

Helen keller

Literature, Russian Literature



Imagine a life without being able to see or hear and not knowing how to communicate with anyone around you. That world of darkness is what Helen Keller lived in for six years. Helen Keller has been an inspiration to people ever since she turned six. From 1886-1960, she proved herself to be a creative and inspiring woman of America. She was a writer and lecturer who fought for the rights of disadvantaged people all over the world. Most importantly, she overcame her two most difficult obstacles, being blind and deaf. Helen Keller devoted her life to improving the education and treatment of the blind, deaf, and mute and fighting for minorities as well. Miss Keller was one of the first to educate the public and make them aware of inflicted individuals' potential. Because of her persistence and strength, she is considered a creative and unique spirit by many people of the world, especially those who can relate to her physical impairments. Helen Keller was born a healthy child. When Helen was 19 months old, she became ill with what was known as acute congestion of the brain and stomach; this is now known as scarlet fever. As a result, she was left blind, deaf, and mute. For many of her earlier years Helen lived in darkness with very few ways to communicate with others around her. Obviously her attempts were not always successful. When she failed to communicate she would throw fits and have outburst that would upset not only her, but her family as well. Because of these violent fits, she appeared to be a very unruly child, but underneath all of the tragedy was a future inspirational figure that would surprise the world with amazing and countless abilities. A large amount of Helen's accomplishments would not have been possible if it weren't for her mother and father. Her parents read about Samuel Gridley Howe's accomplishments

with the deaf and blind at the Perkins Institution in Boston. With this knowledge, her father brought his daughter to Alexander Graham Bell, a family friend who was well known in society. Bell was so fascinated by six year old Helen that he recommended that she contact the Perkins Institute for the Blind in Boston. Anne Sullivan, who was also a recent Perkins graduate, was suggested to be Helen's teacher by Michael Anagnos. Michael Anagnos was the professor of Samuel Gridley Howe, a gentleman who was having great success working with the deaf and blind at Perkins (Notable 389). Helen's greatest inspiration and life long companion, Anne Sullivan, arrived at her home in Alabama in March of 1887. In just a couple of weeks, Helen learned that everything had a name and that she could communicate with others by using the manual alphabet. Helen also found that she could use the manual alphabet and lip reading to prove her intelligence. The manual alphabet is a system that contains 26 hand symbols, one for each letter of the alphabet. It is used to finger spell words. After a couple months of practice, she learned hundreds of new words. In the middle of July, just four months after Sullivan's arrival, Helen was able to write her very first letter to her mother. People around the world were so amazed by her accomplishments that her first biography was written when she was only fourteen years old (Ashby & Orhn 190). After the earlier successes, Helen and her teacher both left for the Perkins Institute for the Blind in Boston in 1888 to provide Helen with a more formal education. Helen and Miss Sullivan moved to New York in 1894 in order for Helen to study at the Wright Humason School for the deaf. Anne raised money so that her student could attend the Cambridge School for Young Ladies. In 1896, Helen began her

studies at Cambridge which included French, Greek, literature, mathematics, geography, and history. She then went on to attend Radcliffe College in 1880. In 1904, she graduated cum laude and received her AB Degree (Notable 390). Not only did Helen help the organizations for the blind, but she helped individuals as well. Helen reached out to help a young four year old boy who, like her, was deaf, blind and mute. His name was Tommy Stringer. Helen convinced Michael Anagnos to admit him into Perkins. She also raised a fund for the young boy. Over time, Helen has accumulated a tremendous amount of awards. These awards include: Brazil's Order of the Southern Cross, Japan's Sacred Treasure, the Philippine's Golden Heart, Lebanon's Gold Medal of Merit, and the Presidential Medal of Freedom. The National Institute of Arts and letters elected her membership as well. In 1952, during the Louis Braille Centennial Commemoration, Helen was made a chevalier of the French Legion of Honor (" Hero" 2) She had finally received all the recognition and honor that she deserved. Aside from being one of the earliest blind, deaf, and mute person to become active in society, Helen was also an author. Her first autobiography, *The Story of My Life*, was published in 1902 with the help of Ann Sullivan and John Macy. *The Story of My Life* became a world-wide best-seller and was translated into fifty languages. Before she had even graduated college in 1903, Helen wrote a 7, 500-word essay called *Optimism*. *Optimism* reflected the goodness that Helen saw in life. After she graduated in 1904, she became even more involved in society. In 1906 Massachusetts instituted it's State Commission for the Blind. Gov. Curtis Guild, Jr. appointed Helen to the commission (Notable 390). *The World I Live In* was published in 1909. It was a collection of essays about Helen's

perceptions of the world around her. Also that year, she became a member of the Socialist party. She was an aggressive suffragist and preferred strong and assertive tactics. During this time she also promoted a textile strike that took place in Lawrence, Mass. The strike was led by the Industrial Workers of the World. Being a socialist made Helen's life more thrilling and gave her life more of a purpose. Her beliefs were reflected through her work of this period. In 1910 *A Song of the Stone Wall* was published. This patriotic poem was 600 lines long. This was the last of her great poems. It is said that, "After Anne Sullivan and John Macy's marriage ended Keller never again wrote with such lyric power," (Notable 390). Also, a collection of socialist essays entitled, *Out of the Dark*, was published in 1913. Helen became active in politics once again when the President relinquished neutrality in World War I (Notable 391). She was against war and supported the Industrial Workers of the World once again. Helen also began to support many other movements during this time such as the abolition of capital punishment and child labor, the birth control movement, and also the National Association for the Advancement of Colored People. Her involvement with this particular group seemed to be the most controversial and it infuriated her family and friends back in her home state of Alabama. The American Foundation for the Blind was founded in 1924 and asked Helen to help raise funds for the foundation. Helen agreed to campaign for the American Foundation for the Blind. She raised two million dollars and spread public awareness (Briggs 307). In 1929, the second volume of her autobiography, *Midstream: My Later Life*, was published. Helen continued to change the world during the 1930s. She began to urge the public in Washington for legislation for the blind. She was

extremely successful and got the Pratt bill passed. The Pratt bill provided federal funded reading services for the blind. She also became the vice-president of the Royal National Institute for the Blind in the United Kingdom in 1932. In 1935 she helped enforce Title X in the 1935 Social Security Act. This recognized the blind as a group to receive federal grant assistance. After the bombing of Pearl Harbor in World War II, Helen supported President Roosevelt's decision to join with the democracies. She showed her support by touring military hospitals. After 1960, Helen retired from her public speaking and traveling. Her health was beginning to decline. She had a stroke in October of 1961 which caused her to remove herself from the outside world. She was awarded the Presidential Medal of Freedom in 1964 but sent her family to accept the award in Washington. In 1968, Helen Keller died of arteriosclerotic heart disease in her home in Westport, Connecticut. Helen became known world-wide as "one of the most remarkable children in existence" by the end of 1887 (Notable 389). Her life-long goal was to help the disadvantaged, particularly the blind and the deaf. She had a huge impact on Perkins. Her hard work and devotion helped her to overcome her handicaps and also inspired others to overcome theirs. Helen pushed for the rights of the blind. She was a benefactor to women's suffrage and the international peace movement before World War I. Many agencies and institutions have been named after Helen Keller as well. Helen Keller International was set-up to fight blindness in the world. Currently, Helen Keller International is one of the biggest organizations that works with the blind overseas ("The Life" 3). In 1986, the Industrial Home for the Blind was renamed to Helen Keller Services for the Blind. This agency provides special

services for the blind in New York. Because of her attempts and struggles, the blind now have better care, training, and employment. " I am a beneficiary of her work. Because of her example, the world has given way a little," says David Jackson, a blind jazz singer (Shuur 2).