

# Helen Keller

## Autobiography (1902)

She was born 27 Jun 1880 in Tuscumbia, AL and died 1 Jun 1968. Her dad was a wealthy editor who lived on a plantation. He died in 1896 when she was 16. When she was 19 months old, she had a severe fever that almost took her life, but did take her sight & hearing. This plummeted her into the dark abyss and she reacted with anger & frustration. She would have tantrums & even be naughty. She loved to smell flowers & feel the leaves. She communicated through simple signals.

Alexander Graham Bell told them to contact Perkins Institute to see if they had a teacher. Ann Sullivan arrived on 3 Mar 87. Helen (age 6) locked Ann in her room. Her first line of business was to teach her table manners. They moved to the family cottage onsite to keep the parents from overindulging her & create a dependency on her teacher. Ann immediately began teaching her sign language that she would imitate, but not comprehend until weeks later when she realized everything has a name (starting with the word "water").

Ann waited for the right moment to impart knowledge. She learned 625 words in the first 5 months. Ann soon put Braille word on objects & spelled them out to make the connection. Then put together simple sentences and then began to read. She had to learn concepts like on/in, hard/soft, fast/slow & color that we take for granted. Deaf people cannot hear inflection of voice & blind cannot see expressions which conversation a challenge.

June 1887, she felt secure & connected & became calm & sweet. She turned her stubbornness into determination. She loves knitting & sewing. Nov 1887, they went to a circus & had a blast. May 1888, they took a trip to the blind school in Boston she later attended. She met & spoke with others without an interpreter. Spring 1890, Sarah Fuller taught her how to speak basic sounds ("I,M,P,A,S,T") by feeling the vibrations of their throat & movement of their lips.

Winter 1891 she wrote "Frost King" & sent it to the school. Only to find out it was read to her & she forgot. It was published & soon she was brought before a school court of investigation for plagiarism. She was reluctant to write ever since. Summer 1893 they went to the World's Fair with Dr. Bell. She learned & grew up a lot on that trip.

She went to Radcliffe College with Ann interpreting [she was the first blind girl to graduate college]. She learned 7 languages: English, sign, Braille, French German & Latin. Books tell her so much that is interesting that she cannot see.

Helen Quotes: "There is no king who has not had a slave among his ancestors, and no slave who has not had a king among his."

"But the angel of forgetfulness has gathered up & carried away much of the misery & all of the bitterness of those sad days."

"Everyone who wishes to gain true knowledge must climb the Hill Difficulty alone."

Ann Sullivan Quotes: “It was no doubt because of this ignorance that I rushed in where more experienced angels fear to tread.”

“Yesterday’s perplexities are strangely simple today, & today’s difficulties become tomorrow’s pastime.”

She has one advantage over ordinary children, that nothing from without distracts her from her studies.”

“and a good opportunity to explain something of real interest to her attention from her studies.”

“I try to find out what interests her the most & make the lesson about that.”

Helen’s 1896 speech:

“...Be of good cheer. Do not think of today’s failures, but of the success that may come tomorrow. You have set a difficult task, but you will succeed if you persevere; and you will find joy in overcoming obstacles – a delight in climbing rugged paths, which you would perhaps never know if you did not sometimes slip backwards – if the road was always smooth & pleasant. Remember, no effort that we make to attain something beautiful is ever lost. Sometime, somewhere, somehow we shall find that which we seek.”