On September 25, 1957, Carlotta Walls and her classmates, known as the **Little** **Rock** Nine, marched into Central High School surrounded by protesters and escorted by National Guardsman. They were carrying out the 1954 Supreme Court ruling in Brown versus Board of Education, which ordered the integration of all schools. Walls, at that time, now Walls LaNier, was the only woman of the Nine to graduate from central high school. She finished in 1960 and she left Arkansas and never looked back until now. Carlotta Walls LaNier just published a memoir titled, “A Mighty **Long** **Way**: My Journey to Justice at **Little** **Rock** Central High School.” Later in the program, Wikipedia founder Jimmy Wales joins us to talk about changes and how people edit entries to Wikipedia.

But first, the story of the **Little** **Rock** Nine. And as always, we want to hear from you. What are your memories of school integration? And how different are things really today? Our number here in Washington is 800-989-8255. Our email address is talk@npr.org. And you can join the conversation at our Web site, go to npr.org and click on TALK OF THE NATION.

Carlotta Walls LaNier joins us from Colorado Public Radio in Denver, Colorado. She is the youngest member of the **Little** **Rock** Nine, the only female in the group to receive a diploma from **Little** **Rock** High School and a recipient of the congressional gold medal. Thank you very much joining us.

Ms. CARLOTTA WALLS LaNIER (Author): Thank you very much for having me. Can I just correct one thing?

SEABROOK: Oh, please.

Ms. LaNIER: I am the only female of the **Little** **Rock** Nine to participate in graduation exercise. Two others that were juniors that became seniors did receive diplomas.

SEABROOK: I see.

Ms. LaNIER: But the schools were closed during that time.

SEABROOK: I see.

Ms. LaNIER: Okay.

SEABROOK: Thank you, thank you very much.

Ms. LaNIER: It’s okay.

SEABROOK: Please take us back to the moment that you made that decision that would take you to **Little** **Rock** Central high school?

Ms. LaNIER: It was a no brainier for me. I was in the ninth grade and the homeroom teacher came in and spoke about what was going to take place in school that day, at Dunbar Junior and Senior High School. And halfway down the bulletin, he stated, those of you who live at certain street boundaries and have any intentions of going to **Little** **Rock** Central High School, please sign this sheet of paper. And he put it on the first desk.

And it came around and when I received it, I signed my name and passed it on and didn’t think another thing of it. I pass this school everyday, going to the Black Junior and Senior High School. So, it was – what was there, the access to a great education, was what I wanted. And I knew I had the right to be there.

SEABROOK: Now were you one of only nine students to sign that paper or…

Ms. LaNIER: Oh, no.

SEABROOK: Oh, okay.

Ms. LaNIER: No, it was 114, I think, that had signed up and the numbers continued to dwindle. I think it was 39 students and their families that went before the superintendent of schools, Virgil Blossom, to hear how things were going to go at **Little** **Rock** Central High School. And I think, once it was stated that we could not participate in any extra-curricular activity, some students start dropping out.

SEABROOK: I still remember that your first full day of school at Central High was a few years after Brown v Board.

Ms. LaNIER: Correct.

SEABROOK: Tell us about that day. What do you remember?

Ms. LaNIER: September 25th was the day that we had the 101st Airborne, the Screaming Eagles to be our protectors. And to see to it that we did get through the door and go to our classes with as **little** interference as possible. President Eisenhower called out the 101st Airborne after a three-week stalemate between the governor of Arkansas who had called out the Arkansas National Guard initially to keep us out of the school. So this was a trump on President Eisenhower’s part.

SEABROOK: Mm-hmm.

Ms. LaNIER: So it was a great day. It was a great feeling to know that the Supreme Court decision, Brown v Board, was being upheld. A constitution was being upheld and federal government was in charge.

SEABROOK: Now - but you can’t have felt as a young teenager that day. Did it feel like it’s just a great day or weren’t you anxious, nervous, scared?

Ms. LaNIER: Well I was anxious – I was anxious mainly because we had been out of school for three weeks waiting for all these litigation to take place. And I was one whose job - as it was stated by mother and father - to do well in school. And we were two-and-a-half to three weeks behind. And I was concerned how far behind I might be. So that was what was going through my mind, to make sure that I could quickly catch up in my studies.

SEABROOK: Do you remember walking into the school flanked by National Guardsmen?

Ms. LaNIER: Yes, I surely do.

SEABROOK: And…

Ms. LaNIER: And it actually, it was a good feeling to know that they were there to make sure that we did get into school and to protect us.

SEABROOK: Now, after you began school, in your book you listed there were many distinctive groups of people at Central High based on their views of segregation at the time - the tormentors, the sympathetic students, the silent ones. Tell me about these groups?

Ms. LaNIER: Well, it was that group that were the tormentors. They - that was their job every day, to make it miserable for us. And we knew who they were. We could see them walking down the halls. We could see them in our classrooms. There was the group of young people that or students that I think if school had started correctly, where we could have entered on the first day, I think that there would have been a group of students there that would have welcomed us.

But because of what had taken place, they were also on a fine line there - a tight rope. They would be harassed by that group that - whose job was to make it miserable. And then there was that group, the silent majority that just looked straight ahead and did not comment one **way** or another. And I think maybe if they had spoken up, I think that would have changed a number of things.

SEABROOK: What things? What, what, what was the hardest thing? Was it those silent people?

Ms. LaNIER: The hardest – well, stay in safe. Even though we had the National Guard, the 101st Airborne there, children will be children. And they will find a **way** to it miserable for you. So you had to be on the defensive side all day **long**. So that part was rather difficult, trying to maneuver your **way** through the hallways. And then once you got to your class, to make sure that you weren’t sitting in spittle or glue or someone flipping an ink pen at you or what have you. So those things were, you know, you just could not keep your mind focused on your classroom, in class activity.

SEABROOK: Did you find that any students reached out to you or were there those that try to hold up in this? xxx

…you know, you just could not keep your mind focused on your classroom and class activity.

SEABROOK: Did you find that any students reached out to you? Were there those that tried to hold you up in this?

Ms. LaNIER: There were some that were on the quiet side that reached out, especially in classes that – such as gym class or my lab partner in biology, when we were, you know, put together. Then we had to work together. And there were a number of people, but again, they could not be outwardly friendly with me.

If - some people have asked, you know, did you get phone calls in the evening and chat about what took place in your algebra class or your Spanish class? And the answer is always no. I did not have a normal teenage life in high school.

SEABROOK: It’s hard to imagine having to worry about sitting on a tack every day, all day, every class.

Ms. LaNIER: Yes. Well, that was a part of what we had to do, and you did it. You know, that was a part - that was a focus that you had to consider. So some handle it better than others. And I was just one who was determined to stay there and get the education that was afforded to me.

SEABROOK: We’re getting a lot of calls in. The number for people out there is 800-989-TALK, 800-989-8255. And we’re going to go to our first caller. His name is Ed in Forest Hill, California. Hi. You’re on TALK OF THE NATION.

ED (Caller): Hi. I wanted to state that that was the day I learned my father was a racist. And I wanted to thank your young lady there because that’s how I remember her, for teaching me that there was a better **way**.

Ms. LaNIER: Thank you.

SEABROOK: Well, how did you find out about your father? What happened?

ED: Well, he forced the four of us, the children in the family, to sit down and watch this while he railed at the television for this breaking of the American **way** and how he felt like life was ruined and that our nation was gone and that he was going to have to do something about it.

And he worked in the national space race at the time, and he was believing he was a patriot and fighting communism and that we were wasting time worrying about this. And he used words that I hadn’t heard before, actually, in a rather protective life, and it was a frightening situation for me as a young child watching…

SEABROOK: Thank you.

ED: …because I was born in ’47. But it was also at that moment in my life where I realized I didn’t want to be like him.

SEABROOK: Thank you for your call, Ed. We’re talking with Carlotta Walls LaNier. She was the youngest member of the **Little** **Rock** Nine. Her book is called “A Mighty **Long** **Way**: My Journey to Justice at **Little** **Rock** Central High School.”

We’re taking your comments. What are your memories of school integration? The number is 800-989-8255. Also, you can send us email. The address is talk@npr.org. I’m Andrea Seabrook. It’s TALK OF THE NATION from NPR News.

(Soundbite of music)

SEABROOK: This is TALK OF THE NATION. I’m Andrea Seabrook in Washington. In September of 1957, Carlotta Walls was 14. She and eight other black classmates enrolled in an elite, white high school in **Little** **Rock**, Arkansas, and they became icons of the civil rights movement.

We’re talking to Carlotta Walls LaNier this hour. It’s taken some 40 years for her to tell her story, and the result is her memoir. It’s called “A Mighty **Long** **Way**: My Journey to Justice at **Little** **Rock** Central High School.”

We want to hear from you. What are your memories of school integration, and how different are things today, really? Our number here in Washington is 800-989- 8255. The email address is talk@npr.org. You can also go to npr.org and click on TALK OF THE NATION.

Carlotta Walls LaNier, aside from the torment at school, there were attacks outside of school, the Labor Day bombing, as well as the bombing of your own home right before graduation. Tell us about these.

Ms. LaNIER: That’s correct, and there had been a bombing in the fall of some city officials’ homes and cars. And that was resolved in three days, and they found and arrested the perpetrators. In February, just a few months prior to my graduation, I went to sleep one evening about 9:00, 9:30, and 20 minutes later or so, I heard this loud explosion, and it shook me, and the smell of dynamite.

I didn’t know it was dynamite at the time, but I soon discovered that that’s what it was. And that was probably the scariest time of the three years, not knowing whether my family was safe. I was at one end of the home, and they were at the opposite end. It was just my mother and my sisters there. My father was working at his father’s place because of the fact that once he would get a job and they would find out it was a father of one of the kids at Central High School, he would lose his job. So he was trying to make ends meet, and he was not at home that night.

SEABROOK: We have a question from a listener by email, saying: Have you seen any of the tormentors since that time?

Ms. LaNIER: A few. We were on “The Oprah Winfrey Show” many years ago, and she found a few of them, and a couple were there to apologize for what they did during that time.

SEABROOK: It sounds like it would be a difficult conversation.

Ms. LaNIER: Well, it was interesting, to say the least. My concern was had they – it was pretty much what Ed had said about his father. One person on the show stated that she was taught at home to hate us and to make it miserable for us. And as she grew up, she realized those **ways** needed to be changed. And my concern was had she passed on that on to her children, and had she broken the chain of hatred. And she said she had.

SEABROOK: That question was from Brett in Sacramento, California. We have another caller here, Faye, in San Francisco. Hi. You’re on TALK OF THE NATION.

FAYE (Caller): Hello.

SEABROOK: Hi, go ahead.

FAYE: Well, I wanted to comment, because I had a similar experience, although it was 10 years later in Mississippi. I was one of the early integrators in my high school in Batesville, Mississippi. There were six of us in my class. And as you described, every day was constant tension and name-calling and isolation. Nobody spoke to you, except to call you a bad name. It was that **way** for the, I think, two years I was there, until I graduated in 1969. And what had happened recently that was sort of interesting is that since 1969, there have been reunions at every milestone, 10 years, 20 years, 25 years. We were never invited back to the reunion.

Ms. LaNIER: Never invited. I know.

(Soundbite of laughter)

FAYE: And they always had it at the country club, which, of course, was segregated. This year, for the first time, we all received invitations, out of the blue.

Ms. LaNIER: Yes. We did, too, for the 50th anniversary.

FAYE: Is that right?

Ms. LaNIER: Yes.

FAYE: Did you attend?

Ms. LaNIER: Unfortunately, I couldn’t. I did send my money in to go, but the governor was having a reception at the same time, and we were committed to that reception on that day and time. So unfortunately, I couldn’t go. But I had really planned to go and take my husband.

FAYE: Well, I did go. We all made a pact that if one would go, we would all go. And we all attended this past June.

SEABROOK: And?

FAYE: We were - I have to say, we were well-received. The people who planned it and who reached out to us were very remorseful. The others were friendly, but nobody wanted to talk about anything that happened back then. They just kind of wanted to sweep it under the rug.

SEABROOK: Thank you so much for your call, Faye. Appreciate it.

FAYE: Thank you.

SEABROOK: Let’s go to Christie in San Antonio, Texas, with a question for you, Carlotta.

CHRISTIE (Caller): Hi, how are you both doing?

SEABROOK: Go ahead. Mm-hmm.

CHRISTIE: Yeah, first of all, I wanted to know if you would enlighten a bit. It sounds like such a trying time that you had to have come from such a morally and loving base foundation being your family, and what this did as a unit, how this brought you all together or anything that you or – it just seems like we’ve lost so much of that in these days. And I just - if there’s anything that stood out, such a God-fearing time for you, if you could explain.

SEABROOK: Thanks for your call.

Ms. LaNIER: Well, it was really the support and strength of my family that enabled me to continue to do what I was doing. We knew we were doing the right thing, and we did have loving, supportive parents. And we had loving and supportive communities, as well. So that helped a great deal.

I have to agree with you. We’ve lost some of that today. And I think parents are supportive, but I don’t think they are as engaged in schools as they should be.

SEABROOK: I want to turn to your book, and specifically why it took you so **long** to tell your story. The **Little** **Rock** Nine were approached numerous times to tell the stories - in 1977, after your father passed away, again in 1981. You were approached these times. What made you finally come forward?

Ms. LaNIER: It was after the 30th anniversary. It took 30 years for all nine of us to gather together again. And we gathered in **Little** **Rock**, Arkansas, due to a fall meeting by the NAACP, and they invited the nine of us back. And it was at that time that some of those memories started flooding back, and we all had children. And we had the opportunity to meet the governor, who was at that time Governor Clinton, and who invited us to his - to the mansion. And we sat there that night and talked about many things, and he imparted to us that he was 11 years old when that took place. And he remembered all of the things that he saw on television.

And I sensed, listening to him and listening to Hillary Clinton, that they were genuine, sincere people. And I also recognized that they could walk with all people. And the questions that he was asking us, again, were sincere, and I got back to Denver, Colorado, and I started getting these phone calls from various teachers who had seen us on CNN and requested my presence in some of their classes.

And I thought that maybe I should do this and see how it works with talking to young people that - at the age that I was at that time. And that started me talking to high school students. And from there, it took a **long** time, though, I must admit, to get to this point of writing my memoir because I had pushed so much into the recesses of my mind, and it had to be pulled out. And it was painful.

So it just took a while. And you know, I was not taught to hate. So I didn’t hate anyone. I felt that there were a number of ignorant people that were doing some very ignorant and stupid things to us, and a lot of it had to do with how they were raised. And also, once you have been just in a small cocoon for so **long**, and you never had the opportunity to meet other people and go places and experience other things, you're kind of stuck in time and I felt sorry for them, to be honest with you. So - but I still did not want to relive all of the pain and harassment and misery and so forth.

But my children are grown now and I have done quite a bit of speaking to colleges and high schools and had been asked many times to tell - give your account of the **Little** **Rock** Nine. So often we're known as one entity, the **Little** **Rock** Nine, but there are nine distinct personalities with nine different stories, and this book here is mine.

SEABROOK: When you finally did sit down to write the book, how - what did you do to access those memories?

Ms. LaNIER: I was questioned a great deal by a friend who I was constantly been requested to come and speak to her class every quarter at University of Denver, and she took the time to lay out a plan to see about putting my thoughts down on paper. And I'm forever grateful to Dr. Margaret Whitt for doing that.

We took it as far as the two of us could, and that was the process that started it. And fortunately I was able to meet up with Lisa Frazier Page, who dug deeper, I guess you could say.

SEABROOK: I'm very interested to get your thoughts about today's public school system.

But let's start with a call from Glenn(ph) in Walterboro, South Carolina. Hello there, Glenn.

GLENN (Caller): Hi, how are you?

SEABROOK: Good. Go ahead.

GLENN: Good. Well, I find - I'm teaching at a public school and I have taught on both the elementary and high school level. And I find that the elementary children, when left alone, will befriend anyone that they like. It could be black, blue, green, purple. Not a problem. But somewhere along the road, the parents teach them that this is wrong for them to do. And so by the time they reach the high school level, the students have segregated themselves again. You know, there are one or two who will step across the bounds, but for the most part they will hang with their own kind.

And I don't know what we can do in those middle years to try to get the parents to leave kids alone and allow them to love people for people.

SEABROOK: Thank you so much for your call, Glenn. This is exactly what - where we were going with our conversation with Carlotta Walls LaNier.

What do you think of this? The public schools look almost resegregated.

Ms. LaNIER: Resegregated, especially in the inner cities. And it could be many reasons. It could also go back to the same reason I wanted to go to **Little** **Rock** Central High School, which was an access to the best education available in **Little** **Rock**.

Some people are moving away from the inner city for that reason. There are some people who are moving away from the metropolitan areas to be in residential areas that will receive better increase on their homes. There are many reasons why people are moving.

But the education of metropolitan cities, I - you know, people pay taxes to - for various reasons, whether it's for the highways, streets and so forth or - and for schools and for health. And I think we need to stand up and voice our displeasure of what is happening in the schools and demand the good education for our children. And I think you will have less people moving away from the metropolitan areas that then segregates these classrooms.

SEABROOK: My guest is…

Ms. LaNIER: A lot of it has to do with economics so, you know, we have to play all of that together.

SEABROOK: My guest is Carlotta Walls LaNier. She's the author of "A Mighty **Long** **Way**: My Journey to Justice at **Little** **Rock** Central High School."

You're listening to TALK OF THE NATION from NPR News.

Another interesting email here, this one from Nancy in Tucson. She says, I went to the New York City public school system in the 1960s and we had busing. What that meant to us, the mainstream neighborhood white kids, is that we had three black kids in our class with whom we were friendly during school but who had to catch the bus and were never included in birthday parties or other extracurricular activities. As such, I see it as having been a tremendous failure.

More attempts at trying to tackle this problem. What do you see in that, Carlotta Wills LaNier?

Ms. LaNIER: Well, I'm - we had busing here in the metropolitan Denver area as well for the same reason, to achieve integration. And I was against, personally, overall for busing, but if that was the **way** we needed to achieve it, then we must do it. But at the same time, take the time to start putting another plan in place so that you don't have to bus kids from one side of town to the other for them to have diverse classroom activities and to get along with each other, so - or to learn about each other.

That is becoming - you know, busing was around **long** before. Busing was - has been there before just for those kids that lived out in the counties, as they would say, outside of the metropolitan area. And they had to be bused in. But then to be bused because of integration, then you start getting - polarizing a lot of people.

SEABROOK: Well – uh-huh?

Ms. LaNIER: So - go ahead.

SEABROOK: Well, I wanted to read one last email, this one from Jane in Blacksburg, Virginia. She says: In half an hour I enter a classroom at Virginia Tech University where I teach a class called the creative process. We study love and loss as the tributaries of creativity and we study the Civil Rights movement. And there you are, Carlotta, in a film we see called "A Time for Justice." Your work makes us all so proud to be linked in our hearts to you.

Ms. LaNIER: Well, thank you very much. I – that makes me feel good.

SEABROOK: Carlotta Wills LaNier. Her book is called "A Mighty **Long** **Way**: My Journey to Justice at **Little** **Rock** Central High School." She joined us from Colorado Public Radio. Thank you so much.

Ms. LaNIER: You’re quite welcome. My pleasure.