

Comment on Kim Nielsen's *The Remarkable Life of Anne Sullivan ...*

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In this engaging and well-written book, Nielsen puts together the truly remarkable story of Anne Sullivan, despite the difficulty in finding certain key materials. It was a timely reading for me as the 2017 Women's March was taking place in support of the lives of women and disadvantaged people. With all the limited resources she had, Anne Sullivan fiercely fought against powerful narcissists of her days and left a great legacy. Even today, though, we are shocked by the horrible reality in front of us. Unfortunately, we still need to continue the path she was on back then.

Some readers may be overwhelmed by exceedingly unfortunate experiences Anne Sullivan had to go through. For those who had similarly-cruel experiences, certain descriptions may trigger their own trauma (I hope that such readers may eventually be able to resolve their own issues). However, I still think that this is a story of unmistakably-positive accomplishments. And I think that the author delivered this point successfully.

The main aspects of the story that struck me the most are: Anne Sullivan's resilience, pedagogical creativity, and the mutual friendship between Anne Sullivan and Helen Keller. I think that the book covers these areas very well.

First, the book documents Anne Sullivan's life as an unfortunate demonstration of the impacts of Adverse Childhood Experience (ACE). Thanks to the recent, large-scale ACE studies, we now know more about the negative physical and mental impacts of childhood trauma (including household dysfunctions, abuse, and neglect). While the damage is often irreversible (as shown in this book), the movement called Trauma-Informed Care (TIC) squarely faces this issue and tries to improve the conditions of the affected people. There are a lot of research and newly-developed approaches in support of the movement (e.g., *The Boy Who Was Raised As a Dog* by Bruce Perry, *In an Unspoken Voice* by Peter Levine, *The Body Keeps the Score* by Bessel van der Kolk, and *In the Realm of Hungry Ghosts* by Gabor Maté).

Second, the book presents Anne Sullivan's innovative educational approach developed through the interaction with Helen Keller. After establishing the basic trust with Helen, Anne tried to provide a natural context of learning a language as "normal" children would do. Instead of the then gold standard of Howe (to teach words in isolation), she finger-spelled a stream of complete sentences as if Helen is listening to other people's natural speech. The effectiveness of Anne's approach was clearly demonstrated by Helen's accomplishments. This kind of pragmatic approach can be seen in most of modern, progressive educational approaches (e.g., *Instead of*

Education by John Holt).

Unfortunately, the educational establishment of those days did not accept or appreciate Anne's approach. This must partly due to Anne's lack of credentials and her status as a woman with an impoverished upbringing, as well as her defiant style.

Actually, even today, the conventional education is more or less stuck in the obsolete, knowledge-transfer model. We need to re-examine why the conventional education is still failing and can learn from Anne's ideas.

But the main underlying theme is the love between Anne Sullivan and Helen Keller. It is obvious that toward the end of Anne's life, Helen wanted to spend her time for her own advancement. However, Helen stayed with and cared for Anne. This may have been partly due to Helen's felt obligation to Anne's complete support for Helen (earlier in their lives). But I am inclined to think that the both women supported each other mainly out of their own intrinsic motivations. That is, both of them must have been helping each other because the act of doing so itself must have been rewarding. That is nothing other than mutual love. We are in the age of extrinsic motivations: i.e., threatening with punishments of all sorts, abusing tangible rewards such as money and status (e.g., *Punished By Rewards* by Alfie Kohn), and relying on unhealthy competitions (e.g., *No Contest* also by Alfie Kohn). Such extrinsic motivations will never be able to explain this valuable story of true love in this book.