



CRUSADING JOURNALIST

NELLY BLY

Shined Light on Women's Issues

By Jordan Pelavin

It took Nelly Bly 72 days to travel the entire world. Twenty-four thousand eight hundred and ninety-nine miles from Hoboken, N. J., and all the way back again. It was an impressive feat inspired by the fictional account in the book "Around the World in 80 Days" and it was only one of Bly's in-depth, investigative and lived reporting experiences.

Bly was born as Elizabeth Cochran on May 5, 1864 in Cochran's Mills, Pennsylvania, what is today a Pittsburgh suburb. Her

father, Michael Cochran was an Irish immigrant who worked in the local mill. Her mother, Mary Jane Cochran cared for her and her siblings at their home. When Bly was in her early teens, her father bought the mill where he had worked for most of her life, as well as most of the land surrounding their family's farmhouse. Her family was not wealthy however—Bly was forced to drop out of the boarding school she attended for a single term due to a lack of family funds.

Bly's writing career started mostly by anger and happenstance.

In the year 1880, when Bly was 16, her family moved to Pittsburgh. In the Pittsburgh paper one day a column was published entitled "What Girls Are Good For." Bly saw the column as misogynistic and under the pseudonym of "Lonely Orphan Girl" wrote an irate letter to the editor about what was wrong with the column. The editor of the paper, George Madden, was so impressed with her writing and her conviction that he put out an advertisement in the paper asking for the author of the letter to contact him.

Once the budding writer

Nelly Bly continued from page 17

came forward, Madden offered her the opportunity to write another piece for the paper under the same “Lonely Orphan Girl” pseudonym. This article impressed Madden so much that he offered her a full-time writing job at the paper. The young journalist decided that she would write under the name “Nelly Bly” naming herself after a character in a popular song of the same name. However, due to a typo her byline read “Nellie Bly” and it stuck.

Bly started her work for the newspaper writing about what she saw as women’s issues—including a series of the working conditions of women factory workers. Her writing ruffled some feathers—she was a woman writer in a time when women’s liberation was just becoming a major issue, writing about women’s struggles. Soon, her editors forced her to the “women’s pages,” where she was assigned stories about fashion and gardening and other things that her editors thought were acceptable for women journalists.

She wasn’t a fan of the stories she was being told to write, so Bly decided to head to Mexico where she spent about six months living and working as a foreign correspondent. She wrote about the government dictatorship and about daily life for Mexican citizens. Her reports were eventually pulled to-

gether and published as a book under the name “Six Months in Mexico.” She was run out of the country when Mexican officials learned of a report she had written protesting the arrest of a local journalist who had criticized the government.

Back in America, Bly eventually made her way to New York City, where in 1887 she took a job for the New York World, where she would pretend to be insane and go undercover at the Women’s Lunatic Asylum on Blackwell’s Island to investigate reports of mismanagement and negligent. She went to a boarding house and scared the borders so badly that they called the police on her. From there she was taken to court, and then to doctors who declared



her “demented and insane.”

Bly was committed to the asylum and took notes and wrote about the conditions. She spoke to other patients and told their stories as well. She wrote about how the patients suffered abuse at the hands of the nurses, who would beat and berate them. She wrote about how the food was spoiled and the water was undrinkable, and about how there was no warm water and there were rats everywhere. After 10 days, the New York World reached out to the asylum and got Bly released. Her report (and the subsequent book) “Ten Days in a Mad-House” caused huge amounts of public discussion, and helped make



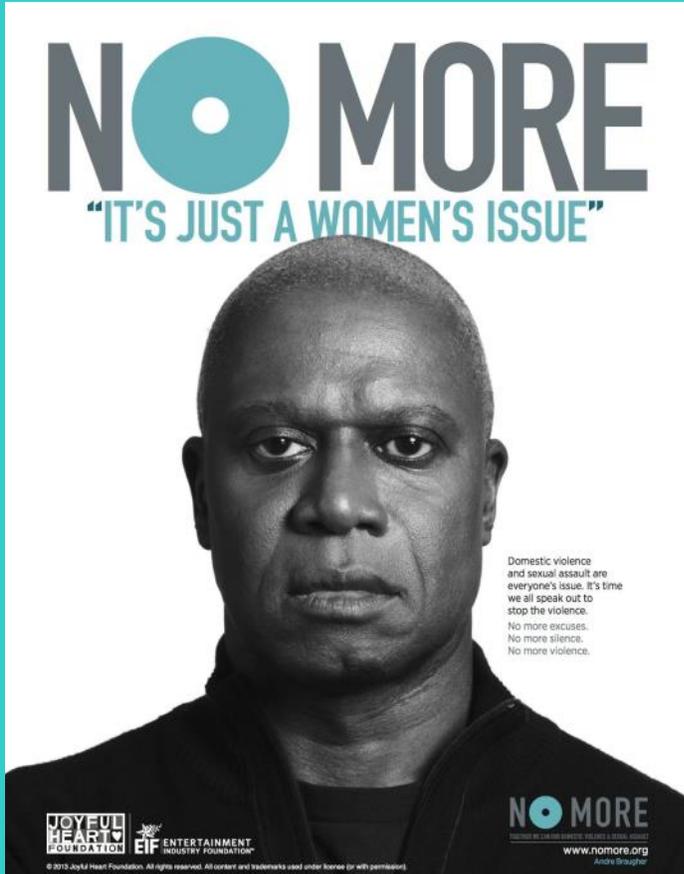
the way for many changes to the system that led to improvements in the facility.

Bly's second most infamous adventure was her voyage around the world in 1889 and 1890. With just a small bag and the clothing on her back, Bly set out to turn the fiction of the story "Around the World in 80 Days" into something real. She traveled by train, boat and car, and stopped in countries all over the world. She wrote stories about everything that she saw. It took her 72 days.

In 1895, at the age of 31, Bly married Robert Seaman, 73, a manufacturing millionaire. She left her journalistic career to join her husband in the world of manufacturing, becoming the president of Iron Clad Manufacturing Co. Bly held patents for milk cans and stackable garbage cans as well as for the steel barrel oil drum. Her husband passed away in 1904, from Pneumonia.

After her husband's death, Bly continued to work in the world of manufacturing until an employee embezzlement scandal forced her company to go bankrupt and close. This led to Bly to take up journalism once again. She worked as a war correspondent in Europe during World War I and wrote award-winning stories about the fight for women's suffrage in America.

Bly died of pneumonia in New York City in 1922. She was 57. Bly was buried in the Bronx, N.Y., in a grave near her husbands'. Her grave was modest, when compared to her oversized life.



NO MORE

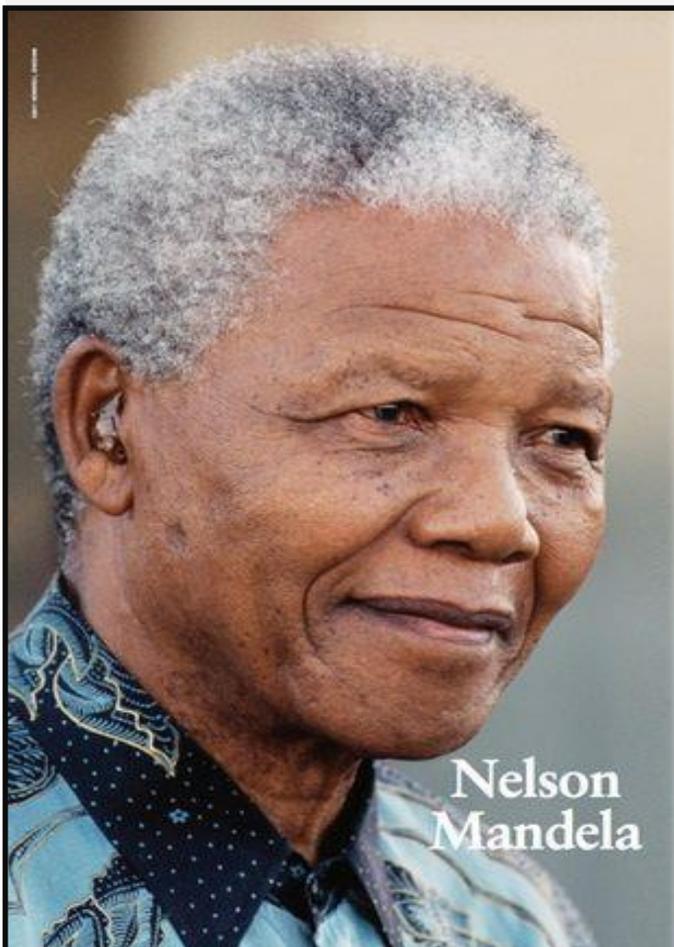
"IT'S JUST A WOMEN'S ISSUE"

Domestic violence and sexual assault are everyone's issue. It's time we all speak out to stop the violence. No more excuses. No more silence. No more violence.

JOYFUL HEART FOUNDATION
EIF ENTERTAINMENT INDUSTRY FOUNDATION

NO MORE
www.nomore.org

© 2013 Joyful Heart Foundation. All rights reserved. All content and trademarks used under license (or with permission).



What can one person do?

INSPIRATION