

THE HELEN KELLER STORY

By PID Scott Neely

Helen Keller wrote 14 books. This story is taken from her book: "The Story of My Life"

This story is about a woman who led an incredible life, Helen Keller.

Imagine what life would be like if you could not see or hear. Imagine you did not know any way to communicate with other people. Imagine being shut inside a confusing world with no way to ask for help.

Helen Keller lived in such a world. When she was 19 months old, she became very ill. The disease left her blind and deaf.

No one knows what illness struck her, although some believe it may have been scarlet fever. And yet, in spite of these problems, she grew up to graduate from college with high honors. She wrote 14 books, had a vaudeville act, met seven presidents, and traveled to 39 countries giving speeches on good causes. Her story was made famous by the Broadway play and movie "The Miracle Worker".

Helen as a child

Helen grew up in the country near Tuscumbia, Ala. She was a smart, loving child. But she also misbehaved a lot. Her parents felt so bad that she couldn't see or hear that they didn't teach her proper behavior. Helen also acted naughty because she was upset when she couldn't communicate with others.

She wandered around the table, grabbing food from other people's plates. One time she locked her mother in a cupboard. She bit and scratched people. Some members of her family thought she would always be impossible to handle at home.

Teacher

When Helen was about 7, inventor Alexander Graham Bell helped Helen's worried parents find a remarkable teacher, Anne Sullivan.

Anne Sullivan knew she had to be strict with her naughty student. For example, she would not let Helen eat until Helen sat properly, with her napkin on her lap. At first Helen rebelled, fighting her teacher for hours.

Anne Sullivan took Helen to a little cottage on the family's property so she could teach her without the family's interference. In just two weeks, Anne Sullivan taught her much about how to behave. However, when they returned to the family house, Helen continued to throw tantrums occasionally.

The miracle

One day, during one such tantrum, Anne Sullivan made Helen come out to the yard. While she pumped water into Helen's hand, she spelled out "w-a-t-e-r" using a special hand alphabet. And then the miracle happened. Suddenly Helen understood. She understood that what her teacher was spelling stood for actual water. She realized words had meaning. From then on, everything changed. That day alone she learned 30 words.

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The excitement of learning

Helen learned to speak by feeling how Anne Sullivan's mouth moved when she spoke. She learned to read and write French, German, and Latin in Braille. She even learned to play chess.

Amazing abilities

Helen was able to do wonderful things sighted people could not do. She could remember people's handshakes years after last meeting them. She could identify hundreds of plants by their smell. Once, at a competition held by a group of rug experts, all the judges were blindfolded. Each judge had about an hour to feel many different rugs. Then they had to identify each one by touch. Only Helen was able to identify all the rugs.

Amazing achievements

Helen wrote her autobiography, "The Story of My Life" when she was just 23, and it was later translated into 50 languages. To write, Helen wrote on a braille typewriter and then retyped her work on a regular typewriter.

Throughout her life she traveled, speaking and raising money for good causes such as the American Foundation for the Blind, women right to vote, peace and ending poverty.

On stage

When Helen was in her 40's, she and Anne Sullivan went on a vaudeville tour to talk about her life. People were curious about what it was like to be deaf and blind, and yet still be in control of your life. Vaudeville shows had many different acts, including comedy, music and dancing.

Helen Keller was presented with an Academy Award in 1955 because of how inspiring her life was. It was a duplicate of an award that was given to movie maker of the documentary, "Helen Keller in Her Story".