

Warriors Don't Cry: A Searing Memoir of the Battle to Integrate Little Rock's Central High Study Guide

Warriors Don't Cry: A Searing Memoir of the Battle to Integrate Little Rock's Central High by Melba Pattillo Beals

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Plot Summary

On May 17, 1954, the United States Supreme Court ruled in the landmark case of *Brown vs. The Board of Education of Topeka, Kansas*, declaring it illegal to have segregated public schools. All public school systems were ordered to begin integration within a specific time period. This decision was met with many emotions, including hatred and fear. The story revolves around the actions that took place in Little Rock, Arkansas during that turbulent time.

Melba Pattillo is one of the students that become collectively known as The Little Rock Nine. Nine black students are integrated into Little Rock's Central High School in 1956. Melba is 15 years old. Although Melba was raised in a household that is brimming with love, knowledge, strength and unshakable faith, the events that occur shake the girl's foundation and her entire world.

The main characters in the story are Melba Pattillo; her mother, Lois Pattillo, and grandmother, India Peyton. Other significant characters include the remainder of the students: Elizabeth Eckford, Ernest Green, Gloria Ray, Carlotta Walls, Minnijean Brown, Terrence Roberts, Jefferson Thomas, and Thelma Mothershed.

Lois Pattillo is a remarkable woman. An English teacher, Lois is studying for her master's degree, something that is all but unheard of in that time and place. Grandma India, a maid, is a highly self-educated woman who rules as the matriarch of the family and is a source of great strength for Melba and her brother Conrad. Although Mr. Pattillo is present in the first part of the story, it is Mother Lois and Grandma India who take the reins with the children, never allowing them to forget to take pride in who they are and not to back down for what one believes in. Both women are also a deep fount of faith, a trait which serves the family well in times of desperation and danger.

The ridicule, hatred, threats and physical abuse the students suffer is unbelievable. There are thousands of people who want the students removed from the school and will do anything to ensure that it happens. There are a bevy of physical attacks, from attempted rape to hitting, kicking, attempted murder, to a large number of threats and severe emotional and mental abuse. The students survive on their wits, deep desire to persevere, and strong faith. The presence of the 101st Airborne Screaming Eagles also plays a significant part in the story, as the students' protectors inside the school.

Although school officials and police are ordered to protect the Little Rock Nine, it is more common that the students are left on their own to face the horrors of racism. As the school year goes on, the segregationists become desperate to have the students removed from the school so they cannot return for another school year. The efforts are extreme, from extreme provocation to attempted murder. Melba is saved more than once by a white boy named Link who proves to be a true friend. Melba learns that Link is fighting his own battle with racism regarding Nana Healey, a woman who has worked for Link's family all his life and who was cast out, penniless, when she became ill. The woman has virtually nothing, and Link must feed her so that she can stay alive. Nana



Healey is dying and together, Melba and Link do all they can to ease the old woman's pain.

There is a tremendous battle between Arkansas Governor Faubus and the Supreme Court. Faubus unfailingly breaks the law by ignoring the integration ruling and openly defies President Eisenhower. There are court battles and retaliation against those who defy the Governor and other state officials. Despite all odds, Ernest Green becomes the first black student to graduate from Central High School.

The story ends with a 30 year reunion with all the students at their alma mater. Each student has gone on to accomplish great things and have continued their education and forward movement in personal and professional growth. Grandma India once told Melba that one day she would be grateful for all she was forced to endure. As usual, Grandma India was right.



Chapters 1-4

Chapters 1-4 Summary and Analysis

Melba Pattillo was born on Pearl Harbor Day, December 7, 1941. The family believed that Melba's birth on that day was a sign that the baby would have a part in some kind of monumental change. Melba was a large baby and received injury from forceps because her mother was so petite. Melba got an infection in her head and nearly died. A janitor revealed to Melba's mother and grandmother that the doctor had ordered a cleansing solution of Epsom salts and water to clean out the infection, but the procedure had never been performed. The medical staff's response was, "We don't coddle niggers."

Melba healed and other than asthma, grew to be a healthy girl. Horace Mann was the school for black children in Little Rock, so that's where Melba and the other children went to learn.

It was the mid-1950s when the ruling for *Brown vs. The Board of Education of Topeka, Kansas* was handed down by the Supreme Court. The ruling stated that it is illegal to have separate schools for blacks and whites, and integration was ordered for all public schools. Racism was at an all-time high, although the Arkansas state government was proud to announce that there had not been a KKK lynching in the state for nearly ten years.

Arkansas passed a law in 1955, which stated that the school systems would integrate in two years' time. In February 1956, a federal lawsuit filed by the NAACP caused a judge to proclaim that integration should be commence immediately.

On May 17, 1954, the day that *Brown vs. The Board of Education* was decided, the public went wild. It should have been a happy day but 13-year-old Melba noticed that her teacher looked afraid, and all the children were dismissed early. The teacher warned the children to walk in groups. Melba got distracted along the way and ended up taking her usual shortcut through a persimmon field. The shortcut was sometimes risky because of a large girl named Marissa, who the teachers referred to as "retarded." Marissa was fond of pelting people with persimmons.

As Melba walks through the persimmon field, she hears someone calling out to her. It's a man in a car. Melba can't see him clearly from her location but feels a sense of fear. The man keeps asking if Melba wants a ride home and tells her that he has a car full of candy. When Melba politely refuses, the man starts to chase her through the field. The man, who is white, is screaming that no niggers will ever attend school with his children and the man plans to teach Melba a lesson. The man hits Melba, punches her in the face, and attempts to rape her. Melba struggles but is no match for the big man. Melba is utterly terrified but she hears her grandmother's voice telling her that God is always with her. Just as Melba is losing the struggle, the man grabs his head and groans.



Marissa hits the man repeatedly on the head with a leather book bag and the girls get away.

Melba does not know what rape is and it must be explained to her. Grandmother India and Mother Lois take care of Melba and swear her to secrecy. Although the family is well educated and aware of what's going on in the world, this is the first time racial violence has struck so close to home.

The family always goes to the same grocery store, and Melba thinks of it as a festive place with wonderful aromas and the opportunity to visit with friends and neighbors. The family is particularly upbeat on one trip to the store. Melba's parents and Grandma India have cashed their paychecks and intend to shop and pay off their monthly tab at the store. The grocer overcharges the family by \$22, a full day's pay for Mr. Pattillo. Melba watches breathlessly to see if any of the adults would question the grocer about the gross error. After a long while, Grandma India politely inquires about the charges. The grocer becomes enraged, makes threats, and says that the family should be grateful that he is so generous and therefore they have no right to complain. In the end, the family pays the grocer and vows to never return. Although it would be difficult to find another store, other stores do exist.

The episode at the grocer's has a lasting effect on Melba. Melba always thought of her father as a big man, one who could conquer the world. The confrontation with the grocer shook Melba's foundation.

The Pattillo family spends a great deal of time talking and reading. Education is extremely important, particularly to Mother Lois, an English teacher. Mother Lois studies for her master's degree at night while Melba and her brother Conrad stay with Grandma India or their father. Mother Lois has an ongoing argument with her husband, Howell, about the importance of finishing college. Howell is one class away from getting a degree but has no desire to complete his education. Working on the railroad, in the great outdoors, makes him happy. Eventually, the couple gets a divorce.

The Pattillo family spends a week in Cincinnati with Lois' brother, an Episcopalian priest. Melba is amazed at the amount of freedom and how no one calls her names or tries to hurt her, even though she is in all of the places where blacks are forbidden in the South. Melba wants to stay in Ohio forever.

At the end of the summer, the phone at Melba's house rings off the hook day and night. The calls come from friends and family, as well as enemies. The segregationists issue horrible threats and spew hateful remarks. Melba is particularly distressed when one of the threats is issued by a nice boy from church that Melba secretly idolizes.

September arrives and Melba prepares to go to Central High School in Little Rock for the first time. The National Guard is present to prevent any racial violence, but the soldiers offer no real assistance or protection.

There are nine black students scheduled to attend Central High School. The families of these students are scared about what will happen. Melba becomes scared but chooses



not to back out because it would make the whites think they had won. Much of Melba's strength comes from her mother Lois, an English teacher and even more so from her grandmother, India, who plays a significant role in the child's life.

Many phone calls are exchanged before the first day at the high school. Finally, the students get the go ahead to attend and a meeting place is arranged. Grandma India stays on the porch as Melba leaves; Mother Lois drives Melba to the arranged place.

Everyone expected a mob to be at the school, but the expectation was a great understatement. People traveled from different states to fight against the integration. One of the girls, Elizabeth, does not know about the arranged meeting place and attempts to go into the school. As the girl tries to walk through openings in the line of soldiers, her path is blocked. Elizabeth tries again and again, while the mob chants threats and eventually, people begin to grab at Elizabeth. Melba and Mother Lois see this and attempt to retreat. Four men begin to chase them, one carrying a noose. Mother Lois tells Melba to get to the car and leave without her if necessary. Melba is terrified and cannot fathom abandoning her mother, even if it is obvious Mother Lois will do whatever it takes to protect her daughter. Melba is also worried about Elizabeth who is all alone. Melba makes it to the car first and Mother Lois manages to outrun the men. Mother and daughter speed away. Later, many phone calls are exchanged and Melba learns that a white couple sat with Elizabeth on a bus stop bench to protect her from the mob. The couple rode home with Elizabeth to ensure the girl's safety.

Grandma India continues to keep watch throughout the night. Mother Lois offers to take a turn since Grandma India must be tired. Grandma India refuses, saying that Mother Lois doesn't know how to fire a gun. Grandma India is an expert marksman, having been taught by her late husband who often worked away from their rural home. Grandma India explains that it is important to know how to shoot so that the aggressor is only injured, preferably on the hands or feet.



Chapters 5-7

Chapters 5-7 Summary and Analysis

The day after the confrontation at Central High School, the Governor makes another attempt to halt integration. President Eisenhower refuses to give in and requires Governor Faubus to uphold the law. Ike also sends a telegram to the Governor, saying that he expects the state government's full cooperation as well as the cooperation of other state officials and the National Guard.

Melba tries hard to live life as normal, not allowing the integration to take over and still allows herself to have fantasies about her secret crush. Melba and Grandma India often go to school wrestling matches together and Melba disguises herself so she won't be recognized and harassed.

Integration is suspended for 10 day period at which time the students are not permitted to attend school. Teachers in the community as well as other professionals pitch in to tutor the students at a local community college. The nine students become close friends, and although tutors were present and the students were trying hard, studying proves to be difficult.

Although nothing much has changed since the first day at Central High, Mrs. Bates, one of the teachers, arranges for a press conference at her home. Present at the meeting are NAACP attorney Wiley Branton and famous civil rights attorney Thurgood Marshall, who delivered the argument against segregation that resulted in the Supreme Court's school integration law. Melba is impressed by Mr. Marshall, who is well spoken and confident. The nine students and their parents are interviewed by the press. Melba surprises herself by being concise and articulate.

Melba's secret crush, Vince, asks her to be his girlfriend. Melba is not allowed to date and is concerned that Mother Lois and Grandma India will not approve. Surprisingly, Mother Lois agrees that Melba can see Vince, but only in the presence of another adult. The only reason Mother Lois agrees is because the integration has taken away Melba's social life.

Due to the Governor Faubus' refusal to abide by federal law, a summons is issued, which requires him to appear in federal court. The nine students are also required to be present and nearly 200 witnesses are expected to testify. The children are terrified, and no one knows what to expect. Melba hopes she will get a chance to speak to the Governor, so she might be able to convince the official that integration is a positive thing. The Governor does not appear and instead sends his attorneys, which is perfectly legal. At the beginning of the hearing, one of the Governor's attorneys requests a dismissal because the law typically requires a panel of three judges to oversee a federal case that involves constitutional issues. The judge assures the attorney that he is going to allow the hearing to proceed, that the presence of one judge is all that is required in

this case. The attorney asks to be excused from the courtroom and reads a statement saying that the Governor will not concede. The attorney also says that the Governor feels no one has the right to interfere with his judgment in this matter. The attorneys leave and the hearing continues. Only two of the students are called on to testify.

The day comes when the students go to school. As expected, there is a mob at the school, but the students manage to get safely inside. The students are ushered quickly to principal's office and are taken from class to class by guides. Even though a school official is assigned to each student, people, including teachers, officials and students, hurl threats, insults and hateful remarks at the students. Someone slaps Melba across the face and another person spits on her. During gym class, three of the students' mothers crash the barricade and attempt to hurt Melba during a volleyball game. The entire situation is a horror and a nightmare for all the students. At 11:30 students are removed from the school after the mob breaks down the barricades, and manages to bribe the police into allowing them to enter school grounds. The students are spirited away in police cars and delivered safely to their homes.

Melba is interviewed by the Associated Press and is asked to share her experiences on her first day at Central High School. Melba devises a statement off the top of her head and is surprised to learn that her story will be published nationwide and beyond. The statement is well thought out, intelligent, and leans toward the positive. Although the experience at Central was one of the worst of Melba's life, Melba is savvy enough to know that if she tells the negative aspects of the story, integration may be jeopardized.



Chapters 8-11

Chapters 8-11 Summary and Analysis

It is a monumental evening in the Pattillo home when Grandma India allows the family to watch President Eisenhower on television while having dinner. The 101st Airborne Division arrives in Little Rock to ensure that the integration will take place without violence. Governor Faubus follows the President's speech with one of his own, declaring, "We are now in occupied territory. In the name of God, whom we all revere, in the name of liberty we hold so dear, in the name of decency, which we all cherish, what's happening in America?" Mother Lois applauds the President's actions and shouts at the television that the President has called the Governor's bluff. What will the Governor do now?

That evening after everyone falls asleep, the doorbell rings. Everyone is instantly afraid. The men at the door identify themselves as messengers from the president. Grandma India hides the shotgun behind the door and checks the men's identification. The men tell the family that Melba should go back to school and that the girl will be protected.

Fifty uniformed soldiers from the 101st Airborne Division, also known as the Screaming Eagles, gather at Mrs. Bates' house to take the students to school. Melba is very impressed by the soldiers, by their highly polished shoes and neatly pressed uniforms. Grandma India always tells Melba that highly polished shoes are the sign of a disciplined individual. As the students' convoy approaches the school, Melba notices many people standing on both sides of the street. There are waves from friendly neighbors, threats and raised fists from others, and there are some people who simply look horrified. As the students walk amidst the soldiers into the school, Melba can't help feeling a combination of pride and sadness.

The students are unsure what to do once they are inside the school. A soldier is assigned to each student to take them to and from classes and to stand guard outside the door of the classroom. Melba has a difficult time focusing on the work but fortunately it's English, and Mother Lois has seen to it that both Melba and Conrad are well-versed in the subject.

Melba's military escort's name is Danny. Danny is pleasant and seems to be genuinely concerned about Melba's welfare above and beyond the call of duty. Although there are some incidents during the day, no one is seriously hurt. The students return to Mrs. Bates' house by helicopter and are bombarded by reporters. Melba becomes angry when one of the reporters asked her if she would rather be white. As usual, Melba fashions a thoughtful and intelligent response. One of the reporters asked Melba if she can write as well as she speaks. The man introduces himself as a reporter from the New York Post and suggests that Melba write her story. The reporter promises to get the story into print. Melba is suspicious but reminds herself that without the press it is more than likely that one or more of the students would be hanged.



The next day at school, Melba is attacked by several students. Danny is unable to get into any physical altercation with the students, and although Melba is not seriously hurt, she is injured. Melba and Danny go to the principal's office where she is told that there is no use reporting the incident, unless it was witnessed by an adult. The woman tells Melba that the soldiers do not count as adults.

The following day, Danny announces that he has been ordered to stand back slightly, to see if Melba can survive without his immediate protection. Melba realizes that she has been depending on Danny and assures herself that while Danny won't be standing next her side, he will only be a few feet away.

Someone throws what appears to be dynamite on the steps in front of Melba and Danny as they descend into a stairwell. No one is injured. Melba attends her first pep rally and is terrified about what might happen since Danny is not allowed to go with her. Three or four football players pin Melba against the wall and nearly crush her windpipe while saying they plan to make her life hell. Melba tells Danny what happened and Danny suggests that Melba learn self-defense, because "it takes a warrior to fight a battle and survive."

Melba decides that she deserves to treat herself after her first harrowing week at Central high school. Melba claims Saturday as her own, and everyone promises not to speak of integration or anything remotely negative. They also agree not to answer the phone. Grandma India surprises Melba by taking her shopping. Mother Lois also surprises Melba by telling her that Vince called to ask Mother Lois's permission to take Melba out on a date. Mother Lois says yes. Melba goes on her first real date with Vince.

Melba is worried about going back to school and is happy to see Danny waiting for her. The following day, it is apparent that the Screaming Eagles have left their posts on the curb. Instead, soldiers from the Arkansas National Guard are present and Melba thinks that they look more like spectators than soldiers. Fortunately, Danny is still inside waiting to escort Melba to and from class.

With the decreased presence of the Screaming Eagles, the taunts, threats and harassment increase dramatically. One boy throws something akin to acid in Melba's face and she is blinded. Danny grabs Melba and rushes to rinse away the solution. Melba's eyesight returns and later, an optometrist tells Mother Lois that if Danny hadn't been there, Melba may have become blind.

The next week it is announced that half of the Screaming Eagles will be removed from the school. Danny has not said anything about leaving but is acting strangely, reminding Melba to be careful and lists things she should and should not do.

Danny isn't at school the next day. Melba is scared but reminds herself of the things Danny taught her about defending herself and attempts to put some of the techniques into action.



Chapters 12-14

Chapters 12-14 Summary and Analysis

Melba is daydreaming about her 16th birthday when she is confronted by a boy. The boy grabs Melba's arm and twists it up behind her back like a cop would do to criminal who is being arrested. There are other boys approaching Melba and she is afraid. Suddenly Melba remembers a phrase she was taught: "If a fellow's got so little manhood he'd hit a woman, it's up to that woman to relieve him of what a few morsels of his masculinity remain." Melba kicks the boy in the groin and gets away. Once at homeroom, Melba approaches two boys that heckle her everyday and tells them that she plans on being at school the next day and the next day after that.

The nine students are continuously covered in the media. The articles written about them included many personal details, things that the other students used to torment them. The other students began to form factions, each assigned with a different way to torture Melba and her friends. Melba worries about Minnijean's attempts to gain permission to sing in the Christmas choral pageant. Minnijean is convinced that the other students will be less hateful once they realize how well she can sing. No matter what anyone says, Minnijean will not give up on the idea.

Melba is excited about her 16th birthday party. Only Vince shows up and Melba learns that her old friends don't want to be near her. One of Melba's closest friends from Horace Mann says that it was Melba's choice to stick her neck out and they aren't willing to die with her. Melba is no longer part of the group. To add insult to injury, one of the friends from Horace Mann is having a Christmas party on that same night and everyone but Melba has been invited.

One day before Christmas vacation, the nine students gather in the cafeteria to have lunch. The cafeteria is especially treacherous, since there are no adults around to supervise. A group of boys gather around Minnijean, taunting her and trying to trip her while she attempts to walk to a table carrying a food tray. Minnijean stands her ground and during an attempt to trip her, Minnijean's bowl of chili lands on top of two of the boys. The cafeteria workers applaud. Melba discovers later that Minnijean has been suspended. The new cheer from the segregationist students is "One nigger down and eight to go." The incident also adds fuel to the fire of those who continue to attempt the eradication of integration.

The Little Rock Nine are guests of honor at a Christmas party held by The National Organization of Delta Sigma Theta, a professional woman's sorority. Melba and Conrad's father comes over at Christmas and Melba realizes that it is time to stop wishing for him to come home. Melba will have to accept that her father has a girlfriend, and the girl begins to wish for a nice stepfather.



Minnijean is allowed to return to school. Melba learns that the White Citizens Council is offering money to anyone who can cause the students to misbehave and be expelled from school. Melba's grades began to suffer because she can't concentrate. The segregationists seem to have become stronger, and Melba finds herself becoming fatigued and nervous. Melba is surprised to see that she had written in her diary that she wishes she were dead. Melba amends the thought and asks to be invisible for the next month or two. Melba reverts to her original thoughts of death.

Melba tells Grandma India that she wishes she were dead so that the pain and torment would stop. Grandma India says that it's good idea. Melba is shocked and repeats herself. Grandma India, says once again, that she thinks it's a good idea and wants to know how Melba plans to do it. Melba is horrified when Grandma India says that the segregationists will be thrilled if she dies and begins to construct imaginary headlines regarding Melba's death. Melba gets the point and realizes that dying won't solve anything. Grandmother and granddaughter make a standing date to spend time together praying, playing games, or reading the newspapers.

Mother Lois issues a standing invitation to Vince to attend Sunday dinner. The action surprises Melba, who quickly realizes that she has not been spending much time with Vince and finds they have little in common.

The students continue to be attacked and Minnijean is falsely accused of attacking a boy, throwing a purse at a girl, and is expelled. Three white students are finally expelled for actions against the blacks, including one that had pushed Gloria down a flight of stairs.

Minnijean is awarded a scholarship by the National NAACP to attend a prestigious new school in New York. Although Minnijean is happy to have the opportunity, she is sad to be leaving her friends, almost as if she is jumping ship. Melba continues to suffer from the abuse of the white students. School officials will do nothing to help. Melba believes that only the warrior in her survives; the real Melba has run away to hide.

A boy named Andy continues to torture Melba, spewing threats and doling out physical abuse. Melba is afraid of Andy and tries to avoid him. One afternoon, Melba becomes distracted by her thoughts and suddenly remembers that Danny warned her to keep focused or else she was apt to make big mistakes. Melba makes a big mistake by standing alone at one of the school entrances. Andy yells to Melba from down the street, saying he's going to kill her. Melba is terrified. A blond-haired boy steps out of his car and approaches Melba. The boy, named Link, tells Melba that he is going to shout and curse at her so Andy can hear. Link will threaten Melba, and meanwhile will lay his keys on the trunk of the car so Melba can take them and get away. Melba starts to argue knowing what might happen to Link if Andy finds out. Link tells Melba that she has no choice, and he intends to kill her. Melba takes the car and flees.



Chapters 15-18

Chapters 15-18 Summary and Analysis

Grandma India and Mother Lois are worried about Link's car being seen in the yard. They cover the car and tell Melba that she did what she could under the circumstances. Link calls and Melba arranges to return the car.

The next day at school, Melba ends up being trapped in the cafeteria with nearly 1000 students. A group of boys, including Link, heckle Melba. Melba attempts to sit quietly and read while the boys hurl threats, milk cartons, and a golf ball which hits Melba in the head. For every attempt, for every threat, Melba simply says "Thank you." The boys are confused. Melba is angry that Link would participate with the boys, especially after he had saved her once and had made a point to be nice to her. After the boys leave, Melba realizes that the peaceful actions she'd learned from her book on Gandhi really work.

Link calls later that night and attempts to explain. Melba does not trust Link. Link tries to convince Melba that his actions kept the other boys from attacking her in the cafeteria. To prove he is trustworthy, Link tells Melba about the boys' plans to "get her" the following day and tells her which areas of the school to avoid. Melba makes an excuse to get off the phone. Grandma India and Mother Lois are both suspicious of Link's motives. Melba is unsure but keeps reminding herself that Link had saved her from Andy once before. Melba would not defy Grandma India and Mother Lois, but Link is on the inside and perhaps it is worth the risk to trust Link if he could help her to survive.

As a school year progresses, the segregationists ramp up their efforts to have Melba and her friends expelled. The group's desperate acts became obvious, which makes their traps easier to avoid. Link calls Melba every night. Although Grandma India and Mother Lois are unhappy about the situation, Link proves himself to be trustworthy and continues to give Melba inside information. Link swears Melba to secrecy, and no one other than Melba's mother and grandmother knows about Link and their arrangement. Link says he sometimes feels guilty because he is betraying his friends and family by helping Melba but feels that the segregationists are wrong. The friendship takes on a cloak-and-dagger feel.

Because of all of the turmoil at Central, many of the senior activities are canceled. Link has been looking forward to the activities for a long time and becomes extremely angry over the cancellations. Link begins to blame Melba and her friends for ruining the school's reputation and his plans. Link finally calms down, and things seem to go back to normal.

Link calls and asks Melba to meet him. Link says he needs help and wants Melba to meet him. Melba hesitates and then fabricates a lie to get out of the house. It is the first time Melba has ever lied to her mother and grandmother. Link takes Melba to meet Nana Healey, a black woman who worked for Link's family all of his life. Nana is sick



and refuses to see a doctor. Link asks Melba to help him convince the old woman to seek help. Link thinks Nana has tuberculosis. When Nana became sick, Link's parents put her out and refuse to help the woman that devoted her entire life to their family. Link buys Nana's food, but the woman refuses to take money. When Melba sees how Link behaves toward Nana, she feels guilty for ever doubting him. Melba decides that she must help Link get medical care for Nana. Melba confesses to Grandma India and Mother Lois about her lie, and about Nana's problem. After the anger subsides, Grandma India agrees to visit Nana on her weekly trips to North Little Rock.

Melba finds a doctor to examine Nana. Link's suspicions were a correct - Nana is dying. Melba is faced with breaking the news to Link. Link is devastated and doesn't know what to do. Link's parents never paid Social Security and Nana has no money or family.

Link warns Melba that the segregationists are making last-ditch efforts to ensure the remaining eight students receive expulsions before the end of the school year. There are rumors that the segregationists are going to attack someone's family. Mother Lois is informed that her teaching contract will not be renewed unless she removes Melba from Central High School. Mother Lois is offered a teaching job in Oklahoma, although her employment record is pristine. The school board tells Mother Lois that they will extend her contract and give her a substantial raise if she removes Melba from Central High School.

Mother Lois makes several pleas to get her job back but is refused. The banks began to call about late mortgage and car payments and without credit at the grocery store the cupboards become bare. Link's predictions came true. Both Grandma India and Mother Lois decide that all polite action has been taken and there is no choice but to contact the media. The story about Mother Lois losing her job hits the wire services and is published around the country. There are a tremendous number of phone calls made to the house, as well as the school. The school administrator still does not offer to renew the teaching contract. Mother Lois goes to the local bishop for help. Suddenly, Mother Lois' contract is reinstated. For the first time in a very long time there is joy in the Patillo house.

The segregationists continue to attack with vehemence. One target in particular is Ernie, a senior who is practicing for graduation. The segregationists are convinced that they will be able to get Ernie expelled before graduation. As the end of the school year grows closer, there are National Guardsmen in the hallways once again. It is obvious that the guardsmen are only there because of their orders and do not support the integration.

School is out and although there is no grand celebration, Melba and the other seven students have reason to rejoice. Melba's only worry now is that Ernie gets through graduation safely. Melba is upset when Mother Lois says that none of the other black students are allowed to attend graduation or the commencement dinner. Melba is upset at first but realizes the Mother Lois is right, the police need to be able to focus on protecting Ernie.



Melba has her own celebration by burning school papers. Grandma India tells Melba that one day she will be grateful for all she has endured. Ernie graduates from Central High School and is whisked away by police. Link calls Melba next day to tell her that Nana Healey has died. Link is inconsolable. Link tells Melba that he wants her to accompany him to Boston because he's going to be attending Harvard. Melba says she cannot go. Link reminds Melba that there is a price on her head, and he's afraid for her life. Link leaves and Melba knows in her heart that she will never see Link again.

During the summer, the Little Rock Nine, including Minnijean, have a whirlwind tour of the North. Although the group had been treated like trash in the south, in the north they are treated like celebrities. Melba and Minnijean even get to see Johnny Mathis, their long time idol.

Back in Arkansas, the school integration program is falling apart. A federal judge grants a stay in the integration order, which would delay the program for three and half years. The NAACP appeals the decision and wins. In retaliation for the victory, Governor Faubus closes down all of the public schools. The racism becomes so violent and prevalent in the area that two of the students' families are forced to move out of the area. Many people lose their jobs and their homes. Grandma India is diagnosed with leukemia and dies at the end of October. Melba is devastated.

The NAACP sends letters across the country asking for families to provide safe haven for the remaining black students so they may finish their education. Melba is sent to Santa Rosa, California to the home of Dr. George McCabe, a professor at San Francisco State University, and his wife Carol. Melba is scared when she sees that the family is white. Dr. and Mrs. McCabe are nurturing, politically conscious Quakers who succeed in building a bridge for Melba. With love and support of the McCabes and Mother Lois, Melba enters college. Central eventually accepts integration once more, in 1960. Only two black students were permitted to attend. Carlotta Walls and Jefferson Thomas eventually graduate from the school, following in the footsteps of Ernest Green.

In 1962 Melba meets, John, a white soldier, who she eventually marries. Together they have a daughter. Link is jealous of the interracial marriage and Melba never hears from him again. Eventually Melba and John break up because he wants a housewife and Melba wants to be a news reporter. Melba reflects on all that she has learned during her experiences at Central High School.

In 1987, the Little Rock Nine attend a reunion in their honor. It is the first time in 30 years that the group has been together. Little Rock has changed drastically in 30 years and Melba confesses that she would not be able to find her way around the city. Little Rock has a black mayor; Noble's brother Conrad is the first black captain of the Arkansas state troopers, the same group of police which prevented the students from entering Central High on the first day. The group that once raised the ire of state officials has the attention of Governor Bill Clinton who is at the school to greet them.

Reporters lob questions at the nine students. Someone says that Governor Faubus has retired to a small town in Arkansas. In an interview, Faubus said he would do the same

things all over again. The Little Rock Nine said they would, too. Seeing Central High School brings a flood of memories for everyone. Melba feels terrific fear, apprehension, and is suddenly transported back to 1957. The doors of the school open and out steps a young black student, who introduces himself as the president of the student body Council.



Characters

Melba Pattillo

Melba was born on Pearl Harbor Day, December 7, 1941. On that day, the Pattillo family knew that this baby girl would be a part of great change. Melba was almost robbed of that chance when medical staff at the hospital neglected to give Melba necessary care for a head infection and she nearly died.

Melba grows up to be a intelligent and well spoken young woman, full of big dreams, strong will, and unshakable faith. Melba is tall for her age, very pretty, sensitive, a loyal friend, committed student, and deeply devoted to her family which includes her mother, Lois, a seventh-grade English teacher; father, Howell, a railroad worker; Conrad, a brother; and Grandma India, the matriarch of the family. Each person helps shape Melba into a young woman who is able to combat the horrors of racism while never losing her faith or herself.

Melba suffers greatly for her choice to become one of the Little Rock Nine. Through it all, Melba learns a great deal about herself in the face of tremendous adversity. There are times when Melba wants to give up but is encouraged by friends, sympathetic strangers, and most of all, her family.

Melba survives the year at Central High School and goes on to California to finish out her education after the Governor closes all the schools. Melba graduates from college, marries and has a child, and in 1987, gathers at Central High School to celebrate the triumph of the Little Rock Nine.

India Peyton

India Peyton is a strong woman with a great deal of faith and love of her God and her family. India, referred to in the story as "Grandma India," joins her daughter, Lois, in being the backbone of the Pattillo family, supplying Melba with as much support and advice as possible.

India is a widow that lives with her daughter and grandchildren. The woman is very proper and believes in education, respect, and good manners. India never graduated from high school and works as a maid. The woman is self-educated and highly intelligent. The children spend a great deal of time with India when their mother is studying for her master's degree. India helps to ensure that the children are raised properly and that they learn to take pride in who they are. Early in the story, Melba relays Grandma India's commitment to working with Melba so that she would know how to read, write, and do the basics of multiplication tables by the time she was four years old. India also stands guard over the family in times of great peril, staying awake at night with a shotgun on her lap to keep away intruders and hate mongers who would otherwise harm or kill the family. India is also an expert marksman, having learned to



shoot to injure and not kill during the early part of her marriage when she was often alone in a rural area.

India is a force to be reckoned with and is a constant reminder of what is right and wrong. Even in the face of utter despair, India supports Melba in a way no one else can. India contracts leukemia and dies the autumn after Melba's year at Central High School.

Lois Pattillo

Lois Pattillo is a seventh-grade English teacher in the Little Rock school system, mother to Melba and Conrad, wife to Howell, and daughter to India Peyton. Lois is a remarkable woman, proving that it is possible to face adversity head on and succeed. Lois is a strong figure in the lives of her children, leading by example and showing that it is possible to get what one wants if only one is willing to work for it. It is this attitude that gives Lois the strength to go for her master's degree in a time when such educational status was rare for a black woman. Lois' formidable strength is also shown in her support of integration and Melba's part in it. As a mother, Lois is often terrified for Melba's safety but manages to get through, doing all she can to protect her home, family, and admirable ideals.

Howell Pattillo

Howell Pattillo is Melba's father.

Conrad Pattillo

Conrad Pattillo is Melba's younger brother.

Elizabeth Eckford

Elizabeth Eckford is a petite, quiet, private girl, who is a highly intelligent and serious student. One of the students integrated into Central High School.

Ernest Green

Ernest Green is a senior boy with a warm smile. Ernest is the oldest of the integrated students and a member of Melba's church. The first black student to graduate from Central High School.

Gloria Ray

Gloria Ray is a member of Melba's church. The girl is soft spoken and delicate. One of the students integrated into Central High School.



Carlotta Walls

Carlotta Walls is a sleek athlete full of adventure and a good attitude. One of the students integrated into Central High School.

Minnijean Brown

Minnijean Brown is one of Melba's best friends. Minnijean is a lot like Melba, a tall girl with big, bright dreams. One of the students integrated into Central High School.

Terrence Roberts

Terrence Roberts is a junior, a friend of Melba's since the first grade. Terrence is very verbal, funny, and intelligent. One of the students integrated into Central High School.

Jefferson Thomas

Jefferson Thomas is an athlete who is soft-spoken, highly intelligent, and has the gift of making subtle jokes that cause people to giggle at inappropriate times. One of the students integrated into Central High School.

Thelma Mothershed

Thelma Mothershed is petite, pale, and a close friend of Melba's. Thelma wears thick, horn rimmed glasses and suffers from a heart condition. One of the students integrated into Central High School.

Objects/Places

Central High School

Central High School is the high school attended by the Little Rock Nine in 1956, the first school in Arkansas to be integrated as a result of the U.S. Supreme Court ruling in the case of *Brown vs. The Board of Education*.

Central High School was located on Park Street between Fourteenth and Sixteenth Streets in a white neighborhood. Melba often thought that Central High School resembled a castle, full of grand possibilities and magic. The truth was completely different.

On the first day the Little Rock Nine attempted to enter Central High School, their way was blocked by a mob of thousands of angry citizens as well as the local police. One girl, Elizabeth Eckford, made it to the police line but was denied entry. The mob harassed and threatened to kill Elizabeth and chased Melba and Mother Lois down the street with a noose.

There were over 1,000 students at Central, many of them were the children of affluent and powerful white families who were also members of segregationist societies. The atmosphere was terrifying to the integrated students who were forced to have guides deliver them to their classes. The mob bribed the police and broke down barricades to get at the students.

The 101st Airborne was responsible for the protection of the students. Despite the presence of a large number of soldiers, the students faced a great deal of mental, emotional and physical abuse. The school officials did little to nothing to help rectify the situation. The students were often whisked away from the school in police or military vehicles or via helicopter.

In 1987, the Little Rock Nine reconvened at Central High School only to find that the student body president was a black student, signifying great change.

Brown vs. The Board of Education Decision

Brown vs. The Board of Education Decision was the landmark ruling on segregation that took place on May 17, 1954. The crux of the case was a lawsuit between Brown and the Board of Education of Topeka, Kansas. Oliver Brown was one of thirteen parents who filed a class action lawsuit in 1951 on behalf of twenty students who had been denied access to white elementary schools. Although segregation was not required in Topeka, it was permitted. The families, recruited by the Topeka NAACP, filed a lawsuit, saying that it was unfair that their children should be required to walk great distances in order to receive a lesser education. The families claimed that the former ruling on the segregation of schools was a violation of the children's civil rights.

The suit eventually supported 200 plaintiffs who were fighting for equal education of black children. *Brown vs. The Board of Education* was not the first lawsuit of its kind and in total represented five lawsuits from four states.

The attorney for the plaintiffs was Thurgood Marshall, an advocate for civil rights and the man who would become the first black justice to serve on the U.S. Supreme Court.

Marshall stood on behalf of the thirteen parents, including: Oliver Brown, Darlene Brown, Lena Carper, Marguerite Emerson, Sadie Emmanuel, Shirley Fleming, Shirley Hodison, Zelma Henderson, Maude Lawton, Alma Lewis, Iona Richardson, and Lucinda Todd. It was decided that Oliver Brown should represent the group as the father of a complete family. One man would provide a single face to the Supreme Court, thereby making the case more personal.

The Supreme Court ruled that the previous law of *Plessy v. Ferguson* of 1896, was unconstitutional and desegregation was ordered to take place. *Brown vs. The Board of Education* was the springboard to the Civil Rights Movement.

Pattillo Home

Pattillo Home - Located on Cross Street in Little Rock, the Pattillo home served as both a haven and a prison to Melba and her family during the height of the integration crisis in the mid-1950s.

Little Rock, Arkansas

Little Rock, Arkansas - Site of Central High School, the first school in Arkansas to integrate black students.

U.S. Supreme Court

U.S. Supreme Court - Site in Washington, D.C. at which the federal case involving *Brown vs. The Board of Education of Topeka, Kansas* was decided. The Little Rock Nine also went to the U.S. Supreme Court where they sat and talked with their friend and supporter, famed attorney Thurgood Marshall, who would eventually become an Associate Justice on the Supreme Court.

Little Rock Federal Building

Little Rock Federal Building - Site of the first hearing with the nine students where the judge overruled the Governor's attempt at barring integration.



Mrs. Bates' Home

Mrs. Bates' Home - Site of many meetings and dinners for the Little Rock Nine.

Horace Mann

Horace Mann - Segregated school attended by the Little Rock Nine before Central High School.

Philander Smith

Philander Smith - A community college in Little Rock, where the nine students went to school during the halted integration.

Santa Rosa, California

Santa Rosa, California - where Melba was sent to finish her education. Home to Dr. George and Mrs. Carol McCabe.



Themes

Racism

The central theme in "Warriors Don't Cry" by Melba Pattillo Beals is racism. The work brilliantly displays the attitudes and various violent acts that occurred in Little Rock, Arkansas in the 1950s, even though much of the story revolves around the group of nine students that were integrated into Central High School.

Racism was already a fact of life in the South, but its prevalence became internationally recognized when Melba Pattillo and the other students faced grave danger in order to integrate into the white school system. There were also blacks that objected to integration and were not supportive of the Supreme Court's decision in Brown vs. The Board of Education.

The students and families in the story are subjected to everything from threats to horrific violence including attempted rape and attempted murder. The grandmother in the story, Grandma India is forced to stand guard throughout the night with a shotgun on her lap to prevent mobs from breaking into their house and lynching Melba and the rest of the family.

Although the students persevere and complete the school year at Central, the triumph accomplished little if anything in the way of changing the minds of the segregationists. The Little Rock Nine became international celebrities for their heroics and eventually returned to Little Rock to see that things had begun to change for the positive.

Fear

One tool constantly used by the segregationists was the element of fear. Fear permeated the lives of the black students and their families every moment of the day and night. It was fear that almost caused people to give up the hope of ever realizing desegregation.

Some examples of fear mongering include: physical, mental and emotional harm; being cast out by friends, neighbors and colleagues; having to live with constant threats and acts of hatred; attempted rape; attempted murder; ongoing physical abuse by students and adults; loss of work; loss of freedom; and fear of what the future might bring.

One cannot imagine the amount of fear felt by the students as they entered Central High School for the first time. The scene was overwhelming. and seven of the original sixteen students chose not to participate in the program due to the fear of what might happen to them and their families. Many were afraid to die.

The act of being held prisoner in one's house also created a fear in that going outside, even in a group, did not ensure safety. The fear also caused a lack of trust. Melba was



afraid of Link's motives and it took the episode with Nana Healey to fully trust the boy who had saved her life on more than one occasion.

When the group reunited at Central 30 years after the integration, Melba recalls being filled with intense fear, of being terrified all over again of what had lain behind those double doors leading inside.

Faith

Faith plays a significant role in "Warriors Don't Cry." The students and families had to exercise faith in each other, their supporters and protectors such as the NAACP, President Eisenhower, the Screaming Eagles, and Thurgood Marshall—and in justice. The main way in which faith appears throughout the story is through the characters' faith in God.

The Pattillos, like many people in the community, practiced a strong commitment to faith in God. The Little Rock Nine were members of various community churches and it was often members of those churches, including a local bishop, who stepped in to help when no one else would. Grandma India had instilled great faith in Lois, and in turn, both women along with Melba's father, instilled great faith in Melba and Conrad.

There were many times throughout the story when Melba is faced with what seems to be one hopeless and terrifying situation after another. It is only Melba's faith in God that gets her through these times, in the way of inner strength, beliefs, and answered prayers. Melba always remembered what she had been taught, that God was always with her and that God never loses one of his flock. It was this faith that helped the children and families of Little Rock survive this horrible time and come out the other side.

Style

Perspective

The perspective of the author in "Warriors Don't Cry" is that of one of the nine students who suffered greatly in order to have integration in schools in Arkansas in the 1950s. While many tales have been written about this time, there are none that can truly explore and depict what happened during that time, the emotions the experience brought, or the price the students paid, more than someone who was in the thick of it.

Melba Pattillo Beals started to write "Warriors Don't Cry" when she was eighteen but discovered that the wounds were still too fresh and too painful to face. Years later, the wounds were still there but had begun to ease and the pain wasn't as severe. The chronology of the book is accurate, having been derived from the author's diaries, newspaper clippings, and the memories of those involved. The words of a teenage girl being attacked because of the color of her skin are more potent than any objective news story or even the recollections of those on the sidelines. The news headlines do give a broad perspective on the legal aspects of the case as well as an overview of how the case affected the rest of the world.

Tone

The tone used in "Warriors Don't Cry" is purely subjective and is written in the first person to convey emotions and experiences otherwise not available through a less personal accounting of the events that took place in Little Rock.

Melba Pattillo's voice is strong, even in the moments of deepest hurt and darkest despair. The character of the girl is impeccable and even in those worst moments, the tone does not reflect hatred or the need for revenge as one might expect. Instead, Melba has been taught to believe - and to practice - the theory that all are God's children and must be forgiven for their sins. In this teaching, Grandma India surely knew that those negative emotions, if permitted to linger, would gain the power to destroy everything they'd worked so hard to achieve.

After Melba left school that year, the tone changed to one of temporary relief of having survived the experience. Life would not be easy but there were times when Melba could enjoy the peace and freedom allowed by the absence of school. The tone of true healing began when Melba was sent to Santa Rosa, California to live with the McCabes, a white family who stood against racial violence and who helped Melba to cross the bridge into a society that would recognize her worth.

The overall tone of the book clearly conveys that Melba's involvement in Civil Rights did not end the day she walked out of Central High School.

Structure

"Warriors Don't Cry" by Melba Pattillo Beals is a non-fiction accounting of the integration of Central High School in Little Rock, Arkansas in 1956. The book is 226 pages in length and consists of 18 chapters. The shortest chapter is 6 pages in length; the longest chapter is 22 pages in length. The average length of the chapters is 12.5 pages.

The first six chapters of the book provide the background of the Pattillo family as well as the impetus for the Civil Rights movement, including the activities of the NAACP and the basic details surrounding the landmark U.S. Supreme Court Ruling on Brown vs. The Board of Education. The balance of the book is dedicated to the rest of the series of events that took place over the course of the school year at Central High School and shortly thereafter.

The chronology of the book is clear and concise, due in part to the author's diaries and clippings saved by the Pattillos during that turbulent time. Although the number of events were many and the battle long, the author manages to abbreviate that time into a clean, easy-to-follow time line that hit on all the important news related items as well as her own personal struggles.



Quotes

"My grandmother India always said God had pointed a finger at our family, asking for just a bit more discipline, more praying, and more hard work, because He had blessed us with good health and good brains."

Page 1

"With the passage of time, I became increasingly aware of how all of the adults around me were living with constant fear and apprehension."

Page 7

"What if Grandma is wrong? What if God can't fix things. What if the white people are always been gonna be in charge. God, now, please give me some sign you are there and you are going to do something to change my life. Please hurry!"

Melba Pattillo, age 8

Page 11

"It was like a nightmare - suddenly my joy and freedom ended."

Page 23

"Dear diary, It's happening today. What I'm afraid of most is that they won't like me and integration won't work and Little Rock won't become like Cincinnati, Ohio."

Melba Pattillo

Page 31

"I stood motionless, stunned by the hurtful words. I searched for something to hang on to, something familiar that would comfort me or make sense, but there was nothing."

Page 35

"I felt a kind of joy and hope in the thought that one white man was willing to use his own money to call attention to the injustice we were facing."

Page 52

"I knew very well that without the church and help of the people sitting around me, I had little chance of making it through that school year. Certainly, I couldn't count on the police."

Page 53

"Today is the first time in my life I felt equal to white people. I want more of that feeling. I'll do whatever I have to do to keep feeling equal all the time."

Page 58



"The phone started to ring nonstop - calls from angry strangers spewing hatred and threats."

Page 86

"For the first time ever, Grandma places dinner on trays in front of the television so we could hear President Eisenhower speak to the nation."

Page 90

"Once the Screaming Eagles had delivered us safely inside the front door of Central High School, all of us - the soldiers, we nine students, white school officials - were standing absolutely still, as though under a spell."

Page 96

"Sixteen had always seemed to be the magic age. That signaled the beginning of freedom, when Mama and Grandma might let loose their hold and let me go out with my friends on pre-dates. But with the integration, I was nowhere near being free."

Page 141

"Our relationships with one another and the joy of our camaraderie have not changed. For me our reunion has been a rediscovery of a part of myself that was lost - a part that I want to be in touch with."

Page 225

Topics for Discussion

Was it brave or impulsive for Melba to sign up for Central High School? Explain.

What might have happened if Minnijean was allowed to participate in the school choral program?

What might have happened if Thelma had had a heart attack?

How might the actions of the Little Rock Nine have affected the futures of their families?

Do you think Melba's passive aggressive behavior was successful in thwarting her attackers? Discuss.

What do you think would have happened if Melba had run away with Link?

What might you have done differently if you had been one of the Little Rock Nine?

Grandma India told Melba that it was important to forgive the people who had done her harm. If you were in Melba's situation, could you forgive?