

As an investigative reporter, Nellie Bly uncovered the truth. Her indomitable spirit also led her to seek challenges others might not. In 1889, Nellie upstaged Jules Verne's marvelous story when she circled the world in 72 days.



NELLIE BLY

For ten days, Nellie Bly pretended to be insane. She succeeded almost too well, barely avoiding a permanent stay at New York's most infamous psychiatric hospital. While Nellie's "caretakers" violated nearly every ounce of her fellow patients' dignity, she took careful notes. And her published stories of torture and cruelty became the foundation for modern investigative journalism.

ERASMUS WILSON wrote for the *Pittsburgh Dispatch* under the pen name "Quiet Observer." In 1885, one of his articles condemned working women, suggesting women belonged in the home performing domestic chores. The piece caught the attention of 21-year-old Nellie Bly, who wrote an angry letter supporting a woman's right—and need—to work. The response, well written and passionate, launched a career that would span several decades and establish traceable origins to today's clandestine style of investigative reporting.

Nellie Bly's career skyrocketed when she headed for New York. There, she weaseled an interview with the

managing editor of *New York World*, then owned by Joseph Pulitzer. Her first assignment, given partly on a whim to placate the young journalist, was to investigate the treatment of mentally ill patients at New York's infamous Blackwell's Island. Her published stories of cruelty that included beatings, torture and spoiled food incensed both policy makers and the public at large. Her impact was remarkable. Funding for the facility took a sharp rise, followed by general reform for institutions of its kind.

In 1894, with her career in full bloom, Nellie's in-depth coverage of a Chicago railworkers' strike captured the full emotions and strife felt by blue-

collar workers of that era. Her passion for unmasking the bitter side of poverty and the underprivileged gave her writing heart and soul—and worried those it exposed.

Nellie Bly was the first female reporter to dirty her hands for the chance to uncover a great story. Her "we have our sources" style of reporting would set the stage for Winchell, Rather, Woodward & Bernstein and all who would follow. Always digging, tremendously inquisitive, willing to risk the danger that can sometimes accompany truth, Nellie Bly established the gritty side of journalism...a side that would forever link revelation with repercussion.