

Bertha von Suttner

By Charity Suttner

Hi. My name is Bertha von Suttner. I was born in 1843 in Austria to a wealthy family named Kinsky. Only girls from wealthy families got to go to school and become educated back then. I learned to read, write, and speak German, French and Italian. My father was in the army. He died before I was born. My mother gambled away a lot of money. When the family fortune ran out, I had to get a job.

Usually women in my day didn't work. But I had no choice. So I went to work for Baron von Suttner teaching his four little daughters. I fell in love with his handsome son Arthur. He wanted to marry me. But his mother wanted him to marry a rich girl. She talked me into answering an ad in a Paris newspaper. A wealthy inventor and businessman was looking for a secretary who spoke several languages. The man's name was Alfred Nobel. He invented dynamite and had many factories in several countries. He fell in love with me, but I was still in love with Arthur von Suttner. While Nobel was gone on a business trip to Norway, Arthur wrote to me and asked me to come back. I missed him so much, we ran away together and got married in secret. Even though I married Arthur, Nobel and I remained friends and we wrote to each other for the rest of our lives. Our letters are kept in libraries in Sweden and Norway.

Arthur and I took up writing to make a living. I became involved in the peace movement and spent many years speaking and writing on the subject of world peace. I wrote to Nobel and told him of my many peace efforts. I often asked him to contribute money to the cause. I suggested that he set up a prize to be awarded each year to the person who contributed most to world peace that year. He did contribute money but I thought it was only because he loved me. I was surprised to learn that he left his fortune, when he died, to establish the Nobel Prizes for outstanding achievements in physics, chemistry, medicine, literature, and peace.

Since 1901 when the prizes were established, only nine women have received a Nobel Prize. I was the first. In 1905 I was awarded the Nobel Peace Prize for my work to spread world peace. I wrote several books, edited a newsletter, founded peace societies, and traveled and spoke widely on the subject of peace. At that time, I was one of the most recognized and influential women in the world. I was even invited to meet with the American President, Theodore Roosevelt at the White House. Today, the Nobel Prize is the most important award given out each year.

Even though I spent my whole life teaching others about peace, shortly after I died in 1914, Adolf Hitler nearly took over Europe.



It is all the more remarkable that Baroness von Suttner won an international reputation at the beginning of the twentieth century. On a lecture tour of the United States in 1904 she was even received at the White House by President Theodore Roosevelt.

Not the least of her achievements was her break with the military and aristocratic traditions of her family, first by deciding to earn her living as a governess and later by writing the anti-war novel *Die Waffen Nieder* ("Lay Down Your Arms"), which brought her into the peace movement. Eloping with the brother of the young ladies she was tutoring and going off with him to the Caucasus to become a writer was also not quite what a well-bred countess was expected to do.

The Baroness was not able to come to Norway when her prize was announced in 1905 on the traditional day, December 10, and there was no presentation speech. The following April, she was introduced by Bjørnstjerne Bjørnson who spoke of her "real influence on the growth of the peace movement and how in one of the most militaristic countries of Europe she had continued to cry, "Down with arms." Although laughed at first, her words received a hearing because they were uttered by a person of noble character and because they proclaimed humanity's greatest cause.