

A Pattern of Life—One Block at a Time

By Helena Cherniak-Kennedy

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Picture it. You look outside your window, and see the sun shining in the blue April sky. The crocuses are just coming up through the melting snow. Your neighbours are leaving for work, but they are going to stop at the polling stations first. Today is Election Day for your new Prime Minister. The election campaign has been running for a long time, and you know who you would vote for. Your husband leaves to go to the polling station, but you will not be coming with him. Although you live and work in Canada, you are not considered a “person” and cannot vote. You are a female.

Nellie Letitia Mooney was born on October 20, 1873 in Chatsworth, Ontario and is known to Canadians by her married name, Nellie McClung. Throughout her life, Nellie showed many signs of courage, citizenship, and care for her community. Her life and pursuits teach us many lessons.

Firstly, when she started her activism, she did not win everything right away and she did not establish women’s right to vote by herself. Although she did not always succeed, the important thing is that she persevered, and today, that is all that matters. The group of women activists to which she belonged was called “The Famous Five”, with Emily Murphy, Louise McKinney, Henrietta Muir Edwards, and Irene Parlby. It was this group that brought “The Person’s Case” to court. The Famous Five tried to prove that women were indeed “persons” as seen in the *British North America Act 1867 (UK)*, Section 24. In this case, the Famous Five were successful in establishing by law that women were indeed persons and could be part of the Senate.

Secondly, Nellie was creative in her approach to achieving change! After being rejected by Sir Roblin, Premier of Manitoba, she went to a mock parliament where she did humorous imitations of Roblin to help gain awareness for women’s rights in Manitoba. Thanks to Nellie McClung’s creativity and persistence, in 1916 the new Liberal government allowed women to vote in Manitoba, soon to be followed by the other provinces. The accomplishments continued, as Mrs. Nellie McClung was appointed Liberal member of the Alberta Legislative Assembly for the period 1921-1925.

Today, as Calgarians, all citizens over the age of 18 have the opportunity to vote, run for government and participate in government, and although people may think that it has always been this way, it has not. In the 2010 Municipal election, 53.24% of eligible voters voted. Approximately half of this percentage was women. The election results would have been very different if only men had voted. To this day, Nellie’s efforts have really paid off. In Parliament, there are many women involved as Senators and as members of the House of Commons.

Nellie McClung. The words have meant and still mean so much to women throughout Alberta and Canada. Lively leader; courageous, spirited female role model; persistent politician. She guides us, even today. As she once said:

“In Canada we are developing a pattern of life, and I know something about one block of that pattern . . . I helped make it”.

If each citizen of Calgary helped to make one block, just like Nellie, then our world would be a better place. Calgarians should look to people like Nellie McClung as a model of how to experiment with change. To be a leader like Nellie, each one of us must have the courage and belief that we can succeed. Then we must have the perseverance to find the right path to reach our goals.

Now, picture this. Today is Election Day. You get in your car and drive yourself to a polling station, where you mark a ballot. You have just given your vote for the next Prime Minister of Canada. You are a female.

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