

Ruby Bridges

Ruby Bridges lived in New Orleans in the south of the USA where African Americans had been segregated from white Americans. Black children had not been allowed to go to all-white schools and racist violence was common.

In 1960 when Ruby was aged 6 the law changed to allow Black children to attend white schools where the standard of education was much better. Ruby was the only African American child brave enough to go to her new elementary school.

On her first day of school US marshals had to protect her from a violent screaming crowd who threw things at her. Only one teacher, Barbara Henry, was willing to teach Ruby: all the white parents of children in her class kept them at home. For a whole year Ruby was the only child in Barbara's class and she had to spend breaks and lunchtimes alone with her teacher. That year Ruby and Barbara never missed a single day of school.

Ruby's family suffered: her parents lost their jobs and her grandparents were evicted from their home. Every day when she went to school she had to walk past angry parents screaming at her.

Eventually the school became mixed and Ruby's nephews and nieces went to the same school. Ruby later became a travel agent and in 1999, aged 45, she set up the Ruby Bridges Foundation which aims to end racism and prejudice.

She says: "Racism is a grown-up disease and we must stop using our children to spread it."