

Emily Murphy (Video Script)

By Sarah Malik

Today, women are at the forefront of Canadian society, especially in Alberta. However, not so long ago, life was very different for women in Canada. They were silenced for speaking out, they weren't allowed to vote and they lived in fear with limited rights and freedoms. But one courageous Albertan woman helped to change it all. Her name was Emily Murphy.

In order to understand her story as a changemaker and true Alberta champion, let's journey back to 1868: the very beginning of Emily's life. Emily was born into a well-off family in Ontario. She went to school in Toronto, where she met her future husband, Arthur Murphy.

In 1903, Emily moved to Manitoba with her husband and two daughters. Four years later, the family moved to Edmonton.

Emily enjoyed writing, and published a few books. She also had a strong interest in protesting for the rights of women and children. Most notably, Emily began a campaign to protect the property rights of married women. In 1915, she successfully persuaded the Alberta legislature to pass the Dower Act, which gave women legal rights to part of their husbands' property.

The following year, Emily, as a member of the Edmonton Local Council of Women, tried to attend the trial of several women who had been arrested. She and the other females in attendance were removed from the court because it was said that the testimony was "not fit for mixed company." Emily found this to be very unfair, and protested to the provincial Attorney General. Because she spoke up for herself, Emily was appointed police magistrate for Edmonton and then Alberta. She was the first female magistrate in the British Empire.

Although Emily played an important role in many judicial cases, she is best known for being a suffragist. She was a strong advocate that the right to vote should be extended to women. Emily is particularly famous for her participation in the Persons Case.

On her first day as a magistrate, she was challenged by a lawyer. He said that as a woman Emily was not a person in the eyes of British law. At the time, women were not included in the definition of "persons" under the Constitution. This led Emily to begin a decade-long campaign to have women declared as legal persons.

In 1927, she invited Henrietta Muir Edwards, Irene Parlby, Louise McKinney and Nellie McClung to a meeting at her home in Edmonton. The women met at what appeared to be tea

parties but were actually secret meetings where they discussed their concerns. Emily carefully drafted a petition to put before the Supreme Court of Canada regarding the interpretation of the word persons in the British North America Act. All of the women signed the petition and the case was titled *Edwards v. Attorney General of Canada*.

At first, the Supreme Court ended up denying the petition, which is why the group of women, now called the Famous Five, took their request to the Judicial Committee of the Privy Council. This was Canada's highest court of appeal at the time.

In October of 1929, after much deliberation, the Privy Council reversed the decision of the Supreme Court. It concluded that the word "persons" does include women, and that women are eligible to be summoned to and become members of the Senate of Canada.

Unfortunately Emily was never able to see her hard work truly come to life, as she died in 1933. However, Emily's contributions were not forgotten. She was named a Person of National Historic Significance and an honorary senator. A park was also created in Emily's honor in Edmonton, and there are many statues of the famous Five all around Canada.

Although Emily certainly changed history, she has been criticized for being racist and supporting the eugenics movement, which was the idea that the human race could be improved by controlling reproduction. What Emily supported was not right, but instead of denying her role as a changemaker because of some of her beliefs, we should learn from her mistakes and try to create a better future.

I have been inspired by Emily to join the speech and debate program at my school, where I am able to discuss topics that I feel passionate about. So far, I have participated in multiple competitions, and won a few medals. Whenever I feel nervous when going up on stage, I think of Emily's bravery, and it encourages me to keep going.

Emily's story has also inspired me to stand up for what I believe in by doing a fundraiser for the Alberta Children's Hospital, where I sold used clothes and did a bottle drive in my neighborhood to raise money to help sick kids.

Thirdly, Emily has inspired me to be more helpful and considerate of others. I am doing this by getting my lifeguard certification so that I can work at the YMCA and help people at the pool. I also volunteered at the Calgary Public Library, and will continue to do so this summer, where I tutored young children in math, reading and coding. I want to use my skills to uplift other people and make a positive difference in our world.

In the words of Alberta Champion Emily Murphy, “Success is not measured by what we have, but by who we become.”

***Note:** Video, including the music, was created using the website Canva.

References

- Emily Murphy*. (n.d.). Archives of Women's Political Communication. Retrieved April 12, 2024, from <https://awpc.cattcenter.iastate.edu/directory/emily-murphy/>
- Jackel, S. (2008, April 1). *Emily Murphy*. The Canadian Encyclopedia. Retrieved April 12, 2024, from <https://www.thecanadianencyclopedia.ca/en/article/emily-murphy>
- 30 Best Emily Murphy Quotes With Image*. (n.d.). Bookey. Retrieved April 12, 2024, from <https://www.bookey.app/quote-author/emily-murphy>