

## *My 2000 Strike Story: Fred Taleghani*

It had been a typical busy night in the PICU. I had been at the hospital just over a year and had really settled in into my new unit and routine. As always, the PICU was short-staffed so I had picked up an extra shift. I sat eating my dinner in a quiet place to unwind and relax, before heading back out the chaos of a typical PICU shift. My reverie was interrupted by Dawn, a day-shift charge Nurse, coming into the room. I barely knew her but I knew she was involved in the union. I had never worked at a union-represented hospital before, so I knew I was a member but beyond that I did not even know we were in contract negotiations. That would change in an instant.

Dawn strode into the room and walked up to the CRONA board. I watched as she tacked a sign with one word that would change everything: "IMPASSE." Seeing my puzzled expression, she began to explain what this meant. The break room was quickly filling with Nurses gathered to hear the news Negotiations had become ineffective and CRONA was going out on strike!

In just a few hours, the hospital was crawling with managers. They began collecting keys and telling us to clean out our lockers. Our manager announced that she had been assured our unit would be staffed by non-union temp workers. At 7:00 a.m., we sat waiting for the scabs to come in and take report. We needed a minimum of 12 Nurses, but by 7:30 a.m., only four replacement workers had shown up. The growing panic of our managers was palpable. By 8:00 a.m., the manager was frantically trying to move patients around. Half an hour later, the CRONA president came by and offered to cover the PICU on a shift-to-shift basis since so many patients were uncovered. We gave report and walked out as a group. We would learn later that the same issue had occurred in the NICU.

As we walked out the front doors of the hospital, we were cheered by a huge crowd of off-duty CRONA Nurses who were already walking the picket lines. We picketed for over an hour and eventually went home to sleep, exhausted from our shifts and unsure of what would come next.

I woke up a few hours later to a call from the CRONA president, asking if I would be willing to come in and staff the PICU that night. She assured me that it was with full union approval, so I agreed. The few CRONA nurses in the building checked in with each other as well as with some of the NICU nurses who also had been asked to cover critical patients. I left the next morning and did not return for over 50 days.

I applied at a registry and prepared to begin working on a temporary basis to earn money while we waited for the hospitals to come to their senses. Much to my surprise, there was more work available than I actually needed. Even better yet, I found I was working with many of my same colleagues! We quickly arranged carpools and dubbed the UCSF PICU "LPCH North." The inability of the hospital to cover the normal patient load meant that the surrounding hospitals were packed with our patients. We provided them with the same quality care, just in a different location.

As the strike went on, we continued to picket and attend informational meetings on an almost daily basis. I formed many lifelong friendships that summer as we stood united in a cause and fight we all thought was worthy. One of the most powerful events of the strike was our candlelight vigil. Over 500 Nurses gathered in front of the fountain — each holding a lit candle — for a moment of silence. It was one of the most powerful and moving experiences I have ever participated in.

After 52 days, the strike finally ended and we returned to work. The strike of 2000 was difficult and it involved sacrifice, but it remains one of the most professionally-affirming events of my life. CRONA Nurses stood united and we stood together for what we knew was right — and it got us the benefits and rights we have today. Looking ahead to the fight we face today, I know CRONA Nurses have the power and the strength to stand up for what Nurses and patients need and deserve. I have walked the line before, and I am ready to do it again!

In solidarity,  
Fred Taleghani