

# Helen Keller

*Helen's signature*

The story of the little girl, Helen Keller, who was deaf-blind and learned to communicate when her teacher, Anne Sullivan, spelled "water" into her hand, while pumping water over her other hand, was made famous by the movie "The Miracle Worker." That movie may be all you know of history's most famous deaf-blind person who grew up to be one of the 20th century's leading humanitarians.

Helen dedicated her life to the betterment of others, helping people see the potential in their own lives, as well as the lives of people around them. She was a woman of intelligence, determination and achievement. With endless support by Anne Sullivan, and later Polly Thomson, Helen became an author, lecturer, political activist, fund raiser, world traveler, advocate of the physically handicapped, and the first deaf-blind person to effectively communicate with the sighted and hearing world. Helen Keller's legacy showed the world what persons with physical limitations can accomplish, which helped to change public perceptions of people with disabilities.

In honor her Helen Keller's upcoming birthday, let me share some facts about her life.

## Birth

Helen Keller was born a very healthy baby in a small town called Tuscumbia, Alabama on June 27, 1880, fifteen years after the end of the Civil War. Her birthplace and childhood home was an estate called Ivy Green, located on a 640-acre tract of land built by her father's parents decades earlier. Although Helen left Alabama when she was eight, she always claimed Ivy Green as home, and continued to identify herself as a Southerner throughout her life and travels.

Ivy Green was placed on the National Register of Historic Places in 1954 and is open to the public for touring.



*Ivy Green main house and cottage*

## Family

Helen's parents were Arthur Keller, and his second wife, Kate Adams Keller. Kate was 20 years younger than her husband. They had three children together. Helen was the oldest, then Mildred, and the youngest, Philips Brooks. Captain Keller also had two grown sons from his first marriage who bitterly resented their father's marriage to Kate only a year after their mother's death.



*Helen's parents- Arthur and Kate Keller*

Above all else, Arthur Keller, a former lawyer, was a loyal Southerner who had proudly served as a captain in the Confederate Army. Kate was a Memphis, Tennessee southern belle who had been pampered and protected by her father, Charles W. Adams, a brigadier general in the Confederate Army (and born in Boston). But Kate, unlike her husband, was not a dyed-in-the-wool Southerner. She had illustrious northern roots, was related to a number of prominent New England families, and shared many Yankee values. Marriage at age twenty-two to the forty-two year old captain, with whom she had little in common, ended Kate's luxurious southern lady existence.

To her dismay, Kate discovered that her jovial husband, like most of the southern gentility during the tumultuous postbellum period, has lost most of the family's money during the Civil War and was struggling to make ends meet. Although a member of a distinguished southern family, Captain Keller was forced to earn a living both as a cotton plantation owner and as the editor of a weekly local newspaper, *The North Alabamian*. A friend once bluntly described Captain Keller as "a gentleman farmer who loved to direct rather than work" and "a man of limited ideas and ability." In 1885 his fortunes took an upturn when President Cleveland appointed him U.S. Marshal for the Northern District of Alabama.

Still, money was scarce and although there were helpers to run the plantation, Kate alone raised her own vegetables, fruit and livestock to save money. She toiled from dawn to dusk. She never complained publicly about her husband's shortcomings or regrets about her marriage, and found escape by tending her flower garden, becoming devoted to women's suffrage, and taking refuge in books and other intellectual pursuits.

Helen's father died in 1896 when Helen was only sixteen, and her mother in 1921 when Helen was forty-one years old. Helen missed her mother dearly after her death. She wrote, "*I had absolute faith that we would meet again in the Land of Eternal Beauty: but oh, the dreary blank her going left in my life!*"

## Brain Fever

Helen was an unusually pretty child with nearly perfect features, beautiful pale blue eyes, and golden curls. She thrived for 19 months and showed signs of being quite intelligent, already walking and learning to talk. Then in February of 1882 she contracted an illness called "brain fever" by her family doctor, described by modern physicians as likely to be either scarlet fever or meningitis. For several days she was close to death with a raging fever, which she survived, but permanently left her deaf and blind, unable to even distinguish light. Keller describes the outcome of her illness as having "*plunged me into the unconsciousness of a new-born baby,*" and then recounts how this new state became normal: "*I got used to the silence and darkness that surrounded me and forgot that it had ever been different.*"

Effective communication with Helen came to a sudden stop, as did her emotional and social development, and any instruction or education. Unable to see or hear what was around her, Helen spent her early years clinging frantically to her mother's skirts. As Helen grew into childhood, her frustration with her silent and dark world also grew. Although she had self-invented primitive hand signs and gestures for basic communication, she realized that she was shut out of most that was passed between the people around her, and her unfilled need for connection tortured her. Her behavior became wild and unruly, frequently throwing explosive, violent tantrums. Her parents felt helpless about how to deal with her destructive behavior. As it was a frequent practice of the era, family and friends suggested that Helen be sent to live in an asylum, as she was "*unsightly*" and "*seemed unlikely to ever change for the better.*" Her parents resisted and hoped for a better path.



***Helen and her mother, Kate***

## Hope

Kate Keller gained hope for her daughter after reading an article in 1886 about the successful education of another deaf-blind girl, **Laura Bridgman**. Soon after, Kate sent 6 year old Helen and her father to Baltimore to see leading Eye, Ear, Nose and Throat specialist **Dr. J. Julian Chisolm** at the University of Maryland. After completing his examination, Dr. Chisolm believed that Helen could learn to talk and be educated, although there was nothing that he, or anyone else, could do to restore her sight or hearing. He referred the family to **Alexander Graham Bell**, best known for his invention of the telephone which revolutionized communication.

While Alexander Graham Bell worked in many scientific, technical, professional and social capacities throughout his life, he would remain fondest of his earliest vocation. To the end of his days, when discussing himself, Bell would always add with *pride* "I am a teacher of the deaf".

Bell's interest in sound technology was deep rooted and personal as both his wife and mother were deaf. It was also the family business, as his grandfather, father and uncle were all experts on the mechanics of voice and elocution (the skill of clear and expressive speech, especially of distinct pronunciation and articulation). By age 16, Bell had joined his father in his work with the deaf. He was tenaciously committed to teaching the deaf to speak intelligibly and both improved, and invented, numerous techniques to that end. Throughout his life he continued to work with the deaf, founding several schools for the deaf, and instructing many teachers how to teach the deaf to speak using a method called Visible Speech developed by his father, and improved upon by him.

Bell first met and interviewed Helen in 1886 in Washington, DC. She later described this meeting as the start of her education and fulfillment and "*that interview would be the door through which I should pass from darkness into light.*" She said she could sense the tenderness and sympathy in him. He understood her self-invented primitive hand signs and gestures, sat her on his knee, and made his pocket watch chime so she could feel its vibration. Helen wrote that she "*loved him at once.*"

Bell remained a prominent figure in Helen's life until his death in 1922. They frequently spent time together and developed a parent-child like relationship. Helen said that Bell dedicated his life to the penetration of that "*inhuman silence which separates and estranges*" and she dedicated her first, and most successful book, *The Story of My Life*, to him.

After this first meeting, Bell advised Helen's parents to apply to **Michael Anagnos**, the director of the *Perkins School for the Blind*, where Laura Bridgman had been educated, for a teacher to be sent to Tuscumbia for one-on-one teaching of Helen. This was the beginning of Helen's long and extremely demanding path of learning.

### Anne Sullivan

It was Anagnos, who selected **Anne Sullivan** to be Helen's tutor. She was a *Perkins School* star student and recent graduate who had studied the instruction methods used to teach Laura Bridgman, and *Tadoma touch-lip reading* (sometimes referred to as tactile-lip reading) invented by **Sophia Alcorn** and developed at the school. She arrived at Helen's home in Tuscumbia on March 3, 1887 at 20 years of age.



*Helen and Anne Sullivan, July 1888*

Anne was orphaned, a former ward of the state, financially needy and without any tutor experience when she arrived at the Keller home—but she understood the heartbreak of blindness. Anne herself lost her sight after contracting trachoma, a contagious conjunctivitis that attacks the eyes, which was partially restored after several surgeries. However, her eyesight remained erratic and limited for most of her life, and her eyes frequently caused her much pain. Anne was well aware of the kind of life that awaited Helen were she banished to an asylum, as she had lived in a state run poor-house herself. But because of her own triumphs over adversity, Anne was also aware of the miracles that might be achieved through persistence and disciplined effort.



**Helen and Alexander Graham Bell**

When Anne arrived at the Keller home, Helen was 7 years old. She persuaded Helen's parents to let her have complete charge over Helen, with no interference to her methods. She and Helen moved into the little cottage beside the main house at Ivy Green, and instruction began. Her first focus was to mold Helen's behavior into something considerably more civilized and tolerable, but Anne also immediately introduced Helen to finger-spelling using the manual alphabet of the deaf. However, Helen made no apparent connection between the finger-spelling and the objects the signed words were supposed to represent. Anne persisted, routinely spelling words into Helen's palm -- and refusing to do so when Helen misbehaved.

On 5 April 1887, after a month of no progress, the now famous moment arrived when the two were down at the water pump. Anne was spelling "water" into Helen's palm while letting the water run over the girl's other hand when suddenly, Helen got it! Frantic with excitement Helen spelled it back to Anne: *w-a-t-e-r*.

Helen later wrote of that day, "...*That living word (water) awakened my soul, gave it light, hope, joy, set it free... Everything had a name, and each name gave birth to a new thought. As we returned to the house every object I touched seemed to quiver with life.*"

She also wrote of the days that followed, "*I did nothing but explore with my hands and learn the name of every object that I touched; and the more I handled things and learned their names and uses, the more joyous and confident grew my sense of kinship with the rest of the world.*"

When Helen asked for a name to call Anne, Anne spelled back *t-e-a-c-h-e-r* ----the name that Helen called her by for the rest of their lives together.

## Education

After more than five years of isolating silence and darkness, this communication breakthrough proved Helen's ability to learn simply astonishing in its speed and breadth. Helen quickly and eagerly learned to read and write, learning nearly 600 words, most of her multiplication tables, how to print block letters, and how to read Braille within a matter of months.

**Helen's handwriting written with the aid of ruler**



**American Sign Language Manual Alphabet**

Home schooling created a wonderful foundation for Helen's education, but Sullivan felt impeded by the isolation and limited materials available in Tuscumbia. Anne felt it best for Helen to continue her studies in the educationally rich environment of the Perkins School and persuaded her reluctant parents to allow the pair to move to Boston to attend school in May 1888 when Helen was 8 years of age. The two spent time there off-and-on throughout Keller's adolescence, living at the school for long periods of time and sometimes staying in Alabama.

Helen later wrote of her time there, "*I joined the little blind children in their work and play, and talked continually. I was delighted to find that nearly all of my new friends could spell with their fingers. Oh, what happiness! To talk freely with other children! To feel at home in the great world!*"

Helen wanted to learn to speak. So in addition to her Perkins School studies, she began taking private tutor speech classes at the Horace Mann School in 1890 with Sarah Fuller in Boston, who had been taught the Visible Speech method by Alexander Graham Bell.

By this time, Helen's parents could no longer afford to pay Anne or afford Helen's school costs. Luckily, Helen and Anne were gaining national recognition for Helen's gifted intelligence and accomplishments, and Anne's unique and extraordinary teaching skills. Helen began to meet famous and influential people, and a number of wealthy benefactors stepped in to defray their costs, allowing Helen to continue her education and keep Anne by her side.

Helen and Anne moved to New York October 1894 to 1896 so that Helen could attend the Wright-Humason School for the Deaf and continue to improve her speech skills, touch-lip reading, and her general education.

Around this time, Helen became determined to attend college. The pair moved to Massachusetts in October 1896 to attend the Cambridge School for Young Ladies, a college preparatory school for women.

The pair then moved to Wrentham, Massachusetts in December 1897 to continue Helen's college preparatory studies with private tutors.

At 19 years of age, Helen's college preparatory studies were finished. She had mastered several forms of communication: She was able to finger-spell, use sign language, read Braille, use both a conventional and Braille typewriter, hand-write words, touch-lip read, and speak. She had studied math, algebra, geometry, grammar, writing composition, poetry, history, economics, physiology, philosophy, geography, English, Latin, French, German, Greek, politics, world news and was well read.

In 1899 Helen applied to and passed the entrance exam to Radcliffe College, the female coordinate institution for the all-male Harvard College. In September 1900 she became a member of their freshman class and on June 28, 1904, Helen graduated cum laude, with a Bachelor of Arts degree at 24 years of age. Upon graduation, she announced that her life would be dedicated to the amelioration of blindness.



***Helen's Radcliffe graduation***

Here are two links of rare footage films of Helen. The first with Anne Sullivan demonstrating touch-lip reading <https://youtu.be/KLqyKeMQfmY> and the second a demonstration of finger-spelling and speaking with Polly Thomson [https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=8ch\\_H8pt9M8](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=8ch_H8pt9M8)



***Helen and Anne Sullivan, 1899***

Helen was the first deaf-blind person to ever graduate from college! This was an amazing accomplishment, especially during an era when few women attended college, and when most people with disabilities were consigned to an asylum.

Helen's graduation from college could not have been possible without a lot of grit, hard work, and the help of Anne Sullivan. Anne accompanied Helen on every step of this educational journey. Despite the physical strain on her own limited sight, Anne sat by Helen's side at every class, spelled the contents of class lectures into Keller's hand, and spent hours conveying information from textbooks to her because they were not in Braille.

The only disappointment in Helen's schooling was that despite 25 years of hard work to improve her spoken voice, she was always dissatisfied with it. Helen's speech remained difficult to understand by those that spent little time with her, and she used an interpreter (Anne and then later Polly) to translate her speech for most of her later career public speaking events.

## Social Activism

**John Albert Macy**, an instructor of English at Harvard, edited Helen's first book. This collaboration brought him into intimate contact with Helen and Anne, and the three formed a close attachment to one another. Eventually, John married Anne in 1905, and joined the ladies' household. John openly declared an allegiance to socialism, and many believed it was his influence that led Helen to join the Socialist Party in 1909. Anne did not share their socialist political views.

Helen believed she was able to overcome many of the difficulties in her life because of her class privilege. She said, "*I owed my success partly to the advantages of my birth and environment,*" and "*I have learned that the power to rise is not within the reach of everyone.*"

Helen worked throughout her life to achieve social change and was an integral part of many important social movements in the 20th century. In addition to advocating for the disabled, she was an outspoken advocate of women's suffrage and legalized birth control. She supported the labor union movement, striking workers unemployment benefits, social security, and was a defender of the radical Industrial Workers of the World union. She criticized World War 1 as a profit-making venture for industrialists and urged working-class men to resist the war. After the deployment of nuclear weapons in WW2, Helen visited Hiroshima and Nagasaki to speak out against nuclear weapons. She supported the civil rights movement, jailed dissidents, and was a founding member of the ACLU. She expressed passionate views about the need for a just and economically equitable society. She blamed industrialization and poverty for causing disability among a disproportionately large number of working-class people and became increasingly concerned about racial inequalities. She supported the newly formed NAACP.



**Helen**

As a public figure, she bluntly spoke her mind on these issues in her public speeches, newspaper and magazine articles, interviews, appearances at rallies, books and other writings. Speaking openly on these topics was extremely brave for anyone, never mind a disabled woman—and it cost her in many ways, but Helen lived her life campaigning for these things until her last day.

Helen's beliefs led to her being watched by the FBI most of her life and experiencing times when she was shunned severely. For most of her life, the press and the public was overwhelmingly supportive of her, praising her courage and intelligence, but after she expressed her socialist views, she experienced public prejudice about her disabilities. Some believed that her disabilities disqualified her from civic life. According to her critics, her disabilities left her politically pliable and incapable of intentional deliberation. A New York newspaper once wrote, Helen's socialist views as "*mistakes sprung out of the manifest limitations of her development.*" Such attitudes frustrated and enraged her! She responded publicly by asking the newspaper to fight fairly and use arguments against her own instead of simply reminding people that she could not see or hear.

## Earning a Living

While Helen was at Radcliffe, she wrote *The Story of My Life* with the help of editor John Albert Macy. The story proved to be a sensation when it was serialized in the *Ladies' Home Journal* in 1902, and the autobiography earned even greater acclaim when it was published in book form the following year. The autobiography became an almost unparalleled best seller, still in print in over fifty languages.

Keller assumed that she would build on the massive literary success of her autobiography and become an economically self-sufficient author, but she found supporting herself as an author more difficult than she anticipated. In her lifetime, Helen published 14 books and produced numerous published articles. However, editors and the reading public only wanted to read about her disability, and Helen wanted to write on her expanding and increasingly controversial economic, political, and international views. The critics panned her views and few bought her books and other publications, forcing Helen to seek new ways to support herself and Anne.

In February 1913, Anne and Helen began a fifteen-month adult-education lecture tour in the Northeast in an effort to supplement their income from Helen's writing. Although these lectures were popular, the pay was



**Helen using a Braille typewriter**

too little to sustain them. In addition, they had to travel to a new town for each lecture and the daily schedule was becoming too hectic for Anne, whose eyesight and health were growing poor. To add to their troubles, John and Anne's marriage began to collapse, and although they never divorced, John left the household to live on his own in 1914.

In 1914 **Polly Thomson**, joins the household as a secretary to Helen because of Anne's failing health, and the trio move to Forest Hills, New York in 1917.

Still struggling to make ends meet, Helen and Anne appear as themselves in a 1919 silent Hollywood film *Deliverance*, a story about their lives and the plight of the blind. The movie was well reviewed in the national press, but was a box office failure, yielding little money reward.

The search for income continued and the two began touring on the vaudeville theater circuit late in 1919. Helen was billed as "The Star of Happiness" and the "8th Wonder of the World". Every show started with the story of Helen's life and ended with a Q&A session, which gave Helen an opportunity to show off her quick wit. It was a hit! The audience and critics loved the show, and they were paid in the top tier for vaudevillians--\$2,000 per week. It allowed the ladies to stay in the same town for a week, sustain themselves financially, and often gave Helen an opportunity to talk about the issues she cared about during the Q&A.

Helen quit the vaudeville circuit in 1924 when Anne's sight and overall health became too poor for her to continue. By then, Anne had lost most of her vision. She experienced chronic pain in her right eye, which was then removed to improve her health. Anne never regained her strength and vitality and many of her duties shift to Polly.

### **American Foundation for the Blind**

The end of the vaudeville circuit for Helen meant that, once again, she needed to find a meaningful public life and financial stability. The newly created American Foundation for the Blind (AFB) supplied both, becoming the center of her and Anne's lives as they worked for the AFB from their Forest Hills home.

Working on behalf of blind people with and through the AFB, from 1924 through the early 1940s, Helen with Anne's help, worked ceaselessly, raising funds and lobbying state, national legislatures and Congress. Decades before the American Disabilities Act she fought to make visible why civil rights policies for people with disabilities was a necessary step towards guaranteeing full citizenship and inclusion in our community and all aspects of life. Her lobbying efforts were influential in removing physically disabled persons from asylums.

She emphasized educational and employment possibilities for people with disabilities, including state assisted programs to help people with disabilities with job training and placement. Helen visited 25 state legislatures in person, making an appeal for them to establish services for people with vision loss, hearing loss, and war-related disabilities, including the provision of assistive technology and public-health services to prevent blindness from poor health and malnutrition. She prompted the organization of Commissions for the Blind in 30 states by 1937. She made an appeal to the international Convention of Lions Clubs, asking them to become the *Knights of the Blind*, and they did--proudly continuing this commitment across the globe today.



**Helen with Polly Thomson in Japan**

Helen began expanding her influence by traveling the world to advocate for people who faced disabilities, discrimination, and other blows that life dealt them. She regarded herself as a "world citizen", visiting 39 countries on five continents between 1939 and 1957, including the most grueling trip of her life in 1955 at age 75--- a 40,000 mile, five-month trek across Asia.

The State Department worked with the AFB to fund and facilitate Helen's travels and promoted her as a semi-official ambassador for the United States. She attracted huge crowds wherever she went and through her many speeches and appearances, brought inspiration and encouragement to millions of people.



During World War II, she visited disabled veterans worldwide to demonstrate -through her mere presence- that they could still accomplish great things. In 1948 she toured Hiroshima and Nagasaki just three years after the atomic bombs were dropped. Around the world, she simultaneously scolded foreign governments and philanthropists for their limited efforts to help the blind, and other disabled persons, and coaxed them, with great success, to do more.

Most of this time abroad, Helen was accompanied by Polly and, sadly, without Anne.

## The End

Anne Sullivan remained with Helen until her death. By 1935 Anne was completely blind and in very poor health. On October 15, 1936, at age 70, she had a coronary thrombosis, fell into a coma, and died five days later, on October 20 at their Forest Hills home. Helen was holding her hand when she passed.

Anne was cremated and her ashes interred in a memorial at the National Cathedral in Washington, DC. Anne, *The Miracle Worker*, was the first woman to be honored and recognized for her achievements in this way. At her funeral, Bishop James E. Freeman said, "*Among the great teachers of all time she occupies a commanding and conspicuous place. . . . The touch of her hand did more than illuminate the pathway of a clouded mind; it literally emancipated a soul.*"



Anne's death profoundly upset Helen and prompted her to move to Connecticut with Polly. During Anne's last months, the women had received a visit from **Takeo Iwahashi**, an English-speaking director of a school for the blind in Japan. He urged Helen to visit Japan, and Anne exacted a promise that Helen would someday visit. In 1937, after Anne's death, Helen made good on her promise. The 56 year old Helen, unsure of the rest of her life, saw in the trip the possibility of a new focus. It was this trip to Japan as a tourist that resulted in Helen's shift to international travel and advocacy, with Polly by her side.

Polly had a stroke in 1957 from which she never fully recovered, and died in 1960. It ended Helen's travels.

**Winnie Corbally**, a nurse originally hired to care for Polly in 1957, stayed on after her death and was Helen's companion for the rest of her life

Helen spent her later years mostly raising funds for AFB. She suffered a series of strokes in 1961 and spent the remaining years of her life at her Connecticut home. Helen died in her sleep on June 1, 1968, just a few weeks before her 88th birthday. She was cremated and her ashes placed next to those of her constant companions, Anne and Polly, at the National Cathedral, where visitors over the years twice have worn the braille letters completely off the plaque by her grave.

Her work on behalf of the blind continues today through the various institutions that she helped to found and fund, including Helen Keller International and the Helen Keller National Center for Deaf-Blind Youth and Adults.



## Interesting Facts

- **Helen was good friend with Samuel L. Clemens (Mark Twain)**

She met Samuel at a lunch in New York when she was a teenager in 1895 and remained friends with him until his death. He admired her sense of humor and sharp intelligence. She wrote that he "treated me not as a freak, but as a handicapped woman seeking a way to circumvent extraordinary difficulties". She recognized the author by his scent, as he reeked of tobacco from cigars. He was the first person to call Anne Sullivan a miracle worker and wrote a blurb for her autobiography, *The Story of My Life*.

- **Helen fell in love with Peter Fagan**

In 1916, at 36 years of age, Helen fell in love with Peter, a former newspaper reporter in his late twenties, working for Helen temporarily while Anne was sick. The couple secretly got engaged and took out a marriage license before Helen's family found out and forbade the marriage because of her disability. Helen regretted that she never married.

- **Helen Keller's image is on US currency**

Introduced in 2003, Helen's image is on the Alabama state quarter which includes her name written in Braille.

- **Helen loved dogs**

Dogs brought Helen joy, companionship and acceptance. From her childhood to the very end of her life, dogs were always by her side. And she doted on them all. She wrote, "one of the first things she would do if she suddenly had vision, 'I should like to look into the loyal, trusting eyes of my dogs...whose warm, tender, and playful friendships are so comforting to me.'" She was also the first to introduce the Akita dog breed to the US, a gift to her from a Japanese police officer during her visit to Japan.

- **She was nominated for a Nobel Peace Prize in 1953**

The nomination came after she advocated for the rights of the blind and disabled and secured a promise from Egypt's Minister of Education to create secondary schools for the blind that could lead to a college education.

- **She was on Time magazine's list of the most important figures of the 20th century in 1999**

- **She won an Oscar**

Helen is the only famous historical figure to receive an Academy Award for appearing in a documentary about her life (originally titled *The Unconquered* and later renamed *Helen Keller in Her Story* in 1955) – and then have someone else win an Oscar for portraying her in another movie about her life (Patty Duke won best supporting actress in *The Miracle Worker* in which she says only one word, "Water!")

- **Helen and Anne's image is on a 1980 US stamp**

- **She had her natural eyes removed**

At the age of 30, had surgery to remove both her eyeballs, as her left eye had a pronounced bulge, leading to Helen's preference in her young adulthood to have her picture taken in profile to hide the problem. She was given a pair of glass eyes in a beautiful shade of blue, her natural eye color, following the surgery.

- **She received the Presidential Medal of Freedom and many other honors**

The Presidential Medal of Freedom was rewarded to her by President Lyndon Johnson in 1964. Helen Keller won numerous honors, including several honorary university degrees, the Lions Humanitarian Award, the French Legion of Honor, Brazil's Order of the Southern Cross, the Philippines' Golden Heart, Japan's Sacred Treasure, and election to the Women's Hall of Fame.

- **She met every President of the United States, from Calvin Coolidge to John F. Kennedy.**

- **The Twin Tower destruction destroyed a large collection of Helen Keller media**

Despite a large collection of media containing live footage of Helen in various stages and contexts of her life being captured over the years, a great deal of this footage was stored at the World Trade Centre, and lost on 9/11/2001.

