Mary Dover

By Yuvi Y.P Parashar

The cloudy Calgary sky was brushed over with a navy-blue hue. It was December 2024, and the cold had settled deep into the city's bones. I watched an army of delicate snowflakes landing on the Calgary Tower like frozen confetti. The tower glowed in eye-catching reds and pastel pinks, the downtown lights spilling on the mirror-like skin of the Bow River, casting on the body of the Peace Bridge. I could hear the CTrain humming its tune in the distance - Calgary was indeed alive. I could not stop thinking about the intricate paintings and artifacts we admired at the Glenbow Museum as we walked along the iconic path of the Peace Bridge. This is the land of fearless leaders and the soil that gave birth to the heroes of Alberta, something that I am proud of. Feeling patriotic, I walked past Memorial Drive with my chest inflated and my head held high, feeling fortunate to live in this city. I am proud to be Calgarian.

As I was admiring the skyline, my phone buzzed in my pocket- it was my friend telling me about Alberta Champions. My eyes lit up as I realized victory was inevitable. After all, researching and writing are among my hobbies, and since it was winter break, I had time. I scrolled through Champions on the essay website and none of them truly won me over until I landed on Mary Dover. Her story was cut from a different cloth. As soon as she drew her first breath, Mary Dover was woven into the intricate fabric of Alberta's vast legacy, a knot of fate that would tighten in the years to come. Born as Mary Cross, she came into this world on Alberta's day of confederation: July 1, 1905. She was the daughter of one of Alberta's pathfinders, ranching industry trailblazer, and co-founder of the Calgary Stampede: A.E. Cross. Mary could have steered into the path of a carefree, life of leisure, but that wasn't her style. She seized a life of bold pursuits. Mary yearned to nurture her inferno for adventure. Though Mary attended the best private schools in Calgary, she would always describe herself as an athlete with modest academics. In her early teens, she found herself as a flourished equestrienne. Following an arduous scholastic journey, Mary completed her formal years of education. Throughout the following days, one could only hear pops of champagne around Mary's house. Unbeknownst to her, thunderous bangs were written in her future.

As time passed, she found herself in a pivotal moment in her life. A harmony of Mary's loved ones' laughter echoed through the Cross household. The delicate sound of glasses clinking and toasts being made flooded into Mary's ears. She was getting married! In 1930, Mary was happily married to her soulmate, Melville Dover. Mary could relate to the craving for adventure Melville radiated. He was a debonair sales executive, whilst having been a thrill-seeking pilot in the First World War. Mary could not have asked for a better husband. They explored the world hand-in-hand, settling in Colombo, Sri Lanka. In 1933, their beloved son David was born. Her story sparked a fire in me, I slept that night thinking that this essay was mine to win.

I scarfed down the last of my breakfast when I felt the research begging for me to dig in. I stopped in my tracks as a shrilling voice hit me; It was my mom and she made it clear - I needed

to help with the Christmas lights. Before I knew it, I had bundled up and headed out with my mom. I felt irritated as I detangled the never-ending string of Christmas lights with my fingers frozen. All I could think about was research and my warm bed. The thought alone was paradise. Without warning, a scream cut through it all. I saw my mom curling up on the concrete holding her ankle.

My world had been shaken. My mom's leg was broken, yet she was smiling through it. After she made her initial recovery, I could take my first relaxed breath in hours.

This was an opportune moment to work on the essay that I sought after to research about. Hours melted away as I read about Mary Dover and the depth of how she made a decision that would change the destiny of her beloved land of wild beauty.

After years of stability in Colombo, Mary longed for adventure. After consideration she made the decision that she wanted to serve. In Second World War, the role that women played was limited to nursing and volunteering. Mary was ready to shatter these boundaries. Her objective was set in motion when she worked with the Red Triangle Organization. Mary's indefatigability was brought to the forefront and recognized by powerful individuals including Brig. F. M. Harvey VC. Harvey saw Mary's leadership potential and recruited her to lead thousands of eager Albertan women to aid in the war. With her in control, Alberta became an exemplary training ground for females. Dover was not one to stand idly while war threatened her world. She understood the gravity of the moment, igniting this realization in the hearts of countless women,

"The war has come to our doorsteps, our country is liable to be bombed. We are a small population but have a fine spirit and we must be ready, not only to defend our country but also to keep up the spirit." Mary had broken through traditional gender norms that would redefine women's contributions to Canada's war effort.

Mary was awarded the rank of Major for her unyielding dedication. A pivotal moment in Canadian military history was set in motion because of Dover's ambition. In March of 1942, the Canadian Women's Army Corps gained the status of an independent militia unit, ending the drought of equality for the women of Alberta. This victory could not take away from the duty of the organization, instead she cemented it further.

"It's not a women's organization. It's simply another corps in the army. Its members have a heavy responsibility."

My mom's accident made me rethink everything I understood about myself. Mary seemed to appear in every corner of my life, her presence and inspiration woven into the fabric of my life in ways I had not anticipated. I saw her in my recovering mother. My mom's determination echoed parallel to Mary's resilience and how she left comfort to serve her country. Just the next day, I saw Mary standing before me as I listened to stories of grit from Bethany, a 90-year-old veteran while volunteering at the Salvation Army. Beth's words still echo in my mind,

"Average people stay in their comfort zone; people who bear the storm of life… are called above average."

I questioned the paths I had been blindly walking on - I always had taken the easy path, never inviting the struggles and rewards of seemingly perilous routes. At this time in my life, emotionally burdened by my mom's situation, my heart was dropped into a churning ocean. Mary helped me and showed me how growing from discomfort rather than retreating into ease will help me find the path to true greatness. Unnoticeably, I was mirroring Mary as she slowly rebuilt my character. I was dead set on being the best version of myself, unlocking a new, vigorous side of me. This energy helped me see the bigger picture— Mary's messages coming together, awakening strength. It was not about overcoming an obstacle to attain victory; it was about *valuing* the struggle. I was on the path of growth and witnessed the depth of the quiet struggle women around me. Mary dared me to choose challenge over comfort by doing something I was not brave enough to do: join the Junior Police Academy (JPA) with CPS. In the JPA, even at my most nervous, I could not compare with what Mary had endured. The discipline, the pressure, and the responsibility she carried on such a large scale.

What started as a name and a word count, metamorphosized into me navigating the rugged path of my life. To me, Mary was more than a historical figure on a website, she reflected the kind of person *I* wanted to become. I now challenge beliefs that had unknowingly governed my life. Seemingly insurmountable obstacles stand before me still, but I've learned to embrace them with a smile. Mary's determination and strength echoes in every part of my life. Whether it be helping my mom recover from her injury or marching with cadets at the JPA. Her history is a light in the darkness of uncertainty that guides me through fear and doubt into personal transformation. Mary instilled in me that true strength lies in confronting it and shattering it. Through Mary Dover, I found the zeal for any journey I embark on. In exchange for her, I no longer just live in Alberta—I walk forward with Alberta stitched into *my* story.

Sources:

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