

BIOGRAPHY

Helen Keller

Helen Keller was born in Alabama in 1880. When she was almost two years old, Helen became very sick. After she got well, her parents discovered that she could no longer see or hear. She was so young when she became sick that she had not yet learned to talk. Because she could not hear or see, Helen did not learn to speak until she was an adult.

Her parents learned about the new ways to teach students with a disability. In 1887 when Helen was 7, her parents contacted the Perkins School for the Blind in Boston, Massachusetts. The school asked a former student, Anne Sullivan, to go to Alabama to teach Helen.

Anne Sullivan taught Helen sign language, a way to spell out letters using hand signs. Helen became very good at sign language and went on to be an excellent student. She graduated from Radcliffe College in 1900, the first deaf and blind person to earn an arts degree at Radcliffe.

Helen became a world famous author and speaker. She wrote 12 books and many articles. She travelled to 40 countries, often raising money for the blind. She helped start Helen Keller International, an organization that researches the issues of vision and health. Helen also promoted many charities, including the American Foundation for the Blind. She met many presidents, authors and celebrities. In 1964 President Lyndon Johnson awarded her the Presidential Medal of Freedom.

Helen Keller died in 1968. She is still honored for her perseverance, her generosity, and her ability to touch people's lives.



The first word Helen Keller learned was "water." Anne Sullivan took Helen outside to the water pump where she ran cool water over one of Helen's hands, while fingerspelling w-a-t-e-r into Helen's other hand.

What Do You Think?

What do you think is Helen Keller's greatest accomplishment? Why?

The Sign Language Alphabet

Can you spell your name in sign language?

