**Teresa DeAnda’s Story**

Teresa DeAnda grew up in the small Central Valley town where she still lives with her husband and children, and has grandchildren nearby. She began our interview by telling a story she often tells in public settings. This story involves a large-scale pesticide drift incident in Earlimart, her hometown. While she was running errands in a nearby town, a toxic pesticide drifted into town from the agricultural fields about a quarter mile away from her home. She came home to find the sheriff standing at her front-gate and her husband telling her they needed to leave the area. The family bundled into the car and left town. Meanwhile, neighbors and other people from her hometown were undergoing a botched decontamination process organized by the government. Teresa learned about what happened to them several days later at a meeting organized by the United Farm Workers. The sickest people, who were vomiting and experiencing other acute symptoms of pesticide poisoning, were taken to the local school, made to take of their clothes with little privacy, and sprayed down with fire hoses in the cold night. Some of them didn’t even get their hair wetted down. One woman didn’t want to take off her clothes, because her children had never seen her naked before. She said, “Where’s my rights? Where’s my rights?” and was told, “Lady, you’ve lost your rights tonight.” She wouldn’t take off her underwear so they yanked it off themselves. The ambulances had not yet arrived and people were told to sit on small tarps until they were eventually transported to various area hospitals, with the children’s names written on their stomachs. At the hospital the doctor called Poison Control, and was told that there was nothing wrong and for everyone to just go back home and try to avoid getting re-exposed. They were given back their pesticide-covered clothes to wear home.

Two more drift incidents in other Valley towns followed soon after, and Teresa visited these towns to assess the impact herself and to get involved in dealing with the accompanying problems. During this time she formed a community group in her town to help resolve the problems caused by the pesticide poisoning. Through the connections she made with regional pesticide organizations she was soon hired to be the Central Valley representative of a statewide pesticide-control non-profit. Teresa’s family escaped the heaviest exposure, and did not have to experience the decontamination process first hand. Nonetheless, Teresa became a town spokesperson who articulated that story to broader audiences and sought solutions to the widespread problem of pesticide drift in the Central Valley.

Teresa then said that really she had been dealing with pesticides problems for years before this key event in her life, often complaining to the farmer whose land borders her home and to local government officials about the drift that she and her children regularly experienced. She also described her advocacy work as having begun earlier as she fought for the rights of her autistic child in the school-system.

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