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Beyond the Miracle Worker: The Remarkable Life of Anne Sullivan Macy and Her Extraordinary Friendship with Helen Keller

Kim E. Nielsen

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After many years, historian and Helen Keller expert Kim Nielsen realized that she, along with other historians and biographers, had failed Anne Sullivan Macy. While Macy is remembered primarily as Helen Keller's teacher and mythologized as a straightforward educational superhero, the real story of this brilliant, complex, and misunderstood woman, who described herself as a "badly constructed human being," has never been completely told.

Beyond the Miracle Worker, the first biography of Macy in nearly fifty years, complicates the typical Helen-Annie "feel good" narrative in surprising ways. By telling the life from Macy's perspective-not Keller's-the biography is the first to put Macy squarely at the center of the story. It presents a new and fascinating tale about a wounded but determined woman and her quest for a successful, meaningful life.

Born in 1866 to poverty-stricken Irish immigrants, the parentless and deserted Macy suffered part of her childhood in the Massachusetts State Almshouse at Tewksbury. Seeking escape, in love with literature, and profoundly stubborn, she successfully fought to gain an education at the Perkins School for the Blind.

As an adult, Macy taught Keller, helping the girl realize her immense potential, and Macy's intimate friendship with Keller remained powerful throughout their lives. Yet as Macy floundered with her own blindness, ill health, and depression, as well as a tumultuous and triangulated marriage, she came to lean on her former student, emotionally, physically, and economically.

Based on privately held primary source material, including materials at both the American Foundation for the Blind and the Perkins School for the Blind, *Beyond the Miracle Worker* is revelatory and absorbing, unraveling one of the best known-and least understood-friendships of the twentieth century.

From the Hardcover edition.

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