

THE PUBLIC ~~WOULD~~ WILL NOT HAVE IT

American women have a heritage of being

- persistent,
- patient, and
- spunky,

now a long-time proven winning combination for them.

The American woman's push for voting rights began before the Civil War. Then it slowed a lot during that terrible contest, but picked up force again immediately after. In 1868 Congress recorded its first bill to amend the Constitution to permit women voting. But nothing happened. In 1878, ten years on, there was a Senate bill to mandate that women be allowed to vote. It went



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promptly into the political dust bin, and the Senate did not even bring it up for a vote until nine years later. It did not pass. That Senate bill remained, with its wording unchanged, wandering in the Washington wilderness for forty-two more years. Then, persistence, patience, and spunky-ness won out. The bill was resurrected. It became the Nineteenth Amendment to the United States Constitution, on August 18, 1920.

One year before that Amendment, Ellen Muriel Deason was born. Little Ellen would grow up to become the public face of another very successful women's assertion of themselves, this time in the music business. It would be a story of women's rise to entertainment power.



A young girl hopeful of a singing career, like Ellen in her youth.
Image Credit: "Woman with Blond Hair Sitting on Grass Playing a Cutaway Acoustic Guitar" by MusicOomph is licensed under CC BY 2.0

As Ellen entered her early adult years, the world around her continued to improve for women. There was more independence in dress, greater choice in social conduct rules, wider roles of leadership in organizations, and a clearing of entrenched attitudes that only an Eleanor Roosevelt could

have done. But times were tough, and there was meanness by employers, secondary statuses everywhere, and even some official government regulations that specified lower wages for women than for men. It was reported women often were paid half of what men earned.

Then came World War II, which depended on women flooding our factory floors, taking on men's jobs to keep industry running. Yet, after the war, old attitudes and habits that kept women down lingered still.

Ellen had married at 18, and she and her husband became professional singers. They worked together, but Ellen's husband was told by a leading entertainment figure that he should not use Ellen's name as a headline in their musical performances, just his. The reason? Well, names of women would not sell tickets and records. Headliner names were for men. So, Ellen, around the age of 33, was thinking it was time to quit. She had little hope for a growing career when confined to limited recognition.

At that time, there was a popular song presenting men's infidelities as being caused by women taking advantage of them. Women were to blame for such. A songwriter and producer named J. D. Miller had written a push-back song that took on a woman's view of that. He had it recorded by a man's voice. It didn't get much play. But Paul Cohen at Decca Records saw a window. He thought it should be recorded by a woman and pushed by his larger record label. He knew of Ellen, and he contacted her husband and her. Would she come to the studio and do a recording of it?

Without very much thought, Ellen agreed. She later said her decision was simply to get the \$125 standard recording fee of the day. There was no intention for or hope of anything else. Do the job, get the money, go home, and then move on to other things, singing or not. The recording was made on May 3, 1952, and the record was released in June.

Ellen's reluctance and lack of enthusiasm was not much off the mark. The record was banned by a national radio network for being too "suggestive," and the major national live performance venue for her kind of music would not allow it to be performed there. Ellen was not only going to end her career, she would go out under the blemish of a banned recording.

But, enough people (women) had heard the record before it was pulled, and not all stations were under the ban. Many listeners liked it ... a lot. They began to call the censoring stations to tell them to spin it. The public would have none of this banning stuff. They wanted to hear Ellen's recording, over and over, again and again. The ban was lifted, and a woman burst into the men's number one record world with a million seller. It topped the charts. For the month of September that year, it was *Billboard* magazine's most played song in juke boxes in the Country and Western song category, and also that month it was the best selling Country and Western retail record. Ellen's name became a headliner.



Honky tonk Bars on historical Broadway in downtown Nashville, TN. Lower Broadway is famous for entertainment district of country music. Image Credit © www.123rf.com/profile_Jiawangkun

You may already know who she is. She continued her singing career and spent the rest of her life performing under her stage name Kitty Wells. It would be a few years before any other women were such popular stars in the world of country music, but eventually they did come. Next was Virginia Patterson Hensley under her recording name Patsy Cline. Women would ride on at the top of this music scene, their faces and names routinely accepted as stand-alone recording artists and concert draws.

It took decades for women to gain the right to have their votes count, and it took decades after that for women to have their names count on country marquees and record labels. Now, it is taking decades for the words of the songs they sing to count. The words of Kitty Wells's break-through hit said that it was time for society to recognize that at times men are at fault, and to stop presuming women are always to blame. Women singing it is not the same as men believing it. When

women today confront men about harassment, or even abuse and assault, the response still — it has been a long time since 1952 — is demeaning, as if given to lesser persons.

Public statements are made by men that women who protest men's harassment are just after the money, or that we all should "lighten up" a bit about it all. A university president

even crassly tried to diminish the credibility of victims in a massive case of abuse among his school's female athletes by offering that "they [the victims] are enjoying that moment [of being in the spotlight] ... the awards and recognition." Such expressions of ignorance and disregard spoken by leaders show we are not there yet.

IT TOOK DECADES FOR WOMEN TO GAIN THE RIGHT TO HAVE THEIR VOTES COUNT, AND IT TOOK DECADES FOR WOMEN AFTER THAT TO HAVE THEIR NAMES COUNT ON MARQUEES AND RECORD LABELS. NOW, IT IS TAKING DECADES FOR THE WORDS OF THE SONGS THEY SING TO COUNT.

But, American women continue persisting, being patient, and being spunky. They will ensure that Kitty Well's legacy will be in two parts. The first one was for the performer, this second one will be for the words she sang. The public will not have it any other way. It is coming. The number of views of a YouTube clip of Kitty singing that song in 1952 is getting close to 4 million - *It Wasn't God Who Made Honky Tonk Angels*.

When Mr. Cohen called Kitty to ask her to do the recording, it was a world where a woman's name would not sell records. The advice given to her husband was quite good. It was a true fact, not a prejudicial statement. It came from someone who would know, none other than Roy Acuff, established as the King of Country Music.

Guess what Kitty Wells became known as for all time.



The information for the charts at the right was obtained at Wikipedia, searching there for each year with the search string "XXXX in country music". The data provided on those pages is represented as certified by *Billboard*.

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The time period for the data shown is for post war 1945 through 1975. For the years after 1975, the amounts and percentages of women participation in hit records remains about the same as shown for the later years of the two graphics shown here.

Country music is growing its base and has become the number one musical format for radio.

