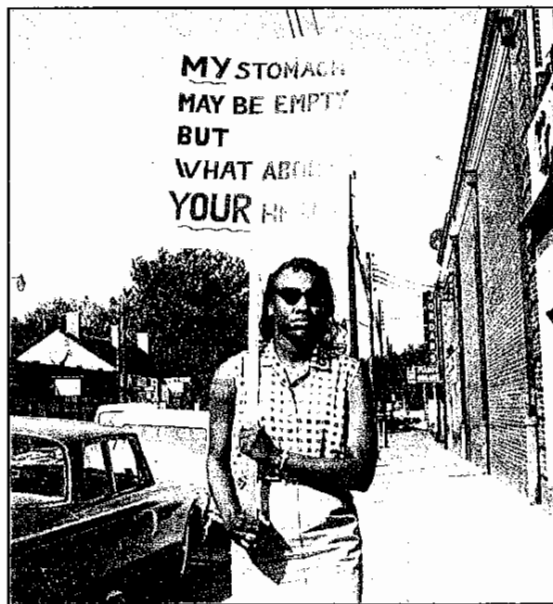


[Excerpt]

Interviewer: Now, let me think. We didn't talk about one of the main things you did in high school. In the '60's, you did the sit-in.

Gaye Adegbalola: Okay. It was in '60. As it happened, in Fredericksburg it was only like three months or so. It was intense but the civil rights movement was sweeping the south. What makes things so different—when you think back on that time—I mentioned before—people didn't have phones, people didn't have cars, people didn't have magic markers. You have to make your signs to picket with—that kind of thing. My family, we had a TV; we didn't have a car. We would watch some of this stuff on the TV where we learned about Martin Luther King. You know the word spread. I guess as close as we got to celebrity in Fredericksburg, Harry Belafonte's wife at the time came down and spoke at a mass meeting. He was very prevalent in the civil rights movement. There were mass meetings at the churches. We had speakers who would come and talk about what was going on and what was needed. We would raise funds. During this time, there were four major leaders, Whitney Young was the economic leader with the Urban League, Roy Wilkins was the legal leader with the NAACP, Dr. King was the spiritual leader and James Farmer who is legendary in Fredericksburg was the activist. He was the main activist, the main thinker behind activism at the time. He spearheaded the freedom rides and demonstrations down south. We didn't know these people personally but we knew of these people, they were legendary. It was Dr. King who moved people. Anyway, there was a very active National Association for the Advancement of Colored People group here.



Gaye pickets outside of Grants in downtown Fredericksburg the summer of 1960.

My mom was one of the youth advisors. It was a page out of the Birmingham struggles that they used young people for the sit-ins and in the picket lines because they did not have to worry so much about their jobs and also people didn't know who they were. Young people started to take on that role in the Deep South. The sit-ins started in North Carolina at A&T University. That was college age kids that started that. There were mass meetings in Fredericksburg first; there was an active NAACP. The leader was Dr. Philip Wyatt who was a famous dentist here and very active at the state level of the NAACP. My mom worked with young people so she was one of the youth leaders. She and Judge John Scott's mother, who was Mamie Scott, they worked together. We had these learning sessions first. We had role playing where people blew smoke in your face, where people cussed you. You were taught to be a pacifist and to not respond to anything. You were told to dress a certain way, act a certain way, carry a certain book, and so on. My mom helped to organize who sat-in where and when. It was hot in the summer and people walked from Mayfield to be there.

Interviewer: I am sorry. How did you decide what stores to picket?

Gaye Adegbalola: Well, we decided to go after the chain stores. With everyone hitting the same stores throughout the south, it would really be a financial dent. There were no fast food places, there were no McDonald's, no Subway, so people on their lunch hours would eat at the lunch counters in these stores. This was a booming business. People would go on dates to Woolworth, to buy a hamburger, that kind of thing. If we hit the same places across the country, they would feel it economically. The bus boycotts in Montgomery ceased because the money crunch was happening and it got to them. We went after Grant's, Newberry's, Woolworth's and People's Drug Store. Those were the four chains that were downtown. Grant's is where Ben Franklin is now; Woolworth's is where the big antique mall is at the corner of William and Caroline; Newberry's was in the middle of Caroline, I guess in the 900 block—where another antique place is now; and People's was right on the alleyway leading into Market Square.

Interviewer: There wasn't a Penney's down here?

Gaye Adegbalola: There was a Penney's but it didn't have a lunch counter.

Interviewer: They all had to have a lunch counter.

Gaye Adegbalola: There were local places that had lunch counters. There was Willis Drug Store, Bond Drug Store, Goolrick's Drug Store and we didn't have enough people to do it all, so we went after the chain stores. We quickly found out is all that we needed to do was have a person in every third seat to keep anyone from sitting by you. In other words we didn't even need every other seat, if you sat in every third seat; you would end up with someone having to sit by somebody black. Let's see. There would be two empty seats in between and then a person. Not three holes, but one person, two empty seats, and another person, and two empty seats. Because if someone white sat down, they would have to sit down by someone black and nobody white wanted to do that.

Also, sympathetic whites would refuse to shop at these stores. It was kind of like a real economic thing that happened and then when we had enough people, we would put up a boycott/ a picket line around the store. We had the picket line with people not crossing the picket line, not shopping there, and not eating there. You know we closed down the lunch counters, so you had people who were out of work. Not just the waitresses but also the food suppliers and everything else. When you closed those places down, it was a long hard summer. Eventually, it was just lifted in those three places—just one day, they decided to change policy. The only place that never changed policy was People’s Drug Store. They never gave in; there was a manager a man named Mr. Southworth; he was just venomous in his whole attitude and his whole demeanor. Black folks were never served there at least not while I was around all through the next year.

Shortly after that, we approached the movie theaters. We went in to meet with people because we always had to sit in the balconies, and we always had the old stale popcorn. Of course, I used to buy Jujubes or Good and Plenty to throw down on the white folks. You got a lot of hard candy for a nickel back then. That was another hobby quite like bulldozer. It isn’t something you say with pride, but it is something that I did. We sat in the balconies.

Interviewer: Still when you were in high school?

Gaye Adegbalola: This is a big deal because the only place that was air conditioned in the whole town was the movie theater. We would go down on Sunday afternoon and just stay—stay as long as you could because it was cool. We went to meet with the folks there and they said, “we will with no fanfare.” Let’s just do it. It was just accepted. I remember some difficult things—both of them around movies. At the Colonial theater which was on Caroline Street; the Colonial is where Tea Tyme is now. On Saturdays they used to have cowboy movies. They would give you little stubs and you could join the Roy Roger’s fan club and the Hopalong Cassidy fan club.

Interviewer: Gene Autry maybe

Gaye Adegbalola: I don’t remember Gene Autry, but I do remember Tom Mix, and Lash LaRue. I had a card and we all would go upstairs. And one of these times, the number on my card was called (I knew my number was going to be called and I don’t know how, but I felt it.) It was true and I had to go downstairs, up on the stage and pin the tail on the donkey for a prize. I missed by a mile. I felt so awful, because I felt like I was representing the whole black race. Because we didn’t get to go downstairs and here I was downstairs. That is my first memory of having to be what some call “super nigger.” You know, you got to be twice as good to get half as far. That is my first real recollection that I had let my people down. I carried that guilt for quite some while after that incident. Every now and then it comes back to me—every now and then.

Another incident I remember at the movie theater, this was at the Victoria which is now a part of the Fredericksburg Baptist Church. I’ve always been a big kid. I have been this size since I was...

(Interviewer: By big, she means tall, she is not big – heavy is what I mean.)