

NOTES FROM: *The Story of My Life*, by Helen Keller

SUMMARY: Two injustices stand out from my reading of Helen Keller's autobiography. The first is that, at 19 months old, she would suffer a severe illness that left her blind and deaf, and that would eventually take her voice too. The second injustice is that this book is *so outrageously underappreciated* and unread by *basically everybody*. It is the *definition* of a hidden gem of a book, and I just loved it.

For one thing, the story of her teacher, Anne Sullivan, and what she did for Helen is just *incredible*. How she taught her to learn, and to think, and to *see without seeing*. For example, she tells the stories of how, at the water pump one day, she finally realized the connection between the word "water" and the cold liquid moving across her hand; and the time when Miss Sullivan spelled the word "think" on her forehead, giving her the first impression of an abstract idea. Unbelievable.

She even tells the story of how, since Miss Sullivan would "write" out words on her palm, she couldn't take notes during lectures "because my hands were too busy listening." *Amazing*. I just loved this whole book, and it's full of great stories of her meeting extraordinarily kind, famous people like Alexander Graham Bell, Oliver Wendell Holmes, Mark Twain, and others. Oh! And how she would put her hand on her mother's throat to feel her talking(!), and how one time she even visited the province where I live and went sailing in the harbor right next to my house!

Even cooler was when she first started speaking to *other* blind kids, saying later that it felt like the first time speaking to someone in her own language. Like I said, I absolutely *loved* this one, and was just completely *amazed* by Keller's warmth and intelligence, and the unending series of kindnesses that made her life so rich in friendship and love.

"During the first nineteen years of my life I had caught glimpses of broad, green fields, a luminous sky, trees and flowers which the darkness that followed could not wholly blot out."

"If I wanted my mother to make ice-cream for dinner, I made the sign for working the freezer and shivered, indicating cold."

"Indeed, I owe to my mother and her loving wisdom all that was bright and good in my long night."

"Cut off as I am, it is inevitable that I should sometimes feel like a shadow walking in a shadowy world. When this happens I ask to be taken to New York City. Always I return home weary, but I have the comforting certainty that mankind is real flesh and I myself am not a dream."

"Few know what joy it is to feel the roses pressing softly into the hand, or the beautiful motion of the lilies as they sway in the morning breeze."

“When one door of happiness closes, another opens, but often we look so long at the closed door that we do not see the one which has opened for us.”

“‘My little sister will understand me now’ was a thought stronger than all obstacles.”

"I can't take notes during university lectures because my hands are too busy listening."

“Every struggle is a victory.”

“Do not think of today’s failures, but of the success that may come tomorrow.”

“We should take our education as we would a walk in the country, leisurely, our minds hospitably open to impressions of every sort.”

“Our enjoyment of the great works of literature depends more upon the depth of our sympathy than upon our understanding.”

“Literature is my Utopia. Here I am not disenfranchised. No barrier of the senses shuts me out from the sweet, gracious discourses of my book friends. They talk to me without embarrassment or awkwardness.”

“Knowledge is love and light and vision.”

“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 sometimes wonder if the hand is not more sensitive to the beauties of sculpture than the eye."

About Mark Twain: "I feel the twinkle of his eyes in his handshake."

“They took away what should have been my eyes, (but I remembered Milton's *Paradise*). They took away what should have been my ears, (Beethoven came and wiped away my tears). They took away what should have been my tongue, (but I had talked with God when I was young). He would not let them take away my soul, possessing that I still possess the whole.”

“Thus it is that my friends have made the story of my life. In a thousand ways, they have turned my limitations into beautiful privileges, and enabled me to walk serene and happy in the shadow cast by my deprivation.”