

Helen Keller

Profile

Name– Helen Keller

Age– deceased. 1880- 1968

Gender– female

Background– Helen Keller was born in Tuscumbia, Alabama on June 2nd 1880. She was born into a middle-class family who made money from their cotton plantation. At the age of 19 months, Helen suddenly lost her ability to see and hear. It was diagnosed as brain fever at the time, but it could have been scarlet fever or meningitis. When she was seven, Anne Sullivan (a graduate from Perkins School for the Blind) came to teach Helen. The pair were inseparable until Miss Sullivan died. Even with her disability, Helen did not give up on herself- instead, she pushed on through her life and became an extremely well known and influential woman. She is a powerful symbol of triumph over adversity.

Description- When she was young, Helen was a bit crazy. Many of her relatives thought she should be institutionalised. However, she grew out of this phase. She was a very fast learner, which made learning skills like reading writing and learning the alphabet reasonably easy given her circumstances. Helen was described as a highly intelligent and sensitive woman with a great deal of persistence. She was very courageous, as she did not hide from her problem but instead chose to dedicate her life to improving the lives of other deaf-and-blind people.



Photo of Helen Keller at age 40

Analysis

Helen suffered adversity through out her whole life- from 18 months of age, to the day she died. Helen's health was affected by her condition a little bit when she was younger, but otherwise she acted and functioned as well as any other person (with the exception of her sight and hearing). As a young child, being deaf and blind made Helen a bit crazy. Happiness would leave her giggling uncontrollably, while anger left her kicking and screaming. She would also impose violent tantrums on those close to her. Helen's relatives were concerned for her, even considering institutionalising her.

Helen's adversity made it almost impossible to seek out help from other people to assist her in overcoming her adversity. She couldn't talk, so she had to rely on body language to convey her feelings. Being blind made it hard to find people to talk about her adversity. Even if she had been given advice, she wouldn't have been able to hear it or understand it.

However, at the age of seven, a graduate from Perkins School for the Blind came to Helen to be her teacher. Anne Sullivan was her name. At first, Helen was reluctant to receive help from Miss Sullivan. Anne spent a long time trying to get Helen to realise the connections between the objects and letters being spelt out on her hand, at first using a doll given to her by the children at Perkins. Anne would spell the word 'doll' on Helen's hand, hoping she would understand the connection between the object and the letters being spelt on her hand. One day, Miss Sullivan took Helen out to the outdoor water pump. She began drawing water and put Helen's hand under the spout. While the water rushed over one of Helen's hands, Anne spelt out 'water' on her other hand. Suddenly, Helen understood what Miss Sullivan had been trying to teach her. Helen spent the rest of the day learning new words and by dusk she had learnt thirty new words.

Helen Keller continued to learn much more from that day, the faithful Anne Sullivan always by her side. She learnt the alphabet both manual and in raised print for the blind, and she gained the ability to read and write. At the young age of ten, she expressed a desire to learn to speak, which she did. Her first speech teacher was Miss Sarah Fuller from the Horace Mann School.

Anne Sullivan stayed by Helen's side through out her life, until 1936 when Anne passed away. When Helen died, her ashes were placed next to Anne's ashes in St. Josephs Chapel. Anne was an extremely important part of Helen's life. Many regard her as a miracle worker for her lifetime of devotion, patience and love for Helen.

Most of the people in Keller's life influenced the way she approached her adversity.

One was Marsha Washington, the daughter of the family cook. Helen and Martha created a sign language between themselves, with which they were able to communicate (albeit, limitedly) with each other. This was an important relationship, as it made Keller realise that just because she couldn't see or hear, it didn't mean she was unable to

communicate in some way. Another important set of people in Keller's life would have been her family. She needed their support to succeed in the world and make sure she didn't give up on herself. Her family was also important because they were the ones who found her life time companion and 'miracle worker'-Anne Sullivan.

Anne had a major role in Helen's life and the way Helen approached her adversity. She managed to change Helen from a wild, uncontrollable child into a responsible and mature woman. The first few weeks of their relationship were rocky because Helen was extremely prone to giving up on herself or having a tantrum because she didn't understand something. However, with a lot of perseverance, Anne turned Helen's frame of mind around. Anne was very good at relating to Helen because Anne herself had been blind once. However, she regained her sight through a series of operations before she came to teach Helen.

Helen was an extremely smart woman, so it was no wonder that she went to college. Her formal schooling ended when she received her Bachelor of Arts degree. Helen's condition influenced her career when she grew up. As she was blind and deaf, most career options were not and/or could not be adapted to suit her and her disability. Helen began a fifty-year on-and-off writing career while still at college. She frequently contributed articles to magazines and newspapers: most often writing about deafness, blindness, social issues, socialism and women's rights.

All in all, Helen's adversity did not majorly affect her ability to get on with her life. She was able to overcome her problems of not being able to see or hear when she learnt to read write and speak. Helen probably couldn't remember a life without her sight/hearing because she was so young when she lost those abilities and losing them did not mean much to her at such a young age.

Part 3: Reflection

I found Helen Keller's story very inspiring and quite remarkable I thought it was amazing that she got so far in her life despite being blind and deaf. Reading Helen's story made me realise just how lucky I am to be healthy and free of disabilities. I think this will make me better appreciate the life I have.

When it comes to implementing ideas and advice from Helen Keller's story, I think I should look at some of the messages that are apparent in her story. These messages can all be applied by anybody in their day-to-day life.

One message I got from her story was that anything is possible if you set your mind to it.

This ties in with another message- don't give up. Using these in every day life can make you a more positive person and improve your ability to deal with obstacles you confront in your life. I think remembering these messages will make me a more positive person when confronted with a problem I should remember Helen's story whenever I am faced with adversity in life, because it will help keep my problem in

perspective- really it's not as bad as I think it is, and if Helen could conquer such a big problem, then surely I can manage too.

Another message from Helen's story is that having a disability doesn't necessarily make you any less of a person I think this will change my attitude towards people with disabilities. Before I read Helen's story, I respected disabled people but I didn't think they were capable of all of the things that can do. Now I know that just because you are disabled, it doesn't mean you aren't capable of accomplishing something that an able-bodied person can.

I think Helen's story should be made better known, as it brings excellent ideas and advice for everybody on dealing with adversity

Part 4: Bibliography

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