

Excerpt from Gwendolyn M. Patton oral history interview

[47:05]... You know, I didn't think I learned any better sitting next to a white child. You know, that was not my paradigm. I didn't define myself in juxtaposition to white people. And that was reinforced with my grandmother, which goes all the way back to '56 on the bus boycott - I mean on the bus.

JM: After the boycott.

GP: After the boycott.

JM: Right.

GP: And she always sat in the back, and I would always sit up in the front and aggravate white folks, they were sitting there, squirming and pushing and all, being a kid. I'm fourteen at that time, fifteen. And one day, there were no white folks on the bus, so I went and sat in the back with Mommy. I said, "We walked all these years, all these days you walked, and my mama and daddy sent money and shoes and doo-dah-to-doo, and you still sit in the back!" I thought she was capitulating, that she - I knew she was a block captain, I knew she was in the Movement, I knew she thought voting was important. [Coughs] But I still thought, "Maybe you are afraid of white folks in a certain kind of way."

And she, very ladylike, extremely ladylike, who had far more class than my la-de-dah teacher relatives, and she always called me Gwendolyn, the whole name, not Gwen, but Gwendolyn, very proper. Uh, and she said, "Gwendolyn, the bus boycott was not about sitting next to white people. It was about sitting anywhere you please. And I am pleased to sit here." And I had to sit back and take that in, which altered my whole thought process. [48:56]