

A Brave Act for “Positive Change”

A protestor recalls her crawl for people with disabilities.



Jennifer Keelan (left) crawls up the Capitol steps in 1990.

Jennifer Keelan got out of her wheelchair. The young girl’s body fell onto the steps of the U.S. Capitol. Slowly, she crawled her way to the top. At age 8, Jennifer hoped lawmakers would see what life was like for people with disabilities. And she wanted them to take action.

Jennifer was one of more than 1,000 protestors that day in Washington, D.C. The date was March 12, 1990. The group was demanding that Congress pass the Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA). People called this protest the “Capitol Crawl.” And the brave act worked!

The U.S. Senate had already passed the ADA on September 7, 1989. But the other part of Congress — the House of Representatives — still needed to approve the act. On May 22, 1990, the U.S. representatives agreed to pass the ADA as well. President George H.W. Bush signed it into law on July 26, 1990.

The ADA was a historic bill. It protected people with disabilities by making it illegal to discriminate against them. For example, stores had to add ramps for people in wheelchairs so they could come inside. The ADA created handicapped parking spots so people would not have to travel as far. Fire alarms had to include flashing lights for deaf people who could not hear the siren.

And, of course, it helped children like Jennifer Keelan. She was born with cerebral palsy, which affects her ability to control movement. She could not go everywhere she wanted. “Places were not wheelchair accessible,” she explained. “I would be denied access because of my disability.” After the ADA passed, Jennifer — and millions of others — could visit more areas of America.

The Capitol Crawl helped members of Congress see the need to support people with disabilities. But Jennifer almost didn’t do it. Some adults worried that it might be too hard for her to pull herself up the steps. After all, she was the youngest person there! But Jennifer said she “had to climb the steps!” It

took her a lot of time. “I’ll take all night if I have to!” she hollered.

“I was not just representing myself but my generation and future generations of kids with disabilities,” she told *News-O-Matic*. She said she wanted “all our voices to be heard.” And she also said the work isn’t over. She said we must “continue to use our voices to create positive change.”

Keelan wants people to understand the ADA is not just about physical access. “It is also about personal empowerment,” she said. “It can empower you to use your voice to exercise your rights or the rights of your friends and family members.”

Keelan had a message for kids. “Never be afraid to use your voice to speak up and speak out to create positive change,” she said. “You don’t have to be a grown-up to change the world.”

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By Rachel Turner

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US

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Student name: _____ Date: _____

Multiple Choice Questions:

1. Which event happened LAST?

- A. Jennifer Keelan climbed the Capitol.
- B. President Bush signed the ADA into law.
- C. The U.S. Senate passed the ADA.
- D. The U.S. House of Representatives passed the ADA.

2. Which statement would Jennifer Keelen most likely agree with?

- A. People with disabilities now have equal rights.
- B. Young people must wait to create a change.
- C. All people should have equal access to places.
- D. Lawmakers in Congress always act quickly to help.

3. To discriminate against a group of people means to ____.

- A. allow them greater access
- B. change a law for them
- C. protest against them
- D. treat them unfairly



Student name: _____ Date: _____

Open-Ended Question:

What were some effects of the ADA? List at least two changes, and then connect at least one of those examples in your personal life.

Discussion:

Do you agree with Jennifer Keelan that “you don’t have to be a grown-up to change the world?” Why or why not?

Find the Five Ws and How!

Who	
What	
When	
Where	
Why	
How	

Author: _____ **Sources:** _____
Headline: _____

K-W-L Chart		
What I know	What I want to Know	What I Learned