



Nellie McClung's BATTLE FOR EQUALITY

By Ilisha Rai

A story about strength, sacrifice, and courage!

Let's go back to 2020, when it was finally our turn to put in our vote. The room had a rich woody scent, and my legs were aching from standing in line. As I entered the booth, my mother told me, you know, we wouldn't be able to vote today if it weren't for our famous women's rights activists. And I had no idea what she was talking about! Weren't women always allowed to vote? And before I knew it, I found myself asking innumerable questions in my head! I knew I had to put an end to all my questions! I was dazzled by who these women were and what they did! As my knowledge grew on this topic, I became even more inspired and grateful for all the women's rights activists, but there was one in particular I was especially inspired by—Nellie McClung.

In 1873, Chatsworth, Ontario, a little girl, Nellie Letita McClung was born. Little did we know, this little girl was about to bring a drastic change to the lives of women! Nellie was known for her vigorous public speeches, several books, and she amazed audiences with her quick wit and legitimate interest in people and their problems. She fought that women should be recognized as “persons” in the government. In 1880, her family moved to a homestead in western Manitoba, an area very far from a school until she was ten years old! Despite a late start in school, she earned her teaching certificate at 16 years old! A few years later, Nellie married a pharmacist, Robert Clung, and had five children! Nellie moved to Winnipeg in 1911 where she was more politically active, engaging herself in things such as votes and legal rights for women, as well as working conditions in factories. Nellie also published her first novel, “Sowing seeds in Danny”, which later became a bestseller!

There was a crucial moment in the suffrage campaign during 1914, when Nellie and others were fed up with the arrogant attitude of some politicians. They rented a theater and put on a mock trial in Manitoba to debate the question, “Should men have the right to vote?”, and fought for equality. They used their strongest weapon—humor! Nellie showed how it would be like if women were in charge and why men should not vote. It was highly successful, thanks to the lovely impersonations made by Nellie McClung. They later performed the show in Winnipeg. It was not surprising that two years later in 1916, Montreal became the first province in Canada to grant women the vote and be able to run for office. In 1914, Nellie and her family moved to Edmonton, and she continued to be involved in Feminist causes. In 1916, women got the right to vote in provincial elections. In 1921, Nellie was elected as a liberal MLA for Edmonton! She was narrowly defeated in the 1926 election, so she went back to her writing, authoring 16 novels as well as numerous short stories, and even a news column!

Nellie was also part of The Famous Five. “The Famous Five” were five important women who fought for women's rights. They all signed a petition asking for women to count as persons and showed various governments in Canada. In 1929, the Privy Council ruled that of course, Canadian women are persons! (There were two exceptions: in Quebec, women couldn't vote; and in New

Brunswick, women could not hold political office.) Finally, all her hard work flourished . Success at last!

Nellie moved to Victoria where she became the first female member of the CBC Board of Governors in 1936. She continued to write and make remarkable speeches until her death in 1951. Her achievements were amazing and can be partly explained by Nellie's favorite motto, "Never react, never explain, never apologize. Get the thing done and let them howl."

How Nellie McClung inspired me:

Nellie helped the Canadian Community by helping women have the right to vote: I would love to contribute to my community by becoming a Developmental Doctor. I would love to uplift children during onerous times in their lives, and so they can continue to be motivated throughout their lives and have a bright future ahead of them. Currently, I am trying to donate to hospitals and charities by putting up garage sales and donating the money I earn to them, volunteering at hospitals, and giving away clothes and supplies to foster cares. I strongly believe that this would have a great impact on those kids and bring more happiness to their lives because they rarely get new supplies.

Public speeches:

After hearing how Nellie made public speeches to help women, and made huge differences with her speeches, I decided to make public speeches too. Now, in community centers, malls, Parks, and other public spaces, I like to make speeches that help the community too. The speeches I make I intend to have an effect or help the people and environment.

Writing about my experiences:

Nellie wrote about her story and path to reaching success. I want to write about how important it is to keep reaching for your goals, and I think a perfect way to do this would be by making a blog and YouTube channel! I would post interviews of people who failed but kept on reaching for their goals and ended up with great success in the end to help motivate other people on pursuing their dreams, no matter what!

Nellie debated for what she wanted.

Nellie has inspired me to participate in debating events because she could fight on her behalf for what she wanted and it used a strategy of skill, not luck. I would love to debate for what I believe should matter too. Debating is a perfect way to do that. I could prepare, and most importantly, use a strategy to help me win, and at the same time I could get what I wanted.

My main take-away:

Nellie also made me recognize one very important main factor. Women are no less capable of things than men. I loved her favorite motto because it really helped motivate me when I was afraid to share my ideas in group projects, but as I kept reminding myself of Nellie's motto, I learned to not be afraid of sharing my ideas and taking hold of important jobs. Now, I love sharing my ideas and taking hold of important jobs, with no lack of confidence.

Resources:

[Alberta Heritage](#)
[Histori.ca](#)

[University of Calgary](#)

[Alberta Assembly](#)

<https://www.thecanadianencyclopedia.ca/en/article/persons-case>

<https://albertachampions.org/Champions/mcclung-nellie-1873-1951/>

[Heritage Minutes: Nellie McClung](#) [History Bits: No Votes For Men!](#) / [Parcelles d'histoire :](#)

[Pas de vote pour les hommes!](#)

