

A True Person

My stomach rumbled and flipped in anticipation. A single word will be the start of something that I wanted to excel at, and as I unfurled, I knew it was only a matter of seconds until...

“Go!” Coach Bhagria’s booming voice scared me at first, but I didn’t stumble and lose my stride. Running quickly, my legs felt like fire, but my motivation was too great. I flew past the obstacles, getting one of the best times. I walked slowly to the sidelines, my hair in sweaty clumps, my face tomato-red, but I had done it. I felt great.

Congratulations rang in my ear. Track tryouts were over, and I was sure I had made it. Packing up my track equipment, I suddenly felt watched.

“You run like a girl,” an unfamiliar voice stated. I glanced at the owner of the voice, a large boy with red hair. I didn’t know him, but his malicious eyes and sneer said it all.

“What’s that have to do with anything?” I shot, and the boy continued to squint.

“Boys are better at running. Besides, shouldn’t you be wearing a tutu?” the boy scoffed, my almond-shaped eyes widened with anger. I was a dancer, and proud of it.

“Stop that. She’s better at running than you Joe,” my best friend Mikayla retorted. The murmurs of agreement proved our point.

“They’re right, Joe. Today, men and women are equal, they have the same athletic opportunities. Women can be doctors or members of the Senate. You can thank women’s rights activists like Nellie McClung for that,” Coach Bhagria spoke, and Joe shrugged. He walked away, clearly in a huff, and stuck his tongue out.

Waving goodbye to everyone, I hopped on my skateboard, the wind cooling my red face. As I neared my house, I thought about Coach Bhagria. *Who is Nellie McClung? What difference does gender make?* I pondered. I opened the door. My mom was in the kitchen, on her laptop.

“Hi sweetie. How were tryouts?” she asked, her black hair in a messy bun.

“Fine. Mom, are boys better than girls?” I questioned, dropping my bag.

“Why don’t you look at the painting of Nellie McClung? The one in the living room,” my mom replied. Now I remembered the painting. My mom and her friends would often talk about her.

I went into the living room, and over the mantle was the painting. Nellie McClung was wearing a hat with flowers and looking determined.

“Nellie. If only you could give me some advice on equality between genders,” I spoke wistfully. It might have been my imagination, but the painting’s eyes glowed.

Suddenly, the room spun. The living room faded, and I felt myself fall onto a large sofa with cushions. I opened my eyes to find a woman with brown curly hair and a warm smile.

“N-Nellie McClung? What are you doing here?” I stammered. I was no longer in my own living room, I was in a mysterious room sitting in front of Nellie McClung!

“Yes, it’s me. You’ve come here with an important question, yes?” she asked. I nodded slowly.

“Does your gender determine your abilities?” I asked, and Nellie McClung smiled. I could sense a story coming.

“You know, I didn’t attend school until I was nine years old, but I became a teacher at sixteen. I have two teaching degrees,” Nellie McClung started. I sometimes thought about being a teacher, or a writer.

“I also wrote many books, including *Sowing Seeds in Danny*. It was the best-selling book in Canada that year,” she added, and my face brightened.

“However, in my era, women had limited rights; they couldn’t vote, and they had to stay at home. Women believed that to have a voice, they had to hold positions of government, like a Senator. However, women weren’t considered people, so they couldn’t be a Senator,” Nellie McClung continued, and I gasped.

“Why weren’t women considered persons?” I questioned.

“We didn’t have the ideal qualities of a person. Anyway, the Famous Five, including Emily Murphy and myself, challenged this rule. We brought it to the highest court of government, the privy court and we won. We even put on a play for Premier Roblin, called *A Women’s Parliament*, where women ran the government,” she continued.

“I also advocated for equal pay for women and improving working conditions for everyone. When I moved to Calgary in 1914, I continued to stand up for myself and other women. Two years later, women got the vote in provincial elections when the Suffrage Bills passed. I was even elected MLA in 1921!” Nellie McClung added.

“Did you ever fail?” I inquired, feeling bad for asking.

“Of course! I lost the 1926 election, and many men, even women didn’t agree with my beliefs. Just remember though: Never underestimate the power of a woman,” Ms. Nellie replied, with an air of determination.

“Thanks for your advice Ms. Nellie,” I spoke. She was such an inspiring woman, and I would never forget her.

“My pleasure. Prove them wrong at the track meet,” Nellie McClung replied, and the room again spun. All I could see was Nellie McClung, looking more courageous than ever. I opened my eyes to my living room.

*Was that really Nellie McClung?* I thought. I wasn’t sure, but I was sure of the lesson she taught me. She inspired me to stick up for what I believe and prove to everyone that women are just as good as men. I will donate to Women’s Shelters, and I will continue to stick up for other people

who are picked on based on their gender, race or physical abilities. Nellie McClung made a huge impact in Albertans by allowing women to have a voice in government, and she is still remembered for her bravery and determination. The Famous Five and Nellie McClung will always be role models for Albertans. She is, and always will be, a true person.

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