

GWEN PETERSON

Narrator

KIM HEIKKILA

Interviewer

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TRANSCRIPT—GWEN PETERSON

Interviewee: Gwen Peterson
 Interviewer: Kim Heikkila
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[START OF INTERVIEW]

Kim Heikkila: This is an interview for the Oxford Community Center Oral History Project. It is Friday, January 30, 2026, and I'm here at the Minnesota History Center with Gwen Peterson, whose maiden, for lack of a better word, name is Crowe. So she's part of the Crowe family, and let's just establish this right at the beginning. She's also married to Bill Peterson, about whom we have heard a lot in this project and who, of course, was also interviewed. So, anyway, my name is Kim Heikkila. I own and operate Spotlight History. Today I'll be talking to Gwen about not just about her own Oxford story, but also about her own athletic experiences, which is something I'm very, very interested in, especially based on some of the things we talked about on the phone. So, thank you, Gwen, and welcome, and I'm just so happy that you're willing to do this.

Gwen Peterson: Thank you, Kim.

KH: Okay, so if we could just start, I'm just going to ask you to tell me a little bit about yourself, like where you grew up and who your family was.

GP: I am the seventh of eight children born to Clem and Otharee Crowe. They both were born in Texas, but I was born in Omaha, Nebraska. We lived there until I was 10 years old. Then my parents moved to Minnesota, so I've been a Minnesotan since I was 10. We moved from Omaha, Nebraska to the Rondo community directly in 1968, just

around the time that 94 was being completed.

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GP: So we moved into the Rondo community, not knowing the history. But I do distinctly remember entering St. Paul through 7th Street, and then once moving into our home, literally crossing the bridge and wondering why we didn't come in on this big, wide interstate. Not knowing that they were just completing it and wondering why there were so few cars on it when I saw it, but it was just brand new. So we moved directly into the Rondo community when we moved here from Nebraska.

KH: And do you know how it was that your parents decided to move here? And why to Rondo specifically?

GP: It was my father's employment, which was Armour Meatpacking Company. The plant was closing in Omaha, and he had options of either Iowa, Minnesota, or back to Texas for transfer opportunities. He did not know anything about Iowa or Minnesota, but he chose Minnesota because he'd heard about the education system at the time. He came up and spent a weekend just kind of learning about the Twin Cities and then he decided that's where we were going to move. So we packed up and transferred to Minnesota because of my father's employment.

KH: We were just talking about the cold winter. What time of year was this?

GP: This was in the summer. I remember because I was born in July and I spent my 10th birthday in Minnesota. So we had just probably been there for maybe a month or two and then my birthday was in July, in 1968.

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GP: So I turned 10 and I was in Minnesota and knew nobody. For a 10 year old, that's pretty traumatic. You don't have friends yet. It's your siblings, but who are they? You wanted to celebrate with your friends. So I distinctly remember that we hadn't been

in Minnesota for maybe a month or two and then my birthday popped up in July of '68.

KH: And what was the hardest thing about the move for you? Was it the friends thing?

GP: The cultural shock. We were from Omaha and until I moved to Minnesota, I had never had a teacher that didn't look like me. All my teachers have been African American, and my community was pretty much African American, predominantly. And so, moving, even into Rondo was different. The school. And then in '68 is when they began the integration, bussing. So not only did we change cities and we changed culture, we were then riding buses intentionally into schools with students and teachers that didn't look like us.

So, for a 10 year old, that was a lot to process in '68. We moved on Fuller Avenue, 686 Fuller was our first home in Rondo. The closest school to us was like two, three blocks away. We could have walked, but then we were told we were getting bussed over to Hancock, which was off of Snelling.

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GP: We just didn't understand it. I mean, we just didn't understand. We always walked to our schools in Omaha, but we just didn't understand why we couldn't walk to this school. We got put on a bus and bussed to Hancock. That was the first time I'd had a white teacher. The first time I was like maybe the only kid of color in my class. First time I ever rode a bus to school. A lot of firsts. So it was the culture shock of Minnesota, seeing people that didn't look like me everywhere, just everywhere, and trying to figure out what that meant. It was just a lot.

KH: I can only imagine. I remember being about that age, and my worst fear was that we were going to have to move because I would miss my friends. Then add on top of that, the culture shock, the racial piece of that, the geographic piece.

GP: In the '60s, you know how turbulent it was in the '60s with the assassinations and race and all of that was going on, so you just didn't know what to expect. Moving to another state you'd never even heard of, a city you'd hadn't heard of, you knew nobody there. You knew you knew nobody there. But you were leaving your friends, your family, you're leaving everything you knew for the first 10 years of your life. I'd say the culture shock was the biggest thing. It took me and my siblings a couple of years to kind of figure out, but we did.

KH: So you were talking about it being the time when busing was happening. Did your family have an option about where you all went to school? Or was that just the district saying, "Well, we're going to send you over there."

[00:08:00]

GP: It was the district saying, because it was Maxfield Elementary that was two or three blocks from us. We were all excited about that, right? Oh, we get to walk to school. And then there's a letter that came that said, "No, you will be bussing your kids to Hancock. The bus will stop here. Have your kids at the bus stop at this time. School is from this time to this time. They'll be returning back on the bus at this time."

KH: And how were you received at Hancock?

GP: A lot of stares. You know kids. They're going to keep their distance until they figure you out a little bit and they test you. So, I think for me, and I would be bold enough to say for my siblings as well, I'm going to just say this. Once they figured out that we weren't dummies, but at the same time, we weren't teachers' pets. I think because we were really interested in activities and athletics, because in our previous schools, we played instruments and participated in everything. We brought that with us. Participating in gym and athletics after school and all that, those are opportunities and platforms where you really get to know other kids. Once that started to happen for us and it kind of, she's

all right, or he's all right. We are still friends with a few of the kids that we met at Hancock.

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GP: So we have 50-plus year friendships with some of those kids that were the first kids we met. The first kids we met on our block, we're still friends with them right now. So there were some good things that happened from that, but I'm really grateful to have a friend that I've known for over 50 years.

KH: That's a treasure.

GP: One of the first friends that we literally met on our bikes on the block that we moved to, that we just kind of, "Hey, you want to play?" "Yeah, let's play." And we've been friends ever since.

KH: That's amazing. So did you encounter any outright racial hostility, racism either in Hancock or just in Minnesota in general when you moved up here?

GP: Yeah. I'll just say yeah.

KH: How could you not?

GP: How could you not? I mean, yeah, and it was hard to understand. For a kid, it's hard to understand why people wouldn't like you when they don't even know you, right? Or would call you something other than your name that you are used to being called by with such hatred and they don't know you. So, for a kid, it's hard to figure that out because you're sure once they know you, this wouldn't happen. But before they get a chance to know you, you get called the n-word.

I can remember, because we went from Hancock to Wilson Junior High, and I can remember being chased home from Wilson, which was on Lafond and Albert, to University, where Montgomery Ward used to be located. We literally used to have to run from the door of that school into the tire service park, which was right off of University

into Montgomery Ward for safety. We couldn't walk. We couldn't walk home. We literally had to run. We were being chased every day after school.

[00:12:00]

KH: Every day? So that was just a routine occurrence.

GP: Yes. By kids that were clearly high school kids.

KH: So they're picking on little kids? Littler.

GP: Yeah. They were not middle school kids. They were high school kids.

KH: Now, this was an experience. I mean, part of the culture shock that you're describing and moving from Omaha here. Again, because you were living in a predominantly African American community in Omaha, so you didn't have those similar—

GP: I've got to say, it wasn't an everyday occurrence. I can share with you. The first time I was called the n-word. I was literally in first grade in a sandbox. Literally in a sandbox, playing with another girl who happened to be white. We had been friends playing, like kids play. One day she sat next to me, and she said, "My mom said, I can't play with you anymore." And I said, "Well, why?" She said, "Because she says you're a nigger." I said, "Well, what is that?" I didn't even know what it was. She says, "I don't know, but I can't play with you anymore." And she got up and left.

I literally went home and asked my mom what it was. I have that memory still. And she said, "There are just some people that just don't like you because of the color of your skin, but don't worry about playing with that little girl. You just go play with other friends."

[00:14:00]

KH: And so that little girl had to be taught what that meant?

GP: Exactly, and I had to be taught, because that was not our nature. That's not

our nature. That's not the nature of human beings. Kids, they don't come here with that. Which was the testimony to our relationship up until that point, where she was taught that. Once she was taught that, of course, the kid's going to do what your parents tell you to do. It didn't hurt me at the time because I didn't know what it was. But then when my mother explained it to me, it was confusing. Then as I got older, I began to understand that this happens to people that look like me.

KH: So when your family moves to Minnesota, and now you're surrounded by so many more white people, and you've had this experience, so now you know, oh, there's something here. Your parents, how did they equip you and your siblings to deal with this context?

GP: I would say that that started in our household from the very beginning in Omaha about how to take care of ourselves, how to take care of each other, what they expected from us. I can remember my father saying to me, because I think he said it to all of us on our first day of school, it was, "I expect you to go to school. Your job is to go to school and learn. My job is to go to work. Don't make me leave my job because you're not doing your job. But, also, if something happens to one of your siblings, to one of your brothers or sisters, you better go and protect them. If they come home and tell me that you didn't jump in, then I'm going to jump on you."

[00:16:00]

GP: So, we knew our job was not only to protect ourselves, but protect our siblings. We went to school with each other and we had to come home with each other. If there was something going on, and one of us was after school, we had to wait. We traveled together. If we were in the same school, we were all together. Our job was to protect each other. We were more afraid of trying to explain to our parents why we didn't do what they said than doing it and maybe losing a fight. We left the school together; we better come

home together.

KH: And was that true in Omaha, also, did you say?

GP: It started in Omaha. It started and it just continued. So we had that going for us, because that was already ingrained in us. We were close enough in age—there were eight of us, well, six of us that moved to Minnesota, but we were close enough in age that maybe one or two of us were always in the same school together, except for my baby brother.

So when he was having similar experiences at Wilson, being chased, after I had moved to high school, we had to do something about that. My brothers that were in high school used to go and visit Wilson to make sure their brother made it home without any problems.

KH: And did you all go to Central?

GP: We all went to Central. We all went to Hancock, Wilson, Central.

[00:18:00]

KH: Did Central let out earlier than Wilson so your brothers could get over there?

GP: Or my brothers would just cut out, because the job was and the responsibility was to get your sibling home.

KH: Yeah, because this is a high stakes situation. It's not like just keeping company. There's a lot at risk here.

GP: A lot, a lot. So we had our own protection ingrained in us about how to survive what was going on around us. At the same time, our parents did teach us, you don't start a fight. You never start a fight, but if someone starts a fight with you, you better finish it. So we never bullied, never anything like that, but we did not suffer being bullied.

KH: Seems fair.

GP: Well, it worked for us. [laughter]

KH: Okay, just to get this on record, what are the names of your siblings? And in what order?

GP: I'll start from the oldest. The oldest is named Jannas. Then Edith, and Edith is no longer with us. Then Clem and he's a Junior. He's named after my father, then Vernon. We call him Wayne because his middle name is Wayne. Then Robert, who you've met, then me. And then the baby is Drafford, D-R-A-F-F-O-R-D. That's us.

KH: And what's the age range, or the age difference?

[00:20:00]

GP: The oldest? Oh, my Lord. She's 80. And the youngest—how old am I? I'm 67—is 65.

KH: So, 15 years. Okay. So your parents were busy.

GP: Well, really busy, because there were eight of us, but I think my mom lost six kids between Edith and Junior. She lost triplets, miscarried triplets, and the rest were stillborns.

KH: Oh, that's so hard.

GP: Yeah. So there were really more of us, but.

KH: You've already been talking about it in terms of you all banded together to make sure y'all were safe in school and coming home. But, in general, outside of that, how would you describe your relationship with your siblings?

GP: It's funny, I was just talking last night to a friend of mine about that. We're very close. I mean, we all have our own lives. It's funny. We all have our own individual personalities. When you have a large family like that, we're all different, but we're very, very close. Again, we were raised that if something happens, you better be there for your sibling. As adults, you have your lives. You go your separate ways. You live your lives. But even to this day, we've just recently experienced this, where one of us had to go

through a medical issue, a serious one, and needed some emotional, physical, financial assistance.

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GP: We did what we do. We all get together; we find out what the issue is, we take care of that. It's not, I don't want to, or I'm mad at you. It's not all that. It's, you could be mad later. Right now, we're going to do this. So what can you contribute? What can you do? I can do this. Let's take care of this. This is what our sibling needs. We're going to take care of them.

KH: No question.

GP: There's no question. There's not even a discussion. The discussion is, how much? What do you want me to do? When does it need to happen? That's the discussion. It's not, I haven't talked to him in three years or I don't like him. No. That may be true. But, right now, this is what we're going to do. You can go back to that afterwards. But, right now, this is what we're going to do. If someone tries to opt out of that, usually, one of us, or some combination of us will go and talk to them and go, "Come on. Yeah, you are. Yes, you are. Come on."

KH: And that really seems like an outgrowth of what you were as kids.

GP: It is that. I'm very grateful that my parents gave us that because now that they both have gone, that is what they left us with, that we know that, if we know nothing else. I know that if I'm in dire need or something happens to my health, or something happens that I need assistance, I just need to let one of my siblings know and then something's going to happen. If we can't fix it all, we are going to fix some part of it, but I just need to let them know what I need. And something's going to happen. I don't know what, but something's going to happen. That is a security that we all have. That's what my parents left us.

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KH: That's quite a gift.

GP: I think of it that way.

KH: And are you all still up here in Minnesota?

GP: No, I have a sister and a brother in Texas. Janice and Drafford are in Texas.

The sister that passed, she did live in Nebraska. And the rest of us are here.

KH: I feel like I was going to ask you something else. Oh, yes, I wrote it down. So you've talked about this and alluded to it a couple of times already about the context when you move to Rondo. Sixty-eight, chaotic year. Martin Luther King is killed; Bobby Kennedy is killed, Democratic Convention, the war in Vietnam, Civil Rights, Black Power. As a 10 year old kid, how much was that bigger context affecting you?

GP: A lot. A lot.

KH: So you're aware of those things?

GP: I was aware. I was aware of the assassinations. I was aware of the Black Panther Party. I was aware of even the Democratic Party. I was aware of all that stuff going on, the racial tensions, all of that. I can't say I fully understood it all, but I remember feeling it all. I remember the intensity of every day in our household, the concern, just the intense oversight of everything.

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GP: Someone had to know where you were at all times, what you were doing, when were you going to be back, who were you going to be with? How long were you going to be gone? Why are you doing that? Don't do it alone. That feeling, I was very much aware of that. I was never allowed to go anywhere by myself. I had four brothers, right? So I was never allowed to go anywhere by myself. Never. If I didn't have a brother that was going to be there, or going with me, or someone that my parents knew and were

comfortable with somewhere that I was going, the answer was no.

KH: Was that because there were things happening locally as well as these big kinds of national events happening?

GP: Yeah, yeah. Also, because I have very traditional parents, especially my father, who just had different expectations for his boys than his girls. The boys knew they had to protect the girls, and the girls knew that they couldn't strike out on their own without a brother. It was just that my father was very protective. So I grew up knowing that if I wanted to go somewhere, I'd have to, A, ask for permission and, B, know that I was going to be accompanied.

[00:28:00]

KH: And how did you feel about that at the time?

GP: I hated it. Especially when I got into my teenage years. I hated it. [laughs] Hated it. Really hated it. I know there's a part of me that rebelled against it, especially my senior year. I'd say from my senior year on, I was in some serious rebellion about being able to be on my own and make my own decisions, wrong or right, and just knowing what that felt like. Because I never had the opportunity to know what it felt like to make my own decision and make my own mistake. Just that opportunity to have that growth was not afforded to me as long as I was in my parents' home.

KH: And was that different for your brothers?

GP: Oh, yeah. Oh, God, yeah. They were allowed to do what boys do, right? One of the stark differences for me, and I'll have to say that, out of the four girls in my family, I probably was the one that did all the things that my parents didn't expect their daughters to do. I played sports. The other three participated, but they didn't play sports like I play sports. I mean, I played sports. I did cheerleading. If it was an activity, I was in it. I think that kind of being at the end of the list, the second to the youngest, your parents are kind

of tired at that point. [laughter]

KH: I'm sure.

GP: So there's some things that I did that were kind of like, "Yeah, as long as you're not in trouble. Let her go." So I kind of did everything that I could do. But one of the stark differences was I learned how to drive, anything that was independent, I was about doing it.

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GP: Probably, in hindsight, I was probably giving my parents fits. I didn't think about it like that at the time, but now, they're probably like, "What is wrong with her?" But I'm doing everything that I can do to make me as independent as I can be under that culture. One of the stark differences for me was that all my brothers, when they graduated high school, my father got them a car. You're going to school, you need a car. Going to work, you need a car. None of his daughters got that. Even me, who went to college. Went to Winona State, could have used a car. No. No explanation though.

KH: Oh, so it wasn't—

GP: Oh, no. It wasn't like, "You're not going to get a car because you're a girl." It was just, "You just don't get a car." I knew it was because I was a girl, because I did everything my brothers did, but I just didn't get a car.

KH: Did you ever say, "Hey, how come I don't get a car?"

GP: I said it to my mom. She had no answer.

KH: Do you have a sense of how she felt about all that?

GP: My mom was my best friend, so, yes, she heard everything that I thought, felt, and she sided with me. Sometimes I could get her to go and plead my case, and sometimes that would loosen it a little bit. But, sometimes, she wouldn't make the effort. She'd listen, but she wouldn't make the effort.

[00:32:00]

GP: So I guess it depended if she thought she could make progress, right? And she heard that. How come I don't have a car? She heard it all from me. I'm the bratty youngest daughter. You know I've got a lot to say about what's going on. Yeah, she heard all of that. But, to her credit, she listened and still was a very supportive and thoughtful mother in that she is the one who drove me to be independent.

She was a housewife and never worked outside the home. I should say outside the home, because eight kids? She was working. But she never worked outside the home because my father never wanted her to. He wanted her to be at home. He worked several jobs, but her job was to take care of the home, take care of the kids. But, with that, she drove independence into her daughters.

KH: So, all three of you, not just the baby?

GP: All four of us.

KH: Four, yes. Sorry.

GP: She drove independence into us. She would tell us, get a job, make your own money, be able to take care of yourself if you have to. Always put something aside for an emergency in case you have to make a different choice than the one you've made. If you work, make sure you do something for yourself out of each paycheck. She says, "I don't care if you just buy yourself a bottle of nail polish. Do something for yourself out of every paycheck." She drove that independence so deep into me. But at the same time, I had a father that was like, "No."

[00:34:00]

GP: So she supported me, which is something that she didn't have. She was oddly independent as a housewife. It was a weird mix. She was independent and dependent at the same time, and she drove that independence in her daughters so that we all worked, we

all had our own careers. We all had our own minds. We're all very strong willed. We will let you know. She drove that in us.

KH: Did you ever get a sense that these kinds of things, these gender differences, were a tension between your mom and dad?

GP: Sometimes. Generally, but sometimes. And I think they were, because I think that's where she started driving her daughters in the way she drove us, just implanting the independence of, be your own woman, make up your own mind. You don't have to do this, this way. You don't have to get married; you don't have to be a housewife. You don't have to go get your own education. Be able to take care of yourself as a woman. She drove that in all four of us, even though that's not what she did.

KH: And maybe it's because.

GP: And maybe it's because. But she drove that into us to the point that my sisters and I have always been independent women. We've married, divorced and everything, but we've never not been able to take care of ourselves.

KH: What year did you graduate from high school?

GP: In 1976. Oh, that sounds old. [laughter]

[00:36:00]

KH: One of the reasons I ask that question is, as we talked about already, there's a lot going on in the country throughout the '60s and into the '70s in terms of civil rights, but also in terms of kind of just general, depending on how you look at it, rebellion or assertion by young people against tradition. There's the women's movement. I know a lot of that second wave stuff was very white dominated. I know there's lots of tensions and problems with that. But do you think any of those wider currents was affecting you, or your mom, in how she was thinking about raising four daughters?

GP: I can say that the women's movement was something that I always felt

detached from as a Black woman. You know, white women burning their bras? I was like, okay. I mean, because I don't think that was a movement that really embraced Black women and the experience they were having in this country. I always felt detached from it. I'm not throwing any shade on it, but it just didn't seem like it was about me. I'm sure my mom felt even more detached coming from a later generation. If I'm honest, I'm just going to say it was like we're watching these white women burn their bras. Okay. That's what it felt and looked like to me, because it didn't feel like it was about me.

[00:38:00]

GP: But I think the broader things that were going on in the country and in our community, I think what they did is they might have frightened my mom and my dad. I shouldn't say frightened. It might have. Yeah. I think they were afraid for us, and I think that's what motivated them to push us to be different from them. I know that's one of the reasons why my father moved us to Minnesota, because he wanted us to have a different experience than himself. My father didn't finish high school. Didn't finish school. My mother graduated in the 10th grade, which at that time was graduation. So, they both wanted something different.

Then for everything that was going on around them in this new state, they wanted to be sure that we took advantage and didn't get caught up in the jail system, and wanted to make sure that we took advantage of education. That was the thing. You had to graduate high school, and then after that, you either had to go to work or go to school, but you had to do something. Staying at home was not an option. If you insisted on staying at home, you had to pay some rent, which meant you had to work, so here's your choices. And you did get that. There was the speech for kindergarten, and then there was a speech for high school. And the speech for high school was, "You either go to work, you either go to school, or if you stay here, you pay some rent."

KH: Which drives you right back to one of those two.

GP: So your choices are work or school. That was the expectation. I have to say to my parents, we weren't confused about what they expected from us. They made it clear to each and every one of us they had to talk. Here's what the expectation is, here's what the consequence is. Up to you.

[00:40:00]

GP: And they were consistent with the consequences. So we were never confused. Like a lot of kids I see today are confused about what they can and can't do. Our parents were very clear. And so, even if we made the wrong decision or a bad decision, we knew what the consequence was before we made it, so we had that surety with our parents. You know, it wasn't, "Oh, I don't know, my parents might not let me." No, you knew if you could, you couldn't, you knew how to ask if you wanted to. You knew what time you were expected. You knew that because they were just very clear and that was a kind of security in a way.

KH: I was just going to ask, did that feel like security, or did that feel like constriction?

GP: Both. I mean, as a kid, it's constriction. When you look back as an adult, they were just trying to keep their kids safe in that tumultuous environment. They did a heck of a job, actually, for eight kids that have different personalities. That amazes me. Eight kids, different personalities, all have some post-secondary education.

KH: That's amazing.

GP: Never went to jail. That's pretty doggone good.

KH: Sure is. So we are talking about Oxford here and we are talking about sports and athletics. So let's start talking about those things. Tell me about how you first became involved in sports.

[00:42:00]

GP: I'll be honest, I was just bored. [laughter] I was just bored. Well, let me go back to Omaha. As a kid in a family of eight kids, you learn how to play with your siblings. So every time you got a chance to go outside to play, you played. Anything that was active, anything that you could be moving about, I'm there, but then Omaha as a city does not have a recreation center system. So if you wanted to do any organized activities, you went to the YMCA or you went to one of the few parks, there weren't that many, I can only think of one or two in the predominantly Black community of Omaha. You went there, and there might have been a playground, and that was it, right?

So if you weren't playing in your front yard or on your block, unorganized, whatever, that was it. Unless you were in school, and then you might have the opportunity. Not for girls at the time, right? Unless there was something called GAA, Girls Athletic Association, where after school, you might put on this horrible blue little jumpsuit and maybe get to play a little basketball or something for maybe a half hour to an hour.

KH: Not competitive, not a team.

GP: Not competitive, not a team. No, just to play around. And so, moving to Minnesota, of course, I'm like, "Hey, are we active? Can we do something? I'm there." GAA was the first chance I got to play anything that even resembled close to being an organized sport. I almost didn't do that because I hated that ugly blue jumpsuit that we had to put on that had GAA on it. It was like, ew. Because you couldn't sweat in your clothes.

[00:44:00]

KH: Was it that scratchy blue stuff?

GP: I can't even tell you what it was, but it was just so uncomfortable. Little bloomer things with a little elastic around? Oh, my God, I hate that thing. I'm having a

nightmare, but I really wanted to do anything, so I tolerated putting that thing on. For maybe an hour after school, you got to run around the gym or outside and do something kind of athletic, right? Burn off some energy. That was my first exposure to something that could be organized for girls.

KH: And that was here?

GP: That was here. That was here in middle school at Wilson. Still, in middle school, there was no opportunity because we hadn't had Title IX yet, right? So there still wasn't an opportunity to play an organized sport. Then by the time I get to high school, my junior year, here comes Title IX. I'm excited because at that point in my 10th grade year, I'm just playing gym classes. We're playing volleyball today, all right. We're playing softball today, all right. Those were my athletic opportunities. And I was just playing off of natural talent, right? No instruction, no camp. Whatever my brother might have taken the time to teach me, like how to throw a ball or something, that's what I'm bringing to gym class. Or I'm learning on the spot. I'm learning volleyball on the spot. I know how to hit a softball already, kind of how to throw a ball. So, as you go, I'm developing my athleticism.

[00:46:00]

GP: But it's just natural athleticism until Title IX. Well, Title IX comes around and then, like I shared, I'm getting recruited by my gym teacher to play volleyball. Never played it before. I'm learning to play it in gym class, literally. She sees me go after this ball and run into the wall. She literally was standing on the wall where I stopped on the wall. She says, "What's your name?" And I said, "Gwen." She says, "Come to volleyball practice after school. It's at three o'clock. Be in the gym." I'm like, "Okay."

KH: So that was a new team because it was after Title IX?

GP: It was the beginning of Title IX. Title IX had just been announced, and it was

the first year of Title IX. So I'm like, "Uh, okay." I didn't even know what I was saying yes to. I knew that she was a gym teacher and she was like six-two, and she told me to be in the gym at 3:00, and I said, okay, so I went, and that's how I started playing volleyball. I started playing volleyball, organized volleyball, before I started playing basketball, and that's only because the gym teacher said, "Be in the gym." I didn't even know what I was going for.

KH: Okay, so this project is about Oxford. I talked to lots of other people who said, well, before I was in high school, I was playing sports at Oxford. Tell me about that.

GP: I was not, because, again, my parents would not allow me to hang out at Oxford. Although I knew all the young ladies that played down there. I knew Lisa, Linda, and Rita Burch. I knew all those girls, but I couldn't go down there. Their parents would let them go. I could not go. I could go down there. I could sneak down there, which is kind of what I did occasionally, but I never stayed long enough to participate in anything, because I knew I had to break camp because one of my brothers saw me down there.

[00:48:00]

KH: So they weren't going to cover for you?

GP: No, they were down there participating in the sports, but if they saw me down there would be a problem.

KH: Because they would rat you out.

GP: They'd rat me out. So I could sneak around Oxford and maybe peek in a gym or walk by the field where they're playing football, but I could not be down there. Again, unaccompanied, I could not. And if my father ever heard? Oh, my Lord. So I didn't get the same experience from Oxford until I worked there that summer.

KH: And what summer was that?

GP: Oh, my God. I was 15. I don't even know what year that was, but I was 15.

That's the first time I met Bill, who I heard about maybe and saw but never met. Because, again, Bill had officiated baseball with my father. So I'd seen him at a distance, like anybody else at a game, and then I'd heard his name from my brothers because he coached them in football and other sports down there. So I heard his name, but I didn't know him. The summer that I was assigned to work down there was the first time I met him. I was introduced to him because he was my boss, technically, down there. So I met him and was scared to death of him.

KH: Why? Why were you scared of him?

[00:50:00]

GP: First of all, Bill is a big guy. He was an ex-Marine. He had that Marine haircut. He had hair literally coming out of his shirt, over his shirt, like a werewolf. [laughs] I'm sorry. He did. He had hair. You know, who has hair coming over their shirt? I was scared to death of him. I'm like, okay. But I'll be honest, I said, "This dude got to be tough. He's in the hood, and ain't nobody bothering him."

KH: And he's white.

GP: And he's white. He's walking up and down the street, and he's manhandling these young boys and taking them to their mamas, and their mama's going, "Okay." And I'm like, "Okay. He got to be all right," because there ain't no white dude going to be walking through the hood and not get checked. You know what I'm saying? Not get accosted or something. He's every day up in the hood. He knows the parents. He knows the kids. He's cool with everybody. But he didn't look like you were going to push him over on any day. I mean, he was just a big dude with hair, which was scary to me. [laughs]

KH: Whether you thought about it at the time, or you know it now, because you are closely associated with Bill, [laughter] but what do you think it was about him that he could be a white guy in Rondo and not get checked?

GP: Because he knew he was a white guy in Rondo. Do you know what I'm saying? And, how can I say this about Bill? Bill knows who he is, and he doesn't try to be anything other than who he is. That could be respected by anybody. He never tried to come off as, "Oh, I'm the white guy in this Black neighborhood and I'm here to save all you poor Black people."

[00:52:00]

GP: That never radiates from Bill, because that's not who he is. He's who he is. He has a genuine care and concern for people, and that is what you meet when you meet Bill. That happens to take place in the Rondo community, because that's where he was. Coming up in the Rondo community, his closest friends were Black. He was not uncomfortable, so working in the Rondo community was not uncomfortable. And because he built those relationships growing up, there were families that knew who he was as a young man. When he took over the Oxford Community [Center], that was like, "Oh, he's cool. We know Bill. Bill's cool. He knows us. There's nothing to learn here. We know who he is. He knows who we are. We're good."

That permeated from his individual friendships to those families that also knew him to the community, so he had that going by the time he got to Oxford and then he just built on that. So that's how he could walk through the neighborhood, because he was raised in the neighborhood. He built relationships with the people in the neighborhood. They trusted him. He trusted them. That trust was the foundation of him being able to be effective in the neighborhood because he was who he was. He was Bill. There are people now that will tell you, "Bill's Black. His skin's just not Black." They'll tell you that. They'll say, "Oh, Bill? Bill's like us." Bill, he's the brother from another mother.

[00:54:00]

GP: But he is who he is. That's because they know who he is, and there's no

pretense. There's nothing built on the color of his skin or the color of our skin. There's nothing built on that. He is who he is. Now, you may not like him because of who he is, but that's with anybody, right? But I'm hard pressed to find someone that doesn't really like Bill, once you get to know Bill, because he's always just been comfortable with who he is, no matter where he is. And that, again, is respectable by anyone.

I think that's how he could walk through because he's always been that person. The irony is, I don't think that he was even aware of that. Do you know what I'm saying? I think he was so comfortable in the neighborhood that I don't think he really thought, "Oh, I'm a white man in the neighborhood in the '60s and nobody's doing anything to me." I don't think that even came to his mind. Because to him, that was his neighborhood. That was his community. These were his friends and families. It just didn't occur to him in the midst of the '60s when all that stuff was going. That didn't occur to him. So that's how he did it.

KH: And your brothers were coached by him, so you were hearing things about him that way. So tell me about this job. Through what did you get this job?

[00:56:00]

GP: I got this job through what was a youth employment program at the time called Neighborhood Youth Corps, which eventually one day I would end up running for the city. I got the job there because I really wanted to work in the library, but all the library jobs had been taken. So, I said, "Okay, I'll take Oxford because it's in the neighborhood." So I went down there. I wasn't really excited about being there. I was, in a way, because I was curious, but I couldn't figure out what the heck I was going to do down here? I'm not down here like that, so I don't even know what goes on. So I just took it as a summer job. There were other kids down there, a summer job, two and a half months, three months, and you're out. I didn't even know what I was going to do.

But on the first day, I remember, oh, my God. He came into the gym. He had on shorts and a T-shirt and this hair, and I was like, “Whatever he says I’m going to do.” I literally was scared out of my mind. I didn’t want him to have to say anything to me at any point about anything. But then he just kind of pushed us off on his staff, and he was doing what he was doing. So I never really had to really interact with him. I made it a point not to have to, because I didn’t want him mad at me at all, ever.

And that was really it. I worked with Pat Gaustad, who was the art teacher down there, and helped her serve lunch and do art projects with the kids, run concessions. Whatever they asked me to do, that’s what I did. As long as he didn’t have to ask me to do it, I was good. [laughs] And one summer was enough. But that’s the first time I actually met Bill, was as an employee. And it was kind of like; I was no different than any other kid. It’s not like sparks flew. No, no. It was like I was just another kid down there working.

KH: Did you like the job?

[00:58:00]

GP: This is funny, I’m going to say this, but I knew it wasn’t my future. It was just a job because what I really wanted to do was work in a library. I did end up after that, all my jobs, my summer jobs, and even my jobs during the school, were at the Lexington Branch Library, which was down the street. So I worked there through high school, during the school year and the summers. That’s what I really wanted to do. So Oxford was the second choice that summer because I couldn’t get into the libraries. But after that, I worked at the libraries.

KH: And you said you were 15. So is that high school or was that still that junior high?

GP: That would have been like ninth going into 10th.

KH: Okay, so it's between junior high and high school.

GP: Just leaving ninth and going into 10th, starting 10th grade that fall.

KH: Okay, so here's my question. So you were an active kid. You liked sports.

Your parents weren't letting you go to Oxford. You were suffering through the blue uniform in GAA. Then you get this job at Oxford, even though you're working with Pat, but did it give you a new perspective on what was happening at Oxford, including for girls?

GP: Yeah, because I got to actually watch Linda, because they would have practices down there or pickup games. I occasionally would just sit on the bleachers and watch. I did not even play basketball at that time, but I would watch these girls playing basketball. And then, again, when Title IX hit, volleyball was the first opportunity.

[01:00:00]

GP: But then basketball came along because my brother Robert, who played basketball, knew that there was going to be a team at Central and said, "Do you want to play basketball?" I said, "Sure," because it was another activity. I don't know anything about basketball. So he is the reason I played basketball, because he taught me how to dribble, he taught me how to shoot. He actually took me to Marion Park Rec Center for a summer and taught me how to shoot a jumper, taught me how to shoot free throws, taught me how to do a layup. He also taught me how to steal the ball. He taught me the basics of basketball.

I can remember being in the parking lot across the street from our home on Portland and Victoria, and he's teaching me how to steal the ball. I'm in the parking lot. He would just come home with the basketball and say, "Come on," and then we'd go over here and he'd teach me something.

So when the opportunity came to try out for the team, he would say, "Okay, you're

going to try out for the team.” I’m like, “I don’t?” He said, “You’re going to try out for the team.” I said, “Okay.” You know, it’s funny, I don’t remember ever going, “I’m going to go do,” you know? It was always someone going, “Hey, you,” and I’m like, “Okay.”

Because I wanted to be active. So I tried out for the team, made the team. But I’ve got to say, that was just natural talent, unlike a Linda Roberts and a Lisa Lissomore, who had been coached and played games and everything. I came with this all I know is what my brother taught me and my natural talent.

[01:02:00]

GP: And I made the team, which was not hard to do because, again, I’d say that the first team at Central that I played on was made up of the experienced girls and the girls that weren’t as good, had some knowledge of the game, and then the ones who knew nothing. There were these three groups of girls that came together for this team. There were those who knew what they were doing, there were those who kind of had an idea and were going to learn from this experience, and those who were just there to, I want to be part of it.

KH: And where were you in that categorization?

GP: Because of what my brother had shown me, I was in the middle. Not far from the bottom. Not far from that third group. I was kind of in the middle because I knew I wasn’t a Linda Roberts, Lisa Lissimore, but I knew I had enough natural talent to maybe one day be competitive, right? To be in the same gym with. But I was just late to the game. They were ahead of me.

KH: Because they had played at Oxford?

GP: Because they had that Oxford experience.

KH: And so the difference for you then was because your parents weren’t letting you go down.

GP: My parents didn't give me that. I didn't get that opportunity because my parents wouldn't allow me. So my brother is the one that said, "Come on, let me show you this."

KH: And that's why then for you; Title IX did make an impact.

GP: It made a huge impact because it kind of opened the doors. It educated my parents that this was going to be okay because the schools were letting the girls play now. So if the schools were letting the girls play, then that's no different than the boys playing for the school.

KH: Oh, interesting. So, it was that kind of institutional support that made it seem okay for your parents.

GP: It was okay for my parents to say, okay, you can be after school now for practice, because I know what you do. I understand what you're doing now because I have the understanding from my sons. So, now that the institutions are going to know where you are, and I know you're going to be in the school, okay. Title IX opened my world athletically. And late to the game, but had enough natural talent to make a team.

[01:04:00]

KH: Who were your same age peers on the team?

GP: Teresa Tierney. Deb Kringle. Barb Strong. Sue Smith. I think Kim was behind me. Linda, Kim, and Rita were all behind me. And Lisa. They were all younger than me. But, yeah, Kringle, Tierney, myself; we were all the same age. But even Deb Kringle and Teresa Tierney had the experience because they played in CAA [Catholic Athletic Association]. They had been coached and played. They had that experience. So they came to that opportunity knowing the game. I'm learning the game and standing on my own natural athletic ability and having learned whatever my brother [taught me]—that's what I bought.

KH: Was it exciting? Was it intimidating?

GP: Both. I was intimidated by my younger teammates because they had this comfort level with the game, but I knew I was a quick study. I knew what I didn't understand, my brother would explain. So between my natural talent and my brother and the opportunity, I would progress. But they came to the game prepared.

[01:06:00]

GP: The thing I liked about our team was that there was no shade on where you were. The experienced girls weren't looking down on the girls who were just trying to figure it out. They would share. They would show and teach. They would give a hint here or there or spend some time with them. It wasn't ever a "Oh, you suck." Which may have been true, but you know what I'm saying? They didn't hold that against. I think it was because of the awareness that it was Title IX. Everybody was coming at some stage. You couldn't expect everybody to know this sport.

So there was that grace that was given to each other that I always really appreciated that we didn't have the bickering and the "I'm better than you" or "I should be starting." There was never any of that, which now I look back and see how rare that was. That it was more like a, we're a team, we're going to help each other.

KH: Because like you say, this is new, in some ways for everybody. Even those girls who had experience, but playing for school was a new thing.

GP: It was new. So you could not expect everyone to have this level of experience. And so, that you knew that, and you knew that you had to develop. There had to be some development. Even for those who came with some experience, there needed to be some development. You kind of figure out what's the thing that this cold player could do? Maybe you're better at defense than you are at offense. Maybe you're better at free throws than jump shots.

[01:08:00]

GP: That all kind of came about and then you kind of knew what to expect. You kind of knew that this person that doesn't know the game is a 50 percent free throw shooter. They're going to make half their shots. You want to shut somebody down on offense, you pull this player off the bench because they may not know anything else, but they're good at defense. They know how to move a seat.

KH: What were your particular skills? Strengths?

GP: Defense, and I had the ability to jump pretty high. I was better at defense than I was at offense. I'm learning the game. My brother's teaching me how to steal the ball, where to be on the floor, how to anticipate. I'm learning a different mental part of the game and that for me was developing quicker than the offensive part of the game. But then, along with basketball, I was also a cheerleader. And so, cheerleading, volleyball and basketball. So it wasn't like basketball was my sole focus like a lot of kids today. I had other things going on so that I was able to focus as much as I did, because cheerleading at that time was a year round sport.

KH: So, you could do both? You did both?

GP: I did both. I was cheerleading while I was playing volleyball. I was cheerleading while I was playing basketball. So it wasn't like I was just a basketball player. I was splitting my time and attention between two activities at all times. The Lisa's and the Rita's, they played basketball. Maybe they ran track, but they were basketball players.

[01:10:00]

GP: I was splitting my activities and my attention between cheerleading and a sport. Cheerleading and a sport, right? I wasn't able to progress at the same pace that my colleagues were, but that's okay. I didn't have that expectation for me. I didn't expect to

play like them. I expected to do what I could do, contribute what I could contribute. And that's what I did, even though they voted me captain. I'm like, "I don't know why you did that, but okay." But it's okay, you know what I'm saying? I really enjoyed that first year of Title IX because it was the first year of Title IX, do you know what I'm saying? What it did for myself and the young ladies that shared that team with me, it was like an awakening for all of us on some level. It meant a lot. It meant a lot in a lot of ways to a lot of young ladies.

KH: And who was your coach?

GP: Coach Steve Studer. What a guy. We love Stu. I don't think anyone else could have coached us.

KH: Why?

GP: It's funny. Studer knew each one of us. Somehow, he figured out enough about each one of us to get what he needed out of us when we needed it. Do you know what I'm saying? He knew how to push us. He knew who he could push and who he couldn't push. He knew when he could be jovial and when he had to be serious.

[01:12:00]

GP: But he just knew how to get what he needed out of us when he needed to get it. We all appreciated that about him, and he was always our friend. He was our coach, but he was always our friend. But he knew when to get on us.

KH: And do you know how he ended up coaching that first girls team?

GP: I do not know because it's not like anybody was chomping at the bit to do this, right? I don't know how he ended up doing it, but he was the best person for it. I don't know how. I don't know if he volunteered, or if the principal said, "Hey, you're coaching." I don't know how that happened. But it was to our benefit that he was our first coach because he was very intelligent and smart when it came to coaching young ladies.

As someone who has coached, you have to have a different approach in coaching young ladies. It's not like coaching young men.

KH: So you've coached both?

GP: I've coached women. I just know that there's a nuance to it. I just have to say that. There's a nuance to it. He just had it down cold. He had it down so cold that you didn't even know that he was doing it. He was just very good at it. He just made you feel like he was your friend, but you knew he was your coach at the same time. He would not hesitate to get in your butt if he had to get in your butt. You didn't feel like he was picking on you because you always knew why.

[01:14:00]

GP: If you were late to practice, you knew that you were going to run. You were going to run. If we were not paying attention in practice, we'd run. He had to get our attention. He knew how to get our attention and once he got our attention, we were good. But we knew what he expected. When he didn't get it, we knew that he was going to find a way to get it, and he got it, and it brought us together as a team.

KH: This was your sophomore year, and it was also the first year of this official team at Central. So you were in the vanguard throughout the rest of your high school years. Like, you were always the first team at a sophomore level, at a junior, and a senior. Did he coach all three years?

GP: Yes.

KH: So he was the coach of the '76 championship team?

GP: Yes, he was our coach. Yes.

KH: So tell me a little bit about how you, either personally or as a team, developed from your sophomore year to then winning that championship in '76.

GP: How can I say this? I think that first year of our team, I think we surprised

ourselves. You don't know what you got, you know what I'm saying? Then you play other teams and you kind of figure that stuff out eventually. I think after the first year, we kind of figured out, we've got some pieces here. You know what I'm saying? We got some pieces. Then we had bonded as a team, so we all expected everybody else to come back the next year. I mean, we bonded. I don't know how to say it, other than that we bonded as a team. So, we kind of figured out, like I said, what the strengths and weaknesses were amongst us and figured out we had something.

[01:16:00]

GP: We could be competitive against St. Margaret-Benild. If we're competitive with them, we must have something, so that next year we came back with a little more confidence. Like, we know what we've got here. Let's try to turn this into something. Let's do some things. Let's go. Because we didn't know that first year. We didn't know how good we were. We didn't know. And neither did Studer. He was finding out, right? But he arranged us. Again, smart coach. He set up scrimmages, like with Minneapolis North, St. Margaret-Benilde. He got the top teams. They were wiping the floor with us, but it was showing him what he had.

It was showing us that we didn't like losing, but we weren't going to be afraid of them next year, you know what I'm saying? Because we knew who they were, so he exposed us to better teams, which made us better. He was a smart enough coach to use what he had to get a win. And so, that next year, I can't say we knew that we were going to win. We expected to win. As a team, we expected to win, right?

[01:18:00]

GP: I'd say that was the change. That was the change from we're figuring out what we got here, and once we figured that out, we're like, oh, now we expect to win. We expect to win. We played with that expectation and Studer had that expectation. So we had

that expectation. We're going to win. We're going to win every game. We're going to go out here. Our intention is to win every game, and that's how we played.

KH: So for a kid who didn't grow up playing competitive sports for various reasons, you ended up being really involved in some firsts, some really important firsts at Central for girls' basketball. The first team and the first team to win this first official unified sanctioned state championship. I mean that's quite exciting.

GP: It was huge. It was very exciting. The thing that I remember the most is the championship game was the first game my parents ever came to see me play anything. They never saw me play volleyball. They never saw me cheerlead. They never saw me do anything except for that championship game. They came. First time.

KH: Why was it the first time or why hadn't they been to other sports?

GP: Well, my mother just basically didn't go. I mean, she was a housewife, again. She just didn't go. My father worked a lot. But, again, he could make it to some of my brothers' activities. But, again, I'm this crazy daughter, the last kid that is doing stuff. I'm doing too much and the most, at the same time. I'm doing nothing that his other three daughters ever did. I'm over here, I'm involved. I'm doing all this stuff.

[01:20:00]

GP: I think because the Rondo community was so supportive of the team and were so excited about the talk in the community, my parents couldn't deny it and I think they decided they were finally going to come and see what their daughter was doing. I think after all this time it was like, "Oh, she's over here, as long as she's not in trouble, then don't worry about what she's doing." But I think that championship game, once the community got involved and was really excited about it, I think they decided, let me go see what my daughter's doing.

KH: And were they excited for you?

GP: Yeah, they were. And after we won, I mean, my father was super proud. I think it took that to click for him that this wasn't just something for girls to do. This is going to be around. This is a real thing. That he got to come and see it, and his daughter was part of it. I think he was very proud of that, that the community was so thrilled about it and supported the team. We all knew each other. I mean, the community, everybody in the community knew everybody, and they knew all the girls on the team.

[01:22:00]

GP: It felt like that community owned that championship. I don't know if that makes sense, but it felt like the Rondo community owned that championship because Central was part of that community. The kids that went there were largely from that community, so that championship meant a lot. It meant a lot. I can remember adults that I didn't even know all of a sudden knew who I was.

KH: You're like a celebrity, as a high school athlete.

GP: We all were. I mean, we couldn't walk down the streets. Kids and parents and adults were, "Don't you play for Central?" It was that big. It meant a lot. I think that's finally what got my parents' attention.

KH: Do you think that it was important that this was a Rondo school, a Rondo community, predominantly African American?

GP: Absolutely. That it was Central High School? Absolutely. That the kids were from the neighborhood? Absolutely. That most of them were honed out of Oxford? Absolutely, absolutely. Very important. Which is why when we won the state championship, the community just combusted. I can remember organizations inviting our whole team for some event, "Come on down here, we'll serve you breakfast." "Come over here, we'll do this." The whole team. "Bring them all. We'll do this. We'll do this." I mean, it was just a sense of pride for the Rondo community.

KH: Which had just been through some really, really hard times, with that freeway, with the general context of racial—

[01:24:00]

GP: Exactly, exactly. So, it was huge. It was huge. I often think that being part of something like that marks you in a way you don't ever forget it. I swear, every time I see a championship won in a sport, I relive that for myself. I know what that feels like. That's a moment that marks you for life. The people you share it with; you're always going to be friends with those people. You guys have shared something that doesn't happen to everybody. We're getting together in another week or so, the team, to go watch Central play and just be together. Because we're still teammates. So it was huge.

KH: Now, maybe it was from the championship game, but are there any particular games or moments in games, like plays in games that really stick in your mind, really kind of honing in on the details of the game itself?

GP: Yeah, there's a couple. [laughs] I'm sorry, I have to chuckle about this, because when we get together, we usually end up talking about this game, but we were playing Highland for the conference championship. Highland had the Hageimeier twins, who were tough. They were real tough. Deb Kringle and Theresa Tierney were on the floor with the Hageimeier twins. It was at the end of the game, and we were bringing the ball up the court, and we had a play that was designed to break a press.

[01:26:00]

GP: I have it in my head, and every time I think about it, I start chuckling because it was so funny. It required Deb Kringle, who was like our biggest player. You just didn't mess with Deb. So she was at mid court, and her job was to stop the ball. [laughs] I'm sorry. Every time I think about this, I have to chuckle. One of the Hageimeier twins was bringing the ball up the court, and we were playing on defense, and Deb was at half court

trying to stop bringing the ball up. The Hagemeyer twin, she's coming down, and she's just barreling down.

She gets to half court and [laughs] I'm sorry, I'm trying to say this without laughing because I'm replaying it in my head, but she runs into Deb. These Hagemeyers are like six something. They're tall. And Deb's a good size. She's like five-eleven. But she's barreling down. There was no love lost between the Hagemeyers. She's barreling down the court. She thinks she's going to dribble through Kringle.

She bangs into Kringle and falls back. Kringle doesn't move. It's like a wall. It's like a wall. It's like, boom, boom. I remember everybody on the bench; their mouth was like—Kringle's standing there like nothing's happened. [laughter] Of course, the Highland coach is going crazy because one of her star players is on the floor, writhing in pain. Kringle's just standing there like, "What has happened?" The Highland coach wanted them to call a foul on Kringle. She's going, "I didn't do anything. She ran into me." [laughter] I mean, it's not funny because she was hurt, but I'm just saying it was the funniest thing I'd ever seen in my life, because Kringle's expression was like—
[01:28:00]

KH: Just stood here.

GP: But she ran up, we got the ball and scored. I'm just saying that was funny. That was the funniest thing. Another thing was St. Margaret-Benilde. Our senior year, the year we won the championship, they were one of the first teams that we scrimmaged early in the year, before this conference season. We were gunning for them because the year before, they had just wiped the floor with us. Like I said, that year, they wiped the floor with us. We were like, okay. So they beat us. I can't remember the score, but they beat us by two or three points. We were like, oh, we almost had them. So we go through the season. And then who do we play the championship game again? St. Margaret-Benilde.

Oh, man.

KH: Sweet, sweet, sweet.

GP: But we beat them by the exact same score. Exact same score. That I remember. See, this was meant to be because they were our nemesis. They were an excellent team. For us to beat them by the same score in the championship game, to me, meant a lot because they were our competitors. They were so good. We knew if we could hang with them, we knew we were good, because nobody was beating Benilde. That we even came close was uncomfortable for them because they were just leaving people in the dust. But beating them by that same score? That was it for me. That was it. I knew we had a team, and we earned that. We worked hard for that all year. We got better, so that when we had to come up against them, we were ready. We were ready.

[01:30:00]

KH: That tastes good.

GP: Still tastes good. [laughter]I still like that. Yes. So, yeah, those are the two games that stick in my mind, winning the conference off that play. [laughs] I'm sorry. Every time I think about it and Kringle, I just have to laugh, because it was like watching rubber bounce off a ball, I swear. Like, oh, my God. And her expression.

KH: Is that on tape anywhere?

GP: I wish it was. I wish it were. Kringle's expression is what got me. We weren't supposed to laugh, but I just put my hand over my mouth because I was cracking up, but those two games were the ones for me.

KH: So we've just spent some time talking about the opportunities that Title IX brought to you and your teammates. Nevertheless, I know that once Title IX is passed, it doesn't mean that suddenly everything is equitable for girls and boys. Were you noticing differences between girls teams at Central and boys?

GP: Oh, absolutely. Absolutely. We had to practice after the boys.

KH: And did that mean you had to hang around school until they were done? You had to go home and come back?

[01:32:00]

GP: Well, their practices were always priority. On the field, in the gyms; it's boys football first, boys track first, boys always first. We were like an afterthought. Because, again, there's no precedent for us. Boys have always had access to the facilities, so we come after that. Central had the main gym, and then they had a smaller gym. When I say main gym, it's not even the gym there now. It was just what they called their main gym. We sometimes had to just use the smaller gym because boys had the priority. I mean, yeah, it was not equitable in access to facilities until after we won the championship. But, yeah, sometimes we had to go to other facilities to practice.

Central used to play their games at Como High School because the gym that we had really couldn't accommodate spectators. So we used to have to make it work. I guess that's the way to say it, especially for the girls. We used to have to make it work. Practice used to be sometimes at Oxford, wherever we could. Like if we had a game, a scrimmage or something coming up on the weekend, if we couldn't get into Central, we'd have to practice at Oxford. We'd have to practice somewhere where we could get a gym.

It was not equitable at the beginning at all, because I don't think that it was quite taken seriously by the ADs [athletic directors], the principals, that first year or two. They're like, "Oh, we'll get you in where we can get you in at."

KH: Did you get any kind of pushback from any boys at school or staff?

[01:34:00]

GP: I think they were curious. I think the boys at school were just curious. What is this? Then they'd like to come around and watch the girls try to shoot a jumper, you know

what I'm saying? Then when they saw there was some that could, it's like, oh, you know? And then some of them wanted to coach. [laughs] Usually, they were the boys that were on the basketball team, they wanted to help coach the girls basketball team for whatever reason. But yeah, it was curiosity, I think. And then I think that grew to a level of respect, eventually, but I think it started out as curiosity.

KH: But by the time you're in your senior year and have this fantastic season, and then you win.

GP: Yeah, then it's respect. Then it's I want to be part of that, right? I want to be part of that. But before that it was like, "I don't know, let's just go see. It can't be that serious."

KH: So you graduate in '76 then, on the heels of this championship win.

GP: Yes.

KH: What do you do after high school? I mean, you already said a little bit.

GP: But I went to Winona State University. I intentionally did not play for the university, but I just participated in recreational athletics. I did that intentionally because I wanted to focus on my studies. Academically, I knew I needed to focus, and I knew that I couldn't if I was playing for the university. So I intentionally didn't play, but I played recreationally. I played softball. I love basketball. But more individual sports, like racquetball, stuff like that. I just intentionally made up my mind because I knew I needed to focus.

[01:36:00]

KH: And what was your major?

GP: Business administration with a personnel concentration. I knew I needed to. Because I wasn't going on an athletic scholarship. I had a few academic scholarships, and I just knew I needed to focus. So I kind of walked away from organized sports, but not

from sports. Do you know what I'm saying?

KH: I do. I absolutely do.

GP: I still played. I was still active. I just didn't need the pressure of playing under a scholarship for the university on top of trying to make sure that I got my education.

KH: Yeah, because there is pressure. I mean, as fun and as valuable as competition is, there is pressure, especially like you say, with a scholarship.

GP: I didn't need it. I knew I would have flunked out of college if I played sports. I knew that. It's not that I was a bad student, but I just knew that college was going to require something different than what I had to provide academically in high school. And I'll be honest that I just didn't think that I was prepared academically for college. I knew I wasn't.

KH: And why did you choose Winona State?

GP: Actually, a young lady, Karen Kaiser, who was a cheerleader, who went to Central and was a cheerleader with me, had graduated the year before and had gone down there.

[01:38:00]

GP: Again, as I'm talking to you, I'm just realizing a pattern with me. I really didn't want to go to college. My father made a deal with me. I was going to go to St. Paul Tech, which is St. Paul College now, and become a legal secretary because I didn't want to go to school anymore. I figured 12 years was enough. My father, who didn't speak a lot, spoke to me and said, "I'll make a deal with you. You go to college for one year. If you don't like it, you can quit and come back and be a legal secretary. But I want you to go. Just go for one year."

So my counselor was also on my neck about college. I wasn't thinking about college. I really wasn't. I was just going to go get a job. Get a trade and get a job. My high

school counselor said, “You need to go to college.” I said, “I don’t want to go to college.” She said, “You need to go to college.” I said, “I don’t want to go to college.” They said, “Okay.” There was a thick book of all the colleges in the United States. He took the book and said, “Go through here and pick a college.” I literally took the book and threw it up in the air, and it landed on his desk, and I did this, and I walked out. He applied. He applied to multiple colleges for me. I never applied. And it was Appleton, Winona, Mankato, Drake and North Dakota State. He applied.

[01:40:00]

GP: I never filled out an application. I was dead set on, I’m done with school. I don’t want to. I want to get a job. And he sent it. I got accepted in all of them. I’m getting these letters going, “I never applied to these places.” So that’s when my father sat me down and said, “Just go for one year.” I had a friend, a cheerleading friend that was at Winona. I called her, and she said, “Oh, come on down and visit.” So, I took a weekend, went down, and visited. I loved the drive. Still one of my favorite drives down 61 south. Year round, absolutely gorgeous. I love that drive, and went down there and spent a weekend with her. Actually, it’s how I met my first husband. She introduced me to him. I loved the drive, I loved the school, and I liked that I would know somebody down there. So I accepted the Winona State offer. I went to Winona State. That’s how I got there.

KH: Did you use that degree? Has that been your career path?

GP: Yeah, I really wanted to go into HR. I really wanted to work in human resources. This is funny. [laughs] You’re making me really pull stuff out of my head. I graduated on May 21st, and I started working for Control Data as a buyer. I graduated on Friday and I started at Control Data that Monday, so it was business. It wasn’t personnel, but it was a business related job. I kind of went straight into my education. Literally, from graduation to work.

[01:42:00]

KH: Holy cow. No rest.

GP: Yeah, just straight. So, yeah, I did work in business with Control Data for a number of years.

KH: And what year did you graduate from college?

GP: In '81.

KH: Well, so we have to get the story back then to Oxford and Bill. We've got some years to cover here.

GP: Yeah, we've got some years. Well, let's get to Bill. I also married my boyfriend, my first husband. I graduated in May, on a Friday, started my job that Monday, and married my first husband that September. I had my daughter and divorced him in '88.

KH: What year was your daughter born?

GP: In '84. Okay. My father passed in '87, divorced my husband in '88, and it was '88 when I saw Bill again.

KH: In what circumstances?

GP: Well, my father passed in '87. I left Minnesota. My parents were living in Texas. I left Minnesota in '87 to be with him before he passed and to help my mom recover. So I stayed with her for a year and came back in '88 with my then three year old daughter.

[01:44:00]

GP: Then literally the day that I got back to Minnesota, my brother Robert called me and said, "Come to this picnic at Como Park for the umpires," because he was umpiring baseball. Him and my brother-in-law and Bill, they all were umpires. He said, "Bring all the nieces and nephews and come to this picnic at Como." I had just literally put my bags down. "What? Okay." So I go and round up my nieces and nephews and go

out to Como to this picnic. I'm in the food line and my nieces and nephews are like five, six, seven, eight, they're one on each leg, one around my waist, they're on my arms and I have plates in my arms and I'm trying to ask them what they want to eat. I'm trying to get through the food line with all these little kids around me.

I have a plate in each hand, a kid on every limb, and someone taps me on my shoulder. I'm like, "Who can this be?" I turn around and all I see is a white face kissing me, with lips on mine. My eyes are open and all I see is this white blur. I can't move because I've got food in my hands and kids on my body. When he backs up, I see who it is and it's Bill Peterson. I haven't seen him since I'm 15.

[01:46:00]

GP: So I'm thinking, "What is going on? What is going on?" And he goes, "Do you remember me?" Because of the hair, I'm scared out of my mind. My 15-year-old mind comes back. I'm going, "Yes?" It's the hair that gave him away. He says, "I just heard you just got back in town." I'm like, "Okay." I said, "Well, I've got to go." So I get through the line. He comes up to me later and says, "Hey, you want to go for a walk?" You know, we're walking around Como and talking and catching up. I found out later that he had asked my brother and my brother-in-law if he could date me.

KH: And you hadn't seen him since you were 15?

GP: I hadn't seen him since I was 15.

KH: But obviously he was in touch with your siblings?

GP: Yes, yes.

KH: And so, he knew what was going on with you.

GP: Which was why I think my brother called me out of the blue and said, "Hey." Because I'm like, this is odd, but okay. So from that day, he called me for a date, which I didn't think he was serious because I'm like, this is Bill. Everybody knows Bill. Why is he

calling me for a date? I just got back to town. I'm separated from my husband. I've been getting ready to divorce him. I've got a three year old daughter. My father just died. He can't be serious. Maybe he just wants to be friends. Okay. So we'll go to dinner, and he was serious.

KH: He was courting you.

[01:48:00]

GP: Yeah, he was ready to court. "Whoa, wait, no. I'm really not. I cannot." I was actually anti-male at that point. I had a lot of anger from my marriage and I don't really want to be bothered. Not really. For like six months, I really spent a lot of time trying to not be bothered, let's just say that; being creative about how to kind of really give this guy the message that you're a nice guy, but I'm not ready. It didn't work. I tried everything and it didn't work. Really. I was asking friends, okay, so what do I do? I've tried that. Nope, I tried that. No. What's next? Okay, I'll try that. No, that didn't work. I literally was asking for advice. He was pretty persistent. I think he knew I was in this spot, like I don't want to be bothered. I don't like men. Get away from me. He just kind of waited it out.

Then finally he wore me down. I said, "All right, I've tried everything. I don't even know what else to do." Again, like I said, he was just himself. He just kind of figured that I was angry, and maybe one day I wouldn't be, and one day I wasn't. It took somewhere between six months to a year for me to be, "All right, I'm not going to win this battle. You're going to stick around? Here's what it's going to be."

So I'd say from that Como picnic to today, we've been in each other's lives. Got married in '99. We've been together 36 years, married for about 26. Ten years we dated and then we married. I was not amenable to dating outside my race. It's not anything I ever thought I'd do.

[01:50:00]

GP: But I did want a good man, and there was one in front of me. So, eventually, after I got through my own problems, I saw the good man in front of me, and then I had enough sense to marry him, and we're still together. So, again, I've got this pattern in my life, I'm noticing while I'm talking to you, it was not my idea. It was not me going after this person. This person had to go, "Hey."

KH: And many times.

GP: And many times, for a long period of time. Because, again, I was not amenable to dating outside my race. Never thought about it, had no interest in it, wasn't attracted to it. I didn't know very many people who had done it. It just wasn't in my thought pattern. But, again, I was amenable to having a relationship with a good person, and that is what got me there.

KH: And how did your family respond? I mean, now, granted, Robert kind of knew what was going on at the beginning, but this was their coach, too.

GP: This was their coach. My father passed, all right? So this was their coach. Like I say, everybody in the community knew Bill. They knew me. My family, which was a surprise to me, my brothers called a family meeting amongst just the brothers and my mom to talk about it. It's not that they didn't like or know Bill. I think it was the difference in age and race. Now, this is the kicker. My brothers had dated outside their race.

[01:52:00]

KH: Double standards.

GP: But, oh, this caused a conference amongst my brothers about someone that they all respected and knew. My mom told me about it, at some point, and I was livid. I was livid that they even thought that they could even have something to say about who I date. I was so beside myself. My mom had to make me promise that I wouldn't say

anything to them because I was on the way out of her house to give them a piece of my mind and she made me promise not to do it. And to this day, I haven't done it. They don't know that I know. They might know now, but they don't know that I know. I was livid.

KH: I mean, you were an adult. You had a daughter. You had been married already and divorced.

GP: It shows you how deeply rooted that family dynamic was about males, you get to do this, and females, you can't.

KH: Because they didn't invite your sisters.

GP: No. Just my brothers and my mom. So I was very, very upset about that. Very upset about that and it wasn't even that they thought he was a bad guy or anything. No, no. It was simply age and race.

KH: And how many years are there between you and Bill?

[01:54:00]

GP: Nineteen. Actually, I was more uncomfortable with the race, initially, and he was a little more uncomfortable about the age. I was never uncomfortable about the age. He was never uncomfortable about the race. So we had to kind of help each other. We had to help each other. I was really uncomfortable about the race, because I did notice things that he never noticed. I noticed that we would go to restaurants and I'd be standing next to him, and they'd look at him and say, "How many?" I'd be standing right next to him. They'd just assume I wasn't with him.

Or once they realized we were together, we got placed back by the kitchen. So I had to start saying, "I'd like to sit here." He never noticed that stuff. I said, "Do you notice that they've always talked to you? They never talk to me. They never assume we're a couple." He never noticed that stuff. I noticed that stuff.

He noticed age when people would ask about our age difference. That would

bother him, but not the race. I guess I was more in tune, and he was more in tune about that, but that never bothered me. The age stuff never bothered me. But I noticed the difference. I noticed being treated differently.

KH: Has that changed over the years?

[01:56:00]

GP: It's gotten better because I think we start engaging younger staff at restaurants who didn't have a problem with it. They would assume that we were together. If I'm standing next to him, they would assume. So it started getting better because people we're engaging started getting younger. They had less hang ups about it. Although, last year, a couple months ago, I was at a Cub, this cashier, she happened to be a white lady. I'm checking out with Bill. She asked me if I was his care keeper?

KH: Oh no, you've got both of those concerns off in one question, age and race.

GP: Yes. I'm like, "What? No, that would be my husband." "Oh." So it hasn't stopped and I don't expect it to. It just doesn't happen as often, but it's still out there. People make assumptions.

KH: So when you and Bill got together for the 10 years you were dating before your marriage, was he still at Oxford?

GP: No, he had left Oxford. He was still officiating basketball, football, baseball, softball. He was on the National Association of Amateur Softball staff. So he was traveling a lot. But, no, he was not at Oxford.

KH: So you mentioned kind of in passing a while ago that you have coached. Tell me about your coaching experience.

GP: I have coached cheerleading at Central. Actually, when I started my nonprofit, I started the nonprofit, SUGAA (Summit University Girls Athletic Association). It's still in existence. It runs out of Martin Luther King Center.

[01:58:00]

KH: Okay, and what's its mission?

GP: Well, its mission was to provide athletic opportunities for girls in the Summit-University area, to try to level the playing field for the girls out of the community once they got to high school, which would also make them competitive for college scholarships. We're just introducing them to sports at an early enough age, so by the time they get to middle school and high school, they could be competitive with the kids that were coming out of other communities that were traveling. What I was seeing was that the kids out of the Rondo community had natural ability. The kids out of the suburbs had camps.

By the time they came to middle school or high school to play for their team, this kid from the suburb had been playing in camps and traveling for two or three years. This kid out of Rondo was coming with natural ability. It's not a level playing field. So, I thought, well, for our girls in Rondo, how can we level that out a little bit? So I started SUGAA. And right now, it's a traveling basketball program out of MLK. But I started it, oh, I think my daughter must have been 10, because I wanted her to play volleyball, or to learn it. The only place I could take her that she could learn was on the West Side. And I'm like, why is that? Why don't we have volleyball? I literally was living around the corner on Marshall Avenue from Oxford at the time.

Why can't I take her to Oxford? Because Oxford wasn't, MLK wasn't, none of the rec centers around were offering. Okay, this is ridiculous. So, I said, "I want my daughter to learn how to play sports in Rondo. I shouldn't have to travel and take her out of the community for her to learn how to play volleyball." So I started SUGAA.

[02:00:00]

KH: How do you spell it?

GP: S-U-G-A-A. Actually, I started it, and then Rita Burch, my teammate, joined in. We put on the first basketball camp at Maxfield, our first summer. From there I made it a nonprofit and we just provided athletic activities year round for girls for free. So we had basketball. We'd roll them from basketball to softball to volleyball and we included racquetball. We wanted them to be rounded athletes.

KH: Not that super hyper focused—

GP: No, we wanted them to learn how to play more than one sport. Then we were moving into swimming and after that we were going to golf, but it was about exposure and exposure in your backyard. You know what I'm saying? You don't have to leave Rondo to learn how to play basketball. You don't have to leave Rondo to learn how to play volleyball. And here's the Oxford part of this story. As I say, I lived around the corner on Marshall. I bought my first house. That was my first house on Marshall. When I started SUGAA, I went to Oxford. At the time, what's his name as the director? He coached at Cretin. I can't think of his name. Arvesta Kelly. Arvesta Kelly was the director at the time.

[02:02:00]

GP: I went and met with him and said, "This is what I'm trying to do. I'd like to run this basketball camp at Oxford for girls to learn how to play basketball from the community. Can I have some gym time?" He would not give me gym time. So I went down to MLK and I said, "This is what I'm trying to do. Can I have some gym time?" "Sure." That's the only reason that my nonprofit operated out of MLK.

KH: And do you think that's because it's the difference between a city facility and—well, MLK was a city facility.

GP: They're both rec centers. The difference was that Arvesta Kelly, who was coaching at Cretin at the time, was running his basketball team practices out of Oxford,

and that was the priority. He said, “No, I don’t have any gym time for you.”

KH: Okay, here’s my question. So this whole project has been about Oxford. A good chunk of it has been about how girls could play, learn to play sports, like basketball, maybe volleyball, softball at Oxford. And then you’re talking about, what? This is the ’80s, ’90s?

GP: My daughter was 10. Yeah, early ’90s, ’80s, ’90s.

KH: And suddenly you’re like, where are the sports? What happened? Do you know?

GP: I don’t know. Because, at that time, the only place that girls were playing sports a little bit was at MLK. Not at Oxford at all, because it was being dominated by boys basketball, not girls. That’s why when I went to MLK, it was like, “Yes, come on in.” Gave me the gym time. That’s why it’s located there now.

KH: It’s still there.

[02:04:00]

GP: SUGAA is still running. I had to leave it. Rita Burch started it with me. Rita lasted for a year. When she had to move on, I got Lori Prioleau, who is the baby sister of a girl that I went to Hancock with, but anyway, she was interested, so I partnered with her and we ran it together until ’99, when I decided to go back and get my master’s, and I had to take something off my plate. So I gave her SUGAA and walked away from my nonprofit, but it’s still running.

But I started that so that we could level the playing field in Rondo, so girls could have a competitive opportunity to play at high school level and get a scholarship. One of our success stories is, I cannot think of her name, but she’s at the U. She went to the U, and now she’s coaching at St. Kate’s, either St. Kate’s or St. Thomas, but she was one of our successes. We have a couple of success stories of people. I think one is now a physical

therapist for some professional basketball team. I mean, we have girls that have just come through SUGAA and gone on and done great things.

That was the plan. I mean, that was the purpose of it. Now it focuses on volleyball and basketball, but the initial plan was to make them rounded athletes. They could choose what they wanted to focus on, but just to give them the exposure at an early enough age, so they could develop the skill, so by the time they got to high school, they could be competitive to get on a team and possibly get a scholarship.

KH: Because then there were teams well established by that time?

GP: It was there. That's right. They had the opportunity.

[02:06:00]

KH: It's great that something like SUGAA exists to do this, but how frustrating that you needed it.

GP: I can't tell you how frustrating and disappointing it was to go to Oxford.

KH: That fielded all these girls who played at Central for the championship team.

GP: It's the first place I thought of. Why wouldn't it? This is perfect for Oxford. I was rejected, but we succeeded anyway. But I always thought that it belonged at Oxford. Always.

KH: Well, they missed out.

GP: Yeah, they did.

KH: That's too bad.

GP: So, yeah, I hated to leave it, but I had to go back and get my masters, and I had too much on my plate as a mother and working for the city at the time. It was just too much.

KH: What's your master's in?

GP: My master's is in library and information science.

KH: From Saint Kate's?

GP: Saint Kate's.

KH: And you had said that you always wanted to work in a library. Did you then?

GP: I did. I was working for Parks and Recreation. I went and got my master's, and then tSt. Paul Public Library, kind of recruited me. So I transferred from Parks to the libraries and created the Urban Library Program for them, which the focus was to recruit people of color to become library employees. I was there for maybe somewhere between five and seven years, something like that, and then I got recruited back to Parks. So I went back to Parks and Rec.

KH: St. Paul?

[02:08:00]

GP: St. Paul. So, yeah, I still love libraries, and I really enjoyed working at the administrative level, creating something that exposed libraries to people in a way that they could become part of that institution. The libraries were struggling with diversity, and the purpose of that program was to expose and recruit, and partnered with St. Kate's, created a curriculum that gave them a certification as a library associate and employed them in St. Paul Public Libraries. So I handed that over to a colleague and went back to Parks and Rec.

KH: What did you do for Parks and Rec?

GP: Well, when I went back, initially, I ran the Youth Job Corps, which is now called Right Track.

KH: Yeah, my son did that.

GP: Yeah, the program that I was employed in at Oxford, I became the coordinator for that and ran that for a number of years for the city. It's funny, I started running the program that I used to be employed through. But that was kind of cool, because I had the

inside track about what it was like for kids, how to get them through and what they could expect, so I did that. Then I became a supervisor for the Parks and Rec Department. I oversaw the rec centers on the East Side of St. Paul. Then from there I became a manager of the Recreation Services division. I did that until five years ago.

[02:10:00]

GP: Then I was given the opportunity to create my own division, which was the Community First Public Safety Division, which supported the mission of Mayor Carter. The Parks Department created its own division to support his vision and I became the manager of that division. In that division, I got to recruit my own staff and we created the program existing now called Awakenings.

The purpose of that program is, how can I say this, to work with youth of color between the ages—wait, let me back up. Because it's not primarily youth of color, but it's targeting youth of color, but it's open to all youth between the ages of six and 18, to address the mental health issues they're having in terms of trauma, to introduce the word, even, to them and what it means, and tie that to the behavior they're exhibiting, and give them some alternatives to their behavior that's trauma driven. I had a staff of seven that recruit young people off the street that either aren't in school, kind of going to school, their behavior is trauma driven behavior, drugs, whatever's going on in their life. My staff meet them where they are, probably out in the streets, and try to get them back in school and try to get them to address the trauma, what's going on with them, and give them some alternative choices to make when they are experiencing that trauma.

[02:12:00]

KH: And that's all within the Parks and Rec department?

GP: That's within my division. That's what my staff does. I shouldn't call them mine. I just retired.

KH: That's right.

GP: But we've been at that, I think this coming summer will be six years. We have about 120 kids. They do group work and then individual counseling. They support them, visit them in their schools, find employment, hook them up with the Right Track program for their first jobs, or wherever they want to work, and just kind of mentor and are just kind of like the adult in the gap. No shade on their parents, but most of the kids we work with either don't trust their parents, or don't see their parents, or they just don't have a healthy parental relationship.

So we build trust with them as an adult they can trust, and then we support them, get them back in school if we can. Then from there, just try to support them to make healthy choices and to identify the trauma that they're living is real and give them the word and verbiage for it and then some choices to make when they're faced with it.

KH: That's important to be able to name what is happening.

GP: Yeah, because a lot of cultures, African American, they don't even call it trauma. They only recognize it as you're just not feeling good today, or you're just acting up, or that shouldn't bother you. Well, it's trauma, and here's why. Then maybe when you feel that again, try this. My staff aren't mental health professionals, but we work with a mental health professional that guides their work. So they work with kids one-on-one, and they work with them until 18.

[02:14:00]

GP: But after that, if the kid still wants to have a relationship with my staff, that's on them, but it's not part of the program. So many of our kids are still in contact with my staff because they trust them and they have a relationship with them. I did that for the last five years before I retired in November.

KH: And, now, how's the transition going?

GP: Now I'm talking to you, Kim. I'm still transitioning. I've turned down a couple of job offers.

KH: So, another theme, Gwen, let me just point out to you, and maybe it aligns with the theme you say, but it is that you've been recruited by so many people to do so many things.

GP: I have. You're right.

KH: I'm like, recruited. Oh, another recruited. Recruited by.

GP: Yeah, you're right. I hadn't thought about it until I sat down to talk to you. But, yes, it's never really been my idea. It's like someone's always saying, "Hey, you. Come over here."

KH: Because they see what you can do.

GP: I guess. I just plug along. I don't really think about that, but I am becoming aware of that, after talking to you, that that is how my life has worked out. People have recruited me, I guess. So, yeah, I'm retired, and I'm trying to figure out what that is right now.

KH: That's a big change after a lifetime of work.

GP: It is. But I'm welcoming it. It's long overdue.

KH: Well, Gwen, is there anything else you want to add that you think is important to your Oxford athletic story?

GP: I just want to say how important Oxford has been and is to the community still, even as a recreation services manager. In that job, I was responsible for all the recreation centers and programming in St Paul. Oxford, and when we were able to build the new existing building, that building, that location is a cornerstone for the Rondo community. Being in the position I was in, I wanted to make sure that facility still connected to Rondo once they opened it.

[02:16:00]

GP: Even though we did a community survey to find out what we should call that building, it was overwhelmingly requested that Oxford be part of the name. Because there's a whole generation that only knows that location as Oxford. There's another generation that knows it as Jimmy Lee. That community came forth, that Oxford community, and said, "You've got to name it Oxford. There's got to be Oxford in it." So it is the Oxford Community Center with the Jimmy Lee Recreation Center inside of it and the Great River Water Park inside of it.

KH: So Oxford is the overarching community center?

GP: Oxford is the community center. I'm most proud in my tenure as the recreation services manager to have overseen that project and give that community what is still considered the jewel in the recreation center system.

KH: You are in a unique position to be able to answer the question that I've asked almost everybody for this project. Is Oxford unique among rec centers?

GP: Let me answer it this way. Having been in Parks and Rec for 32 years and having been part of a recreation system that has ranked in the top three for the past 10 or 15 years, the St. Paul Recreation System is unique to the nation. Within that, our recreation center system is unique. And within that, Oxford is unique. Does that make sense?

[02:18:00]

KH: Yeah, this is really a good way to end this project, because that's a question I've been asking everybody, and not everybody has the perspective that you can speak to. So what is it about the St. Paul Parks and Rec that makes it unique?

GP: Access to walking trails, access to water. You could be near water in 10 minutes from no matter where you are in St. Paul. Again, the recreation center system

itself, it's community based. Again, I was born in a city that didn't have a recreation center system. There were no recreation centers. So, to have a system of recreation centers, community based centers, doesn't sound unique, but it is.

KH: This is purely coincidental, but I work part time in the afternoons for Roseville Parks and Recreation. I'm just in the office. We don't have community centers or rec centers.

[02:20:00]

GP: Yeah, so the other unique thing about St. Paul is that it's recreational year round. We're banked off of a historic piece of waterway, the Mississippi, which Parks and Rec is just beginning to take advantage of in its projects. It's got a project in place that will build recreation opportunities along the Mississippi, which again will make it even more unique. I count myself privileged to have worked for the Parks and Rec system because it's not until I've traveled the country and attended conferences and talked to other Parks and Rec professionals that I began to appreciate the uniqueness of St. Paul and its recreation system.

I think the people that are born here don't appreciate it. It's not until you leave and you look for, where are the parts of this city? Where's the walking trail? What do you do here in the winter? Where's the river? Where's the water? Where's the lake? Is there a lake? Where's the picnic shelter? Where's the pavilion? You don't appreciate it until you realize that there are systems and cities that don't even have those things.

KH: What about Minneapolis? Is Minneapolis comparable?

GP: Minneapolis is comparable. It's been Minneapolis, D.C., and St. Paul has been in the top two or three in the past five plus years. Minneapolis is comparable. I could say the same for Minneapolis's system. Twin Cities, but I could speak to St. Paul personally. We have a jewel. We have the only free zoo, Como, which is in our rec system.

[02:22:00]

GP: We have regional parks. We're unique. In that, having come out of that system, having come out of Oxford, that I wanted to come out of Oxford. But being in the community of Oxford and knowing everyone that came out of Oxford and then having the opportunity to oversee the system that it sits in, I wanted to make sure that it stayed a mainstay in Rondo. And that it became something that that community had never had before.

So the water park connected to the old building where people could still feel that community connection. Having a nonprofit out there that serves the community. The turf field. That community deserved those amenities. I was proud to be part of that and having input on seeing that facility serve that community and everyone around it. But having it be there is kind of what I would like to look back on my legacy and say, I did Oxford a solid. I had something to say and do with that happening.

KH: That's amazing. I think that's a really good place to end, unless you have anything else you want to add.

GP: I'm good if you're good.

KH: I am.

[END OF INTERVIEW]