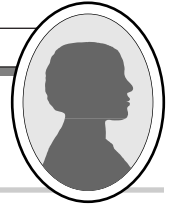


## BIOGRAPHY



## Dolores Huerta

As you read in the text, “*Huelga!*” is Spanish for “Strike!” Some people called Dolores Huerta by the name Dolores “Huelga” because of her readiness to strike. Like Cesar Chavez, with whom she founded the United Farm Workers, she was prepared to strike, to organize a boycott, or to do whatever else was necessary to win justice for migrant farm workers.

*As you read the passage below, think about the experiences that motivated Dolores Huerta to become a social activist.*

Dolores Huerta’s childhood prepared her for life as a labor organizer and crusader for social justice. She was born in 1930 in New Mexico to parents who showed her how to overcome obstacles. Her father, who was a migrant farm worker, became an organizer of farm workers, and was eventually elected to the New Mexico state legislature. After her parents divorced, Dolores and her brothers were raised by their mother and their grandfather. Moving to Stockton, California, her mother worked in a cannery until she saved enough money to open a restaurant and later to buy a hotel.

“[M]ost of the people in the hotel were farm workers,” Dolores recalled. “I saw their plight and heard their complaints of low wages. They would work so hard and earn so little. Their wages were about sixteen dollars for two weeks’ work.” Though still a young teenager, Dolores was already developing a social conscience. She was also honing her skills as an organizer through her participation in her church youth group, choir, and the Girl Scouts.

After graduating from high school, Dolores attended Stockton College and eventually became

a teacher. However, conditions at the school soon frustrated her. “I realized one day that as a teacher I couldn’t do anything for the kids who came to school barefoot and hungry.” Seeking to improve their situation, Dolores joined the Community Service Organization (CSO), a Mexican American self-help group in Los Angeles. She threw herself into its operations—organizing civic and educational programs and citizenship classes, registering voters, and lobbying the California legislature for improvements in the *barrios*, the city neighborhoods in which many Mexican Americans lived.

However, Huerta never forgot the farm workers and their plight. Another CSO official, Cesar Chavez, shared her interest, and a close collaboration began between them. They left the urban CSO and began organizing farm workers. From then on, Huerta worked nonstop on strikes, boycotts, contract negotiations, lobbying, and developing union policy.

In the 1990s, she could look back with pride: “I think we brought to the world . . . the whole idea of boycotting as a nonviolent tactic. I think we showed the world that nonviolence can work to make social change.”

### Questions to Think About

1. How did Dolores Huerta first become aware of the plight of migrant workers?
2. Why did Huerta move from teaching to labor organizing?
3. **Making Comparisons** How would you compare Huerta’s methods in the struggle for migrant workers’ rights with Martin Luther King, Jr.’s, methods in the struggle for African American civil rights?