

### Crossing the Line

The first day on the job at Von's, I felt fear grip me as I pulled up in the parking lot. There were people holding signs, walking back and forth in front of the store, and they didn't look happy. Reality hit me the moment I had to cross that picket line. As I sat in my car, I felt as if I was being watched. My palms began to sweat and I felt as if I had heavy weights on my shoulders. I could not get out of my car. It was now or never, I thought, so I took a deep breath and forced myself out of the car. I began walking quickly with my eyes fixed on the entrance to the store. I felt the stares of workers follow me as I walked closer to the picket line. My heart began to beat faster with every step I took. The picketers turned their faces toward me as I quickly crossed the line, and someone yelled, "Scab!" I didn't respond, I was just relieved to actually make it in the store. Once inside my boss reassured me that everything would be okay. But would it be? Did I have a choice? I hadn't worked in three years and I needed this job to support my family. My mom had lost her job and I had two daughters to support. I knew there would be many challenges to face in my employment at Von's.

It was a challenge just to be new on a new job learning how to bag groceries and give customer service with a smile and offering a carry out knowing if they said yes I would be forced to go outside and face the upset workers. I would silently pray to give me strength to continue my day. I also had to retrieve carts from the parking lot at least five times a day. Normally this

might be an easy task but not during this strike. There would be ketchup on the handles of the carts and some of the carts would be tied to the poles. The workers would be laughing as I got ketchup all over my hands or as I untied the carts. This was a humbling experience just retrieving the carts.

There were challenges inside the store as well. Since the store wasn't as busy as it was before the strike, I was given other duties to do besides those of a courtesy clerk. I had to do lots of cleaning, such as shelves, floors, displays, and bathrooms. I also had to stock shelves and freezers. This would normally be a pretty easy task but not during the strike. As soon as I got all the food stocked in the freezer, the power would go out. It was the workers on strike cutting the power lines on the roof. This was frustrating because then I had to take everything out of the freezer so it wouldn't spoil and put it in a working freezer in the back of the store. As soon as the power got fixed, I would have to put all the frozen food back and then, in no time, the power would be cut off again and I would again have to take everything out of the freezer so it wouldn't spoil. This went on all day sometimes.

The personal challenge of not knowing what I would do after the strike was over. I had no idea when this job would end. I was able to help pay my mothers rent and support my daughters because of this job. I also became close with others I had worked with; through all the challenges we had a bond. Later I also would miss the regular customers that shopped at Vons. Working at Vons did give me the opportunity to have a job reference to be able to apply at a market after the strike was over.

Through the many challenges of working during the strike has definitely made me a stronger person. Two weeks after the strike was over my boss called me back to rehire me at Vons. This was interesting because I had to face those that saw me cross the picket line during

the strike. I heard stories of how the strikers got only paid one hundred dollars a week and how a family had to live in their car because they couldn't afford rent. This made up for all the things that were said and done to me during my employment at Vons during the strike. It was then clear to me how my crossing the picket line didn't help matters for them. I didn't want anyone to know that I worked during the strike if they didn't already know. Being on both sides I was able to now have compassion for this sensitive situation. Now that I am in the union, I will think twice before ever crossing any picket line. I never want be called a scab ever again.