

Barbara Howard



Barbara Howard with Stokely Carmichael.

In Montgomery, after the bus boycott, the Montgomery Improvement Association (MIA) sponsored other civil rights activities in the early 1960s. For Barbara Howard, the eighth and ninth grades were the time of sit-ins.

I was one of the first to integrate a movie theater. I remember that evening. The MIA put us in pairs, two to the Paramount and two to the Empire. I integrated the Empire theater. They did not let us in the first time we tried. We went back a week later, and then they let us in. I remember sitting in the center aisle, scared to death. Fortunately, there weren't many whites there. I remember that distinctly. But boy, we did not stay for the entire movie – I remember that much too. It was the symbolic entering, integration, of the place. I was so scared, I don't remember what the movie was.

What if an older redneck did something to us, then how would we respond? We had been taught if you had to speak, let it be something polite. No cursing. If they struck you, we were told how to crouch and protect ourselves. No fighting

back. Would I be able to do what we'd been taught? That was the fear.

Nonviolence was the philosophy that was being taught to all of us in the movement, stemming from Dr. King's dream of an integrated society and his agreement with Mahatma Gandhi from India. We did freedom workshops at some of the churches, where they would teach us how to act, what to say, how to protect ourselves. Songs – that was the key, that was the spirit lifter. *Ain't Gonna Let Nobody Turn Me 'Round*. *We Shall Overcome*, of course, and *O Freedom*. One of my favorites was *Go Tell It on the Mountain*. This was during George Wallace's time, and Bull Connor, so we put their names in the songs.

A lot of times we would go into the apartment buildings to recruit young people. Many of our rallies were not scheduled in churches, but were in open areas. We'd recruit young people to join us for the sit-ins.

"You can't sit back at your home and think that white people are going to give you something," we'd say. "They are not. You gotta come on out and join us and take it. Help make a difference." We would tell them that we were trying to integrate, to make all of what's available to the whites available to us.

At one point we started saying 'black'. 'Black is beautiful.' I can remember the student leader Stokely Carmichael coming up with that slogan. It made us start to appreciate our own color. It built our self-awareness.