

Think Twice

Anika Islam

Grade Seven, Fairview School

Word Count- 1194



Every four years, women in Canada go to the poll stations to vote for their next prime minister, often without thinking twice about who they owe that thanks to for winning them that right. The harsh truth is, back over a century ago, not a single woman could vote in any type of election- not federal, provincial, or even municipal; in fact, a woman was not even defined as a 'person'. That right had to be fought for, and, without women like Nellie McClung, women today would not be able to do what many do without thinking, such as voting.

On October 20th, 1873, Nellie Letitia McClung, born as Helen Letitia Mooney, came into the world. McClung did not start school until age 10; however, being extremely gifted, she received a teaching degree at only age 16. During those early years, the suffragette inside her started to grow. Even as a youngster, McClung broke boundaries, often going outside for recess to play football, a sport not meant for girls back then, and then fighting with parents who disapproved of her actions. Ultimately, McClung won the argument with her good sense and valid arguments; little did people know that this was only the beginning for Nellie McClung.

McClung was a teacher until she married her husband Robert Wesley McClung in 1896. Her husband became a pharmacist in Manitou, Manitoba, while she became a part of the *Women's Christian Temperance Union*, a group devoted to fighting for the prohibition of alcohol.

From there, in 1911, McClung moved to Winnipeg and had her fifth child; there, she joined the *Winnipeg Women's Rights and Reform* movement, where McClung found out about the growing suffragette campaign. She played a leading role in the 1914 Liberals campaign against Sir Rodmond Roblin's ruling Conservative party, who had rejected women's rights. McClung took part in many debates for the Liberals, often winning over her audiences with her witty remarks and humorous speeches.

On January 28th, 1914, she held a 'mock Parliament', featuring herself as premier and men begging for the vote as opposed to women. The show generated hundreds of votes for the Liberals, and they ended up winning the 1915 Manitoba provincial election, making Manitoba the first province to allow women the right to vote in elections. The rest of Canada soon followed in its footsteps; by this time, Mrs. McClung had moved to Edmonton, Alberta and kept rallying for what she believed in: suffrage for women, prohibition, dower rights for women and safe working conditions for working females. By this point, Nellie McClung had done so much for women, but she is probably most known for her involvement in a case that would change the world forever: *The Persons Case*

Before 1929, women were not defined as a 'person', and therefore, could not serve in the Senate House of Canada. All that changed when a group named *The Famous Five* was formed, a group made by Nellie McClung, Irene Parlby, Henrietta Muir Edwards, Emily Murphy, and Louise Crummy McKinney. These unforgettable people held an innumerable amount of rallies and protests, fighting for what was right, arguing that a woman is a 'person' too. They took their arguments to the Supreme Court of Canada, where, on October 18th, 1929, the decision was taken that a woman was no different than a man, and therefore should be allowed to run for Senate. This case made such a significant difference on how Canada views woman. Perhaps without Nellie McClung, females still might not be identified as a person today.

Alongside her major contributions, McClung had many side adventures. In 1908, her first novel, *Sowing Seeds in Danny*, was published, and it quickly rose to become a national bestseller. In 1912, McClung and other Manitoba woman formed the *Political Equality League*, a group consistently fighting to improve women's working conditions. She was the only female Canadian delegate in the 1938 *League of Nations*, and was a delegate to the *Women's War*

Conference in 1918. She founded several groups, like *The Federated Women's Institute of Canada*, and *The Women's Institute of Edmonton*, and was active in many clubs, including *The Canadian Author's Association*, *The Women's Press Club*, *The Calgary Women's Literary Club*, and many others. She also served as a Liberal MLA to Alberta from 1921-1926.

Nellie McClung fought for equal rights for women, and achieved so much for them, but unfortunately, us females still do not have fully equal rights as men. The world has been trying to grapple with the fact that women still do not get paid the same amount as men, as a recent *Canadian Broadcasting Channel* investigation states. The gender wage gap continues to get worse as it grows wider. In 2009, a woman in Canada made 74.4 percent of what a man made, and in 2010, she made 73.6 percent. In 2011, it got even worse, as the gap dropped to a stunning 72 percent. Women are getting paid less each year, and our country needs to face these problems of gender inequality, lest we want to go back in time where women were not seen as people. If Nellie McClung had lived in our time, she would have likely stood up for this unjust behaviour and set things right; although, we do not have Nellie McClung with us, and that is where I have learned that if you want something to be fixed, you have to stand up and raise your voice.

Nellie McClung has taught us all so much, and she particularly taught me to strive for what is right, that if I want my voice to be heard, I must take action into my own hands, just as she had done. I persevere to make myself a good leader who can tell right from wrong, and, when faced with a difficult situation, I can keep my head cool and make a decision that benefits everyone around me. Nellie McClung taught me to join together with others, and has influenced me to become an active member of the community; I have been able to do this by getting elected into my school council position, and by joining the school *Social Awareness Society*, a club devoted to taking action to tackle problems in the world. Leadership is something that, when, in

your power, is to be used for good, not evil, and Nellie McClung taught me to use that power wisely.. Nellie McClung had such a big impact on my leadership and community association skills, and she is the reason why so many girls are motivated to achieve great things.

Without Nellie McClung, females in Canada would not be able to run for Senate, vote in elections, or even be defined as a 'person'. Now, because of the tremendous amount of work she has done, women everywhere are able to do those things previously deemed a 'man's' job. We are all viewed equal and same to a man. Every four years, women go to the poll stations to vote for the next prime minister of Canada, but now, I want them to think twice about who they owe that thanks to for winning them that right.

Sources

Nellie McClung. (2008, January 4). Retrieved April 8, 2017, from <http://www.thecanadianencyclopedia.ca/en/article/nellie-letitia-mcclung/>
Website on the life and career of Nellie McClung

Nellie McClung. (n.d.). Retrieved April 8, 2017, from <https://www.historicacanada.ca/content/heritage-minutes/nellie-mcclung>
Website with video and information on Nellie McClung

About Nellie. (n.d.). Retrieved April 9, 2017, from <http://www.ournellie.com/about-nellie/>
Information from the Nellie McClung foundation

Nellie McClung Feminist. (n.d.). Retrieved April 9, 2017, from <http://www.historymuseum.ca/cmc/exhibitions/hist/biography/biographi226e.shtml>
Timeline of Nellie McClung's life.

Evans, P. (2016, March 7). Women's wage gap getting wider in Canada, new report indicates. Retrieved April 15, 2017, from <http://www.cbc.ca/news/business/wage-gap-oxfam-1.3478938>
News report on the gender wage gap