

THE REAL HELEN KELLER  
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## Part 1

Janet K Marcous      And when most people think of Helen Keller, it's like she was a wonder woman in a way, and she was very sweet and very nice, like a little angel who would sit and read her Braille books, very demure, very religious and spiritual. She was a safe person for society to look at.

Pump scene from *The Miracle Worker* / sync sound

Allison Bergmann      I think that most people know of Helen Keller as a disabled seven year old in the grips of an oblivion of no sight, no sound, rescued by an incredible teacher at a well at the age of seven, brought out of that oblivion through language and through the use of language, and then it disappears from people's minds. It's a shame because she did live eighty more years, and people don't realise that, she just seems to be a perpetual seven year old at the well.

Film/sync sound      "Yes. Oh, my dear."

Narration      Helen Keller is still celebrated as the deaf blind child who triumphed against the odds. She became an American icon. It was a role that Helen Keller never chose and she battled against it all her life. Being the world's most famous disabled person both opened doors and imprisoned her.

Archive/sync sound      "Miss Keller's life has made her a symbol of hope and achievement for the handicapped. Now 80 years of age, but alert and vigorous, Helen Keller continues her inspiring ways."

Narration      Behind the public image, Helen Keller was an extraordinary woman ahead of her time – a pioneering Socialist and provocative campaigner. Complex, defiant and bold.

Bill Johnson      I think that my earliest memories are when she visited my grandmother in Montgomery, I lived there, was born there and grew up there and she brought this great stack of Braille books to read and I was fascinated because, not only were they Braille, but they were in French or German or something, and all the kids at school knew that she was visiting my

grandmother and so I made a quarter by telling a friend (laughing) if you give me 25 cents you can come home and see Helen Keller. So I remember that.

Narration Helen Keller was born in 1880 in Tuscumbia, on the Tennessee River in Alabama. The Kellers were a genteel Southern family made poor by recent civil war.

Today the family home is a shrine to Helen Keller.

Tour/ sync sound Welcome to Ivy Green. Now these are family pictures. This was her father, Captain Arthur Keller. He was a captain in the Confederate Calvary, a US Marshall, a lawyer, and also editor of the local newspaper.

Narration Her mother, Kate Adams Keller, was an independent minded woman who had moved to rural Alabama to marry Captain Keller.

The first of three children, Helen was adored. At the age of 19 months, after a sudden illness, she became deaf and blind. Helen and her family struggled to communicate and Helen began to devise basic signs to express herself. But the family had no idea what they should do for Helen.

Her uncle wanted her shut away in an institution. He found her “defective and not very pleasant to see”.

But her aunt argued that “she has more sense than all the Kellers – if there is a way to reach her mind”.

Tour/sync sound C’mon girls, let’s go over here to the little cottage.

Narration Her mother was determined to do her best for Helen so the family contacted Alexander Graham Bell, known for his work with deaf people. He suggested they approach the Perkins School for the Blind in Boston to find a teacher. Anne Sullivan, a recent student at the school, was recommended for the job. It was a perfect match. Helen was very bright and desperate to learn.

Her first breakthrough was grasping the meaning of language.

- Tour/ sync sound      Helen and Annie were at the pump and Annie was pouring water, or pumping water, over Helen's hand and spelling the word *water*, W-A-T-E-R, and continuously using the manual alphabet. And that's when Helen realised then that the water flowing her hand, that word meant *water*, here at the pump. And, as I told you before, when the day was over, 30 new words, in five months, 700, and within a year, Annie had taught her the manual alphabet, to read and to write.
- Narration                Annie Sullivan used the deaf-blind manual alphabet to teach Helen, spelling words into the palm of Helen's hand. Annie was an intuitive, inspiring teacher and her success was even more remarkable given the bleakness of her childhood and education.
- Mary Klages             She had been the daughter of indigent Irish immigrants. Her father was alcoholic, her mother was tubercular. Her mother died when Annie was eight and her father abandoned her because she was blind, so she ended up in the almshouse. And the almshouse, the poor house, was an institution that was basically the catch-all for all of the defective members of Boston society, so she was in there as a blind girl, but she was thrown in with prostitutes, with women who were alcoholics, who were insane, who had all kinds of difficulties.
- Narration                Thousands of people died in the almshouse. Conditions were appalling. Up to ten thousand people are buried here in the almshouse grounds. In adulthood, Annie would be determined to propel both Helen and herself away from the same fate.
- After six years in the almshouse, Annie fought her way out to Perkins School for the Blind and, here, at age 14 she received some medical treatment for her sight and began her formal education.
- Mary Klages             It made her a survivor for one thing. And I think that kind of ability to fight also led her to be rebellious, to be angry, to be abrasive, to be outspoken, all of those qualities which are valuable in someone who is trying to do something in the world but which are anathema to a culture that thinks that

women should be quiet and submissive and demure and have those kind of middle class values, be ornamental rather than outspoken.

**Narration** Annie's determination would drive her teaching of Helen. Annie reported Helen's progress in private letters to Michael Anagnos, the principal at Perkins School. He recognised that no deaf-blind child in the United States had ever before been so successfully educated and released details to the press.

**Mary Klages** Anagnos takes those letters and translates them into these overblown, florid, extravagant accounts of this genius child that he and Annie Sullivan have discovered or is being created.

Graphics - newspaper headlines

Music

**Allison Bergmann** There were stories told about Helen that she could tell the colour of something by putting it on her cheek and she could smell something and tell you what colour it was, which of course is rubbish, I mean we know its rubbish.

**Mary Klages** Oh Annie thought they were nonsense and every time one of them came out she would write a letter saying, usually to Anagnos but often to other friends as well, saying why do you have to, why do they have to print such ridiculous stories. She in fact said that the simple truth would be so much more compelling if they would just stick to it.

**Narration** Anagnos' promotion of Helen's education boosted his career. He was one of many who would capitalise on Helen's success.

Around the world, newspapers picked up the story, bringing overnight fame to Helen as the inspirational all-American dream child who triumphed against the odds. The myth of Helen Keller had begun. From now on, the press and public would follow her every move.

**Tour/ sound sync** Helen was very close to ten of our presidents. Here she is with Eleanor Roosevelt, Helen and Eleanor. There she is with Eisenhower.

Narration                    By the age of 11, Helen had learned the manual alphabet and was soon also taught to read lips and speak. In the United States, sign language was well established as the natural language of deaf people, but Helen's childhood coincided with a new movement called oralism which argued that deaf children should be taught to lip-read and speak.

Archive/ sync sound – Helen and Annie demonstrating how Helen learned to speak:

Annie Sullivan            When I saw Helen Keller first, she was six years and eight months old. She had no way of communicating with those around her except a few imitative signs that she had made for herself – a push meant go and a pull meant come, and so on.

Narration                    Helen's great friend, Alexander Graham Bell, and the Perkins School were both in the forefront of oralism. The miracle child was used to promote a campaign that would lead to generations of deaf children being expected to learn to speak.

Archive/ sync sound:

Annie Sullivan            But after experimenting for a time, we found that placing her hand in this position, we found that she could feel the vibration of spoken word. For instance, the throat, she feels the G, the hard G – "G"- and on the lips, she feels...

Janet K Marcous            I don't think it was for Helen Keller's benefit and same for me, I don't think it was what was best for me. It's a one way street. I spoke, but when others spoke to me I would have to try to lip read or use what's called Tadoma, which is a tactile way to try to understand what someone is saying, by feeling their mouth and throat. It's just not fair. It's helpful for other people, it helps other people be more comfortable, but it's unfair to me, or to Helen.

Archive/ sync sound with Polly:

Helen Keller                It is not blindness or deafness that brings me my darkest hours. It is the acute disappointment in not being able to speak normally. [Polly Thomson interprets.]

Narration                    Helen worked for years to develop her speech but always felt she had failed.

- Janet K Marcous I see her with many people surrounding her. I see her as a person who had good friendships, good connections with other people, but at the same time I don't think she had any peers, she didn't know anyone like herself, she had no friends who were deaf blind, and in that way she was very isolated, and so I think she was very lonely.
- Narration From the moment she discovered language, Helen thrived on ideas and learning and wanted to go to college. She chose Radcliffe, the leading women's college of her time. Helen's fame had led her to a circle of well-known and influential friends. And as her father struggled with debt, they supported Helen through college.
- She was the first deaf blind student to attend college in the United States. Radcliffe did admit her, but grudgingly. Very few staff or students made any real effort to communicate with Helen and she felt isolated. Most books were not provided in Braille. Classes were laboriously finger-spelled to her by Annie. And Helen spent hours each night typing up the day's lectures from memory.
- Reader The argument brought against me, that no deaf blind person had ever gone to college, was precisely the kind of argument brought a generation ago against any woman's going to college. There was no precedent, but women created a new precedent.
- Georgina Kleege For any woman to get a college degree in America in 1900 was an exceptional thing and for a woman who was both deaf and blind it just, again, seemed miraculous, seemed beyond anybody's expectations. And I think the aura always around Keller that she was sort of miraculous or special or sort of beyond what would be possible for ordinary people may well have gotten in the way of other people following directly in her path.
- Narration The image of Helen as exceptional overlooked her hard work and resilience and it created an assumption that other disabled people could not make the grade. It would be another 50 years before another disabled person in the United States gained a college degree.

Helen wanted to be a writer and was approached by a publisher to write the story of her famous childhood. She needed an editor and was introduced to the Harvard lecturer and Socialist writer John Macy.

Georgina Kleege She found him a very valuable editor. It was important to her that this person who was a professional editor and a literary critic took her seriously as a writer and it was John Macy who introduced her to Socialism, introduced her to a lot of figures in the Socialist movement.

Narration John and Helen shared politics, but John and Annie fell in love and married. Friends worried about what this might mean for Helen. But Helen thought, rather than losing Annie, she was gaining John. The three of them set up house together in Wrentham, near Boston.

At the turn of the century, Boston was a centre for writers, intellectuals and Socialists. Through John Macy, Helen met the leading radicals of the day.

It was a brilliant and exciting time for Helen. Soon she was writing on Socialism, marching with the suffragettes, lobbying on disability rights, campaigning against the United States' preparations for war. But the press was not enthusiastic about this new, political Helen. They claimed that her beliefs sprung from "the manifest limitations of her development".

Reader So long as I confine my activities to social service and the blind, they compliment me extravagantly, calling me the 'archpriestess of the sightless', 'wonder woman', and 'modern miracle', but when it comes to a discussion of a burning social or political issue, especially if I happen to be, as I so often am, on the unpopular side, the tone changes completely.

## Part 2

Narration At home in Wrentham, Helen Keller continued to develop her politics and pursue her writing. Her own struggles led her to identify strongly with all who experienced discrimination.



In 1909, she joined the Socialist Party. Later she moved to the radical labor union, the Industrial Workers of the World, or Wobblies, regarded by the government as dangerous revolutionaries.

In her 20s and 30s, Helen wrote articles in support of the labor movement and disability rights, she campaigned for birth control and defended militant women's suffrage. Her writing and lecturing also earned her some money.

As the United States prepared to enter the First World War, Helen joined leading pacifists in protest.

Dorothy Herrmann She wholeheartedly believed that the United States should not enter the First World War because she believed that the war was really going to be an exploitation of the workers, that they were the ones that were going to die on the battlefields, and that the war would only benefit the capitalists. This was an extremely unpopular stance to take, and for similar beliefs the very radical wing of the Socialist Party, the Wobblies, many of them were eventually tarred and feathered and left to die in the desert. Helen, however, may have been publicly condemned but, again, because of her handicap nobody was going to think of putting a Helen Keller into prison or tarring and feathering her.

Narration The government attacked the Socialists as unpatriotic. Several of Helen's close friends were arrested, and jailed on fraudulent charges. She wrote articles and letters appealing for the release of those imprisoned.

Archive – police violence against demonstrators

Sync sound – Ballad of Joe Hill:

The copper bosses killed you Joe  
They shot you Joe says I  
Takes more than guns to kill a man  
Says Joe I didn't die. Says Joe I didn't die.

Narration As Helen's politics became more radical, the press accused others of putting thoughts into her head. They protested at the "pathetic exploitation of Helen Keller" by Annie and John and the Socialists.

- Reader                    They seem to think that one deaf and blind cannot know about the world of people, of ideas, of facts. It is true, I cannot hear my neighbors discussing the questions of the day. But, judging from what is reported to me of their discussions, I feel I do not miss much. I can read. I can read the writings of well informed thinkers. I have magazines in raised print. Of course I am not always on the spot when things happen, nor are you. At all events, I can claim my right to discuss them. I have the advantage of a mind trained to think, and that is the difference between myself and most people, not my blindness and their sight.
- Mary Klages             I don't think there's any evidence that Helen was the puppet of anybody or any force or any organisation. The accusation that she only learned her Socialist beliefs because John Macy was putting ideas into her head or that the Wobblies were using her as a spokesperson, that people were somehow feeding her information that then she was repeating as if she didn't have a mind of her own. I think that that's one of the most outrageous things that you could say about her.
- Narration                In 1916, she sent a cheque and letter of support to the recently formed National Association for the Advancement of Colored People. The NAACP was campaigning for full civil rights for black people and an end to segregation.
- Reader                    Ashamed in my very soul I behold in my own beloved Southland the tears of those who are oppressed, those who must bring up their sons and daughters in bondage, to be servants because others have their fields and vineyards, and on the side of the oppressor is power.
- Narration                The press in her home state of Alabama got hold of the letter and printed it. It caused outrage.
- Bill Johnson            I think it probably would have caused a stir. I mean, because it's just been in my lifetime that we've had the civil rights movement. I mean the bus boycott in Montgomery in '54 and from that point forward, that's where the turmoil in the South started. The Selma March was a few years later, the integration of the University of Alabama, and that only happened in the late '50s and early '60s so you can imagine what it was like 40 years earlier.

Narration	It was the same southern towns which had attacked Helen Keller for supporting civil rights.
Susan Fillippeli	In 1916, in the South, especially in Alabama, her politics for anyone else might have gotten her lynched. If it were anyone other than Helen Keller. It is really very hard to overestimate the degree of hostility Alabamians would have had in 1916 to her stance on woman's suffrage, Socialism and civil rights.
Narration	Many people wanted to improve the conditions of poor and disadvantaged people, but Helen Keller recognised that this meant <i>fundamental</i> changes to society.
Reader	Many young women full of devotion and good-will have been engaged in superficial charities - feeding the hungry without knowing the causes of poverty, ministering to the sick without understanding the causes of disease, raising up fallen sisters without knowing the brutal arm of necessity that struck them down. All this philanthropic endeavor is altruistic, but it is not profound. We mend small things and leave the great things untouched.
Narration	<p>Helen was still partly supported by benefactors, such as the steel magnate Andrew Carnegie. She was always painfully aware of the contradiction between her own reliance on charity and her Socialist politics.</p> <p>Helen was one of the first people to understand that charity was not the answer. She recognised that disabled people lived in poverty because they were excluded from jobs and that poverty in turn created illness and impairment. She argued that what was needed was radical change.</p> <p>In an era when venereal disease was a leading and unmentionable cause of blindness, she was willing to campaign on this in the press.</p>
Georgina Kleege	People were scandalised when she wrote about it, because she had to write about venereal disease and sexual promiscuity and issues she wasn't supposed to think about. But at the same time she talks about the issue obviously as a woman's issue, a woman's health issue. She also perceived

it as an economic issue because she understood that more affluent women would have access to better healthcare, so for her it was information that needed to be given to less affluent women, so that they could make demands of whoever was providing healthcare to them. So she had a mind, it seems to me, that made these sorts of connections that other people weren't making.

Narrator

Helen Keller knew that her angelic image drew the crowds and she used this to put across her political message.

Georgina Kleege

I think she was very aware of the power of her celebrity. When she signed a petition, when she attended a meeting, when she wrote editorials or letters to newspapers, she was conscious that the mere fact that her name was attached to something or that her name was listed as somebody present had an impact. I think she was quite savvy about that.

Narration

By 1918, Annie and John's marriage had broken down. Helen and Annie needed a new start.

So when Helen's fame brought an offer from Hollywood to star in a film of her life, they seized the opportunity. The film, *Deliverance*, seemed to offer financial independence. And Helen also hoped that it would take her politics to a wide audience.

Helen and Annie loved the buzz of early Hollywood, but the film was a mistake. The producer spiced up the plot with a lover. And Helen appeared in scenes of extravagant sentimentality, on a white charger, leading the world to freedom. Helen called the film "too ludicrous for words".

Anne Finger

One of the things I really enjoy in that film is there's a scene where Helen is in her room at Radcliffe and she goes over and touches a bust of Homer, and then she goes into a fantasy sequence where she's with Ulysses.

What that fantasy sequence is doing is telling us she has longings like other women do. She would like to be touched, she would like to be held, she would like to know love, but alas that can never happen, it's gotta be kept in this realm of fantasy.

I think it could never be because of people's tremendous fears about disability and sexuality and that, obviously for anyone as pure as Helen is, she would be so sullied by actual sexuality that it could just never happen. So once again she's set up as this tragic but brave figure, there's an air of melancholy surrounding her.

Narration

The film was a financial flop. When it opened, the actors' union Equity was on strike. Helen refused to attend the opening night and joined the picket line.

Just two years before the fantasy love scene was written into *Deliverance*, Helen had experienced a secret love of her own. Peter Fagan was one of the Boston intellectuals, a young Socialist writer who had come to work as Helen's secretary.

Allison Bergmann

He thought the way she did, he was committed to the things that she wanted to be committed to, he was committed to her. He was a handsome man, personable. It was a good choice no matter what and, yes, I think she was desperately in love with him.

Keller Johnson

Helen and Peter got caught kissing one day in the library up in New York, in the New York area, and Anne Sullivan was really disturbed and wrote a letter to Mrs Keller in Montgomery, Alabama, where the family was living at the time, and told them they were sending Helen down for a visit and Helen did come to Alabama and Peter did follow her.

Narration

Helen and Peter had taken out a marriage licence and made plans to marry in secret. The newspapers broke the story and Helen's mother whisked her back to the family in Alabama. But Peter was determined to follow.

Ann Fagan Ginger

My father had written a message to Helen on the Braille typewriter which he normally used, but in code, saying that he would go to Alabama, drive front of her house on a certain day and he would stay there, and if she wanted to come live with him and be his wife all she had to do was walk out the door and he would be there. But he didn't want the brother to shoot him in the

process, which I guess there were stories in the paper indicating that he would do.

- Bill Johnson Well I don't doubt it. I mean I have very vivid memories of my grandfather and, yes, I think so, but, I suspect it wasn't just his doing, I mean, I'm sure that my grandmother felt the same way about the situation and, as I recall, Helen's mother was there too, so I guess everybody made the decision for Helen.
- Narration Helen was 36 years old, but her family was appalled at the idea of their *disabled* daughter getting married – especially to a Northerner and a Socialist.
- Bill Johnson It was just the notion that it was a bad idea for Helen and that it's a good thing they ran that rascal off.
- Keller Johnson Annie Sullivan was very against this relationship and we're not sure if it's that Annie Sullivan was maybe concerned about Helen, maybe someone taking advantage of her and, you know, jumping on the band wagon and marrying her simply to enjoy the life, meeting the different people and being able to travel, or if Annie Sullivan was maybe jealous of Helen and Peter's relationship.
- Reader The brief love will remain in my life, a little island of joy surrounded by dark waters. I am glad that I have had the experience of being loved and desired. The fault was not in the loving, but in the circumstances.
- Narration Throughout Helen and Annie's lives together, the image was of Annie sacrificing her life to Helen. They are portrayed as inseparable, Annie the liberator and Helen her dependent. But in fact, Annie was dependent on Helen financially and emotionally.
- Paul Longmore It's also ironic, isn't it, that Annie Sullivan was a person with a disability herself, but is never really remembered that way and when her disability is noted, it's minimised. It's reduced to almost insignificance, she has a little eye trouble, she wears, she wears kind of designer sun glasses in *The Miracle Worker*, she actually looks kind of cool. But we don't think of this as

in fact two disabled people mutually supporting one another, we think of it as dependent and professional.

Georgina Kleege It seems to me such a complicated relationship, I mean they were together for fifty years and during that time they were hardly ever separated. It's a kind of intimacy that it's just hard to imagine.

Narration In 1936, Annie Sullivan died. Helen was devastated.

Reader Never have I trodden the stones and thorns of personal disaster as I am doing now. Every hour I long for the thousand bright signals from her vital beautiful hand.

### Part 3

Narration From before her time in Hollywood, Helen Keller had taken on a secretary, Polly Thompson. Over the years Polly's role grew and, after Annie's death, she became Helen's assistant and interpreter.

Helen Keller had always been committed to campaigning on disability issues. In 1924, she had accepted a job as fundraiser and ambassador with the newly established American Foundation for the Blind. The AFB seemed to offer a route for more high profile campaigning and also provided an income. But the job demanded compromise.

Georgina Kleege I think the fundraising in some ways was very difficult for Keller, she didn't like doing it, she felt like she was begging. I think she felt it was a step backwards in the evolution of being a blind person, to find herself there on a stage asking for money, even though she was not asking for money for herself. I think she perceived it as something that was needed and she was willing to do it because she believed in the cause.

Narration For most of her adult life, Helen believed that she could be most effective working for the AFB and within the system. However, she always criticised charity because it avoided the fundamental changes she believed were necessary.

The American Foundation for the Blind and Helen Keller secured some of the earliest disability legislation, including federal funding for education and employment, talking books and the standardisation of the Braille system.

The AFB was happy to use Helen's fame, but her left-wing politics always worried them.

Dorothy Herrmann     The American Foundation for the Blind was run mostly by Republican businessmen, very wealthy businessmen, who were adamantly opposed to Roosevelt's New Deal. And at one point, one official wrote that Helen Keller's habit of playing around with Communists and near-Communists is an embarrassment. They didn't quite know what to do about her, they needed her because here was this shining symbol, she brought in the money, but they were also afraid of her political outspokenness.

Narration                By 1940, Helen and Polly had moved to Arcan Ridge in Connecticut. There, she developed a deep and loving friendship with the left-wing sculptor Jo Davidson and his wife Florence. Jo had learned the manual alphabet during his college days and so was able to communicate directly with Helen and soon the Davidsons became Helen's close political allies.

During and after the war, the government continued to use Helen Keller as a figurehead. She visited military hospitals and travelled internationally, as a symbol of hope.

Archive – Japan:

Sync sound                "For the first time since before the war, Helen Keller pays a visit to the people of Japan, this time as a guest of the United States government."

Narration                All over the world, Helen drew huge crowds. People were charmed by her.

In Japan, the United States government used Helen Keller as an ambassador, hoping that the inspirational image might begin to heal the rift.



- Archive “She’s respected as a woman and revered as a saint. Hiroshima and Nagasaki were still recovering from the atomic bomb when Helen Keller went there on pilgrimage.”
- Archive “Helen Keller, one of the world’s truly great women arrives at Kingsford Smith Airport, Sydney, to begin an Australia-wide lecture tour...”
- Bill Johnson It’s overwhelming, it really is. When I read back and read about what she did, the people that she met. She met everybody in the world and then, as she got older, she travelled everywhere and did everything.
- Archive/ sync sound – Israel:
- Narration Helen’s disability rights work appeared to be in keeping with the saintly public image. Because of this people were open to her ideas - not always realising how radical they could be.
- When she was in Israel, Helen was proudly shown a village for blind people. She argued vehemently against the segregation of blind people and convinced her hosts to break up the village.
- The American Foundation for the Blind’s core work was always with blind people, but Helen lobbied continuously to make their work include the particular needs of deaf blind people and of black disabled people.
- Her 22 years of persistence eventually led the AFB to set up a service for deaf blind people.
- Narration Helen Keller always dreamt of a society where everyone would be treated equally, an ideal that people are still fighting for today.
- Georgina Kleege Keller’s idea was that, with education and training, disabled people could be self supporting, could be self sufficient, and this is a totally revolutionary idea. I think it’s something that activists are still saying, you know, but I think it was something that Keller said very, very early, so early, in fact, I don’t know that people quite got a handle on it in her own time.

- Narration Helen's friend Jo Davidson was a friend of the musician, Larry Adler. In 1947, along with other celebrity radicals, Helen and Jo attended Adler's opening night at the Café Society jazz club in New York.
- Larry Adler I knew about her and every one of my generation knew who Helen Keller was, and they knew all about her and I knew all about her, but to experience meeting her was beyond anything I'd ever expected, because how could I imagine that she would ask me to play for her.
- Music - Larry Adler plays *Malaguena* on harmonica
- Larry Adler And when I played, her face, especially when I played the Malaguena, it just lit up, as if there were light bulbs inside of her. It was a very exciting experience. And then, I cannot describe how I felt when her interpreter said to me, Mr Adler, she would like you to play the second number again. I tell you, I can't describe to you how I felt.
- Narration In the lead-up to McCarthyism, the Café Society opening was picked on by the press. Adler, Davidson and Keller were attacked as dangerous Communist tricksters.
- Aware that Helen had an FBI file, the American Foundation for the Blind worried that her actions were affecting contributions and that they might be investigated.
- Helen's FBI file spans at least 30 years and much of its content is still withheld.
- Narration As McCarthyism took hold, terrified liberals found themselves being forced into denouncing each other as unpatriotic traitors.
- Larry Adler I would have trusted Helen Keller to know anything about me at all. I would be absolutely sure that she wouldn't betray me, that was the impression I had of her. So I don't think that the danger she might have been in would have influenced her thought or way of behaviour, and I'd like to say it didn't influence me either in mine.

Georgina Kleege I think in a lot of ways Helen was immune from a lot of detailed scrutiny because I think, throughout her life, a lot of people fundamentally did not believe that the ideas she was expressing were her own. And so, when they perceived her disabilities, they stopped looking. And it's kind of an odd thing, because I know it would have infuriated Keller, that they were sort of dismissing her as a true, independent, autonomous consciousness, time and time again. I don't think that she would have gone to the FBI and said no, no, investigate me, I really am in earnest here...

Dorothy Herrmann Even though her writings and her personal beliefs branded her, without a doubt, as a Communist sympathiser, J Edgar Hoover, for instance, knew that he would be on very, very dangerous ground if he ever went after the luminous Helen Keller.

Reader I love my country. To say that is like saying I love my family. I did not choose my country any more than I chose my parents, but I am her daughter just as truly as I am the child of my Southern mother and father. What I am my country has made me...But my love for America is not blind.

Archive – Un-American Activities Committee:

Sync sound “Are you or have you ever been a member of the Communist party?”  
 “I have not refused to answer the question. I told you before I will answer the question. Your purpose is to use this to disrupt the motion picture industry...”  
 “I have never read Karl Marx and I don't know the basis of Communism beyond what I've picked up from hearsay. And what I've heard, I don't like because it isn't on the level.”

Narration In 1955 Helen sent birthday greetings to the imprisoned Communist Elizabeth Gurley Flynn. It was a gesture of solidarity - nothing out of the ordinary for Helen.

But on this occasion, the anti-Communist press splashed her letter across their front pages, provoking a rush of protest. The American Foundation for the Blind was alarmed that they might be investigated by the FBI – and they tried to pass off the incident as a minor indiscretion by Helen. A few weeks later, a letter of retraction appeared, credited to Helen.

- Susan Fillippeli      That seemed to put a lot of people's fears to rest, but it was an interesting letter because in a lot of ways it seemed to go against everything she had stood for in her life. In many ways, that letter had a different cadence, a different tone, than most of Helen Keller's other writings had. I have to wonder how much pressure the AFB put on the crafting of that letter.
- Narration              At the same time as Helen was under attack for her politics, she was the subject of a film biography which would restore the saintly public image. It was good publicity for Helen's work on behalf of disabled people, but it left a lot out.
- Allison Bergmann      She's portrayed as a hair-netted, sensible-shoed saint, and it's everything Helen would have hated. It made her look trivial. It's appalling that her views are really not in the film - her views on hats and shoes are in the film.
- Archive – 53 documentary:  
Sync sound              "And Helen's hats, back through the decades, are a minor footnote on the history of our times..."
- Narration              The same Helen who was under FBI surveillance was being portrayed to mass audiences as a mild old lady.
- Georgina Kleege      There are a lot of painful scenes in *The Unconquered*. Helen is treated as a child, Polly is sort of physically peremptory with her. There's the final moment in the film when she's there reading in bed and Polly comes and, you know, takes the book away and says it's time to turn out the lights. But of course, you know, she can read in the dark - but she is reading the bible, they're very careful to point that out, so I guess it's all right, she's not reading anything inappropriate.
- Mary Klages            One of the compromises involved in maintaining her image was that she couldn't ever show any ill temper, she couldn't ever be angry in public, she couldn't ever have a negative emotion. She once said that she couldn't drink a Martini because people would say, oh my God, the American saint is getting drunk. She couldn't have this kind of normal life.

- Janet K Marcous      People want to keep Helen Keller in a place where they can idolise her and it's like a frozen picture in time, free of any problems, free of any struggles, without oppression, but someone on a pedestal who was amazing, this picture in their minds. That keeps them safe.
- Georgina Kleege      I think I would like Helen Keller to be remembered as a whole and complex person. I think, as a disabled person, I feel a certain urgency to talk about some of her revolutionary statements - for instance finding a link between disability and economic status, talking about education and training as a means to self-sufficiency - that these types of issues I think are important to remember that somebody had to say them first, and I think in a lot of instances that was Helen Keller.
- Narration              In 1961, Helen retired from public life following a stroke – spending her last years at home at Arcan Ridge. On 1 June 1968, a few weeks before her 88<sup>th</sup> birthday, Helen Keller died.
- She had left instructions for a simple, intimate funeral, but her wishes were ignored. Instead, the AFB and family members arranged a large public service at the National Cathedral in Washington DC.
- Susan Fillippeli      Here, her family and the AFB had one last time conspired to deprive her of the last earthly tribute that would be paid to her. So in that sense, even in death, she wasn't free, her image wasn't free.

Archive – Helen Keller walking dog

END CREDITS