

You Can Do It

Never bend your head. Always hold it high. Look the world straight in the face.

- Helen Keller (1880-1968)

The irony of a blind woman advising people to *look* the world straight in the face delighted me. Helen Keller certainly did.

Blind and deaf from the age of 19 months, she went from being a fully sensitive baby to a young child that could feel, smell and taste, but had no other method to gather information about her world during her most critical formative years. She became as much as most of us could imagine a wild child to be. In effect, she was an uncaged animal who hurt herself as well as anyone who tried to help her.

Yet she became a college graduate, lecturer and writer who was especially well known for her inspirational work and her championing of the cause of deaf and blind people. While she could neither hear nor see? Yes, without any ability to see or hear through the senses we normally associate with these functions.

A home-school teacher, Anne Sullivan (1866-1936), brought Helen out of the abyss that was her life, taught her how to learn from others and to communicate with them. Anne became Helen's companion for life. Sadly, Anne died before Keller reached the height of her fame and consequently she received far more attention and praise for her miraculous work after her death than before. Anne taught Helen, Helen taught the world.

Helen Keller told us all to hold our heads high. That doesn't mean that we should ignore our weaknesses or the dark events that happen around us. It means that we should look beyond them to see the objectives we want to achieve.

Many of us get bogged down with the problems of our days. Relatively small problems take huge shapes and unsettle us far more than they should. In fact, most of those problems will have been forgotten a few years after they seemed so unmanageable to us. Helen says that we should treat them with the respect they deserve: attention, but not emotion. Work through the problems and get past them to push on with the rest of our lives.

How does a deaf and blind woman go through college, become an inspiring speaker and a well known writer? Were people impressed simply because she could speak and write although she was blind and deaf? And a woman at that, having grown up in a time when women couldn't even vote?

Helen Keller didn't usually dwell on her problems or her accomplishments in public. She just kept telling people that their problems would pass and that they could make more of themselves if they believed they could. That, more than anything else, was the reason she became famous.

She inspired everyone to do better. She persisted with that message and the world listened. They liked what they heard so much that they came to look past her physical impediments. She wasn't just as good as any normal person, she was better than any normal person because she not only improved herself but she inspired so many others to grow themselves into better people.

That was enough. Go and do likewise.

Bill Allin

Turning It Around: Causes and Cures for Today's Epidemic Social Problems, a book about how, what and when to teach children what they need to know to become competent and confident adults who don't succumb to their problems.

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