

**Nellie McClung**  
**An Inspiring Legacy**  
By Cassandra Chan

As female suffragist Nellie McClung would say, “Never retract, never explain, never apologize. Get the thing done and let them howl.” This Albertan champion was a fierce, indomitable woman, whose relentless personality and blazing determination led her to becoming a game changer for females across Canada. It was during her fight for women’s rights where she exhibited unyielding perseverance, resulting in women of today’s age being able to take on roles of power and become unstoppable leaders. Nellie was never afraid to vocalize her opinions and stand up for what she felt was right; a quality that very few people possess, or even have the courage to embrace. Even today, women today are suffering from gender inequality, targeted kidnapping, abuse, unfair payment, harassment, and stereotypes. This is female discrimination. We need our strong, powerful women to follow McClung’s example and create change in our unequal society. Nellie was an incredible politician, talented author, powerful speechmaker, one of the Famous Five, a role model Albertan, and a great champion.

In her early years, Nellie McClung truly began cultivating leadership qualities. She was born in Chatsworth, Ontario on October 20, 1873, and moved to Manitoba with her family in 1880. Although she did not receive a proper education until ten years old, McClung demonstrated remarkable intelligence by acquiring her teaching degree at sixteen and becoming a published author in 1908. Her first book, “*Sowing Seeds in Danny*”, instantly became a bestseller, which was an incredible accomplishment, considering women weren’t viewed to be as ‘capable’ as men. Consequently, McClung became well known for her impressive writing skills, and more opportunities for her to voice her viewpoints on important matters emerged. This brilliant author also became a member of the Woman’s Christian Temperance Union at the age of 23, which helped her develop and grow in her inspiring leadership skills.

Fed up with the arrogance of several politicians, McClung created a humorous event in 1914 called “*Mock Parliament*” to create political awareness. In “*Mock Parliament*”, McClung organized a pretend trial, audaciously challenging whether men should have the right to vote. “It was uproariously funny,” according to Beatrice Bridgen, a resident of Manitoba, who could recall the boisterous laughter this event produced, as well as the significant attention it brought to women inequality. Manitoba actually became the first province to grant women the vote in 1916 because of its success!

Subsequently, in 1921, Nellie won her seat in the legislature as MLA for the Liberal Party in Edmonton, becoming the third ever woman to be elected into a Canadian provincial government. This skilled leader toiled to improve matrimonial rights and sponsored multiple causes like children’s education and healthcare, all while simultaneously raising five children!

Soon after, McClung was approached by fellow female activist Emily Murphy, who asked her to sign a petition for women to be recognized as 'persons' under the British North America Act. Unlike men, females were not actually referred to as people, as stated by the law in 1927. Considering Nellie had already been fighting for female rights, she did not hesitate to sign the petition. Emily Murphy also enlisted the help of Louise McKinney, Henrietta Muir Edwards, and Irene Parlby. These five Albertan leaders, now known as the Famous Five, were the very ones to put forth this signed petition to the Supreme Court of Canada. When the court first saw the petition, it was denied. However, the petition was then forwarded to the Privy Council in England, which was the highest court in Canada at the time. It was in 1929 that the Privy Council viewed the petition, and, to McClung's delight, approved it. Canadian women were officially regarded as persons at last!

My champion impacted society without a doubt and her work continues to shape Canadian lives to this day. Just by turning on the television, we can see leaders like Dr. Theresa Tam, Canada's Chief Public Health Officer, making paramount decisions to ensure the safety of our country. Articles on Lieutenant General Frances Allen, the first woman ever appointed as the Canadian military's second in command, fill copious headlines and news reports throughout the internet. Elections are now shaped by female votes and opinions, many women are taking on substantial government roles, and everyone, including females, are legally recognized as persons. McClung's persistent advocacy manufactured this reality for women today.

Yet so many girls today are still constrained by unfair judgements and stereotypes. This needs to end. Instead of giving way to inequality, females need to look to Nellie McClung, who didn't let unfair prejudice impede her accomplishments, nor stand in the way of bringing dignity to women past and present. She was, and continues to be, a true revolutionary for females.

Moreover, when Nellie fought for the Persons Act, she wanted females to all be acknowledged as persons under the law. However, are all women truly viewed like this by everyone, even in today's age? Legally, a woman is just as much of a person as a man, and yet, more females are abducted and taken advantage of than males. You hear stories of females being kidnapped, abused, and treated as if they weren't actually people, but rarely the other way around. It is because of these injustices that women all over the world don't always feel like they belong in their communities. Furthermore, women globally have been making considerably less money than men today, even if they have the same education and experience. Over twenty two percent of women are paid less than men, and this statistic particularly increases when regarding women of different races or cultures. As a great spokeswoman and influential writer, I believe McClung would have firmly expressed her outlook on this matter to rectify these injustices.

Has this accomplished woman inspired me? Absolutely. I want to continue her campaign so that all females can gradually break past stereotypes and prejudice. To start, I have been participating in an initiative called Ferocious and Female, where the girls at my dojo work to bring attention to the strong, incredible females in Aikido. We recently interviewed Yumi Nakamura Sensei, who is the highest ranking female Aikido practitioner in Canada. The Ferocious and Female initiative shared Yumi Sensei's story, and is continuing to show others how many empowering women there are in Aikido. Nellie McClung encourages me to never stop telling the world about our important, female role models, so that we can bring about change to the world's perspective of women.

In addition to having great perseverance, Nellie McClung was an engaging author, who brought awareness to inequality merely by using her clever writing expertise. This accomplished woman inspires me to follow in her footsteps, and wield the mighty pen to create change in society. I have always found writing to be rewarding and have even had opportunities to enrapture large audiences, such as a number of my classmates in past grades. For multiple years in a row, I have written the students in my class into fantasy novellas, where we are superheroes and villains on entertaining, action-packed adventures. My classmates were always enthralled by these comical stories, and I was elated with how my writing could be used as a captivating super power, much like how Nellie McClung was able to engage audiences with her often humorous writing too. It was Nellie's witty style that enabled her to engage and invoke others in her urgent causes, creating lasting change for females all over Canada. Using my abilities as a developing author, I can challenge myself to become a skillful writer like McClung, and aspire to be a voice for the elevation of female social status.

Has Nellie McClung demonstrated true leadership qualities? Have her actions impacted society today? Of course! Recognizing that most people have the ability to acknowledge when something is wrong, but very few have the courage and persistence to do something about it, McClung certainly exemplifies the attributes of a true champion. She has affected countless lives across the country in all her years as a female suffragist and gender rights advocate. Whether we are voting in an election or taking on a powerful role in society, women can look to Nellie with gratitude, hope, and admiration. She inspires me to never succumb to hardships, and I will always think of her whenever faced with a challenge. Nellie McClung was a leader, champion, and an Albertan legacy.

## **Bibliography:**

Biography of Nellie McClung, Canadian Activist. New York (New York): Dotdash; 2019 05 21. [modified 2020 08 28; accessed 2021 03 30]. <https://www.thoughtco.com/nellie-mcclung-508318>.

Exposed and underpaid Women still make less than men, including in sectors especially affected by the coronavirus. Washington (DC): Economic Policy Institute; 2020 03 30. [modified 2020 03 30; accessed 2021 03 30]. <https://www.epi.org/blog/exposed-and-underpaid-women-still-make-less-than-men-including-in-sectors-especially-affected-by-the-coronavirus/>.

Lt.-Gen. Frances Allen becomes first woman appointed as Canadian military's vice-chief of defence staff. Toronto (Ontario): The Canadian Press; 2021 03 09. [modified 2021 03 09; accessed 2021 03 30]. <https://nationalpost.com/news/canada/canadian-military-gets-first-female-vice-chief-of-defence-staff#:~:text=OTTAWA%20%E2%80%94%20Lt.%2DGen>.

Nellie McClung. Abbotsford (British Columbia): University of the Fraser Valley; 2004 02. [modified 2004 02; accessed 2021 03 30]. [https://www.ufv.ca/adedfiles/encyclopedia/Biographies/NellieMcClung.htm#:~:text=Nellie%20was%20a%20Liberal%20\(Opposition,rights%2C%20and%20mothers%27%20allowances](https://www.ufv.ca/adedfiles/encyclopedia/Biographies/NellieMcClung.htm#:~:text=Nellie%20was%20a%20Liberal%20(Opposition,rights%2C%20and%20mothers%27%20allowances).

Nellie McClung (1873 to 1951)-Alberta Champions Society. Calgary (Alberta): TransCanada FoundLocally Inc.; 2004. [modified 2021; accessed 2021 03 30]. <https://albertachampions.org/Champions/nellie-mcclung-1873-1951/>

Sowing Seeds in Danny | novel by McClung | Britannica. Chicago (Illinois): Encyclopædia Britannica, Inc.; 2009 04 15. [modified 2020 10 16; accessed 2021 04 13]. <https://www.britannica.com/topic/Sowing-Seeds-in-Danny>.

CBC Archives. Toronto (Ontario): CBC/Radio-Canada; 1974 12 09. [accessed 2021 04 19]. <https://www.cbc.ca/archives/entry/mcclungs-mock-parliament>.