



The Miracle Worker

William Gibson

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NO ONE COULD REACH HER.

Twelve-year-old Helen Keller lived in a prison of silence and darkness. Born deaf, blind, and mute, with no way to express herself or comprehend those around her, she flew into primal rages against anyone who tried to help her, fighting tooth and nail with a strength born of furious, unknowing desperation.

Then Annie Sullivan came. Half-blind herself, but possessing an almost fanatical determination, she would begin a frightening and incredibly moving struggle to tame the wild girl no one could reach, and bring Helen into the world at last....

The Miracle Worker Details

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From Reader Review The Miracle Worker for online ebook

Sean says

This was a fun read but it could be dry and reading it as a script from a play was a little strange for me.

Valerie says

My paternal grandmother lived in Kansas City in the early 20th century. The music halls in Kansas City were cheap and accessible in those days, and many widely-known figures would come to play in Kansas City.

Helen Keller was one of those players. My grandmother said that Helen had to have an interpreter present on stage, not only to convey questions to her, but to interpret her spoken words, since Helen never really mastered speaking well enough to be understood by strangers. At the times my grandmother saw Helen, the companion was not her beloved Teacher, but Helen's sister, Mildred.

I've read many versions of Helen's story, and so I'm not sure whether the significance of this sister is included in the play. As Helen herself later recounted, Helen came in and found her baby sister lying in the crib Helen was accustomed to put her own doll in. Helen unceremoniously dumped her sister out of the cradle (fortunately, somebody witnessed the incident, and caught the baby as she fell), and put her doll in the cradle.

It was this incident that made the already frantic efforts of Helen's family to get a cure for her all the more desperate. It was because her family had refused to believe there was no cure for her blindness and deafness that they had insisted on a cure INSTEAD of having her educated. Really she should have begun getting tuition immediately after she lost her sight and hearing (at 19 months). It wouldn't have done any harm even if she were curable, but if there was no cure, it was essential.

When they reached the stage of desperation, they took Helen to see Dr Alexander Graham Bell, who agreed with other doctors that Helen's disabilities were not curable: but who pointed out that it was possible to educate her.

The play tells more about Annie Sullivan's history than most sources (taken from her letters, probably), though it doesn't go on to deal with other things (such as that Annie was not 'formerly' blind. She had to tend her eyes very carefully even in this period, and had to have operations to restore her sight several times afterward), because they're after the period of the story.

I have to say that I do understand the urgency of the situation. Though it's not true that Helen had learned nothing before (she had developed a sort of gestural pidgin, which was probably more effective than anybody gives it credit for), if it had been left much longer, it's doubtful Helen would have been able to develop the remarkable linguistic skills she later had. She might have been able to learn a little language (Laura Bridgman, the first recipient of training in fingerspelling, was limited in her linguistic capacities, and this may be because she was already eight when her teaching began), but it's unlikely that Helen would have gotten as good at it as she did.

Nevertheless, I can't go along with the people who argue that the cruel treatment Annie meted out was

justifiable. Granted, Annie was quite young at the time, and she hadn't really been given much training in education methods. But still...there were no doubt better ways to teach even an obstinate child like Helen. A preliminary study of the pidgin Helen and her family had developed would have been a good start.

The 'miracle' in the title is well-described by Helen in her own works. It's a little disturbing that the vital word had to go back to Helen's early verbalizations, however. Helen had, after all, her own sign for 'mother'. But it's interesting in another way. Most children's realization that language has meaning happen so early they don't remember it: Helen, at seven, remembered it clearly, and was able to reduce it to very evocative words.

In fact, focusing on the 'miracle', however much of a breakthrough it truly was, in many ways falsifies the picture. Except when Helen insisted on learning to speak (because she wanted to be able to communicate with people who didn't understand fingerspelling), Annie Sullivan was involved, as translator, tutor, and aide, in all of Helen's vigorous attempts at self-education through college. Annie insisted that she couldn't teach speech to Helen, so it was farmed out. But one thing that Annie DID teach Helen in this period was how to read and write. This was done not only via Braille, but also with a form of block printing, and with type-like wooden blocks; and later, Helen learned to use a typewriter. Helen's first letters were as crude and inept as most of her age-mates'. But she very soon mastered the smooth literary style that made her so skilled at communicating.

The main problem with this play is that it leaves Helen frozen in time as the electrified child. Helen Keller turned seven in 1887, and she didn't die until 1968, a few weeks before her 88th birthday. She wrote the classic *Story of My Life* to help pay for her college education. She was quite renowned in her childhood (she was friends with Mark Twain, who died in 1911), but her life didn't end with her childhood. One measure of how little the real woman was known is that people either never knew, or forget, that the adult Helen was a co-founder of the ACLU. Helen Keller was never in her life the 'angel on the hearth' of Victorian fantasies. She didn't stop being strong-willed when she learned to communicate: frustration didn't make her stubborn; rather stubbornness made her frustrated, since she wouldn't give up, and couldn't succeed. Mastering language help alleviate the frustration, but not the obstinacy.

In her later life, Keller became a fairly well-known advocate of radical causes: but this fact is often ignored in stories about her. A postscript added to the play might not go amiss--or an introduction with further information. I'm pretty sure the edition I read (which I don't think was this one) didn't have this sort of biographical information.

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<http://naqderooz.ir/191>

Νατ?σσα says

Το ε?χα δει στο θ?ατρο πριν μερικ? χρ?νια, ?πεσε τυχα?α στα χ?ρια μου το βιβλιαρ?κι. Τρομερ?
συγκινητικ?, βαθει? ανθρ?πινη ιστορ?α.

Deanna says

"No One Could Reach Her"

I went to this play and read this book when I was in grade 4. It had a huge impact on me. It was all I could
talk about for weeks. I wanted to go see it again and again. It will always be one of my favorite plays.
Another friend just posted a review of Helen Keller's autobiography and I look forward to reading that one
too. I would love to see this play with my daughter.

I remember watching as Helen got so upset when she couldn't express herself and fought those who tried to
help. The rages she flew into. I was transfixed by all of it. Hired by Helen's family, Annie Sullivan starts to
work with Helen and slowly helps her learn to communicate and express herself. This was no easy task.
Helen lashed out at Annie (apparently even knocking a couple of Annie's teeth out during a rage). However,
Annie was determined to help this girl who she had grown to love. She was not only going to help Helen
communicate but also to live.

I remember some of the boys teasing me because I was crying and usually I would have been so upset but I
barely heard them.

After we saw the play we read the story in class. As I got older I read it a few more times and always found it
so inspirational and heartwarming.

Such a wonderful memory.

Shailyn Stuckey says

Had to read this for school. Happy to say I enjoyed it.

Iman Danial Hakim says

This book deserves a long and extensive review; and I will do it in the near future.

Haley S says

Well, it's kind of biography and kind of historical but it is SUPER good!! I really liked it!! I recommend this one to everyone!!! A must read!

Bettie? says

The Miracle Worker by William Gibson

film only

pub 1956

autumn 2012

play dramatisation

The film, starring Anne Bancroft came out in 1962. Forty years on, those methods would not be allowed.
The full film is on YouTube: <http://youtu.be/556xz3Mw7rw>

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Esther | braveliteraryworld says

GENERAL:

- focuses on Anne Sullivan and her early efforts in educating Helen Keller
- encouraged me to add Keller's autobiography to my tbr

LIKES:

- extremely moving, extremely powerful.
- the added part about Keller's half-brother, James, was interesting. I wasn't expecting that.
- Similarly, the part about Sullivan's brother, Jimmie, was extremely moving and artfully set up.

DISLIKES:

- the story was the compelling aspect, not the writing.
 - I wish the pacing had been different. The whole narrative was moving towards one singular moment, and after that moment happened, the play abruptly ended.
 - I also wish there was more about James. He was so angry throughout the whole play, and provided such a different perspective than the other characters. I wish they had focused in on him more.
-

Brett says

Very good.

L K Simonds says

I was probably twelve or thirteen when I read Mr. Gibson's account of Helen Keller and her teacher Annie Sullivan, but there are scenes I still remember as if I read them yesterday. One such scene is the showdown between Sullivan and Keller in the dining room of the Keller's big old Southern home. The teacher ran out the family who'd coddled Helen all her life, so she could try and make the child eat breakfast like a human being, rather than an animal. Breakfast was scrambled eggs, cold scrambled eggs that had been knocked to the floor by Keller and scraped up by Sullivan. But wait, was it the book that was so vivid, or was it the film starring Patty Duke and Anne Bancroft? The film's screenplay was adapted by Gibson from his stage play, which was based on the book, so it doesn't matter. The book is wonderful, and so is the film. As with *To Kill a Mockingbird*, they are in harmony.

Helen Keller's story is remarkable, and she was a portrait of courage, tenacity, and hope, as was Sullivan. I highly recommend this 62 year old classic.

Richard says

This play brings back a lot of memories for me. I acted in a production of it in high school. I played a bit part, spoke a single line, and was on stage for one scene. But it was a big thrill to be involved in it, and gave me a love of acting which persists to this day.

Jack Herbert Christal Gattanella says

I read this in middle school and I remember liking it, though in retrospect I wonder if I was emotionally intelligent/mature enough to be invested in it like I could be today.

oh hey William Gibson!

Meg says

One of my favorite plays... the story of Anne Sullivan breaking through the darkness and silence of Helen Keller's world to teach her the very concept of language. It reads incredibly well, but if you must see it in action, check out the classic film version with Anne Bancroft and Patty Duke and absolutely DO NOT WATCH THE REMAKE. It is craptacular to the extreme. I just finished a run at the Hale Center Theater in Orem playing Helen Keller's mother Kate and it positively changed my life forever. I do love a story of ordinary people doing extraordinary things.

FAVORITE MONOLOGUE:

(Anne Sullivan) I wanted to teach you--oh, everything the earth is full of, Helen, everything on it that's ours for a wink and it's gone, and what we are on it, the--light we bring to it and leave behind in--words, why, you can see five thousand years back in a light of words, everything we feel, think, know--and share, in words, so not a soul is in darkness, or done with, even in the grave.

Denice Miller says

This book is play written about Helen Keller's early years, her struggles, and the success she finally experiences because of the determination of her noble Miss Sullivan. Great book. Then you can see the movie with Patty Duke as Helen.

Lexicon says

This was surprisingly very good. I don't usually like nonfiction but this story was incredibly written and expressed the characters very well.

Lori says

I read this years ago. I have always been interested in Helen Keller's life. I find her to be a remarkable lady. "The Miracle Worker" is a play. a well known one that still has productions today. it is about Helen when she is six years old. blind and deaf and acts like a "wild child" Annie Sullivan is hired to teach her. over the month she tries to teach Helen language throughfinger spelling. Helen must also learn manners and to behave in a more acceptable way. a tall order for Annie Sullivan who has had many eye surgeries to have sight. this is a wonderful play and the fact that it is based on real life people and facts from their lives it is a wonderful book. I have seen the miracle worker on stage and the wonderful movie version with Patty Duke and Ann Bancroft reprising their stage roles. a very good play. if anyone finds Helen Keller's and her teacher Annie Sullivan life this is a great play.

Slayermel says

This is the story of Helen Keller who was born a healthy little girl, but after falling ill with a childhood ailment she becomes Blind, Deaf and Mute. I found the story very touching, especially as someone who works with children. The Keller family hires Annie Sullivan to come and help teach Helen, and they are surprised to find Annie herself suffered from Blindness and is only 20 years old. Annie had her work cut out for her as Helen had been so spoiled and lacked all forms of discipline as the parents felt sorry for her and indulged her every little whim. This caused Helen to turn out wild and more like an animal than a little girl. Annie not only had to find a way to get through to Helen, but also to re-teach the family how to deal with the child, and how to change their views on what Helen is capable of.

This is a fabulous story, and it's very inspiring. Never judge a book by its cover.

I remember having to read this in High School as well, and I had completely forgotten all about it until I picked it up again at a bargain book store. I think I enjoyed it more this second time around. Being older and having more of an understanding and appreciation for the difficulties that Helen, Annie and the other members of the family actually went through.

This is a very fast read!

Patricia says

if annie sullivan and helen keller can do what they did.....well, stop complaining.
