

## CHRONOLOGY OF A LIFE

The life and legacy of **Helen Keller**

*Dedication*

To the memory of Patty Tyson Johnson (1915-1993) who guided  
the Helen Keller Foundation for Research & Education during  
its start-up phase, teaching us to know her famous aunt,  
**Helen Keller.**



*As the foremost figure in history to have overcome a health affliction, Helen Keller caused the world to reconsider the abilities of all handicapped individuals, forever increasing their life potential.*

Compiled by the

HELEN KELLER

---

EYE RESEARCH FOUNDATION

*saving sight, speech & hearing*

# CHRONOLOGY OF A LIFE

The life and legacy of Helen Keller

## 1880

Born in Tuscumbia, Alabama, U.S.A., on June 27.



## 1886

Recognized by Alexander Graham Bell, famous teacher of the deaf and inventor of the telephone, as being exceptionally bright despite her severe sensory loss.

## 1888-1898

Matures under the instruction of Sullivan, later to be called "The Miracle Worker" by Mark Twain. World fame grows even before the era of mass communication. Learns to read and write in Braille.

At the age of 19 months, loses sight and hearing as a result of meningitis.

## 1882



Begins instruction, as a result of Alexander Graham Bell's suggestion, under Annie Sullivan, 20-year-old, partially blind orphan and graduate of Boston's Perkins Institute for the Deaf and Blind.

Liberated from the "double dungeon of darkness and silence" by Sullivan who teaches her that water flowing from a well has a name, W-A-T-E-R. Calls it "my soul's birthday".

## 1887

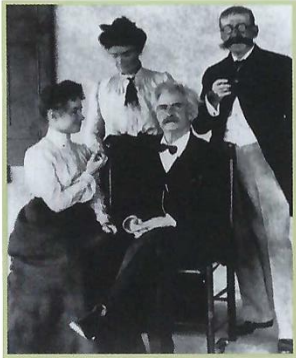
1900

Enrolls in Radcliffe College (later a division of Harvard University) as a regular student. Aided by Sullivan, who spells lectures into her hand.



1903

Publishes her first book, *The Story of My Life*, as an effort to satisfy the insatiable interest of people throughout the world in her “miraculous” accomplishments. Becomes the first blind/deaf person to communicate effectively with mankind.



Befriended by Mark Twain. Recognizing Helen’s great intellect and indomitable spirit despite her blindness and deafness, Twain predicts, “Helen Keller will create a fame that will endure in history for centuries. Along her special lines, she is the most extraordinary product of the ages.”

1899

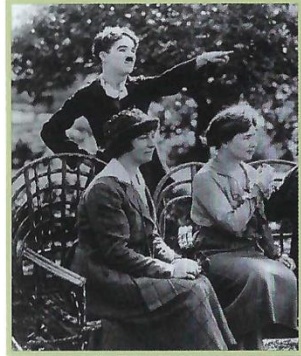


Graduates Cum Laude from Radcliffe College. Is the first blind/deaf college graduate. The next blind/deaf person to graduate from college does so 50 years later. Writes, “I shall devote my life to those who suffer from loss of sight.”

1904

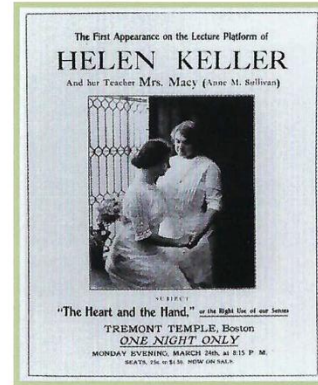
# CHRONOLOGY OF A LIFE

The life and legacy of Helen Keller



## 1919

Stars in the film *Deliverance*. Meets Charlie Chaplin, the first of many figures in the entertainment world with whom she will become acquainted, including Enrico Caruso, Mary Pickford, Katharine Cornell, Douglas Fairbanks and Lauritz Melchior.



## 1919-1924

Lectures and tours in the United States. World fame increases.

Publishes *The World I Live In*.

## 1908



By feeling vibrations of his violin, "listens" to the music of young Jascha Heifetz, who eventually becomes one of the greatest violin virtuosos of the 20th century. Helen can recognize composers. "Each delicate note alighted on my fingertips like thistle-down. They touched my face, my hair, like kisses remembered."

Begins her lifelong work as a counselor on national and international relations for the American Foundation for the Blind. Through Helen, AFB's profile is raised throughout the United States, and development funds are secured.

## 1924

## 1919

1925

Successfully challenges Lions International, the world's largest fraternal organization, to become "knights for the blind in the battle against darkness". The Lions go on to establish numerous sight-saving programs and eye banks. In 1990, the Lions rededicate themselves to "Sight First".

1929

Publishes *Midstream: My Later Life* at age 49. Travels for the first time to Europe.

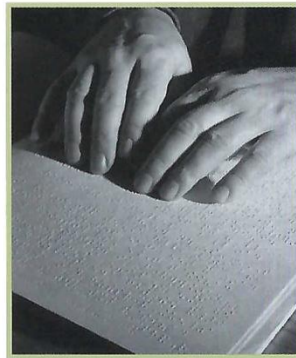


1937

Embarks on the first of three tours of Japan, establishing a close friendship with the Japanese people whose culture especially reveres triumph of the mind over bodily infirmity. Gives 97 lectures in 39 cities. "No foreign visitor had ever been accorded such an enthusiastic reception." (Akita Journal)

Publishes *My Religion*.

1927



Braille is accepted as the world's standard alphabet for the blind, thanks largely to Helen's eloquent pleas for standardization.

1932

Publishes Helen Keller's Journal. Begins close friendship with Eleanor Roosevelt. Meets with President Franklin Delano Roosevelt, who says, "Whatever Helen Keller's for, I'm for." Becomes friends with Katharine Cornell, actress.

1938

# CHRONOLOGY OF A LIFE

The life and legacy of Helen Keller



## 1943-1946

Visits military hospitals, calling it “the crowning experience of my life”. “A drop of sweetness stole into my grief over the paralyzed as they tried to put their wasted arms around me, not always successfully, but their wish was a benediction I shall treasure forever.”

## 1952

Becomes Chevalier of the French Legion in a ceremony commemorating the birth of Louie Braille at the Sorbonne in Paris.

## 1953

Honored by the world's ambassadors to the United States at the Waldorf Astoria as she leaves on a world tour. Called by Eleanor Roosevelt “America's goodwill ambassador to the world”. Calls herself “an international beggar”.



Embarks on world tour on behalf of the handicapped, inspiring governments to begin schools for the blind and deaf, Helen visits 35 countries on five continents between 1946-1957.

## 1946



Awarded the Gold Medal by the National Institute of Social Sciences given annually to a distinguished individual who has been of outstanding service to humanity.

## 1952



1953

Meets with Prime Minister Nehru and is greeted by massive crowds on a tour of India.

1954

Ivy Green, Helen's birthplace in Tuscumbia, Alabama, U.S.A., is placed on the National Register of Historic Places.



1955

Wins an Oscar Award for *Helen Keller In Her Story*, a documentary movie on her life.



Meets with Winston Churchill who calls her "the most remarkable woman of our age".

1953



Helen, Martha Graham and dancers at Martha Graham's studio, circa 1954. Scene from film *Helen Keller In Her Story*, produced by Nancy Hamilton.

1954

Publishes *Teacher - Anne Sullivan Macy*.

1955

# CHRONOLOGY OF A LIFE

The life and legacy of **Helen Keller**

## 1955

Becomes the first woman to receive an honorary doctorate degree from Harvard University.



## 1961

Meets with President John F. Kennedy, the tenth president of the United States with whom she will be personally acquainted.

## 1964

Awarded the Presidential Medal of Freedom by President Lyndon Johnson. This is the highest civilian honor bestowed by the United States.

Meets with President Eisenhower, who becomes the first non-blind person to use talking books during his convalescence from a heart attack. Helen pioneered the concept of talking books.



## 1956

The Miracle Worker, the story of Helen's early instruction by Annie Sullivan, debuts on Broadway, starring Patty Duke and Anne Bancroft.

## 1961

Suffers a stroke and retires from public life. Nevertheless, remains vibrant and interested in world affairs.

## 1955

# 1967

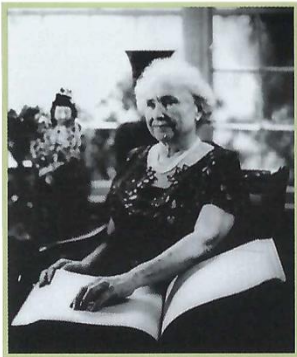
Two separate compilations of writings and speeches are published, *Helen Keller*; *Her Socialist Years* and *The Faith of Helen Keller*.

# 1977

American Foundation for Overseas Blind changes its name to Helen Keller International, the preeminent organization providing public health services to the blind and blindness prevention in developing countries worldwide.

# 1990

*Life* magazine calls Helen Keller one of the 25 most important Americans of the 20th century – a national treasure.



Helen Keller dies at age 88 and is memorialized at the National Cathedral, Washington, D.C. Senator Lister Hill of Alabama eulogizes her as “one of the few names not born to die”. She is called “the first lady of courage”.

Helen Keller’s story continues to be taught in schools throughout the world. Numerous educational and service institutions continue her work under her name. The foremost of these is the American Foundation for the Blind, which she helped to establish.

# 1968

The family of Helen Keller, and distinguished scientists and physicians, come together to establish the Helen Keller Eye Research Foundation, the only research organization bearing her name, to pursue her quest “to help me hasten the day when there shall be no preventable blindness”.

# 1988

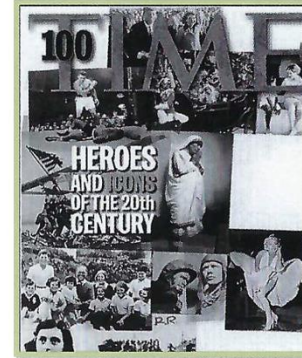
# CHRONOLOGY OF A LIFE

The life and legacy of **Helen Keller**



## 1993

The Helen Keller Prize for Vision Research is established to bring public attention to vision research as a solution to sight loss.



## 1999

*Time Magazine* selects Helen Keller as one of the 100 most influential people of the 20th century.

Gallup polls recurrently confirm that blindness is the most feared of all disabilities. The name "Helen Keller" is preeminent in the struggle against blindness as are few names in other fields.

## 1992

The Helen Keller Eye Research Foundation appoints Ms. Keller Johnson, great-grand niece of Helen Keller, to develop and conduct a school education program based on the life and legacy of Helen Keller.

## 1994

The Helen Keller Eye Research Foundation begins sponsorship of the International Society of Ocular Trauma. The World Eye Injury Registry is established on the internet to help guide eye injury prevention and management worldwide.

## 2000

# 2000

The Helen Keller Birthplace Foundation is established to protect and maintain Ivy Green, her birthplace in Tuscumbia, AL.



# 2003

Helen Keller's image is featured on the Alabama quarter. Her name is written in Braille, the first United States' coin to feature Braille.

# 2006

The Helen Keller Foundation for Research and Education has discovered best treatments for retinal detachment, eye injury, diabetic eye disease, strokes of the eye, and surgery of the macula - the center of vision.

The Helen Keller Eye Research Foundation changes its name to the Helen Keller Foundation for Research and Education - saving sight, speech and hearing. The Foundation now pursues new treatments for both major senses through research and education.

# 2000

Movie Gallery features the foundation in its stores. Millions of customers support this alliance of Helen Keller's legacy with solutions to blindness and deafness.

# 2004

Alabama Governor Bob Riley and his wife, Patsy, unveil a statue of Helen Keller in the U.S. Capitol. The "miracle at the well" now represents Alabama as a beacon of hope.

# 2008

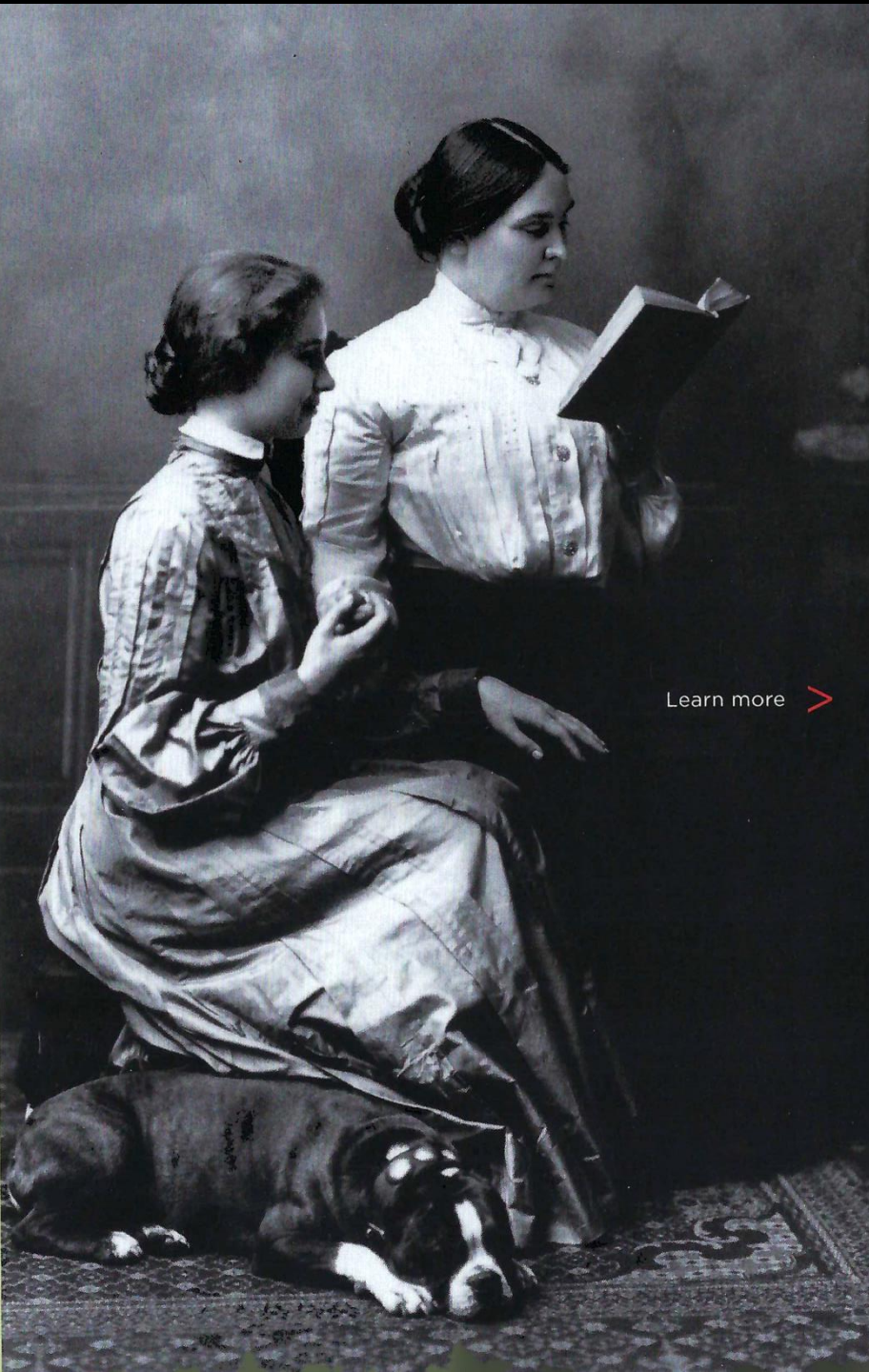
# CHRONOLOGY OF A LIFE |

The life and legacy of **Helen Keller**

“The name **Helen Keller** is known by millions all over the world. But not because she is deaf and blind. Thousands have been, are, and will be deaf and blind. And not because, being deaf and blind, she learned to read and write and speak. But because although she is deaf and blind, she learned to think with a philosophical depth of understanding that reaches the minds and hearts of all, and because she learned to express those thoughts with a clarity all writers must envy.

**Helen Keller** is thought of as a phenomenon, a miracle, a humanitarian, and educator. That she is also a philosopher and a writer will be found, I believe, by those who read these excerpts from her several books, to which it is now my pleasure to commend you.”

Katharine Cornell, *actress and friend*



Learn more [>](#)

For more information about our sister foundation,  
the Helen Keller Eye Research, please contact:

Christina Sullivan  
Project Manager,  
Clinical Research & Development  
[csullivan@helenkellerfoundation.org](mailto:csullivan@helenkellerfoundation.org)

or

Laura Beckwith  
Vice President,  
Operations  
[lbeckwith@helenkellerfoundation.org](mailto:lbeckwith@helenkellerfoundation.org)

Ph (659) 297-5577

## { Memorable Quotes }

"The grandest and the simplest law of the Oracle within us is to do the best of which we are capable, in whatever situation we are placed, and every human being, however handicapped he may be, has the capacity enough to obey it."

"No one has a right to consume happiness without producing it."

"Avoiding danger is no safer in the long run than outright exposure. The fearful are caught as often as the bold."

"Character cannot be developed in ease and quiet."

"To keep our faces towards change and behave like free spirits in the presence of fate is strength undefeatable."

"It is for us to pray not for tasks equal to our powers, but for powers equal to our tasks."

"To me the only satisfactory definition of happiness is wholeness."

"Nothing has happened today outwardly; but for me there is never a dull day. There is in me an ego that observes, examines, and philosophizes constantly. Only when I have said as clearly as I can the best I discern in human beings am I satisfied."

"I will not just live my life. I will not just spend my life. I will invest my life."

"I look upon the world as my fatherland...I look upon true patriotism as the brotherhood of man and the service of all to all."

"The highest result of education is tolerance."

"No nation is wise enough to rule another. That is why empires have fallen and are still falling."

"The beliefs which fire one generation tend to grow chill in the next."

"Analysis is as destructive of emotion as of the flower which the botanist pulls to pieces."

"I believe that the welfare of each is bound up in the welfare of all."

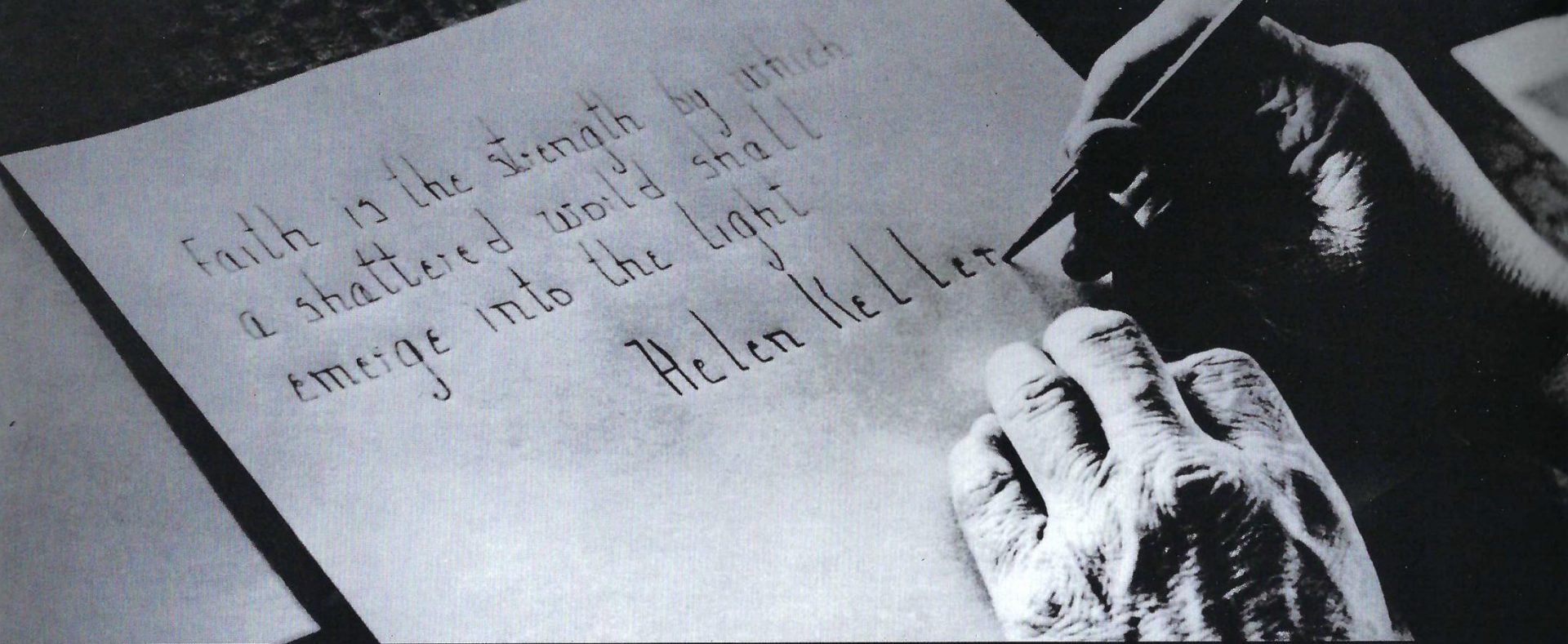
"The best and most beautiful things in the world cannot be seen or even touched. They must be felt with the heart."

"I am a child of God, an inheritor of a fragment of the Mind that created all worlds."

"The destiny and the daily life of mankind depend upon countless obscure hands that are never lifted up in any dramatic gesture to remind the world of their existence."

"To know the thoughts and deeds that have marked man's progress is to feel the great heart throbs of humanity through the centuries; and if one does not feel in these pulsations a heavenward striving, one must indeed be deaf to the harmonies of life."

"I am blind and have never seen a rainbow, but I have been told of its beauty."



### *Mission Statement*

Based on the legacy of **Helen Keller**, the Foundation strives to prevent blindness and deafness by advancing research and education. The Foundation aspires to be a leader in creating and coordinating a peer reviewed, worldwide network of investigators and institutions.

# HELEN KELLER

---

EYE RESEARCH FOUNDATION