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Helen Keller was not the first blind-and-deaf person who overcame her physical challenges. Laura Bridgman paved the way about fifty years before Helen. When Helen's mother, Kate Keller, learned about Laura—from a book she was reading by Charles Dickens—she was hopeful that her daughter could also get the help she really needed. This image depicts the book cover of a [story about Laura Bridgman](#).

As Helen grew older, her deaf-blind-mute condition caused extreme behavioral issues. Frustrated at her lack of ability to communicate, she threw vicious temper tantrums.

Once, in a likely fit of jealous rage, Helen overturned the cradle of her [younger sister, Mildred](#). Had Kate Keller not caught the baby, before she crashed to the floor, one can only imagine what might have happened to the child.

There was nothing anyone could do to reach Helen. She tyrannized the household, but no one “had the stomach” to discipline her even when she smashed dishes and lamps. People observing Helen thought her a “monster,” not least when she plunged her hands into their dinner plates.

One relative considered her a “mental defective” and urged that she be institutionalized. Kate Keller, however, ruled out such a step. Even though she herself was the victim of her daughter’s wild-child behavior, and could not convince the girl to stop clinging to her all day long, Kate could not “put her away.”

Later, when writing her autobiography, Helen recalled these days and events:

I think I knew when I was naughty, for I knew that it hurt Ella, my nurse, to kick her, and when my fit of temper was over I had a feeling akin to regret. But I cannot remember any instance in which this feeling prevented me from repeating the naughtiness when I failed to get what I wanted.
(Keller, *The Story of My Life*, page 10.)

Helen had a friend - Martha Washington, the daughter of the family's cook. Theirs was not a normal friendship:

...I seldom had any difficulty in making her do just as I wished. It pleased me to domineer over her, and she generally submitted to my tyranny rather than risk a hand-to-hand encounter. I was strong, active, indifferent to consequences. I knew my own mind well enough and always had my own way, even if I had to fight tooth and nail for it. (Keller, *My Life*, page 11.)

Although Helen relied on signs (like pushing and pulling) to communicate her desires, she knew her ways were different from those of others. And she remembered much about her bad behavior during those wild days:

Many incidents of those early years are fixed in my memory, isolated, but clear and distinct, making the sense of that silent, aimless, dayless life all the more intense. (Keller, *My Life*, page 13.)

Then someone able to connect with a previously unreachable child joined the Keller household. Her name was Anne Sullivan.

See [Alignments to State and Common Core standards for this story online at:](#)

<http://www.awesomestories.com/asset/AcademicAlignment/CHILD-OF-THE-SILENT-NIGHT-Helen-Keller>

See [Learning Tasks for this story online at:](#)

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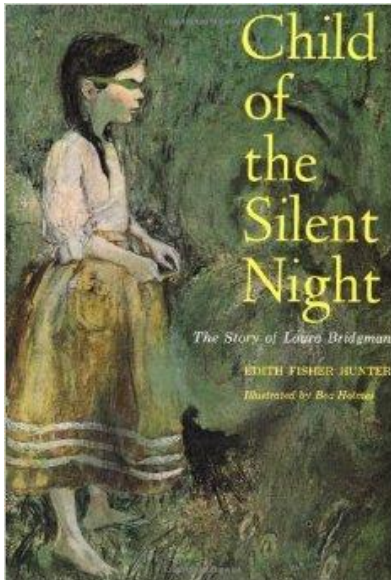
Helen Keller with Baby-Sister Mildred

Photo online, courtesy Perkins School for the Blind.

Information from Helen Keller, *The Story of My Life*, page 16. (Move the cursor, on the right side of the page, down - until you see page 16.)

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