

## A hero to all who care about justice



**BARB GUY**

Cihuacoatl, Mayan Earth Goddess, stands guard over a tableau of Latino musicians, peddlers, farm workers and children. Brown-skinned laborers pick vegetables while acres of green farmland stretch to purple mountains beyond. A woman unfurls a scroll entitled "The Golden Rule."

This gorgeous mural outside Quetzal Imports at 500 North and 600 West in Salt Lake City evokes the strength and dignity of Latino people, the importance of family and the backbreaking work Latinos do to feed our country.

The artist, Ruby Chacon, lavishes her work with icons and images of her culture including her own family and role models like Cesar Chavez. In fact, Chavez's words grace the scroll in the mural, but more about that later.

I don't know how many drivers who travel Cesar Chavez Boulevard (500 South) know Utah observes Cesar Chavez Day on March 31, his birthday.

Chavez died in 1993, but I felt his presence during the Latino rallies last spring. He's a Latino hero, but he's my hero, too. He's the hero of everyone who cares about justice. He taught people to rise up against corrupt employers, bigotry and segregation.

Chavez saw that people wondered if they could ever overcome their hardships. He did a seemingly simple thing: He taught them to say, "Yes we can!" Chavez is long gone, but his words, "Si se puede!" rang throughout Salt Lake City during the rallies last year.

Curious about what Utah kids learn about the great man, I phoned a total stranger. I called Utahn and University of Utah junior Shontol Torres Burkhalter, to ask her what, if anything, she knew about him.

Keep in mind that I, a complete stranger, called her out of nowhere, choosing her because of the mixture of parentage implied by her name, and my access, by happenstance, to her phone number.

Here's what Shontol said. "Cesar Chavez was an amazing person

and so influential in the Latino/Chicano community. When I think of Cesar Chavez I think of my grandma; she always quotes him. She taught us, 'We cannot seek achievement for ourselves and forget about progress and prosperity for community - our ambitions must be broad enough to include the aspirations and needs of others, for their sake and for our own.'"

I was shocked at her ability, at an utter moment's notice, to draw this Chavez quote, perfectly, out of her own head.

I asked Shontol if she was reading Chavez's words from a poster or something. She replied, "No, it's just my grandma. She always has instilled that into her children and her grandchildren and now her great-grandchildren." Wow.

Next I asked Chacon's son, 14-year-old Orion Chacon-Hurst, whom I also don't know, what he knew of Chavez. He said, "I know he was one of the farm workers. They were getting discriminated against and he started a lot of strikes. He seems like the Martin Luther King for Chicano people. I learned about him because Mom used to paint him and she talked to me about him. My mom introduced me to Cesar Chavez."

After thinking about the mural so intently, I had to revisit it in

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person. Taking in the vividly colorful countryside, the warmly depicted people and the faces of mentors hidden in the design of Cihuacoatl's dress, I thought about how it's the mothers and grandmothers who are teaching kids about Cesar Chavez.

Then I noticed on the woman's scroll, the wise words Shontol knows by heart, Chavez's Golden Rule.

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*BARB GUY is a regular contributor to these pages. © Salt Lake Tribune.*