

Helen Keller



Early Life



- Helen Keller was born on June 27, 1880, in **Tuscumbia, Alabama**.
- She was the first of **2** daughters born to **Colonel Arthur Keller and Katherine Adams Keller**.
- Keller had served as an officer in the **Confederate army** during the **Civil War**.
- The family earned an income from their **cotton plantation**.

A Sudden Illness



- In **1882**, she fell ill with what the family doctor called “**brain fever,**” which produced a **high body temperature**. She was struck **blind, deaf, and mute** (temporarily) as a result.
- *Today, we call these types of illnesses **febrile illnesses**. Historical biographies attribute Helen’s illness to one of the following: **scarlet fever, meningitis, rubella, or encephalitis**.

Getting Help

- In 1886, while looking for answers and inspiration to help Helen, Katherine Keller came across a travelogue written by **Charles Dickens** called ***American Notes***. She read of the successful education of another deaf and blind child named **Laura Bridgman**, who was under the care of a specialist named **J. Julian Chisolm**. Katherine sent Helen and Colonel Keller to **Baltimore, Maryland**, to meet him.
- After examining Helen, Chisolm recommended that the Kellers see **Alexander Graham Bell**, the inventor of the **telephone**, who was working with deaf children at the time. Bell suggested that the Kellers travel to the **Perkins Institute for the Blind** in **Boston, Massachusetts**.

Anne Sullivan



- Michael Anagnos, the director of the institute, suggested that Helen work with one of the institute's most recent graduates, **Anne Sullivan**. This would begin a **49**-year relationship between teacher and pupil.
- Sullivan began by teaching Helen **finger spelling**, starting with the word "**doll**" to help Keller understand the gift that Sullivan had brought her. Sullivan helped Helen to make significant progress with her ability to communicate.

Getting an Education

"I seldom think about my limitations, and they never make me sad. Perhaps there is just a touch of yearning at times; but it is vague, like a breeze among flowers."

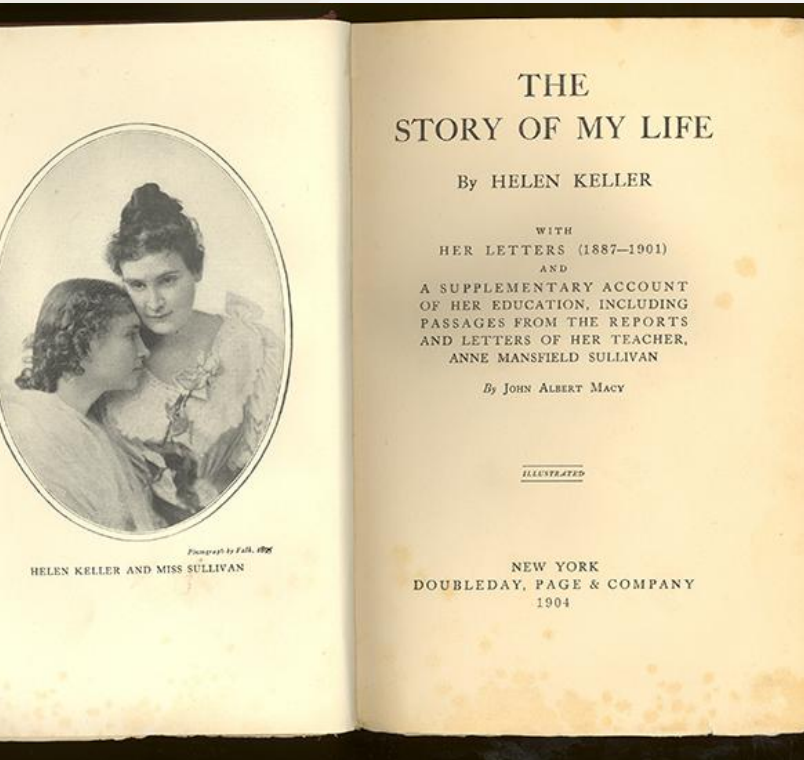
- In 1890, Keller began **speech classes** at the Horace Mann School for the Deaf in Boston, where she sought to learn to speak so that others could understand her.
- From 1894-1896, she attended the Wright-Humason School for the Deaf in New York City. There she continued to work on her communication skills, and also studied regular academic subjects.
- Helen became determined to **attend college**. In 1896, she attended the **Cambridge School for Young Ladies**, a preparatory school for women.

Famous Friends



- As her story became known to the general public, she began to meet famous and influential people. One of them was writer, **Mark Twain**, who was very impressed with her. They became fast friends.
- Twain introduced Helen to his friend, **Henry H. Rogers**, a Standard Oil executive. He was so impressed with Keller's **talent, drive, and determination** that he agreed to pay for her to attend **Radcliffe College**.

College Life



- Keller wrote her first book, *The Story of My Life*, in which she detailed her transformation from childhood to 21-year-old college student.
- Keller graduated *cum laude* from Radcliffe in 1904, at the age of 24.

Leaving a Legacy

- She became a member of the **American Federation for the Blind** in 1924, and participated in many campaigns to raise **awareness, money, and support** for the blind.
- ***The Story of My Life*** was used as the basis for the 1957 television drama, ***The Miracle Worker***. In 1959, the story was developed into a **Broadway play** of the same title, starring **Patty Duke** as Keller and **Anne Bancroft** as Sullivan.
- During her lifetime, she received many honors in recognition of her accomplishments, including the **Theodore Roosevelt Distinguished Service Medal** in 1936, the **Presidential Medal of Freedom** in 1964, and election to the **Women's Hall of Fame** in 1965. She also received **honorary doctoral degrees** from Temple University and Harvard University, and from the universities of Glasgow, Scotland; Berlin, Germany; Delhi, India, and Witwatersrand in Johannesburg, South Africa.

Death



- Keller **died in her sleep** on June 1, 1968, in **her home in Connecticut**, just a few weeks before her **88th** birthday.

"Once I knew only darkness and stillness. My life was without past or future. But a little word from the fingers of another fell into my hand that clutched at emptiness and my heart leaped to the rapture of living."

