

**Adams Helen Keller** (1880 - 1968)

Helen Keller was a deaf and blind author and teacher whose determination to overcome her handicaps made her a role model for millions of people and became an American heroine.

She was born in Tuscumbia, a small rural town in Northwest Alabama, USA, she was born with full sight and hearing and became deaf and blind at the age of only 19 months as the result of an attack of scarlet fever.



At the time of Helen's birth the family were far from wealthy with Captain Keller earning a living as both a cotton plantation owner and the editor of a weekly local newspaper. Helen's mother, as well as working on the plantation, would save money by making her own food. The following few years proved very hard for Helen and her family. Helen became a very difficult child, smashing dishes and lamps and terrorising the whole household with her screaming and temper tantrums. Relatives regarded her as a monster and thought she should be put into an institution.

By the time Helen was six her family had become desperate. Looking after Helen was proving too much for them. A specialist doctor gave confirmation that Helen would never see or hear again but were told not to give up hope, the doctor believed Helen could be taught and he advised them to visit a local expert. This expert was Alexander Graham Bell, the inventor of the telephone, Bell was now concentrating on what he considered his true vocation, the teaching of deaf children.

She was educated by a woman named Anne Sullivan, and learned to speak and to read Braille. Also she tried to control Helen's continuing bad behaviour. Of particular Helen's table manners. She had taken to eating with her hands and from the plates of everyone at the table.

Although she learned to understand what somebody else was saying by touching their lips and throat, her efforts to speak herself proved at this stage to be unsuccessful. This was later attributed to the fact that Helen's vocal chords were not properly trained prior to her being taught to speak. Unfortunately though, Helen's speech never really improved beyond the sounds that only Anne and others very close to her could understand.