

Canada's Unsung Champion

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Take a look around you, or pick up a newspaper. It's not a secret that we live in a world full of hatred, misunderstanding, and inequality. Since the beginning of time, we as a civilization have come a long way - however, one common misperception has always stood prevalent: Women are supposedly "less capable" in multiple fields when compared to men. Time and time again, women have been told that they lack the ability to pursue their goals, and there has been a fixed mindset that one gender is more proficient than the other. This was not the world Ruth Gorman wanted to live in. With perseverance, drive, and determination, Gorman pushed for change - shaping the society we live in today, and paving the path for a brighter future.

On February 14, 1914, Ruth Gorman was born to Colonel Mark Bennett and Fleda Pattyson Peacock. Even as a young adult, she was a powerhouse; a force to be reckoned with. At the mere age of 23, she began to break stereotypes and societal norms; pursuing both an arts and a law degree, which, at the time, was highly unusual for a woman. Gorman attended the University of Alberta, where she graduated with a Bachelor of Arts in 1937, and a Bachelor of Laws in 1939. In 1940, at the age of 26, Gorman was admitted to the Alberta Bar Association, becoming one of the first female lawyers to do so. This was just the beginning.

From there, Ruth continued to apply her expertise, strength, and willpower to advocate for many causes in the province. Sharp-witted, intelligent, and resilient, she refused to be portrayed as inferior to a man. Clear in her strategic thinking, she followed her dreams, regardless of the constraints women faced. She volunteered and fought on behalf of multiple minority groups, was a member of the *Calgary Local Council of Women*, and joined the *Western Canada Concept* party. Most impressively, Ruth was Calgary's Woman of the Year in 1960 and

the Alberta Woman of the Century in 1961. In 1968, she was made an Officer of the Order of Canada.

Furthermore, she was a most noteworthy individual while advocating for the rights of Indigenous people in Alberta. Gorman volunteered as the solicitor for the *Indian Association of Alberta*, working with significant figures such as John Laurie to have section 112 from the Indian Act revoked, in hopes of granting Indigenous peoples the freedom to vote, while maintaining their treaty rights. Thus, she was given the title *Queen Morning Star of the Cree* for her support to the Indigenous community. Although she resigned from the *Indian Association of Alberta* in 1962, she still actively voiced for minority concerns. Despite her many efforts, Gorman did not appear as the face of these endeavors, she remained a supporter of John Laurie, working behind the scenes. During this time, she began writing his biography. The resulting book, *Behind the Man*, is deemed to be just as much hers as it is his.

Hence the steps taken by Ruth Gorman, we as a nation are closer to equality between men and women, we are accepting, and many regulations have been placed in hopes of diminishing the restraints of minorities. Indigenous peoples now have a say in many decisions, and their input is valued. Children with disabilities have programs and special education, so that they may have the same experiences as children without disabilities. Women pursue careers and ambitions in all fields, overcoming stereotypical gender norms. We have long ways to go, but this is a step in the right direction.

Although figures such as Ruth Gorman have consistently fought for the rights of minorities, our society still faces major issues revolving around the divide and harassment of individuals. Specifically, the violence and mistreatment Indigenous women face. In 2015, the

United Nations Committee on the Elimination of Discrimination against Women concluded that, although they represent just 4.3 percent of Canada's female population, 16 percent of female homicide victims are Indigenous. Numerous programs and policies have been developed to address violence, however, despite these efforts, studies have shown that misconduct against women in Canada continues to be a persistent and ongoing problem, one that is even more alarming for Indigenous women.

In 2014, Statistics Canada reported that over one-third of Indigenous women who had been abused in the previous 12 months indicated that they had been victimized multiple times. Due to the worldviews and perspectives of many, women are still considered as items - not human beings. As such, this intolerable behaviour fails to be addressed, and many citizens are likely not aware of the suffrage allocated to women, especially to those who identify as Indigenous. Ruth Gorman would not have accepted such inexcusable actions. She would have done anything and everything in her power to raise awareness and campaign for these issues, perhaps organizing a nation-wide movement such as Time's Up and MeToo.

As an inspiring role model, Ruth has encouraged me to take my own initiatives towards achieving my dream of becoming a law school graduate with an LLM (Master of Laws) degree and potentially becoming a barrister. Some steps I have taken towards this goal include becoming an avid member of debate and speech, participating in Model United Nations, and collaborating with others through extracurricular activities and volunteering. She has taught me that the path may be hard, but you cannot expect others to constantly pick up the pieces for you. An essential lesson of life is learning to fend for yourself and fighting for what you believe in, even if you are alone. You also need to stay true to what you are fighting for - to accomplish

something, you must never let those who doubt you discourage you. Always focus on what matters.

Additionally, I have learned that being the center of attention is of little importance; sometimes working behind the scenes is just as beneficial, if not more. If you truly are passionate about an issue, it's not about the recognition- it's about creating change. As a leader of tomorrow, I firmly believe it is my responsibility to encourage growth in our society- there are still miles to go before equality is established, and it is in the hands of my generation to move Canada closer to that goal.

Ruth Gorman encouraged evolution in our stances so that we could all be considered as one united nation. Without her, where would we be? Perhaps in an abyss of discrimination, hostility, and injustice. To all the citizens of Canada: we have our means of resolving issues and establishing a firmer foundation for the well-being of Canadian society. Despite this, do we ever stop to consider how this revolution began? The answer is simple. This was initiated by the one and only - Ruth Gorman: Canada's Unsung Champion.

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