

Making the Wild Rose My Own – The Alice Jamieson Way



It was a two-and-a-half-hour drive from Lethbridge. The anticipation made it feel even longer. Finally, we reached Calgary downtown and my dad pulled into the parking lot of the Harry Hays Building. “We’re here,” he announced smiling radiantly. Mom, dad, my sisters and I took the elevator to the second floor and almost ran to suite 210. There was a long queue of people waiting beside a sign which read: “Immigration, Refugees and Citizenship Canada”. We were about to become Canadian citizens and make Alberta our permanent home!

I recall sitting down in a hall with my family, waving the Canadian flag. Things were getting organized, but I could not wait for the ceremony to start. “All rise for the honourable magistrate,” it was announced at last. We all stood up as a middle-aged lady in a black gown made her way to the stage. The magistrate looked very familiar, but I could not place her face.

The suspense was short-lived as she introduced herself, “My name is Alice Jamieson ...” I could not believe my luck! The great Alice Jamieson would be administering my oath of citizenship. “...You have decided to make Alberta your home just like I did back in 1882, when I moved from Chicago to Toronto and then to Calgary. You have invested a tremendous amount of time and effort to make the wild rose and the maple leaf your own,” her words echoed with me. “By Canadian law, all of you are equal irrespective of your gender, race and skin color. This equality has been achieved through generations of struggle. In 1914, I became the first woman in Canada and the British Empire to be appointed a judge and the response was not the most cordial. The opposition continued as I was appointed a police magistrate in Calgary Women’s Court in 1916. You might find it hard to believe that in 1917, one of my judgements was challenged on the basis of my gender! But every cloud has a silver lining. The Supreme Court of Alberta ruled in my favour. This also led to the famous *Persons Case* with five other Alberta women winning women’s right to be considered as ‘persons’ just like men,” she shed light on the big picture, and I felt truly inspired.

“Please rise for the singing of the national anthem,” Magistrate Jamieson had finished her speech. I sang out loud with all my heart. Now it was time to take the oath. We repeated “I swear that I’ll be faithful and bear true allegiance to her Majesty Queen Elizabeth the Second ...” One by one, people were called up to the stage to receive their certificates of citizenship. I felt proud shaking Magistrate Jamieson’s hand and receiving my certificate from an Alberta champion. I was now a Canadian! My family members congratulated each other, and others in attendance.

People started clicking pictures with the Magistrate and other guests of honour. “Now is my chance to talk to her,” I thought to myself. I stood next to Magistrate Jamieson. She must have noticed my nervousness, because she winked at me and said, “Follow me.” She brought me to a small room where we sat down on the couches. I could not believe that I was going to have a conversation with my idol. She smiled and asked me what my name was. I tried to speak but words got stuck in my throat. Finally, I whispered my name. “Would you please tell me a bit more about your life outside judiciary, Magistrate Jamieson,” I mustered all my courage and said. “Please call me Alice,” she made me feel at ease. “I was born on July 14th, 1860, in New York City. But I spent most of my childhood in Chicago. I married Ruben Rupert Jamieson in Ohio on March 8th, 1882. At the time, he was working for the Canadian Pacific Railroad in Toronto. We moved to Calgary when he became the Superintendent of the West Division of the CPR. Later, he served as the mayor of Calgary. We had four children,” Alice was becoming nostalgic. “Those were the days. The feminist movement was picking up steam in Alberta. In 1907, I co-founded the YWCA Calgary to address the housing needs of newcomer single women. I also lobbied for several women’s rights as the first president of Calgary Local Council of Women,” she continued. “Wow! What a full life!” I appreciated the extent of her achievements. Right then, someone knocked on the door. My parents were outside waiting for me.

Just before I left, I told Alice that I wanted to be like her someday. She smiled and nodded. I went out the door, contemplating all the freedoms I enjoyed today due the efforts of champions like Alice Jamieson. I looked back and saw Alice waving goodbye. I happily waved back. I thought about my public speaking in school and how my peers and teachers always appreciated my talent. I vowed to hone my skills and enter a legal career when I grew up. I would become an attorney and setup a legal practice in Alberta. This would allow me to understand the constitution and the law, as lasting change could only be brought about through these documents. I would then get into politics and be the voice of common people, especially women, minorities and the underprivileged sections of the society. Who knows, maybe I will be the next Naheed Nenshi, Stephen Harper or Rachel Notley. Even if I did not win an election, I would play my part as a good Samaritan and social activist. In any case, I would make a difference and bring about positive change in the society, following in Alice Jamieson’s footsteps.

“Who were you talking to in the room?” dad broke my chain of thoughts. We were now driving back to Lethbridge. “It was Alice Jamieson,” I replied. “What are you saying,” mom exclaimed in disbelief. “Alice Jamieson retired in 1932 and passed away in 1949. You have an active imagination, don’t you,” dad gave me a reality check. I looked down in my lap at my copy of *200 Remarkable Alberta Women*. “It doesn’t matter if Alice was there or not,” I said to myself, “She is with me in spirit and I will further her legacy through my life.”

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