

The Continuous Female Advocate:  
Gloria Steinem, A Second Wave Feminist

By

Jolie Haertter

Honors: United States History 2

Mr. Mealy

Fall 2016

“I can say whatever it is that I feel,” said Gloria Steinem.<sup>1</sup> A lot like her grandmother, who was president of the Ohio National Women’s Association from 1908 through 1911, Steinem was an unstoppable and determined activist who has done so much for the feminist cause. Many significant events occurred during the age of The Second Wave of Feminism (1960s-1990s). The Second Wave of Feminism is a period of time where women gathered up, and they were determined to change what they believed was wrong with how women were treated and represented. They had done revolutionary things that had changed female's' life today. Through hard work, people can work together and change something evolutionary. This is what Gloria Steinem had did with the Second Wave of Feminism.

Steinem was born in Toledo, Ohio on March 25, 1934. As a child, she spent her early years traveling in a house trailer because her father, Leo, was a traveling antique dealer.<sup>2</sup> This affected her schooling and she did not have consistent schooling until she was 11 years old. “I didn't go to school a full year until I was 11 or 12, so I lived in books,” said Steinem, “I really was an observer of life.”<sup>3</sup> During the summers, they would go to a resort that her father built in Clarklake, Michigan. Her mother, Ruth, was a reporter, but gave it up to go Michigan with him. The isolation of living in a trailer increased her mother's depression. In 1944, when she was ten, her parents divorced, and her dad’s resort closed soon after. She took care of her mentally ill

---

<sup>1</sup> "Gloria Steinem Quotes." BrainyQuote. Accessed October 30, 2016.  
[http://www.brainyquote.com/quotes/authors/g/gloria\\_steinem.html](http://www.brainyquote.com/quotes/authors/g/gloria_steinem.html).

<sup>2</sup> "Gloria Steinem's Wandering Childhood." WSJ. October 27, 2015. Accessed October 30, 2016.  
<http://www.wsj.com/articles/gloria-steinems-wandering-childhood-1445959650>.

<sup>3</sup> "Gloria Steinem Quotes." BrainyQuote. Accessed October 30, 2016.  
[http://www.brainyquote.com/quotes/authors/g/gloria\\_steinem.html](http://www.brainyquote.com/quotes/authors/g/gloria_steinem.html).

mother who had depression. When she was 12, they moved to Massachusetts to be near Smith College because that is where Steinem's older sister, Susanne, went. Later, they moved back Toledo Ohio. At age 12, they moved again into a farmhouse where her mother's parents had lived. Susanne, Steinem's older sister, asked her father to take in her mom, so Gloria could focus on her studies for her last year of highschool. Their dad reluctantly agreed and took her on the road, and Steinem went to Washington D.C. with her sister.<sup>4</sup>

As time went on, Steinem decided to attend Smith College in Northampton, Massachusetts where she had studied government. Steinem graduated at the top of her class, although government was quite an unusual choice for woman to choose around this time period. The traditional path for a woman was to get married, become a mother, and be a dutiful housewife. Back in this time period, women were expected to marry and have children opposed to going to college and getting a decent career. "In the 1950s, once you married you became what your husband was, so it seemed like the last choice you'd ever have I'd already been the very small parent of a very big child my mother," Steinem said to *People Magazine*, "I didn't want to end up taking care of someone else,"<sup>5</sup> After university, she went to India on a scholarship to help with peaceful protests against the government policy. While in India, she took an interest in writing and journalism.

In 1960, Steinem worked as a writer and journalist for *Show Magazine*. She felt like she was not getting the challenging jobs. "A Bunny's Tale" was one of her famous articles she wrote in 1963 that recounted her experience waitressing at Hugh Hefner's Playboy Club. Gloria had

---

<sup>4</sup>History.com Staff. "Gloria Steinem." History.com. 2009. Accessed October 29, 2016. <http://www.history.com/topics/womens-history/gloria-steinem>.

<sup>5</sup>@people. "Gloria Considers Gloria – Vol. 37 No. 3." PEOPLE.com. January 27, 1992. Accessed October 29, 2016. <http://people.com/archive/gloria-considers-gloria-vol-37-no-3/>.

said, “A woman reading *Playboy* is a little like a jew reading a nazi novel.”<sup>6</sup> This was a job where she and other women were not treated equally and underpaid. The article came as a shock to many people.

In addition, Steinem founded *New York* magazine. She became engaged in women's rights after writing a column called “After Black Power, Women’s Liberation” which was during an abortion hearing by a feminist group called Redstockings. Unbeknownst to many people, Gloria had a story behind this.

*I just assumed you had to put up with this. I don't think I understood the need for a movement until I went to cover an abortion hearing. I had had an abortion when I first graduated from college and I never told anyone and I listened to women testify about all that they had to go through, the danger, the infection, the sexual humiliation, to get an illegal abortion and I began to understand that my experience was not just mine but an almost universal female experience. And that meant that only if you got together with other women was it going to be affected in any way.<sup>7</sup>*

In 1968, she started attending meetings in New York City for a radical feminist group referred to as the Redstockings.<sup>8</sup> Redstocking got its name because it was a play off of the word bluestocking and red because was commonly associated with uprising or revolution. Bluestocking was a term that had a negative meaning throughout the 18th and 19th century. Redstockings strongly believed that women were oppressed or, in other words, not treated equally. Their slogan was “sisterhood is powerful.” This meant they had to stick together if they

---

<sup>6</sup>“Gloria Steinem Quotes.” QuoteHD. Accessed October 30, 2016.  
<http://www.quotehd.com/quotes/author/gloria-steinem-activist-quotes-and-sayings>.

<sup>7</sup> Steinem, Gloria. Email interview with the author. New York City, New York October 12th, 2016.

<sup>8</sup> “Gloria Steinem.” Encyclopedia Britannica Online. Accessed October 29, 2016.  
<https://www.britannica.com/biography/Gloria-Steinem#ref671227>.

wanted to change things. They often held meetings about abortion which is what attracted Steinem to the topic of feminism in the first place.<sup>9</sup>

In 1971, Steinem joined Betty Friedan, Bella Abzug, Shirley Chisholm, Dorothy Height, Jill Ruckelshaus, Ann Lewis, Elly Peterson, LaDonna Harris, Liz Carpenter, Mrs. Lyndon B. Johnson, and Eleanor Holmes Norton to create the National Women's Political Caucus. It was the only national organization committed only to increase women's participation in all areas of political and public life. The purpose of this organization was to represent and recruit women wanting to be active in office. They tried to magnify the voice of women to try to improve their status in the government. Because congress had failed to pass the equal rights amendment in 1970, the women believed change would only happen if women would be in the government to make it happen. In 1971, only 4.5 percent or 363 women were state legislators; in the 21st century, 23.5 percent or 1,738 women are state legislators. In addition, in 1971, there were 7 female mayors out of 30,000 cities which would be considered one percent. In the 21st century, there are 76 mayors. There was only 15 members in congress in 1971, and in the 21st century there are 89. This does make the National Political Caucus very successful and they continue to work hard to create more enhancement.<sup>10</sup>

On December 1971, *Ms Magazine* was featured as a "one shot" in *New York* magazine. Not a lot of people would know that this would be the first magazine where true women's voices would heard. This was all a test to add this in to see if anyone would be interested. Most magazines back then were based on cosmetics, marriage, and parenting. "Most women's magazines simply try to mold women into bigger and better consumers," Steinem has said.<sup>11</sup> *Ms. Magazine* was a magazine that was created by a few feminists including Steinem during the second wave of feminism to spread word about abortion and other women's right issues. In July

---

<sup>9</sup>By Linda Napikoski Women's History Expert. "Redstockings: Pioneering Radical Feminist Group." About.com Education. February 24, 2016. Accessed October 30, 2016. <http://womenshistory.about.com/od/feminism/a/redstockings.htm>.

<sup>10</sup> "NWPC History." National Women's Political Caucus. November 17, 2015. Accessed October 30, 2016. <http://www.nwpc.org/about/nwpc-foundation/>.

<sup>11</sup> Most women's magazines simply try to mold women into bigger and better consumers. Read more at: [http://www.brainyquote.com/quotes/authors/g/gloria\\_steinem\\_3.html](http://www.brainyquote.com/quotes/authors/g/gloria_steinem_3.html)

of 1972, the papers hit newsstands. “I’ll give it six months before they run out of things to say.” challenged Harry Reasoner a network news anchor. In a matter of 8 days, its 300,000 “one-shot” test copies sold out nationwide. Within weeks, 26,000 subscription orders and over 20,000 reader letters came in the post. *Ms.* made women’s views heard and worldwide feminism issues acknowledged. The magazine is still actively spreading the current news on feminine rights and issues internationally.<sup>12</sup>

In 1971, the Women's Action Alliance (WAA) was formed by Steinem, Brenda Feigen, Catherine Samuels, and others. They organized this program to help women overcome discrimination and sexism. The board of directors were Bella Abzug, Shirley Chisholm, John Kenneth Galbraith, and Maya Miller. Although Steinem was not on the board, she did a considerable amount of work for the association. She did a remarkable amount of fundraising that was very beneficial to the WAA. They received an unbelievable amount of letters, so they launched different programs to help with all the issues people were having. Projects ranged from encouraging women to take on nontraditional jobs to non-sexist educations. Unfortunately, due to lack of funding, the alliance ended.<sup>13</sup>

In 1986, Steinem had been diagnosed with breast cancer in her 50s. She had to undergo treatment and surgery. Because of this, she was forced to take a break from her activism. She told *The New Yorker*, “I’d been through five stages of burnout; I got breast cancer; the universe was telling me to slow down.”<sup>14</sup> The treatments were successful, and she, in the 21st century, is cancer free.

---

<sup>12</sup> By the Time *Ms.* Celebrated Its 15th Anniversary in 1987, Reasoner, Media Soothsayers, and the Nation Had All Been Pressed to Change Their Tune. "About - Ms. Magazine Blog." Ms Magazine Blog. Accessed October 30, 2016. <http://msmagazine.com/blog/about/>.

<sup>13</sup> "Sophia Smith Collection: Agents of Social Change Online Exhibit - Women's Action Alliance." Sophia Smith Collection: Agents of Social Change Online Exhibit - Women's Action Alliance. Accessed October 30, 2016. <https://www.smith.edu/library/libs/ssc/agents/waa.html>.

<sup>14</sup> "First to Know." First to Know. October 09, 2014. Accessed November 05, 2016. <http://firsttoknow.com/famous-women-and-two-men-who-had-breast-cancer/>.

A tradition that started in 1992, Take Our Daughters to Work Day was created by Steinem. In April 1993, the first ever Take Our Daughters to Work Day was celebrated. Its purpose was to expose young girls careers outside their homes.<sup>15</sup>

In the 21st century, Steinem is still working vigilantly towards female equality. As of 2016, she resides in New York City, but she is on tour for her new book called *My Life on The Road*. In Between touring, she does speaking engagements worldwide. "I hope to live to 100," She said, "There is so much to do."<sup>16</sup>

---

<sup>15</sup> Chatel, Amanda. "10 Gloria Steinem Facts That Will Make You Love Her Even More." 10 Gloria Steinem Facts That Will Make You Love Her Even More. Accessed November 05, 2016.

<https://www.bustle.com/articles/71389-10-gloria-steinem-facts-that-will-make-you-love-her-even-more>.

<sup>16</sup>"Gloria Steinem Quotes." BrainyQuote. Accessed October 30, 2016.

[http://www.brainyquote.com/quotes/authors/g/gloria\\_steinem.html](http://www.brainyquote.com/quotes/authors/g/gloria_steinem.html).



(This was a photo taken by the author at a local speaking event in Lancaster, Pennsylvania.)



## BIBLIOGRAPHY

### Interview

Steinem, Gloria. Email interview with the author. New York City, New York October 12th, 2016.

### Websites

@people. "Gloria Considers Gloria – Vol. 37 No. 3." PEOPLE.com. January 27, 1992. Accessed October 29, 2016. <http://people.com/archive/gloria-considers-gloria-vol-37-no-3/>.

By Linda Napikoski Women's History Expert. "Redstockings: Pioneering Radical Feminist Group." About.com Education. February 24, 2016. Accessed October 30, 2016. <http://womenshistory.about.com/od/feminism/a/redstockings.htm>.

By the Time Ms. Celebrated Its 15th Anniversary in 1987, Reasoner, Media Soothsayers, and the Nation Had All Been Pressed to Change Their Tune. "About - Ms. Magazine Blog." Ms Magazine Blog. Accessed October 30, 2016. <http://msmagazine.com/blog/about/>.

Chatel, Amanda. "10 Gloria Steinem Facts That Will Make You Love Her Even More." 10 Gloria Steinem Facts That Will Make You Love Her Even More. Accessed November 05, 2016. <https://www.bustle.com/articles/71389-10-gloria-steinem-facts-that-will-make-you-love-her-even-more>.

"First to Know." First to Know. October 09, 2014. Accessed November 05, 2016. <http://firsttoknow.com/famous-women-and-two-men-who-had-breast-cancer/>.

"Gloria Steinem." Encyclopedia Britannica Online. Accessed October 29, 2016. <https://www.britannica.com/biography/Gloria-Steinem#ref671227>.

"Gloria Steinem Quotes." QuoteHD. Accessed October 30, 2016. <http://www.quotehd.com/quotes/author/gloria-steinem-activist-quotes-and-sayings>.

"Gloria Steinem's Wandering Childhood." WSJ. October 27, 2015. Accessed October 30, 2016. <http://www.wsj.com/articles/gloria-steinems-wandering-childhood-1445959650>.

History.com Staff. "Gloria Steinem." History.com. 2009. Accessed October 29, 2016. <http://www.history.com/topics/womens-history/gloria-steinem://www.history.com/topics/womens-history/gloria-steinem>.

"NWPC History." National Women's Political Caucus. November 17, 2015. Accessed October 30, 2016. <http://www.nwpc.org/about/nwpc-foundation/>.

"National Women's Political Caucus (NWPC)." Encyclopedia Britannica Online. Accessed October 30, 2016. <https://www.britannica.com/topic/National-Womens-Political-Caucus>.

"Sophia Smith Collection: Agents of Social Change Online Exhibit - Women's Action Alliance." Sophia Smith Collection: Agents of Social Change Online Exhibit - Women's Action Alliance. Accessed October 30, 2016. <https://www.smith.edu/library/libs/ssc/agents/waa.html>.











