But, as I said, people were not asking for a lot -- Just a little. If he would have agreed, we all would have been happy with each other.

Q: How were the supervisors treating you after you started organizing the union?

A: How can I tell you? They stopped talking to us. It was not the same -- the environment was very tense.

Q: Did the patron try to divide you? To have some workers on his side?

A: No, he never did. He did not talk to anybody.

Q: When you met with Alicia and Newman what did you discuss?

A: About work: What actions we were wanted to take. It is so long ago that I do not even remember the details. We all told her [Alicia] that we could start our own shop. That we could do the same job. But, in reality, it is a little hard. She did not know anything about our work. Although, everything is possible. So I think she could not have helped us. It was easy for us to do it, because we were used to doing it. But, we did not have the capital.

Q: Since you did not start your own business, how did you decide to go on strike?

A: Well, let me tell you. We all went because Nobody knew what a strike was all about. We heard people talk about it. But, I had never suffered it in my own flesh. To me I think we all were in the same boat. We did not know what was going to happen. We just said: "Let's go on strike." But, in reality, we were not sure what was going to happen.
Q: Do you think that you were fully informed by Alicia and Newman about the benefits and consequences of a strike?

A: Well, I could not tell you. I do not remember if we were fully prepared.

Q: Well, did they say to you; go on strike means that you may go back in one week, one month one year, or maybe never?

A: Maybe yes, maybe not. I do not remember. Maybe they told us because somebody is supposed to know...In reality I have a very bad memory.

Q: When you decided by vote to go on strike, how did you feel, Dona Elena?

A: In reality, I felt bad because I was not used to doing those things. I felt bad for the people who worked in our place when the people [meaning supporters] on the picket line insulted them. I did not feel okay. But what was worst was that the other compañeras (coworkers)...I had to go to the picket line at certain hours because that was my shift...So the others asked me to cover their shift also because they said they had to do errands. They were all lies. They did not have any errant to do. They went to work, and that was not okay. They went to work, and what did I do? What did they have to do? I did not work during those three months. So, the others went to work and asked me to cover for them. It was wrong because among compañeras, they should have said: "I am going to work some days, and then you go work some days"...I think so. We were all suffering the same thing. I personally was suffering a lot. What really helped me was that one of my sons worked with the firemen and made good money, and he did not have a family yet (meaning married). He helped me to pay my house biles (bills). Other people like Prieta (dark one --Consuelo Zavala) she did not have anybody to help her. It was hard for her. Others, maybe because they were more active, AS helped them. She helped some a lot. She gave them money for the rent and this and that. As far as I am concern, we were all suffering, she should had helped everybody equally. For some, she argued that it was because of the couple that was working there. We were not a couple, but we suffered the same. We did not have anybody to help in the house. It
was the same because at that time my husband was not working at all. I was the one who earned a salary. And so, it was hard. People think that...Who really helped me was my son because you know that the house bills do not wait. Later on I had to help him because it was a lot for him. My other son also worked but he did not make as much as the other. And there are some sons who help you and there are sons who do not.

Q  How did you feel about the union itself? Was it working for you? Was it what you expected?

A:  How can I tell you? I felt in some ways okay and in some ways bad. It is as I was telling you. I did not know anything about a strike before. All of the sudden, since you do not know anything, you get involved. And, when you want to leave, you want to get out. You cannot; it is like everything. We all suffered. We did not know, we were blind. We did not know what to do. We imagined some things, but we all thought that the Sir was going to accept our proposal, and that was our mistake. They also (meaning the employer) lost. But, for those who have, it is not the same. Because if it is two or three months, they can support themselves. But us? The poor ones? We cannot be without working. That is what we did not think about in advance --to think and clearly see what we were going to do. We had to pay for rent, food, and you have to eat. What helped me was that I did not have little children.

Q  Were you part of the negotiation committee during the strike?
A:  Yes I did go.

Q  How did you see the negotiations? Did you feel hopeful about them?

A:  Well, they [the owners] did not seem upset --not happy, but polite.

Q  Were you present when the incident between Paulina Martinez [a worker] and the security woman happened?
A: No, I was not there.

Q: How did you feel when you saw the scabs going to work in your place?

A: Well, I never told them anything, never, never. Why should I tell you that I insulted them. I felt bad because they knew that we were outside for them too. Because, in the future we could all benefit. And yet, they always worked. Maybe because they had greater need. Maybe because they wanted to harm people. Who knows? I did not feel okay for them to work because that was my job; they were taking it away from me.

Q: Did you know them?

A: I hardly knew some.

Q: What happened when you went back to work?

A: When we went back to work we were all divided. They [the scabs] worked on one side, and we worked on the other. We could not talk to them.

Q: What did you win with the strike? what were the benefits?

A: Well, we won our job back.

Q: What else?

A: [laughing] Leave --because the work ended. Leave because they (meaning the employer) moved the shop. Alicia used to say that they may move the shop a few miles always, but look how far they moved? So what did we win? What was worse for me was that some companeros like Alicia and Uriel Caballero helped the patron train people in Mexico. They were always allied with Lupe. They cooperated with the patron in Tijuana. When they [the patrones] started having meetings, they called Alicia and Uriel, but they never said anything about it. But we were told that the Sir promised them that he was going to make them supervisors. One time, Lupe was going to Mexico on an airplane and all of that.
Because the Sir paid for that. Alicia even took her children to Mexico to her mother's. She and Lupe traveled very often...They said that they made very good money. Alicia should not have cooperated with the patron. Nevertheless, we had been on strike for a while. She was best friends with Lupe. [Lupe Farias was one of the two Mexicans who did not support the union. She always took the employer's side. Lupe also trained the scabs for different jobs]. And so what happened? They [Lupe, Alicia and Uriel Caballero] were fired as soon as the Sir did not need them any more.

Q    Do you think that Alicia and Uriel Caballero were informing the patron about the union activities long before the strike, during the strike or did they only cooperate after the strike?

A:    Before the strike, I do not know. I could not tell you. But, why then were they offered those jobs? Because nobody else had that offer made to them. Although, this was almost right before they closed the shop. But as a union members, they never told us about their activities. We all said among ourselves: "Why did they (the employer) not request from anyone else to work in Mexico? No. Only them, Alicia and Uriel."

Q    How were you affected with all the changes at Calliope Designs, since you were the one with more seniority? How did you feel about the union?

A:    I felt the same. But, let me tell you, you always find lots of discrimination. I thought it was because of my age; I do not know. There is always lots of discrimination at the work site. It is true that I had worked there for a long time but they always preferred the new ones.

Q    Mexicans or North-Americans?

A:    Mexicans. There were times that they [the employers] gave the better paid ornaments to them to make. I do not know why! Maybe it was the patrones, or the supervisors who made those decisions. I think that, in most places, the people with seniority have the preference. If that is the case, seniority did not count in that place.
Q  Did you ever try to talk to them about it?

A:  No.

Q  When you went back to work after the strike, did you think that you won something with the strike?

A:  No, we did not win anything. The only thing that we won was the moody faces we saw every day. We may have won something, but not better pay, because although the ornaments stayed at the same pay. However, the patrones did not reduce the pay anymore. Whenever they created a new ornament, they set how much money they were going to pay us for making them. But, we were making less money. They hired a new man to check our work. I do not know why because we had our supervisor. He just came, took the ornaments already made, and checked them. Maybe he was from Tijuana or someplace else.

Q  Do you think that the patron planned to move the shop to Mexico before the workers started organizing? Or do you think that he decided to move it because of your organizing?

A:  I think he moved it due to our organizing. We did not think about it. Everything seemed so easy to us. We did not stop and think that he could take the shop some place else. Nobody thought that he could do that. I personally think that because everything seemed so easy to us. We thought that nobody could train as well and as fast as us. However, people do not get a good training unless some workers train them because it takes a while for people to make good ornaments. But when they learn, they can make good ornaments. Lupe and Chana were the ones who trained them. But, they were not that good anyway. The patrones had to find workers who could train the new people well. So they choose Uriel and Alicia Caballero. They were even talking about moving to Tijuana. Little did they know that the patrones were going to kick them out whenever they could not use Lupe and all of them any more.
Q: Some people had mentioned to me that they are quite sure that Uriel and Alicia Caballero were informing the patron about the union activities long before the strike ended, because whenever you agreed about an action, the patron would come with something else. What do you know about it?

A: Those situations in fact happened, but I am not sure if it was Alicia and Uriel or some other people. Who knows? I cannot blame them. What we saw... And this has to do with what I was telling you. We questioned ourselves about the fact that, among all the workers, they choose Alicia and Uriel to travel. They had small children and a more complicated life to leave. And that is why people think they were informing the patron, that they were on his side. I am not so sure.

Q: Let's move to another point. Were you the union treasurer?

A: No. The only thing I did was to signed the checks. I do not remember who took the money to the bank. Paulina and I signed the checks.

Q: When you went back to work and you were divided and could not talk. How was the situation?

A: We had a difficult time. There were some women who wanted to talk to us, but they were not allowed. Lupe did not let them talk to us. They probably thought that we were going to do something to them. After awhile things got easier.

Q: I think Lupe was quite upset about everything that people told her and the rally in her house.

A: Maybe she was mad. But that is life: she should not feel resentful. I personally do not feel resentful to anyone.

Q: Not everybody is as nice as you Dona Elena. People have told me that as soon as you went back to work Fina had an accident. Do you remember how it did happened?
A: I was working, but I did not see because we worked on the other side. When she came out crying, she told us that the supervisor had thrown a box on her head. We all felt mad. Why did he do that? Fina was a worker there, and she was working. Only because they wanted for her to leave?

Q: What happened when Fina came to your side crying? What did you do? Did you stop working and talk to the patron?

A: I do not remember.

Q: Do you remember what the union did to protect Fina?

A: No.

Q: Other people were commenting that it was around that time that the company laid-off the most active union members. Do you remember who those people were?

A: Mario, Sara, Javier and Rafael. They were laid off for one month. I do not remember if they were laid off together or at different times.

Q: Did you continue having meetings with the patron?

A: No.

Q: When you had problems, how did you communicate with him?

A: I do not remember what we did.

Q: What happened when the patron started closing down the shop? Did he tell you his plans?

A: No he did not tell us anything. One day when we arrived at work, there was no masa. So, we wondered: "How are we going to work?" Lupe was just laughing. When the patron arrived he told us this is it. He told us to pick-up our belongings, making sure that we did not take anything that did not belong to us. We had our own
equipment to work. We either had bought it there or someplace else. So, we picked up our stuff and left. Only Lupe and her niece stayed working. But, she was kicked out soon after.

Q: How about Uriel and Alicia?
A: No, everybody was out that day. Including them.
Q: Did you receive some kind of compensation?
A: Nothing, they said that they did not have the means.
Q: Do you remember when that happened?
A: No.
Q: You did not know this was coming?
A: We imagined because they were taking people to train people there. We knew it since they were bringing ornaments to finish them here. Juan was the one working doing the finishing.
Q: Did anybody ask where the ornaments were coming from?
A: Yes, we asked, but they told us that they were going to have both plants working. The one in Tijuana, and this one. We were fully aware of the other plant's existence, but we did not know that this one was going to be closed. You know, that business got better. That is why we thought the patron was doing fine. Alicia Caballero kept going there to train people so the production would be faster and better. I think she should have told us what were the patron's plans.
Q: Was the union gone at that time?
A: Yes, but I think that she should have told us about the plant closure. With time we could have looked for another job. But, since we did not know, we had to collect unemployment when he close the plant. That is why I felt happy when she was also laid-off, same as us.
Q: Do you remember when the union stop working?
A: No, I do not know.

Q: Do you remember when you all got laid-off?
A: In the middle of August of 1993.

Q: Can you give me your opinion about the the process of forming a union, the strike and all the experiences you had with the union?
A: They are experiences that helped us in the future. I do not blame the strike. I blame the patron because we were not asking for a lot. He probably lost a lot with the strike, but I think he did not care.

Q: Do you think they were constructive experiences?
A: I had both, good and bad experiences. The bad one was the strike. It was bad because the same workers who were supposed to be on strike looked for other jobs and left the strike. We all suffered, but some more than others. I wish we could have been all united. Look at Javier Arreguin --A worker who pressured everybody to go on strike. He looked for a job immediately. Later on, he regreted being on strike. We do not know what could have happened if we did not go on strike. Maybe the I would have changed, maybe not.

Q: Are you satisfied that all of you were able to organize to show the patron that you had courage? And that Mexicans can organize themselves?
A: Yes, even though, everything is gone. I do not think it is the end of the world, but what can you do?

Q: Anything else you want to say?
A: It was hard because we all had different opinions. It was hard, but it is in the past. I think that the union is all gone.
Q: Would you join another union?

A: No, I am too old to do that.

Q: But you have now the experience, can you imagine how things could have been if you had somebody like you now with your experience?

A: Things could have been different. But it is hard, very hard. It was a tough experience.
Sara Ochoa, worker,
Calliope Designs

Q: Sara can you tell me where you come from?
A: I come from Michoacan, Mexico.

Q: Did you work in Michoacan?
A: No, never.

Q: Did you have union organizing experience in Michoacan?
A: No.

Q: How old were you when you came to California?
A: I was 24 years old.

Q: When did you start working at Calliope Designs?

Q: What was your position at Calliope Designs?
A: I was making ornaments.

Q: Where was the company located at that time?
A: It was located by Industrial Dr., near K-Mart. The place was like a portable building. It was not a building. It was a trailer.

Q: How many people worked at Calliope Designs at that time?
A: I think there were no more than 20.

Q: How was the racial breakdown?
A: There were approximately 4 to 5 Mexicans and the others were blancos (white people).

Q: Were everybody involved in the ornament production?

A: Yes. Well, there were the patrones (owners) and the patrona's (owner woman) sister that was also the owner. They made new [ornament] samples for us to make. They mostly supervised our work. It was like a family, all united.

Q: How were the working conditions at that time?

A: The patrones treated everybody fine, as I told you [the company] was small and we were like a family. They talked to people, played with us, and all that. The environment was very family oriented. You did not feel like working for a patron.

Q: Do you remember the year the company was moved to Tesconi Circle?

A: No, I do not remember, I think it was around 1980. Two years after I started working there.

Q: Did the patron hire more people after you move to Tesconi Circle?

A: Yes, when we moved to Tesconi Circle, the place was bigger and there were more tables--when we worked at la traila--the tables were plain kitchen tables; round and square tables. When we moved to Tesconi Circle, the tables were industrial working tables, with iron legs, larger and taller. The tables were designed with shelves on top for us to put our belongings. These tables were better conditioned that the others.

Q: When you moved to Tesconi Circle in 1980, how many people was working there and how was the ethnic breakdown?

A: There were already many more Mexican workers because Mexicans were the ones who produced more. White people did not last in that job.

Q: Why?
A: Because that work was per contract, per piece rate. You were train for a month by the company and you were paid by the hour, minimum wage. After a month you worked by contract. You had to make certain number of ornaments to make money [good wages], if not, you were going to make less. As a rule the company paid you the minimum wage the day you did not make enough ornaments. But they did not like for a person to produce less than the minimum wage because they were losing money. So they paid you the minimum for only one day. You knew that the following day, you had to produce more than the minimum salary, or if you made more than that. Well it was better for you.

Q: I understand that the patrona's sister was also part of the business. Do you remember in what year she left the company?

A: I do not remember. But I think it was after 1980. She was a very kind person towards the workers, I think she had problems with her brother in law, the patron. So she left.

Q: How were the working conditions when she was part of the business?

A: They were better because she did more for the workers, she did not make any changes in how much money they paid us for the ornament's manufacturing. For example, if they made a new design. She explained to us ways to make it faster and easier for us, so that we made more money.

Q: How were the working conditions after she left the company?

A: When she left, we saw less and less the patrona and the patron. What I mean, is that since we moved to Tesconi Cr. the situation changed, then the lady left and things were much more difficult. They [the owners] were seen very little, we heard that they were doing business trips, etc. We started having supervisors and we never again talked to the patrones. Anything we needed we asked the supervisors.

Q: Do you remember the year the patrones started paying you less for the ornaments' manufacture?
A: It was approximately since 1986.

Q: How did it happen, can you tell me?

A: Well, the first year they told us that they were going to lower the pay for the ornament making [Mrs. Ochoa was contacted by telephone to confirm what other workers had previously said in their interviews] because the patron said to Dona Elena's daughter that the workers had made too much money. And that it was his turn to make money. The patron said that they were selling the ornaments at a lower price, and they had many more salaries to pay because they had more people working; the dough making, the finishing person, everything. That is how they told us, because they were selling them for less money. After that year, each year they reduced systematically the payment for each ornament.

Q: In addition to reducing the payment in the ornaments, how were the working conditions?

A: First of all, the people was not happy any more because if they paid us .50 cents for an ornament, one year, they next year, they paid us .40 cents. They had already reduced .10 cents. There were even some ornaments that .20 cents were reduced. Then if the previous year they paid us .50 cents for each ornament and we made a 100. We made $50.00 that day. If the following year they paid for the same ornament .35 cents. I made only $35.00 a day. So we were losing. If I wanted to make $50.00 the way I did before, I had to make more ornaments, I had to work harder. That is why people were not happy.

Q: Since that time, people were not happy, and you started organizing yourselves. Other workers have had a difficult time remembering how you started organizing yourselves. Some are even confused about the timing between the day—Monday, Martin Luther King (MLK) day—you did not work and the strike itself. How the idea of stop working came about to scare the patron?

A: The idea came from the workers, we the workers. They [the owners] reduced the payment for the ornaments year after year. The reason the workers were upset was because the patron did not have any communication with us, they never talked to us. When they wanted to
make changes in the company, reduce the salary, they just put a list on the wall next to the phone. One day, somebody used the phone and saw the prices lowered once more. We got upset because there was an ornament that was paid at $1.55, and that year in 1988, when we stop working, they were paying the same ornament at $1.00. then how much money they had reduce? .55 cents! And we had to do the same work. That is why the people...we started talking among ourselves since the majority was Latino we talked. We were upset for what the company was doing. We decided that we were not going to work one Monday. We were going to the company, but we were not going to work. We all decided to that. We entered and the woman who prepared the masa (dough) had everything ready. We had cutters and everything ready but we did not work. They asked us: "What is happening? Why you are not taking your masa." We told them: "We are not going to work, we are going to drink coffee and we want to talk to the patrones because we think that what the patrones are doing is not fair because they are not giving us any explanations about the ornaments' cut in pay. They are not even taking the workers into consideration." They [patrones] said that we were making too much money, and that we could not make that money in other places because we were uneducated. But we made that money working hard, with great efforts. We thought that if we each made a $100.00 in one day. How much money the patrones were making? How much money they made? They were paying us only a $100.00 a day, but how much money they were making? That is why we decided to get together and stop working. But we did not say anything, we said that we wanted to talk to the patrones. The supervisors called the patrones and told them that the workers did not want to work. so we were there, just drinking and drinking coffee but we did not work.

Q: The patrones talked to you?

A: Oh yes! They came and talked to us and we had a meeting of approximately three hours. We told them about all the things we were upset. The fact that they did not take us into account, and that they should have a meeting first with all the workers, and explain to us why ornaments were going to be cut in pay. They said that even though they reduce our salary, we made to much money. But we told them that if we made to much money, how much money were they making? they should take into account our opinion.
Q: How were you communicating with them? Who was translating for you?

A: There was Fina, Angelica and Holanda Arzate spoke very good English. And of course Lupe Farias. She was interpreting for the *patrones*, and the *patrones* came out very upset. But we told them that we were not going to work. We went home and they stayed in a meeting.

Q: How is that you decided to go to California Rural Legal Assistance (Referred in the document as: CRLA) to see Christina Briano [a CRLA staff member].

A: Somebody, I think Elena talked to Gloria her daughter, then Gloria told her to call some place were we could do something. Gloria called CRLA and she was referred to Newman [Strawbridge]. That was the first time we met Newman, he explained to us what to do, and we talked to him and all of that. From then on we met systematically with Newman. Little by little we started—the decision to have a union was not over night. We took time to think about it. Newman told us that we had already left work and that if we went back just like that, the *patron* will fired us any day. He said that we had to organize and protect ourselves. Because we had left our work, the *patron* was not going to trust on us any more. So we had to protect ourselves. That was one of the reasons for us to organize and form a union. The *patrones* forced us to take that step. They are to be blame because they already had lots of money, they were not thinking about the workers any more. They only wanted money for them and only for them. That is why we decided to organized ourselves and form a union. We wanted to have better and more benefits because there were people who had been already ten to twelve years and they were paid forty vacation hours at $ 5.00 the hour. That person could have made $ 15.00 per hour [a person who worked per piece rate or contract] but the *patron* did not pay the vacation based on the piece rate. He only paid $ 5.00 and only forty hours a year. We thought that it was not fair.

Q: Did you have health insurance? Did you have to pay for it?

A: We paid for it. At the beginning when the *patron* gave us health insurance, he paid for the worker. If I wanted health insurance for my family, I had to pay for them. He paid only my part. Later on, arguing
that the insurance company was increasing the rates... If I remember correctly, when I left (1993) I was paying $8.00 for me in addition to my family's full coverage.

Q: Lets go back to the meetings you had with Alicia and Newman.

A: Well the first meeting we had was only with Newman. Alicia came to the second meeting and she interpreted for us.

Q: When they came and talked to you. Did they inform you about forming a union, the benefits and consequences of forming a union?

A: Yes. They explained everything to us. They told us that belonging to a union, if we win it was good, and if we lose it was good to. They explained to us the good and bad things, what we could have in the future. They explained everything to us. When we had that meeting, Newman told us to think about it to make a decision. Not in that moment, but to take some days to think about it because to take that step was very important.

Q: When Alicia and Newman left the meetings, did you discuss it among yourselves?

A: We were always talking about that. We talked at work, always making sure nobody could hear us.

Q: Like Lupe Farias?

A: Yes. We were always careful, we knew who could trust and who we could not trust. We always talked about the break time, when we needed to inform ourselves about something.

Q: How is that you decided to organize a union? did you call AS and NS? How was the process to form a union?

A: Well, as I told you. From the first meeting we had with Newman, then we had the second one in which Alicia interpreted for us. From then on, we had meetings once a week. Once a week we got together and started talking and as I told you, we saw as well as Newman saw that
people were very interested in forming a union. There were people who were very excited about it. But at the end that people were the weak ones. The people who were the most encouraged thought that we were going to get benefits we wanted, and it was not like that. Alicia and Newman explained to us that the struggle was not win over night, that it was going to take time. If we won, it was going to take time to receive benefits.

Q: Do you remember when you took the vote to form a union? If you do not remember the dates, it is okay. But was everybody there? And how many?

A: Everybody. We were approximately twenty to twenty two. Because there was a woman who was sick, Celia Alcazar. And she also voted. (Paulina Martinez was pregnant? Did she go to that meeting?) Yes, and she also voted.

Q: When you voted, it was a secret ballot. And it showed that everyone wanted a union. And someone's son, I think Dona Elen's made some buttons?

A: I do not remember who made them.

Q: Do you remember that if you wanted a union, you had to inform the patron in whatever way you could, like a letter, a meeting, or simply; wearing buttons about union organizing. So the next morning, all of you walked into the shop wearing your [I want a union] buttons.

A: Yes,

Q: How was that morning?, How were you all feeling? How was the supervisors and patrones reaction to see you wearing buttons?

A: Well. Are you asking me about the day we voted, or the day we walked in the shop wearing buttons?

Q: When you went to work wearing buttons. You alredy had voted and agreed to form a union, the next step was to inform the patron about it to make your campaing for union representation legal. The way you informed him was wearing hand made buttons. Do you remember? the
buttons said: "We want a union or "Queremos un Sindicato". Do you still having those buttons?

A: I do not remember.

Q: Can you look for them, also any other inofrmation in paper I can look at.

A: I think I have newspapers.

Q: What happened that morning? When you all gattered in the parking lot and all of you pinned your buttons?

A: Well, when we got in the patrones were not there.

Q: Where were they?

A: They always came around 9:00 a.m. or 10:00 a.m. They were always late. But the woman supervisor did not look to happy. The woman who made the masa, who was always on the company and patrones' side was not happy either. And we were very happy, we had achieved through the vote the agreement of wanting a union.

Q: What happened when the patrones came around 9:00 a.m. or 10:00 a.m.?

A: Well, the patron always laughted in ways to ridiculize us. He always laughted that way, never talked to us. The patrona talked to us, but we felt it was mostly in a hypocritical way. She was not sincere.

Q: The patron stop talking to you since you started organzing, or was he like that always?

A: No, he changed since we started organizing the union because when he used to talked to the workers, he was a playful person. But since we started organizing--Well before that time because we did not see him a lot. But everytime he went to the plant he made funny coments, he tried to make us laugh. Nice coments. Later on, no. After he new our intentions of organizing, no more. Even to Juan, Juan Espinoza a worker. He
always worked with him, he always helped the patron and the patron talked to him. But since we started the organizing, he [patron] stop talking to Juan. If he needed something, he went to Lupe so that Lupe told Juan what he needed. He did not want to talk to Juan. And before, he always talked to him, even in Spanish. The little Spanish he knew, he talked in Spanish to Juan. When we started organizing, he totally stop talking to Juan. If Juan was right next to him, he called Lupe to translate for him. He was very mad.

Q: What happened after you made the buttons, and wear them in the shop? How long did you wait for the election?

A: I do not remember.

Q: How was the working situation, from the time you walk in to work wearing your buttons, to the day the Nationa Labor Relations Board (NLRB) came to hold the elections to have union?

A: The patron stop talking to us. For example, before we started the organizing, if we needed masa, we asked the person in charge of it. After the organizing, they made the masa whenever they wanted to. They saw us in a different way, they wanted to slow down production and that affected us financially.

Q: Did they continue reducing the payment for the ornament making?

A: No because they always reduced the payment at the beginning of the year, in January. And the election campaign took place between March and April. They had already reduced the pay in January.

Q: What happened when you, the workers had the election for a union? Were you nervous? Did you feel confident that you were going to win?

A: Yes we were nervous because we knew that if we did not win the election for the union, maybe the next day we were left without a job. Even though the majority of the workers wanted a union because you never know if at the voting time a person may change his or her mind. He may say; "No I do not want union." and we never know.
Q: So the NLRB representatives counted the votes and informe you immediately of the result?

A: Yes, and we won. I do not remember for how many. Lupe voted, but not the supervisors. I guess we won by a big margin 21 or 22 to 3. Lupe; of course voted againsts the union.

Q: What happened after the election for representation? When did you start having negotiations with the patron?

A: In reality, after he accepted the union. The patron did not talk, well he did not even talk to us before. But after the election, he always argued that he could not talk to us. He said that he had to talk to our representatives.

Q: Who were the union representatives?

A: the union representatives were Alicia and Newman, they were the representatives. Therefore, he said that he could not negotiate anything with us. If he got new ornaments, he paid them very bad and we told him; "This ornament does not fit the salary because it is complicated and takes a long time to make it." Then he said; "I cannot negotiate with you, I cannot."

Q: He took an antagonist attitud?

A: Yes.

Q: How did you see Alicia and Newman as your representatives or the negotiators?

A: Well, we went to negotiations. I went to one, I think it was every month because later on they have a new supervisor. I mean, a foreman, but later they had a supervisor and a foreman. The foreman was the one who communicated with us because they (the patrones) did not want to have any kind of communication with us and I do not remember how we did the negotiations. But some times workers went to the negotiations.
Q: How did you sit to talk to them? Did you have translators? Was the entire meeting translated to the workers? did you arrive to the meetings with proposals?

A: Yes,

Q: When did you work in the proposals?

A: We had meetings, we got together with Alicia and Newman, all the workers and there we wrote—we all agreed on what we wanted.

Q: What did you want?

A: We wanted form them to stop cutting our wages, we wanted paid vacation. we wanted to have our vacation paid at the piece rate salary and not at $5.00, the hourly rate, we wanted more two weeks. We wanted sick days, and we also wanted the MLK day as a holiday. That was the first day we stop working...

Q: When you decided to stop working that Monday. Did you do it because it was MLK day, or because it was a mere coincidence?

A: It was a coincidence because we did not even remember it was MLK day. In fact, we did not know.

Q: Going back to the previous discussion. What else did you ask for?

A: Health insurance...The patron never talked to us, he always talked to Alicia or Newman. for example; If I was talking to him, he never looked at me. He looked at Alicia and Newman.

Q: How did you feel when he ignored you?

A: Well, I felt very uncomfortable because at that time, I was already working for him approximately ten years. I felt terrible that he took that atitude towards the workers because it was us who made him rich. Our work gave him thousands of dollars in profits. It was not Alicia or Newman. They were representing us, but if I was asking the patron a
question, he was responsible to answer to me, not to Alicia and Newman. They were working for us. We were the patron workers, not Alicia and Newman.

Q: What did you do when you saw that after three months of negotiations, you did not have an agreement with the patron for a contract?

A: Well, sometimes the workers got discouraged, sometimes workers regreted to be in the union.

Q: Since workers were becoming discouraged about the union. Do you think that you were fully prepared by AS and NS about unions and strikes? Its benefits if you win a contract, or its consequences if you lose?

A: Well, maybe no, because they told us that maybe we will win soon, but reality showed us the opposite because we had several problems later on. As I told you many workers were becoming very unhappy, things were getting worst and worst. We lost all the power inside the company. We could not discuss anything because the patrones attacked us immediately by telling us that they had to talk to the union representatives. So there were people who were not happy.

Q: Even though you did not Calliope Designs' costumers, you knew exactly the months when you had the pick in production? what were those months Sara?

A: Those months were approximately from July through December.

Q: But the key production months?

A: Oh, those were October, November, and December. Those three months were very important for the patron to met the production demands.

Q: What were the tactics you used to have an agreement since nothing was working?

A: We decided to go on strike.

Q: How did you reach to that decision?
After we organized ourselves and the *patrones* accepted the union. The company started giving us ornaments in which we were not making any money. That was their way to attack us. People who were not supporting the union received the ornaments from which we made our money.

Q: Who were they?

A: There were two American Indian women. They never wanted to participate in the union, despite the fact that we invited numerous times and visited them at their house. Also some Mexican women, like Consuelo Anguiano and Lupe Farias, they did not want to participate. I do not remember other names, but there were more people. These people were the ones who started making lots of money because the *patrones* gave them the best ornaments for weeks. and we received the hardest to make ornaments. Since the *patrones* were making new designs, we always got them and of course, you do not make money with new designs because you still practicing.

Q: When you talked to them about it, what was their response?

A: Well. that they needed the ornaments production, and that is why they gave us those ornaments.

Q: What the union did about it?

A: Nothing.

Q: How did you reach the conclusion to go on strike? Where there people who thought that July was not the best time to go on strike? Were AS and NS informed about the pick production months? They were suppossed to have experience in union organizing, and your union was very new. You did not have an union fund, yet you decided to go on strike. Why?

A: Well, Alicia and Newman told us that we should think about it, and if July was the best month to go on strike. But the majority of the workers thought...We did not thought about the timing, but how you are saying. AS and NS were suppossed to have experience, that is their job...