

# One of the “Little Rock Nine” Takes the Podium at Petaluma Museum

Congressional medal winner and member of the “Little Rock Nine,” Melba Pattillo Beals takes the podium on Feb. 21 at 4 p.m. as the keynote speaker at a Celebration of Black History exhibition on display at the Petaluma Museum in Historic Downtown.



The exhibit, titled “A Journey of Faith,” is the largest black history exhibit in the North Bay.

Beals speaks in the century-old Carnegie library building at 20 4<sup>th</sup> St. in Petaluma. Admission for this special event is \$7 for Museum members, or \$10 for non-members. Museum memberships are available by calling 778-4398 and help to underwrite this and other historical, cultural and educational events at the Museum. Seating is limited.

Beals made history as a one of the nine African-American students involved in the desegregation of Little Rock Central High School in 1957. The band of brave black youth later became known as the “Little Rock Nine,” for their stalwart determination in the face of the constant intimidation and threats from those who opposed desegregation of the formerly all-white high school.

Beals recounted her experiences during that harrowing year in her book titled *Warriors Don't Cry: A*

*Searing Memoir of the Battle to Desegregate Little Rock's Central High School.*

While attending all-black Horace Mann High School in Little Rock, Beals volunteered, with eight other black students from Horace Mann and Dunbar Junior High Schools, to transfer to the all-white Central High School, seeing the move as an opportunity to better her education.

Beals later recounted that a soldier assigned to protect her during the tumultuous transfer, instructed her by saying, “In order to get through this year, you will have to become a soldier. Never let your enemy know what you are feeling.” Beals took that advice, and while the times remained turbulent, all but one of the “Little Rock Nine,” finished the school year successfully.

Barred from entering Central High the next year, because the city's schools were closed, Beals moved to Santa Rosa, California, where she lived a sponsoring National Association for the Advancement of Colored People (NAACP) member family, and completed her senior year of high school.

As of 2006, Beals is the only one of the Little Rock Nine to have written a book based on her experiences at Central High. Published in 1995, *Warriors Don't Cry* gives a first-hand account of the trials Beals encountered. The book was named the American Library Association (ALA) Notable Book for 1995 and won the Robert F. Kennedy Book Award that same year. *White is a State of Mind*, her 1999 sequel to *Warriors Don't Cry*, follows Beals from her senior year in high school to her college and family days in California.

Beals was awarded the prestigious Spingarn Medal by NAACP in 1958, along with other members of the Little Rock Nine and Daisy Bates, their mentor. In 1999, then President Bill Clinton presented the nation's highest civilian award, the Congressional Gold Medal, to the members of the Little Rock Nine.

Beals currently lives in the San Francisco area and works as an author and public speaker.

For more information contact Museum President Joe Noriel at [joenoriel@yahoo.com](mailto:joenoriel@yahoo.com) or call 707-778-4398. [www.petalumamuseum.com](http://www.petalumamuseum.com).