

Civil Rights (1955)



Rosa Parks December 1, 1955

Rosa Parks was a civil rights activist who refused to surrender her seat to a white passenger on a segregated bus in Montgomery, Alabama. Her defiance sparked the Montgomery Bus Boycott. Its success launched nationwide efforts to end racial segregation of public facilities. <https://www.biography.com/video/rosa-parks-legacy-15821379604>

I was thirteen when this happened. I remember reading about it in the Chicago newspapers which is where I lived with my family. We lived in an all-white neighborhood on the northwest side. The neighborhood was predominantly Polish with close knit and extended families.

My family was one of the larger ones. In 1955, I was one of seven children. Three more joined us before the decade was out. My Mom was one of 9 brothers and sisters, and my Dad was one of 5. Both my grandmothers and a grandfather lived very close by. One of my grandmothers lived in a basement flat in a two story apartment building. Me, my brothers and sisters, and my parents lived in an apartment on the second floor. One of my Aunts and Uncles and their two children lived on the first floor. More of my Aunts and Uncles and cousins lived within a couple of blocks of us. And quite a few more lived within 2 or 3 miles of where we lived. Most of the adults were first or second generation immigrants.

They all worked hard to support their families. They had lived through the Great Depression of the 1930's and World War II in the 1940's. And by the mid-1950's almost all of them owned their home. We never had a lot, but we always had enough.

Our lives pretty much were built around the Catholic Church and School which was across the street from our home. We did not have much interaction with Negroes as they were generally called at the time. We really did not have much interaction with other ethnic or racial groups either. The only times we saw Negroes was when we went to downtown Chicago or when we went to a White Sox baseball game on the southside of Chicago. We rode on buses and elevated/subway trains with Negroes or anyone else who used public transportation. There

were not separate seats or water fountains or bathrooms or anything else designated for white people or black people.

So when Rosa Parks refused to leave her seat on a bus so a white passenger could sit down, I was surprised that something like that occurred in our country. I thought it was wrong. But being 13 years old, I did not think about what role, if any, I could play in bringing about changing this situation.