

Nellie McClung

The Shadow Beyond the Living Suffragette

By Maria Sismon

In the world we live in today, many moral and immoral deeds influence our thoughts and actions. COVID-19 is a drastic problem that affects the stability and balance of our society and us individuals. Yet there is another deadly virus that is spreading. This is gender discrimination. When injustice and inequality take place in our society, we should all remember the highly virtuous and most respectfully loved Nellie McClung. Nellie McClung was recognized for her fight to bring in laws that supported women. This Albertan leader was a true heroine for all women and supported them through times they wanted to also share their opinion on specific matters to the public. This was possible with the help of her inimitable group "The Famous Five", a group which consisted of 5 women who stepped into the world to improve the future of all women,

Nellie McClung was born on October 20, 1873 in Chatsworth, Ontario to John Mooney and Letitia McCurdy. She earned her teaching certificate at age 16 even though she started attending school at age 10. This shows not only how clever she was, but that at an early age she was determined to share her knowledge with others. She later joined the Women's Christian Temperance Union where her mother-in-law was the president. Her participation in this group foreshadowed her later involvement with the Famous Five. By 1908, Nellie Published her first book called "Sowing Seeds in Danny". It turned out to be the best-seller and was honored and talked about in many shows and magazines. As her popularity grew, she drew more attention to the causes she championed.

Later on, Nellie McClung and her husband Robert Wesley McClung moved to Winnipeg with their kids. In Winnipeg she was greeted and embraced into the "Winnipeg Women's Rights and Reform Movement" because she was a significant and appreciable speaker who had the talent to embrace audiences through her humorous lecture. In 1914, Nellie decided to run for the Liberal campaign election against Rodmond Roblin who was the representative of the government who disaffirmed and invalidated the suffragette rights for women. Although the Liberals won in Manitoba 1915, Nellie McClung moved to Edmonton with her family and continued her protest for women suffragettes there.

In Alberta she continued her fight for the disenfranchised. Her popularity spread like a wildfire. By 1921, she gained attention at the Britain Methodist Ecumenical Conference and in many speaking expeditions throughout Canada and the United States, which gave her a placement at the forefront as a Liberal MLA for Edmonton from 1921 to 1926. She preserved her courage to face anything and her public profile in the government continued to rise.

Soon after, Nellie McClung and 4 others "Henrietta Muir Edwards, Irene Parlby, Louise Crummy McKinney, and Emily Murphy" joined together simultaneously to form "The Famous Five", a group of female activists representing the rights of women. In 1927, The Famous Five appealed to have girls considered as persons under the British North America Act. They were successful and have paved the way for women's rights to this day. People recognize that how she championed the suffrage movement has changed the lives of many women who wanted to take part in parliament and have their voices shared and valued.

The story of Nellie McClung leads me to believe that she was a true leader and a voice for the nation. As a leader, she defined her skills by using her collective and responsible way of giving a voice and power to women who didn't have the opportunities that their male counterparts had. Her fights for justice were fair. This female activist made a great impact on society with the changes she brought to Canada. Through her, women are given respect and are treated as equal citizens. We all remember her for great dedication and service to Canada and wish she was still alive to change more things women are facing today.

Did you know that 1.5 million women in Canada live in poverty??? It's hard to believe but the truth doesn't hide. Women who have multiple responsibilities like family, extracurricular activities for kids or themselves, are divorced, and have a long drive to the workplace, have a greater chance of undergoing poverty in Canada. The living wage for women in Canada is low compared to men. Unfortunately, Canada is at the 8th place out of 43 countries for the biggest wage difference in gender. Women workers earn 69 cents for every dollar a man makes. This is a huge gap in the living wage, and this is the reason why many women are impoverished in Canada. Most women who undergo poverty are usually first nations women, black or brown women, or women with disabilities. Poverty is at the core of what more women than men are facing today.

Nellie McClung would have made a drastic change with her leadership skills and her talent to fight with the Famous 5. She would have dealt with this issue in a concise manner. If Nellie McClung was still alive, then she would have started her encounter through protest and healthy arguments and would have gained massive support through social media platforms and communities. In the world we live in today, it would be hard for a government to deny these rights with such massive support. With someone like Nellie McClung to guide us, we would surely win the battle.

As I contemplate on the example she has endowed, I understand that just living to yourself and dying is not a remarkable life. A remarkable life happens when you step into the world to make a change. Mahatma Gandhi has said *"Be the Change you wish to see in the world"*. This is exactly what this champion and her group of Famous 5 did for the society which created a great impact on Canada and its worldview. We learn in social studies this year about worldviews, and how each person has their own version of a worldview depending on their style of thoughts, what they see around them and how much they are influenced by how others deal with issues around them. Nellie McClung's worldview really had an influence on me and my perspective about the world.

Concerning my worldview and my thoughts, I am inspired by her. I want to also make a difference in people's thoughts about certain issues concerning our people and our society. Through this inspiration I decided that this advocate expressed her feelings through words in speech, which turns out to be her biggest strength. I will follow her path and become involved in the society through words I write, which turns out to be my biggest strength. I would like to write for magazines or even start my own magazine company and express my feelings and thoughts about current events in our community through my words. Perhaps I could find a way to circulate this for free on social media? I will make it creative and fun so that even small kids can enjoy reading it and find deeper connection to it. I will also include the opinion of everyone else who wants their voice shared through my magazines and also give them space for what they want to say. I will be protesting against any act that maligns women or other females who need a voice so that they can have wage equality and equal opportunities in this world. I will fight against it through my writing because I enjoy writing for the purpose of informing and sharing knowledge.

As I reflect back on this Nellie McClung's life, I'm not continuing the journey for the rest of my life with the same heart and mind I came in with when I started writing this essay. Nellie McClung has really defined my perspective of how I protect my rights and the rights of those in my society. *"It takes 10 months for a baby to be born. 4-5 years for a Doctor or Engineer to be born. But it takes A whole century for a leader to be born. In Each century, there will only be one true leader, A leader is not a word but a nation's trust. And that trust is the biggest gift"*. Nellie McClung is undoubtedly a Champion and my role model.

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