

Ruby Bridges and Her Morally Courageous Acts

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For most of us, imagining our first day of school to go something like Ruby Bridges' first day is almost impossible. "On Rubys' first day, a large crowd of angry white people gathered outside the Frantz Elementary School. The people carried signs that said they didn't want black children in a white school. People called Ruby names, some wanted to hurt her" (Coles 9). Not only was Ruby only six years old when she was subjected to these acts, but she had to endure this treatment for over a year. In 1960, Ruby was one of six kids to pass a test in Louisiana that permitted them to go to previously all White schools. The two other kids that planned to go with Ruby suddenly dropped out of the program, so Ruby was all on her own.

Because of her precarious situation, Ruby Bridges is seen as a main activist in the civil rights movement and a morally courageous figure. Despite the wishes of many protesters she stuck with the plan and graduated from the previously all-White school named William Frantz. This was all in an effort to gain proper integration and fair education for Black people. Every day when walking into school she was met with people yelling racial slurs and threats. Ruby needed U.S. Marshals to escort her into school because the state police refused to, and it was too dangerous to go without someone. While in school there was no one to accompany her except for one teacher, and she had to bring her own lunch from home for the fear that she might be poisoned (Rose). However, even throughout all of these troubles she managed to defy the odds. After about a year, the school became integrated, and White and Black kids started to attend William Frantz.

As an adult, Ruby has been a civil rights activist who stands up for the rights and integration of everyone. In 1995, the former psychiatrist of the family, Robert Coles, published the children's book *The Story of Ruby Bridges*, which brought Ruby back into public attention. Ruby decided to help promote Coles' book, talking and lecturing in schools across the United States. For Ruby's efforts she was given a portion of the proceeds from the book which gave her her means to help people. She noticed that William Frantz had a lack of after-school art programs so she helped set up a few. After this, she continued "touring schools across the country telling her story and promoting cultural understanding" (Rose 2021). Then in 2005, Hurricane Katrina hit New Orleans, the city where William Frantz Elementary School is located. After this disaster, the school was left in poor shape. The plan thereafter was to tear it down, which Ruby was not pleased with. "I felt like if anybody was to save the school, it would be me," she said (Rose 2021). Ruby then campaigned to have the school put on the National Register of Historic Places, which was successful. Funds were received due to this and the school is flourishing now more than ever.

Throughout my life, Ruby has personally influenced the actions I have taken. I think about the way she treated the protesters for their actions, instead of treating them the same way they did her, she stayed calm. She believed that the protesters did not know what they were doing, so instead of getting angry and blaming them for their actions she prayed for them. In my life I try not to be prejudiced against people I barely know, and to not blame people for every little thing they do. Not everyone always thinks about the consequences of every action and the way they will influence others. One time in elementary school, when I was about the same age as Ruby when she went to first grade, I had something stolen. Of course I was upset, and tried to figure out who did it. Eventually, I found out who the culprit was, but so he did not become

ashamed I forgave him for what he did. Because of the way I handled the situation, I received my possession back and we grew to respect each other. Just like what Ruby did, forgiving was an action that allowed a better experience full of compassion rather than hate. Furthermore, she has influenced me within my academic environment. I stay grateful for the education I have received and the opportunities I have been given. Ruby, many other Black kids, and even her parents were not allowed the same formal education that many children are today. It is because of this she was sent to school, which in the end gave countless children the chance for equal education.

Ruby is a morally courageous person not only because she paved the way for integration across the United States, defying all the protesters, but she did it in such a way that is an inspiration for children across the globe. She used her courage, morals, maturity and unbreakable spirit to provide fair education for many and therefore she is a morally courageous figure. The example she sets for young people everywhere is hard to ignore, bringing the conclusion that forgiving instead of forever holding onto a useless grudge is ultimately the best course of action. She shows that in this day and age we should never take for granted the education opportunities we are given. After what Ruby Bridges did, many Americans drew the conclusion that integration was the right choice. Today it is widely believed that school should be a fun, safe place for all. As Martin Luther King Jr. once said, “The most time that kids spend away from home is in school, so our schools have to be integrated. And I know that there are arguments on both sides about that, but we’re never going to become the United States of America unless we, the people, are united” (Rose 2021).