A walk through the rubble

Column by Gregory T. Huang

Down break in the stillness of the earliest lilac bloom. I breathe deeply from the cool, dry air. A line of buildings in the outskirts of this sleepy town casts a forbidding shadow across the vast stretch of flat dusty earth before me. The edge of the shadow fades as my feet take me into the shade and walk toward its source.

I am walking through the streets of a devastated city. It resembles a city struck by a tremendous earthquake, except that the mass-destruction is very localized. The site is thick with dust, debris, and the smell of blood. An entire block has been reduced to a barren wasteland of broken metal and concrete. I can't tell if it was a military target or a civilian dwelling, but I guess it doesn't really matter, because it is completely destroyed.

A middle-aged man dressed in soiled, tattered clothes is slumped in an alley. There are bloodsoaked pieces of cloth jammed in his ears, and my guess is that he has almost completely lost his hearing. He is looking at a warped photograph of a woman and two children, frozen in an imaginary in one of the city's northern districts. Oddly, he seems to be talking to himself. It is possible to see through the window in the back of the car, the projection of strength in the face of this sort of devastation. I think that there are people here who have sincere feelings of sorrow.

I have seen enough for today. I don't need to visit a hospital or the morgue. These survivors are good people caught in dreadful uncontrollable circumstances. They are just like you and me, and we are people forever. I am still trying to comprehend what this war has meant for them, but now it is time to go home.

I am back in my apartment, watching the evening news. The TV says that the war appears to be going smoothly, and then he quotes some numbers for casualties. Then a videotape of an air raid is shown, shot by some courageous journalists. I've seen it about 10 times already. On another channel, a middle-aged man dressed in soiled, tattered clothes is shown, shot by someone else. I know that we are not going to come out of this war without losing loved ones. In my heart, I know that nothing has been easy. Our daily lives need not be affected. We are Americans, and we have the ability to fight back. We have so much to lose, but we also have so much to gain.

As the war in the Gulf reaches a cease-fire, we must remind ourselves that our part in this conflict is still being fought. On this, the 20th anniversary of the founding of the United Farm Workers of America, the battles for justice and fair treatment for the American workplace are far from ending. The ongoing boycott against the California table-grape industry is still in its infancy despite seven years of consistent pressure from concerned citizens and organizations such as the UFW.

The majority of table-grape growers in California still spray the vineyards with toxic pesticides that affect us on two levels. The farm workers, who are in constant contact with the grapes, have higher-than-average recorded levels of cancer and respiratory disease. This is not evident in the number of birth defects and the childhood ailments among farm working families; average infant cancer rates in California are alarming. This is due to the density of grape-growing areas in the United States, which is far higher than the national level. These alarming cases have medically been connected directly to the pesticides that workers inhale and absorb through the skin.

Secondly, these same grapes are then sold to, and eaten by, the unknowing American consumer despite the amount of toxins used to grow and preserve them. Because the UFW is a union, we have been able to affect many more workers of the area-wide targeting and picketing of California grape-selling stores and national chains. It is time to take a stand against this. The United Farm Workers of America have created the United Farm Workers of America, and in 1975, Concor-

Let's talk about the war and what it means for the future. As the war comes to an end, we must remember that there are still many problems to be solved. We must continue to work for the rights of all workers, not just the farm workers. We must also remember that the war was not just a battle. It was a war against the people, and we must remember that we will not be able to win until the war is over.

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The button hangs heavily on my coat today. It seems silly to say that "war is not the answer." But it is. The question is not whether we should go to war, but whether we should continue to fight. The United Farm Workers of America have created the United Farm Workers of America, and in 1975, Congress passed the Agricultural Act which allowed a great turning point for workers, still all workers, in the fight against the battlefields, and I know that things are not that simple. In my heart, I know that nothing has been easy, only destroyed.

Despite victory, war was wrong