



Josefina Cervantes

October 24, 1930 - June 26, 2023

"Josefina was at every march, every picket line, every event. She was completely dedicated and loyal to the farm workers' cause-a true warrior."

-Dolores Huerta, farm labor and civil rights icon -

Josefina Flores Cervantes was born in Calexico, California on October 24, 1930. She passed away peacefully on Monday, June 26 in Visalia at age 92.

After her father died in Sacramento from tuberculosis, Josefina began working the fields at the tender age of 7. She worked picking lettuce, beets, carrots, grapes and cotton. As a migrant child she travelled with her mother, sister and brothers following the crop harvest year after year. She did not attend school on a regular basis as no one ever demanded that the children of farm workers go to school in that era. She married young, had 9 children, only 3 of her children reached adulthood and was widowed when her oldest child was 10. Due to her family's economic hardship, her children worked in the fields with her up and down Hwy 99 from Arvin to Selma.

UFW President Emeritus Arturo S. Rodriguez said, "Josefina was one of the true pioneers of the farm worker movement who never stopped participating. She was a part of the three historic pilgrimages from Delano to Sacramento, in 1966, 1994, and 2022."

Josefina became a member of the United Farm Workers (UFW) in the 1960's after hearing Cesar Chavez speak for the very first time at a ranch near Selma. At that time, the UFW was organizing a strike to improve wages and to fight against the exploits of farmworkers. Josefina joined the first 340-mile march from Delano to Sacramento in 1966 to advocate for better pay and working conditions. She especially fought for worker protections for farmworker women, which included clean drinking water, accessibility to decent bathrooms and protections against sexual harassment. In 1973 she became a leader in the huge grape strike. At Cesar Chavez's request, she left California enroute to Chicago and New York to gather support for the farmworker struggle. In Chicago, Josefina attended the founding convention of the Coalition of Labor Union Women (CLUW) and accepted many speaking engagements with organizations wishing to obtain information on the farmworkers' struggle. However, the grape strike was called off after two union strikers had been shot and killed. One union striker was killed on the picket line.

The death of the two union strikers hit home for Josefina and prompted her to commit her life to the farmworker movement. In the decades to follow she helped organize farmworkers throughout the state, participated in over 100 marches and protests to highlight the farmworker struggle. Aside from serving as an organizer for the UFW, she also found herself babysitting for other UFW staff members and leaders, or cooking for UFW staff at the headquarters in La Paz, just outside of Keene, CA.

For half a century, Josefina participated in a multitude of political campaigns and legislative actions to help shape and influence farmworker friendly policies. For example, she helped achieve unemployment insurance for farm workers and enact California's landmark 1975 farm labor law granting organizing rights to field laborers. Even in her 80's she took part in solidarity

fasts to push for federal immigration reform despite pleas from her family members not to fast at her late age.

For a short time, she lived at the Paulo Agbayani Retirement Village on the 40 acres outside of Delano, Ca. Up until 2 years ago, she had resided for over 20 years at Casa Hernandez, the Cesar Chavez Foundation's affordable housing community for low-income seniors in Delano. Often Josefina passed on the history she lived by speaking with students, reporters and filmmakers at both of her senior residences.

When not working with the UFW, she was an environmental advocate with the Center on Race, Poverty and the Environment and with the Community Water Center.

Her last official outing was on March 31, 2021, when First Lady Jill Biden joined the farmworker movement at the UFW's 40 Acres property in Delano to assist in vaccinating farmworkers against Covid-19. As a family tradition, Josefina was joined at 40 Acres by her grandchildren and great grandchildren. Her journey and lifelong commitment to the farmworker community will serve as an inspiration for generations to come.

Josefina was preceded in death by her parents (Tomas Flores and Angelita Rojo Flores); three brothers (Jesus Flores, Jose and Carlos Soto); one sister (Bernice Cortez); one daughter (Elva Herrera); two granddaughters (Corina Contreras and Sophia Herrera).

Josefina is survived by 2 daughters (Maria Gomez and Yolanda Mata); 2 sons-in-law (Humberto Gomez and Jose Mata); 9 grandchildren (Robert K. Herrera, Joe O. Herrera, Steven Herrera, Vincent Herrera, David Joseph Herrera Jr., Mark Anthony Herrera, Humberto Gomez Jr., Magdalena Gomez,

Maria De Jesus Banks); 13 great grandchildren; 3 great-great grandchildren; and numerous nieces and nephews.

Visitation will be held 4:00 PM - 8:00 PM Thursday, July 20th, 2023 at Holy Family Catholic Church, 1275 Smith Street, Kingsburg with the Rosary beginning at 5:30 PM at Holy Family Catholic Church.

Mass of Christian Burial service will be held at 10:00 AM Friday, July 21st, 2023 at Holy Family Catholic Church, 1275 Smith Street, Kingsburg immediately followed by interment at the Kingsburg Cemetery, 12782 E. Clarkson Avenue, Kingsburg.

Services have been entrusted to Salser & Dillard Creighton Chapel. Memorial Tributes and condolences may be offered by logging onto www.salseranddillard.com.

Cemetery Details

Kingsburg Cemetery

12782 E. Clarkson Avenue
Kingsburg, CA 93631

Previous Events

Visitation

JUL 20. 4:00 PM - 8:00 PM (PT)

Holy Family Catholic Church
1275 Smith Street
Kingsburg, CA 93631

Rosary

JUL 20. 5:30 PM - 6:30 PM (PT)

Holy Family Catholic Church
1275 Smith Street
Kingsburg, CA 93631

Mass of Christian Burial

JUL 21. 10:00 AM - 11:00 AM (PT)

Holy Family Catholic Church
1275 Smith Street
Kingsburg, CA 93631

Burial

JUL **21**. 11:00 AM - 12:00 PM (PT)

Kingsburg Cemetery
12782 E. Clarkson Avenue
Kingsburg, CA 93631

Tribute Wall



“ *Salser & Dillard Creighton Chapel created a Tribute Video in memory of Josefina Cervantes* ”



Salser & Dillard Creighton Chapel - July 18, 2023 at 12:46 PM