

Driver Sterling Cook

I graduated from Douglass High in 1966 and drove an LCPS school bus the 2nd half of my sophomore year, and all of my junior and senior years (1964 - 1966). My sophomore year I took over for Ruth Chin, who went out on maternity leave. All the students on my bus were Black. I started driving an LCPS bus when I was 16. The qualification procedure included a road test of 10 - 12 hours on the road behind the wheel of an LCPS bus, with an instructor. My bus was a 1956 or 1957 GMC model that could carry 60 passengers. It was in fair condition, given it was an older bus. Generally Black drivers were given older buses. I lived in Leesburg at the time, and would walk to Douglass Elementary and pick up my bus in the parking lot. I considered my route one of the easiest in the county, because it didn't include any long stretches of dirt roads. Other routes at this time still included long stretches of dirt roads which could become a problem in wet weather (whether from rain or melting slush). The route from Leesburg was pretty straightforward. I'd drive route 7 east to route 28 and then take it south to route 606. All the while I'd pick up students at 5 or so stops, a total of 25 - 30 elementary and high school students). I'd drive east on route 606 to the Fairfax/Loudoun county line and the community of Oak Grove. Here I have my last two stops and about a mile of dirt road. From Oak Grove I'd follow my outbound route back to Leesburg (606 west to 28 north to 7 west into the town of Leesburg). In Leesburg, I'd drop off students at Douglass Elementary and High, parking the bus at a white elementary school on North St. near the hospital and cemetery. I'd have just enough time to walk to Douglass High and make classes (9:00 AM). The round trip was about 70 miles a day. My bus had a governor that limited my max speed to 35 mph. I started noticing white school bus drivers would start behind my bus, but would catch up and pass me. I wondered, were there governors set higher, did their buses have governors? In my senior year my GMC bus had terminal engine failure. My replacement bus was a 1956 or 1957 Chevy. The Chevy carried fewer passengers (40 - 50). I played football in high school and drove the Douglass High team to our 'away' games. Warren Helm drove the bus after I graduated¹.

¹ From May 8, 2020 interview with former LCPS Bus Driver Sterling Cook conducted by Nathan Bailey