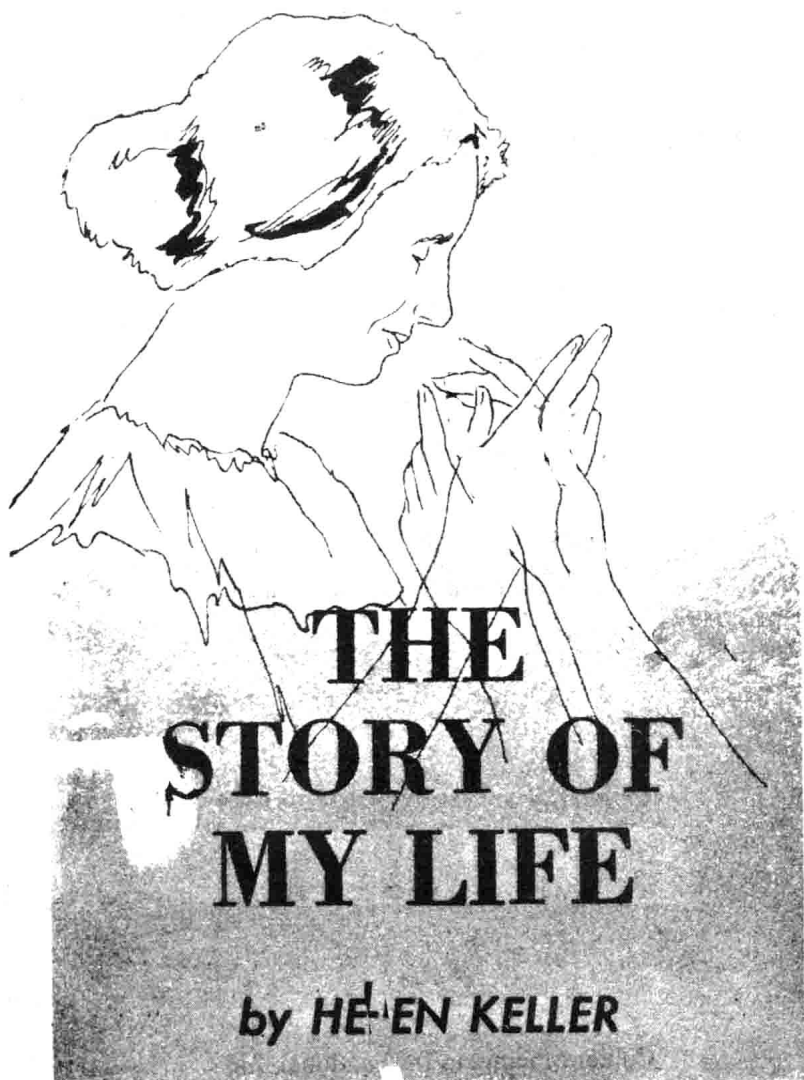


THE STORY OF MY LIFE

by **HELEN KELLER**

ENGLISH LANGUAGE SERVICES, INC.

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Collier Macmillan Publishers
London

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Eighth Printing 1979

ACKNOWLEDGMENT

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Collier Macmillan International, Inc.

866 Third Avenue, New York, New York 10022

Collier Macmillan Canada, Ltd., Don Mills, Ontario

Printed in the United States of America

PREFACE

There is a continuing demand among students of English as a second language for reading materials suited to the abilities and interests of adult beginners. This book is one of a series prepared for these students.

This edition of *The Story of My Life* has been adapted and simplified from the autobiography written by Helen Keller when she was a young student at Radcliffe College and published in 1903. For more than sixty years it has stood as one of the most remarkable accounts in human experience of the achievement of a full, interesting, and meaningful life by a person who was most cruelly handicapped. As all the world knows, Miss Keller lost both her hearing and her eyesight when she was not yet two years old. In spite of this disaster, through her own superior intelligence and the devotion and skill of her brilliant teacher, Anne Sullivan, she learned to communicate with others, to read, and even to speak. Today (1964) in her eighties, she continues to be an inspiration to people everywhere through her joy of living, her enthusiasm, and her genuine interest in others.

This book is intended to be used as supplementary reading on the elementary to early intermediate level, either in a formal classroom situation or by a student working independently. The vocabulary has been held to 2,000 words, and all words not allowable at that level are defined in the Glossary. Sentence structures beyond the level of the book have been simplified, and the length of the original book has been reduced by about half.

There are questions on each chapter to test student comprehension and to stimulate discussion in class. Grammar and word-study exercises are also included.

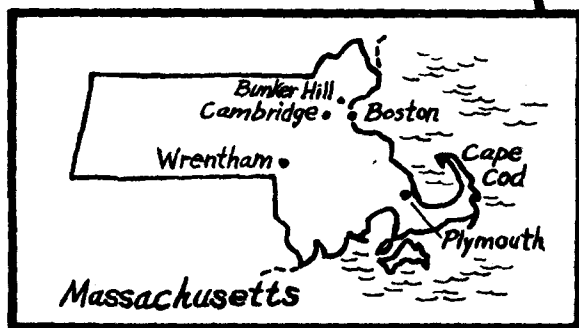
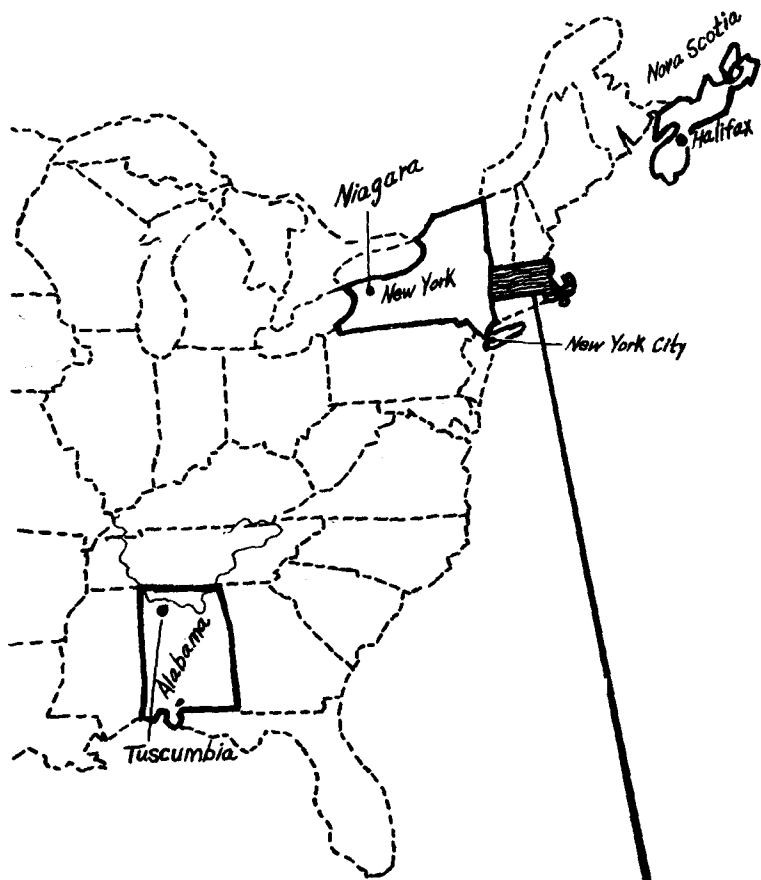
The 2,000-word list was arrived at by using Michael West's *General Service List of English Words* and supplementing it by words from the Thorndike-Lorge list down to frequencies of about 35 per million. The resulting list was then adapted to the needs of learners of American

English in the 1960's by eliminating out-of-date items and words not generally used in the United States, and by adding words commonly used in everyday conversation like the names of common foods and articles of clothing, terms for health and the weather, and so on, and words which have become common in recent years (nylon, atom). Inflections, whether regular or not, were taken for granted, as were about 250 common function words (articles, pronouns, auxiliary verbs, prepositions, etc.), most proper nouns, and items in sets, such as numerals, days of the week, and months of the year. Most important, the allowed list is increased by the inclusion of words regularly formed by adding common prefixes and suffixes to a base word already in the list (e.g., *kind*, giving *kindness*, *kindly*, *unkind*, *unkindness*, etc.).

When words not allowed according to these criteria are required by the story, or when common words are used in unusual or idiomatic ways, they are defined in the Glossary. The Glossary also includes biographical information where it is needed. An asterisk (*) next to an expression in the story indicates its first occurrence and refers the student to the Glossary for a definition or explanation. The Glossary does not attempt to give general dictionary definitions, but only to explain the words as they are used in the story. All items are cited in the Glossary in their base form, whether or not this was the form used in the story.

Helen Keller is one of the COLLIER-MACMILLAN ENGLISH READERS, which, together with other types of English-language teaching materials, have been created by the Materials Development Staff of English Language Services, Inc., under the co-direction of Edwin T. Cornelius, Jr., and Willard D. Sheeler. The abridgment and simplification of Helen Keller's autobiography and the preparation of the Glossary and the exercises were done by Sara Withers. Earle W. Brockman, Jr., served as advisory editor.

The illustrations are by Al Fiorentino.



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INTRODUCTION

Helen Keller is one of the most remarkable persons born in the nineteenth century. She managed to overcome the double *handicap of blindness and *deafness, and to take an active part in the life of the world. Of course, she could never have accomplished this alone. Just as remarkable as Miss Keller was her teacher, Anne Sullivan, the young woman who undertook to lead her out of the darkness and enable her to have a normal life.

Helen Keller was born in 1880 into a middle-class Southern family. Her father was a newspaper editor. They lived in a comfortable house on a farm in Alabama. From the time she lost her eyesight and hearing, at about 19 months, until she was nearly seven, she was cared for by her loving family, who allowed her uncontrolled freedom around the home place. She had the servants' children for playmates, and she ruled them like a little queen. She was not made to sit at the table at meal-times, but wandered around helping herself to food from other people's plates. Without any discipline, she grew up to be a little wild animal, pretty, healthy, energetic, and spoiled. She behaved very badly if anyone prevented her from doing or having exactly what she wanted, and she destroyed dolls, toys, clothes, and other things in fits of temper. She knew about fifty signs with which she could *communicate, and her mother could make her understand a number of things, but as she grew older she became more and more difficult to manage. Her inability to share ideas with others drove her into terrible fits of anger. The dark and silent world in which her brilliant mind was imprisoned became increasingly unbearable. It is no wonder that she later called the day Miss Sullivan came to be her teacher "the most important day in my life."

Miss Sullivan was only a girl of eighteen when she undertook the job of breaking open this child's prison. As a child, Anne Sullivan had known none of the comforts the Kellers had. She had spent her childhood in a *poor-house, where she was very badly treated, and had almost died of sickness and neglect. She had nearly lost her own eyesight, but had later recovered enough to be able to read. Because of her half-blindness, she had been sent at fourteen to the Perkins Institution for the Blind, in Boston. There she learned to use the *manual alphabet, and to read *Braille. But aside from this experience, she had no special preparation for teaching a deaf-blind person. Indeed, at that time there was none to be had. There was no experienced person to whom she could turn for advice, and few even to encourage what many thought would be a fruitless effort. In this educational experiment she had to depend entirely on her own native intelligence, inventiveness, courage, and strength of character.

Miss Sullivan's first problem was to establish her authority over Helen. First she had a struggle with Helen's parents, who could not bear to see their child disciplined. But they wanted their child to be taught, and, realizing that training was impossible without discipline, they gave the teacher a chance to work without interference. Once that was agreed upon, Miss Sullivan had some real battles with the wild little girl. After a few stormy scenes, however, Miss Sullivan's patience and good sense were rewarded. Once she had succeeded in controlling Helen, she could proceed to teach her. Once having gained her respect, she could rule with love and not with fear.

Miss Sullivan invented her own methods to suit the situation, since she had no examples to follow. It is remarkable that she discovered many of the methods used today in teaching foreign languages. She observed that ordinary small children learn their own language, not in the classroom, but at home, unconsciously, from hearing people around them talk. They learn the names of things by asking questions. They gradually learn to form sen-

tences by copying the grown-ups' patterns of speech. When they finally get to school, they are taught a lot of rules for what they have been doing unconsciously right along, communicating correctly in their native tongue.

Anne Sullivan tried to introduce Helen Keller to language in the same manner, by means of the manual alphabet. You will read Miss Keller's account of her first awakening to the *idea* of language, when she finally realized the connection between the sensations in her hands and the real things in the world, and understood that the signs W-A-T-E-R, spelled into one hand, represented the cool liquid that was flowing over her other hand. From that moment, Helen eagerly asked the names for everything she touched, and her mind took in knowledge so fast that her teacher could hardly keep up with her. But at no time did Miss Sullivan talk to Helen in a simplified, unnatural manner. She always talked to her in complete, correct sentences, and she asked everyone in the family to do the same, even though she knew Helen would not consciously understand all the words being spelled into her hand. Helen, like any other child, understood what interested her at the moment. The rest went into some unconscious level of her mind, to reappear when she was ready to use it. Nine months after learning her first word, Helen was able to write complete sentences in her letters. Seldom has a devoted teacher been so splendidly rewarded. It is true that Helen Keller was an unusually gifted, eager pupil. But the accomplishment of releasing this child's mind was Anne Sullivan's.

Once a gate had been opened on the world, Helen never again felt the urge to be angry or violent. She was naturally loving and responsive to other people. As the first deaf-blind person to receive a complete education, Helen was regarded as more than an individual. She was an educational event. The whole world read reports of her progress with interest, and her education was assisted by gifts of books and even money from well-wishers all over the world. Not only teachers, but writers and other peo-

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ple concerned with the life of the mind and the spirit took an interest in this brilliant girl and her skillful teacher. When they met her, they were not only impressed by her brilliance, but charmed by her beauty and her warmth, and many became her life-long friends.

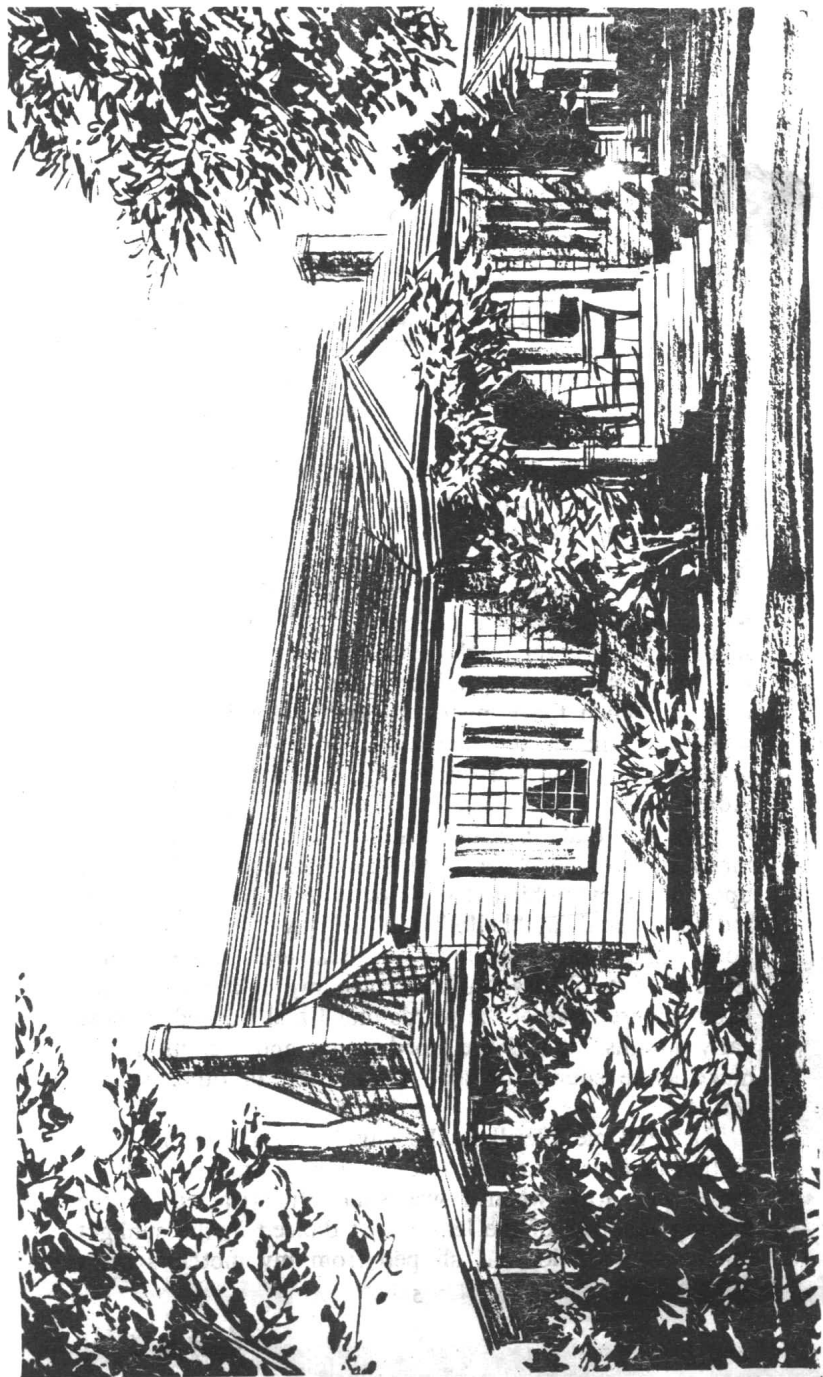
Miss Keller wrote the book you are about to read, telling of her early education, while she was still a college student. She graduated with honors from Radcliffe College in 1904. Since that time she has carried on a career that had really begun at the age of eleven, when she arranged a tea party at which she collected money to help the education of a smaller deaf-blind child. Now in her eighties, Miss Keller has spent her busy life in the service of other handicapped people. She has traveled widely and has friends all over the world. She has written a number of other books, including a biography of her beloved Miss Sullivan, called *Teacher: Anne Sullivan Macy*.

CHAPTER ONE

I was born on June 27, 1880, in Tuscumbia, a little town in northern Alabama. The beginning of my life was simple and much like every other little life. I came, I saw, I conquered, as the first baby in every family always does. There was the usual amount of discussion about a name for me. It was a very important matter. Everybody agreed about that. My father suggested the name of Mildred Campbell, an *ancestor whom he admired very much, and he refused to take any further part in the discussion. My mother wanted me to be called after her mother, whose maiden name was Helen Everett. But in the excitement of carrying me to church, my father lost the name on the way, very naturally, since it was not the one he had chosen. When the minister asked him for it, he just remembered that I was supposed to be called after my grandmother, and he gave her married name, Helen Adams.

I am told that while I was still in long dresses I showed many signs of an eager, determined character. I insisted upon doing everything that I saw other people do. At six months I could say "hello," and one day I attracted everybody's attention by saying, "Tea, tea, tea," quite plainly. Even after the illness that took away my sight and hearing, I remembered one of the words that I had learned in those early months. It was the word *water*, and I continued to make some sound for that word after all other speech was lost.

They tell me I walked the day I was a year old. My mother had just taken me out of the bath and was holding me in her arms when I was suddenly attracted by the moving shadows of the leaves that danced in the sunlight on the smooth floor. I slipped from my mother's arms



and almost ran toward them. Then I felt afraid and I fell down and cried for my mother to take me up in her arms.

Until the time of my illness, I lived in a tiny house which was just a few steps from the big house that belonged to my father's parents. Our little house was completely covered with *vines, climbing roses and *honeysuckle. It was a favorite place for *hummingbirds and bees. The old-fashioned garden was like heaven for me.

But these happy days did not last long. One brief spring, musical with the song of *robins and *mockingbirds, one summer, rich in fruit and roses, one autumn of red and gold, sped by and left their gifts at the feet of an eager, delighted child. Then, in the sad, dark month of February, the illness came which closed my eyes and ears and left me with no more consciousness than a baby who has just been born. The doctor thought I could not live. Early one morning, however, the fever left me as suddenly and mysteriously as it had come. There was great happiness in the family that morning. No one, not even the doctor, knew that I would never see or hear again.

I have some confused memories of that illness. I remember my mother's kindness and love as she nursed me through those painful hours. I remember waking, after a restless sleep and turning my hot, dry eyes to the wall, away from the light which I had loved so much, and which now came to me less brightly every day. Except for these few memories, it all seems very unreal, like a bad dream. Gradually I got used to the darkness and silence that surrounded me and forgot that it had ever been any different, until she came—my teacher—who was to set my spirit free. But during the first nineteen months of my life I had seen broad green fields, a bright sky, trees, and flowers, which the darkness that followed could not completely take away from me.

I cannot remember what happened during the first months after my illness. I only know that I stayed in my mother's arms or held to her dress as she did her housework. My hands felt every object and observed every

motion, and in this way I learned to know many things. Soon I felt the need of "talking" with others, and I began to make a few signs. A shake of the head meant "No," and a nod "Yes," a pull meant "Come," and a push "Go." When I wanted bread, I would go through the motions of cutting pieces and buttering them. If I wanted *ice-cream for dinner, I made the sign for working the freezer and *shivered to indicate cold. My mother succeeded in making me understand a good deal. I always knew when she wished me to bring her something, and I would run upstairs or anywhere else she indicated.

I understood a good deal of what was going on around me. At five I learned to fold and put away the clean clothes when they were brought in, and I distinguished my own from the rest. I knew when my mother and aunt were going out by the way they dressed, and I always begged to go with them. I was always sent for when there was company, and waved my hand to the guests when they left. I think I had some idea of what this meant. One day some gentlemen called on my mother, and I *felt the shutting of the front door and other sounds that indicated their arrival. I ran upstairs before anyone could stop me, to put on my idea of a company dress. Standing in front of the mirror, as I knew other people did, I put oil on my hair and covered my face with powder. Then I pinned a veil over my head so that it covered my face and fell in folds down to my shoulders, and tied a large *bustle around my small waist, so that it almost came down to the floor in back. Dressed like this, I went down to help entertain the company.

I do not remember when I first realized that I was different from other people, but I knew it before my teacher came to me. I had noticed that my mother and my friends did not use signs as I did when they wanted anything done, but talked with their mouths. Sometimes I stood between two persons who were having a conversation and touched their lips. I could not understand and was angry. I moved my lips and made wild movements

with my arms without any result. This made me so angry at times that I kicked and shouted until I was tired out. As the desire to express myself grew, this happened daily, sometimes several times a day.

My parents were sad and puzzled. They wanted me to be educated, but did not know how to do it. We lived a long way from any school for the blind or *deaf, and it did not seem very likely that anyone would come to such a small, far away town as Tuscumbia to teach a child who was both deaf and blind.

When I was about six years old, my father heard of a famous eye doctor in Baltimore, who had been successful in many cases that had seemed hopeless. My parents at once decided to take me to Baltimore to see if anything could be done for my eyes.

The journey, which I remember well, was very pleasant. I made friends with many people on the train. One lady gave me a box of shells. My father made holes in these so that I could string them, and for a long time they kept me happy and contented. The *conductor was kind, too. Often when he made his rounds, I held to his coat tails while he collected and *punched the tickets. His punch, which he let me play with, was a delightful toy. Curled up in a corner of the seat, I amused myself for hours making funny little holes in pieces of paper.

My aunt made me a big doll out of *towels. It was a very funny thing without any shape, no nose, mouth, ears or eyes—nothing that even the imagination of a child could change into a face. For some reason, the fact that the doll did not have eyes bothered me more than anything else. Suddenly I had a wonderful idea. I got up off the seat and searched under it until I found my aunt's coat which had large *beads on it. I pulled two beads off and indicated to her that I wanted her to sew them on my doll. She raised my hand to her eyes in a questioning way, and I nodded eagerly. The beads were sewed in the right place, and I was filled with joy. During the trip I

did not have one fit of temper; there were so many things to keep my mind and fingers busy.

When we arrived in Baltimore, the doctor received us kindly, but he could do nothing. He said, however, that I could be educated, and advised my father to go to see *Dr. Alexander Graham Bell of Washington, who would be able to give him information about schools and teachers for deaf or blind children. Acting on the doctor's advice, we went to Washington immediately. My father was sad because the doctor in Baltimore could not help me, but I did not know this, and I was happy and full of excitement at moving from place to place.

Even though I was a child, I immediately felt the warmth and sympathy that made so many people love Dr. Bell, at the same time that they admired his wonderful accomplishments. He held me on his knee while I examined his watch, and he made it strike for me. He understood my signs and I knew it and loved him at once. But I did not dream that that visit would be the door through which I would pass from darkness into light, from loneliness to friendship, knowledge and love.

Dr. Bell advised my father to write to the Perkins Institution in Boston, a school for the blind, where a blind and deaf girl had been educated years before, to ask whether there was a teacher there who could begin my education. My father did this at once, and received a kind letter in a few weeks, with the comforting message that a teacher had been found. This was the summer of 1886, but Miss Sullivan did not arrive until the following March.