

The Unsung Hero

Larry Itliong

by *Carlo Joaquino*

The heart and hopes of one man led to a reform in the lives of many hard working people today. Also known as Seven Fingers, Larry Itliong played and even led the movement towards higher pay, better working conditions and overall rights for those who worked endlessly in farms. Larry Itliong, a Filipino hero in many of our eyes, started life with not the easiest of roads. Despite having only a sixth grade education and the struggle and stress of having to immigrate to the United States at the young age of 14, Larry excelled and became self sufficient, learning things on his own. His hard work and his natural talent became a model to many of the people who followed him and evidently changed how labor is viewed today. A dream, a goal, even a mere change, any of those things could entitle what Larry Itliong was striving towards in his movement. He not only impacted laborers' lives but he also has become a role model to many, an unsung hero.

Larry worked much of his life and in different locations - places such as Alaska, Montana, and California. He has worked in canneries, railroads, and farms. Through all of these, Itliong noticed the hardships and unfairness that immigrants like him are forced to suffer. He eventually became a leader to a monumental movement, some say could be the greatest social justice movements in US history, the American farm labor movement. Larry partnered with 1,500 Filipino laborers, protested and went on strike against grape growers in Delano, California. Eventually he teamed up with famous Cesar Chavez. In the past Filipinos and Spanish people have not been on good terms, but because of this crisis they were willing to join forces. This was

called the Delano Labor Strike. Despite their different ethnicities and the history between the two, the goal they shared was strong enough to create a bond between them. A bond hoping to achieve their goal, a goal to change the lives of not only themselves but to the thousands that followed in their footsteps. Larry's work in this movement continues to resonate in our society today. His vision and tenacity towards what he wanted eventually affected thousands of people back then and continues to affect people even now, giving hard working laborers much more than what they had before.

He left a legacy to all workers today, a legacy that workers should forever be thankful for. With the labor unions today, working people have a decent pay, they have benefits. Workers today now have a sense of security and they feel like they are a valued part of the respective companies they work for because of this. Larry's hard work changed society forever. He impacted lives of thousands and is now a model to anyone who dreams to make change for the better. Be truly grateful to this icon, this idol, this hero, Larry Itliong.