

SPECIAL EDITION
for
MARCH:
**Women's
History Month**

The Scholastic Tribune

Read all about the exploits of journalist and trailblazer Nellie Bly

EXTRA!
This is a
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PDF!**



NELLIE BLY: DAREDEVIL REPORTER

By Sean McCollum

At the turn of the 20th century, this young woman wrote her way to fame in the man's world of journalism.

"In spite of . . . the assurance that I would be released in a few days, my heart gave a sharp twinge. Pronounced insane by four expert doctors and shut up behind the unmerciful bolts of a mad-house . . . was an uncomfortable position."

CLICK TO CONTINUE

AROUND THE WORLD IN 72 DAYS

**CAN GIRL REPORTER
NELLIE BLY BEAT A MAN'S
RECORD TIME?**

By Nellie Bly

NEW YORK, 1889 - ON Thursday, November 14, 1889, at 9.40.30 o'clock, I started on my tour around the world.

Those who think that night is the best part of the day and that morning was made for sleep, know how uncomfortable they feel when for some reason they have to get up with—well, with the milkman.

I turned over several times before I decided to quit my bed.

I dozed off very sweetly over these thoughts to wake with a start, wondering anxiously if there was still time to catch the ship.

Of course I wanted to go, but I thought lazily that if some of these good people who spend so much time in trying to invent flying machines would only devote a little of the same energy towards promoting a system by which

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TEN DAYS IN A MAD-HOUSE

NELLIE BLY'S HARROWING EXPERIENCE REVEALED!



By Nellie Bly

NEW YORK, 1887 - ON the 22d of September, I was asked by the World if I could have myself committed to one of the asylums for the insane in New York, with a view to writing a plain and unvarnished narrative of the treatment of the patients therein and the methods of management, etc. Did I think I had the courage to go through such an ordeal as the mission would demand? I said I believed I could. I had some faith

in my own ability as an actress and thought I could assume insanity long enough to accomplish any mission entrusted to me. Could I pass a week in the insane ward at Blackwell's Island? I said I could, and I would. And I did.

In giving this story I expect to be contradicted by many who are exposed. I merely tell in common words, without exaggeration, of my life in a mad-house for ten days.

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Need a pick-me-up?
Try our BRAND NEW beverage
COCA-COLA!

The official drink of 1886!
It's loaded with sugar!

*("Ten Days in a Mad-House,"
continued from page 1)*

The eating was one of the worst parts. The hungry and even famished women made an attempt to eat the horrible messes. Mustard and vinegar were put on meat and in soup to give it a taste, but it only helped to make it worse. Even that was all consumed after two days, and the patients had to try to choke down fish, just boiled in water, without salt, pepper or butter. The most insane refused to swallow the food and were threatened with punishment. In our short walks we passed the kitchen where food was prepared for the nurses and doctors. There we got glimpses of melons and grapes and all kinds of fruits, beautiful white bread and nice meats, and the hungry feeling would be increased tenfold.

My heart ached to see the sick patients grow sicker over the table. When the patients complained of the food, they were told to shut up;

that they would not have as good if they were at home, and that it was too good for charity patients.

A German girl, Louise, did not eat for several days, and at last one morning she was missing. From the conversation of the nurses I found she was suffering from a high fever. Poor thing! She told me she unceasingly prayed for death. I watched the nurses make a patient carry such food up to Louise's room. Think of that stuff for a fever patient! Of course, she refused it.

Miss Tillie Mayard suffered more than any of us from the cold, and yet she tried to follow my advice to be cheerful and try to keep up for a short time. She spoke to the doctors and told them she was ill, but they paid no attention to her. The nurses came and dragged her back to the bench, and after the doctors left they said, "After a while, when you see that the doctors will not notice you, you will quit running up to them." The nurses had on heavy undergar-

ments and coats, but they refused to give us shawls.

Nearly all night long I listened to a woman cry about the cold and beg for God to let her die. Another one yelled "Murder!" at frequent intervals and "Police!" at others until my flesh felt creepy.

The second morning, two of the nurses, assisted by some patients, brought the woman in who had begged for God to take her home. I was not surprised at her prayer. She appeared easily seventy years old, and she was blind.

When she was brought into the sitting room and placed on the hard bench, she cried: "Oh, what are you doing with me? I am cold, so cold. Why can't I stay in bed or have a shawl?" and then she would get up and endeavor to feel her way to leave the room. Sometimes the attendants would jerk her back to the bench, and again they would let her walk and heartlessly laugh

when she bumped against the table or the edge of the benches.

The old woman then tried to lie down on the bench, but they pulled her up again. It sounded so pitiful to hear her cry: "Oh, give me a pillow and pull the covers over me, I am so cold."

At this I saw the nurse sit down and run her cold hands over the old woman's face and inside the neck of her dress. At the old woman's cries she laughed savagely, as did the other nurses, and repeated her cruel action. That day the old woman was carried away to another ward.

People in the world can never imagine the length of days to those in asylums. They seemed never ending, and we welcomed any event that might give us something to think about as well as talk of.

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Nellie Bly is declared "positiviely demented."

("Ten Days in a Mad-House,"
continued from page 2)

There is nothing to read, and the only bit of talk that never wears out is conjuring up delicious food that they will get as soon as they get out. Anxiously the hour was watched for when the boat arrived to see if there were any new unfortunates to be added to our ranks.

Soon after my arrival a girl was brought in. She grew more hysterical every moment until the nurses pounced upon her and slapped her face and knocked her head in a lively fashion. This made the poor creature cry the more, and so they choked her. Yes, actually choked her. Then they dragged her out to the closet, and I heard her terrified cries hush into smothered ones. After several hours' absence she returned to the sitting room, and I plainly saw the marks of their fingers on her throat for the entire day.

Once a week the patients are given a bath, and that is the only time they see soap. On bathing day the tub is filled with water, and the patients are washed, one after the other, without a change of water. This is done until the water is really thick, and then it is allowed to run out, and the tub is refilled without being washed. The healthy patients fight for a change of water, but they are compelled to submit to the dictates of the lazy, tyrannical nurses. The dresses are seldom changed oftener than once a month. If the patient has a visitor, I have seen the nurses hurry her out and change

her dress before the visitor comes in. This keeps up the appearance of careful and good management.

I made the acquaintance of Bridget McGuinness, who seems to be sane at the present time. She said she was sent to Retreat 4, and put on the "rope gang."

"The beatings I got there were something dreadful. I was pulled around by the hair, held under the water until I strangled, and I was choked and kicked. The nurses would always keep a quiet patient stationed at the window to tell them when any of the doctors were approaching. It was hopeless to complain to the doctors, for they always said it was the imagination of our diseased brains, and besides we would get another beating for telling. They would hold patients

under the water and threaten to leave them to die there if they did not promise not to tell the doctors. We would all promise, because we knew the doctors would not help us, and we would do anything to escape the punishment.

"After breaking a window, I was transferred to the Lodge, the worst place on the island. It is dreadfully dirty in there, and the stench is awful. In the summer, the flies swarm the place. The food is worse than we get in other wards, and we are given only tin plates. Instead of the bars being on the outside, as in this ward, they are on the inside. There are many quiet patients there who have been there for years, but the nurses keep them to do the work. Among other beatings I got there, the nurses

jumped on me once and broke two of my ribs.

"While I was there a pretty young girl was brought in. She had been sick, and she fought against being put in that dirty place. One night the nurses took her and, after beating her, they held her naked in a cold bath, then they threw her on her bed. When morning came the girl was dead. The doctors said she died of convulsions, and that was all that was done about it."

The insane asylum on Blackwell's Island is a human rat-trap. It is easy to get in, but once there it is impossible to get out. I had intended to have myself committed to the violent wards, the Lodge and Retreat, but when I got the testimony of two sane women and could give it, I decided not to risk my health—and hair—so I did not get violent.

I had, toward the last, been shut off from all visitors, and so when a lawyer came and told me that friends of mine were willing to take charge of me if I would rather be with them than in the asylum, I was only too glad to give my consent. I asked him to send me something to eat immediately on his arrival in the city, and then I waited anxiously for my release.

§ § §

Soon after I had bidden farewell to the Blackwell's Island Insane Asylum, I was summoned to appear before the Grand Jury.

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SAY "BONJOUR"

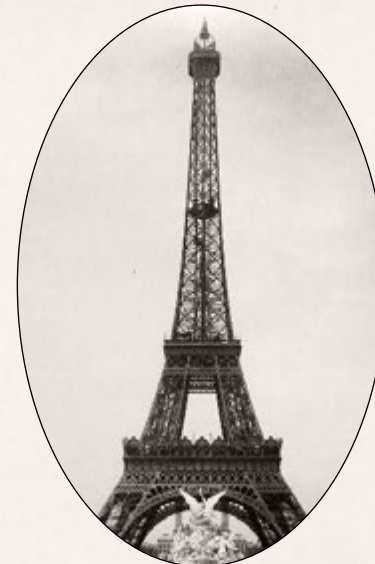
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("Ten Days in a Mad-House,"
continued from page 3)

I answered the summons with pleasure, because I longed to help those whom I had left prisoners behind me. If I could not bring them that boon of all boons, liberty, I hoped at least to influence others to make life more bearable for them.

I swore to the truth of my story, and then I related all. The jurors then requested that I should accompany them on a visit to the Island. I was glad to consent.

No one was expected to know of the contemplated trip to the Island, yet we had not been there very long before one of the commissioners of charity and Dr. MacDonald, of Ward's Island, were with us. One of the jurors told me that in conversation with a man about the asylum, he heard that they were notified of our coming an hour before we reached the Island.

Some of the nurses were examined by the jury, and made contradictory statements to one another, as well as to my story. They confessed that the jury's visit had been talked over between them and the doctor.

Miss Anne Neville was brought down, and I went into the hall to meet her. She was not sworn, but her story must have convinced all hearers of the truth of my statements.

"When Miss Brown and I were brought here the nurses were cruel and the food was too bad to eat. We did not have enough clothing, and Miss Brown asked for more all the time. Strange to say, ever since Miss Brown has been taken away everything is different. The nurses are very kind and we are given plenty to wear. The doctors come to see us often and the food is greatly improved."

Did we need more evidence?

The jurors then visited the kitchen. It was very clean, and two barrels of salt stood conspicuously open near the door! The bread on exhibition was beautifully white and wholly unlike what was given us to

eat.

We found the halls in the finest order. The beds were improved, and in hall 7 the buckets in which we were compelled to wash had been replaced by bright new basins.

The institution was on exhibition, and no fault could be found.

I hardly expected the grand jury to believe me, after they saw everything different from what it had been while I was there. Yet they did, and their report to the court advises all the changes made that I had proposed.

I have one consolation for my work—on the strength of my story the committee of appropriation provides \$1,000,000 more than was ever before given, for the benefit of the insane. §

Nellie Bly was an investigative journalist and avid traveler. She lived in New York City.

("Around the World,"
continued from page 1)

boats and trains would always make their start at noon or afterwards, they would be of greater assistance to suffering humanity.

I endeavored to take some breakfast, but the hour was too early to make food endurable. The last moment at home came. There was a hasty kiss for the dear ones, and a blind rush downstairs trying to overcome the hard lump in my

throat that threatened to make me regret the journey that lay before me.

"Don't worry," I said encouragingly, as I was unable to speak that dreadful word, goodbye; "only think of me as having a vacation and the most enjoyable time in my life."

Then to encourage myself I thought, as I was on my way to the ship: "It's only a matter of 28,000 miles, and seventy-five days and four hours, until I shall be back again."

A few friends, told of my hurried departure, were there to say good-bye. The morning was bright and beautiful, and everything seemed very pleasant while the boat was still; but when my friends were warned to go ashore, I began to realize what it meant for me.

"Keep up your courage," they said while they gave my hand the farewell clasp. I saw the moisture in their eyes, and I tried to smile so that their last recollection of me would be one that would cheer them.

But when the whistle blew, and they were on the pier, and I was on the *Augusta Victoria*, which was slowly but surely moving away from all I knew, taking me to strange lands and strange people, I felt lost.

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Nellie Bly prepares to "act insane" before successfully infiltrating Blackwell.



(*“Around the World,”*
continued from page 4)

My head felt dizzy and my heart felt as if it would burst. Only seventy-five days! Yes, but it seemed an age, and the world lost its roundness and seemed a long distance with no end, and—well, I could never turn back.

I looked as long as I could at the people on the pier. I did not feel as happy as I have at other times in life. I had a sentimental longing to take farewell of everything.

“I am off,” I thought sadly, “and shall I ever get back?”

Intense heat, bitter cold, terrible storms, shipwrecks, fevers, all such agreeable topics had been drummed into me until I felt much as I imagine one would feel if shut in a cave of midnight darkness and told that all sorts of horrors were waiting to gobble one up.

The morning was beautiful and the bay never looked lovelier. The ship glided out smoothly and quietly, and the people on deck looked for their chairs and rugs and got into comfortable positions, as if determined to enjoy themselves while they could.

“You have now started on your trip,” someone said to me. “As soon as the captain assumes command, then, and only then our voyage begins, so now you are really started on your tour around the world.”

Something in his words turned my thoughts to that demon of the sea—seasickness.

Never having taken a sea voyage before, I could expect nothing else than a lively tussle with the disease of the wave.

“Do you get seasick?” I was asked in an interested, friendly way. That was enough; I flew to the railing.

Sick? I looked blindly down, caring little what the wild waves were saying, and gave vent to my feelings.

People are always unfeeling about sea-sickness. When I wiped the tears from my eyes and turned around, I saw smiles on the face of every passenger. The smiles did

not bother me, but one man said sneeringly:

“And she’s going around the world!”

I too joined in the laugh that followed. Silently I marveled at my boldness to attempt such a feat wholly unused, as I was, to sea-voyages. Still I did not entertain one doubt as to the result.

Of course I went to luncheon. Everybody did, and almost everybody left very hurriedly. I joined them, or, I don’t know, probably I made the start. Anyway I never saw as many in the dining room at any one time during the rest of the voyage.

When dinner was served I went in very bravely and took my place on the Captain’s left. I had a very strong determination to resist my impulses, but yet, in the bottom of my heart was a faint feeling that I had found something even stronger than my willpower.

Dinner began very pleasantly.

The waiters moved about noiselessly, the band played an overture, Captain Albers, handsome and genial, took his place at the head, and the passengers who were seated at his table began dinner with a relish equaled only by enthusiastic wheelmen when roads are fine. I was the only one at the Captain’s table who might be called an amateur sailor. I was bitterly conscious of this fact. So were the others.

I might as well confess it, while soup was being served, I was lost in painful thoughts and filled with a sickening fear. I endeavored to listen to the enthusiastic remarks about the music made by my companions, but my thoughts were on a topic that would not bear discussion.

I felt cold, I felt warm; I felt that I should not get hungry if I did not see food for seven days; in fact, I

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Throughout her career, Nellie Bly was committed to exposing the mistreatment of women, often risking her life to get the full story. Like the laborers pictured above, Bly worked on an assembly line at a box factory in 1887 while on assignment.

(*“Around the World,”* continued from page 5)

had a great, longing desire not to see it, nor to smell it, nor to eat of it, until I could reach land.

Fish was served, and Captain Albers was in the midst of a good story when I felt I had more than I could endure.

“Excuse me,” I whispered faintly, and then rushed, madly, blindly out. I was assisted to a secluded spot where a little reflection and a little unbridling of pent up emotion restored me to such a courageous state that I determined to take the Captain’s advice and return to my unfinished dinner.

“The only way to conquer seasickness is by forcing one’sself to eat,” the Captain said, and I thought the remedy harmless enough to test.

They congratulated me on my return. I had a shamed feeling that I was going to misbehave again, but I tried to hide the fact from them. It came soon, and I disappeared at the same rate of speed as before.

Once again I returned. This time my nerves felt a little unsteady and my belief in my determination was weakening. Hardly had I seated myself when I caught an amused gleam of a steward’s eye, which made me bury my face in my handkerchief and choke before I reached the limits of the dining hall.

The bravos with which they kindly greeted my third return to the table almost threatened to make me lose my bearings again. I was glad to know that dinner was just finished, and I had the boldness to say that it was very good!

I went to bed shortly afterwards. No one had made any friends yet, so I concluded sleep would be more enjoyable than sitting in the music hall looking at other passengers engaged in the same first-day-at-sea occupation.

I went to bed shortly after seven o’clock. I had a dim recollection afterwards of waking up enough to drink some tea, but beyond this and

the remembrance of some dreadful dreams, I knew nothing until I heard an honest, jolly voice at the door calling to me.

Opening my eyes I found the stewardess and a lady passenger in my cabin and saw the Captain standing at the door.

“We were afraid that you were dead,” the Captain said when he saw that I was awake.

“I always sleep late in the morning,” I said apologetically.

In the morning!” the Captain exclaimed, with a laugh, which was echoed by the others, “It is half-past four in the evening!”

“But never mind,” he added consolingly, “as long as you slept well it will do you good. Now get up and see if you can’t eat a big dinner.”

I did. I went through every course at dinner without flinching, and stranger still, I slept that night as well as people are commonly supposed to sleep after long exercise in the open air.

The weather was very bad, and the sea was rough, but I enjoyed it. My seasickness had disappeared, but I had a haunting idea, that although it was gone, it would come again, still I managed to make myself comfortable.

Almost all of the passengers avoided the dining room, took their meals on deck and maintained reclining positions with a persistency that grew monotonous. One bright, clever, American-born girl was traveling alone to Germany, to her parents. She entered heartily into anything that was conducive to pleasure. She was a girl who talked a great deal and she always said something. I have rarely, if ever, met her equal. In German as well as English, she could ably discuss anything from fashions to politics. Her father and her uncle are men well-known in public affairs, and by this girl’s conversation it was easy to see that she was her father’s favorite child; she was so broad and brilliant and womanly.

There was not one man on board who knew more about politics, art, literature or music, than this girl, and yet there was not one of us more ready and willing to take a race on deck than was she.

I think it is only natural for travelers to take an innocent pleasure in studying the peculiarities of their fellow companions. We were not out many days until everybody that was able to be about had added a little to their knowledge of those that were not. I will not say that the knowledge acquired in that way is of any benefit. Nevertheless, it was harmless, and it afforded us some amusement.

I remember when I was told that we had among the passengers one man who counted his pulse after every meal, and they were hearty meals, too, for he was free from the disease of the wave, that I waited quite eagerly to have him pointed out, so that I might watch him. If it had been my pulse, instead of his own, that he watched so carefully, I could not have been more interested thereafter. Every day I became more anxious and concerned until I could hardly refrain from asking him if his pulse decreased before meals and increased afterwards, or if it was the same in the evening as it was in the morning.

I almost forgot my interest in this one man, when my attention was called to another, who counted the number of steps he took every day. This one in turn became less interesting when I found that one of the women, who had been a great sufferer from seasickness, had not undressed since she left her home in New York.

“I am sure we are all going down,” she said one day in a burst of confidence, “and I am determined to go down dressed!”

One family who were moving from New York to Paris, had with

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(“*Around the World*,” continued from page 6)

them a little silver Skye terrier, which bore the rather odd name of “Home, Sweet Home.”

Fortunately for the dog, as well as for those who were compelled to speak to him, they had shortened the name into “Homie.” §

Nellie Bly was an investigative journalist and avid traveler. She lived in New York City.

(“*Nellie Bly*,” continued from page 1)

It was her first newspaper assignment in New York City.

To get the job, the 23-year-old woman had agreed to go undercover to investigate abuses at an insane asylum. Her name was Nellie Bly.

Nellie Bly: Today, few Americans recognize that name. But 100 years ago, you would have been hard-pressed to find any American who did not. Nellie Bly burst upon the scene at a time when a woman’s place was, in the words of one newspaper editor, “defined and located by a single word — home.” But Bly’s “push-and-get-there” style helped to change the way reporters did their jobs. Bly also was a shining example of why women deserve the same opportunities as men.

Bly was born Elizabeth Cochran in a small Pennsylvania town in the 1860s. She landed her first job with a Pittsburgh paper after she wrote a stern reply to a story that had attacked working women. At the newspaper, she took the pen name of Nellie Bly and began developing her distinctive writing style. Her gift was to get the story behind the story through pluck and charm. People she interviewed seemed to trust her, and would tell her details that other reporters could not get. At times, she went undercover to expose wrongdoing.

Pittsburgh was not big enough for her ambitions, however. In 1887, she left only this note for her edi-

tors: “I am off for New York. Look out for me. BLY.”

§ § §

From the beginning, Bly’s favorite stories focused on helping the less fortunate. It was no surprise when she accepted an assignment from *The World* newspaper in New York City to pose as a mentally ill girl. This kind of investigative reporting was new to newspapers at the time. Bly was one of its pioneers.

A different kind of story, though, made Bly’s name a household word. In 1873, French author Jules Verne published a novel called *Around the World in 80 Days*. In it, a fictional hero named Phileas Fogg circles the globe on a bet. But no real person had attempted the feat. In 1889, bored and seeking adventure, Bly proposed that she attempt it as a publicity stunt for *The World*. She got the assignment.

Newspaper sales skyrocketed as New Yorkers, then the rest of the country, bought copies of *The World* to keep track of Bly’s whereabouts. After a couple of near-disasters in catching departing steamships, she arrived back in New York in 72 days, 6 hours, and 11 minutes — beating Phileas Fogg’s time by more than a week.

Bly then returned to what she did best: championing the downtrodden. In 1893, an economic crisis sent shock waves through U.S. businesses. In several places, workers fought bosses in nationwide strikes. Bly got the scoop from both sides, but firmly backed the strikers.

In 1895, Bly married millionaire industrialist Robert Seaman. She helped manage his manufacturing company. When he died in 1904, she took over as president. The company flourished. Then, in 1911, embezzlers nearly drained the company dry. A long series of court battles followed to save the company.

Three years later, to escape the drudgery of finances and lawyers, Bly returned to journalism. She signed on as a reporter covering World War I in Europe (1914–1918). Bly went to the front lines — the first female reporter to do so.

After returning to the U.S., Nellie Bly wrote a regular column for *The New York Evening Journal*. Her special concern was helping abandoned children.

She died in 1922. In the obituary, her former newspaper, *The World*, wrote: “Nellie Bly was THE BEST REPORTER IN AMERICA and that is saying a good deal.” §



This art ran on the cover of The World in 1890 with Nellie Bly’s article.