

## Hellie Wilson

### 1927 - 2015

---

Helen Dacey Wilson was a Canadian public servant, broadcaster and author. During her time in government, she helped enshrine women's rights in the Canadian constitution.

Hellie was born in 1927 in Wilson Cove, Nova Scotia. She grew up poor and the youngest of thirteen siblings. She moved to Ottawa when she was fifteen and later wrote two best-selling books on her childhood memories: *Tales From Barrett's Landing* (1964) and *More Tales From Barrett's Landing* (1967). She was also a popular radio columnist for CBC Ottawa, wrote articles for *Chatelaine* under pseudonyms, and worked in book sales in both Montreal and Ottawa.

She began her career in federal public service in the early 1960s, joining the National Art Gallery of Canada in Ottawa. Over the next 30 years, she progressed through a series of positions, including administrative assistant to the federal cabinet minister Judy LaMarsh and Communications Officer for Prime Minister Pierre Trudeau.

In the early 1980s, she was appointed vice-president of the Canadian Advisory Council on the Status of Women (CACSW). This institution had been set up in 1973 "to advise the federal government on the impacts of public policy on women, and to inform the public about women's issues". With her help, the CACSW cemented the explicit inclusion of gender equality in the Canadian Charter of Rights and Freedoms. Throughout the years, the CACSW pushed the government to implement measures with regards to parental benefits, employment opportunities, professional practices, gendered violence, sexual assault and harassment, and much more.

After retiring in the mid-1980s, Hellie continued to be a strong advocate for women and human rights. The home she shared with her partner, Betty Zimmerman, provided a temporary residence to



numerous individuals in need of help. She was also very generous with her time and money, helping others in whichever way she could. The Wilson-Zimmerman house was home to a handful of cats and was frequented by many artists, writers, activists and politicians over the years. Until her passing, she remained an engaged citizen in her community, caring for humans and animals alike. She is remembered by friends and family as a quick-witted person with an unmatched kindness. She died in June 2015 in Ottawa at the age of 87.