



Capitol Crawl for the ADA
Washington, D.C., 1990



Artwork by Leah Parsons Cook

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Capitol Crawl for the Americans With Disabilities Act (ADA) Washington, DC, 1990

On March 13, 1990, over 1,000 people marched—or rather, *rolled*—in their wheelchairs to the steps of the US Capitol Building. The Disability Rights group ADAPT was protesting a wide range of injustices - lack of accessibility to basic amenities like transportation, water fountains, entrances, stairs; discrimination in jobs and education; institutionalization and sterilization—but the immediate grievance was the failure of Congress to pass the Americans With Disabilities Act. In front of 50+ journalists, 80 activists flung themselves out of their wheelchairs and crawled, pulled, dragged, and climbed up the steps to illustrate that there was no physical way for them to meet with their representatives with dignity. The youngest member of the action was 8-year-old Jennifer Keelan Chaffins, who had already been protesting for two years. Looking back, she said, “Even though I was quite young, I realized that as one of the very few kids that got to be involved in this movement, it wasn’t just about myself but it was about (the other kids) as well. I realized that people with disabilities are fighting for their right to be acknowledged and accepted ... and I can too, and I want to be a part of that.” Three Congressional leaders came out to meet the activists and vowed to make sure the ADA passed. Four months later, the ADA was signed into law.

Look Closer! Check out these details:

- Recognize that building? That’s the US Capitol Building in Washington, DC. At the time, it was not wheelchair accessible.
- Why is that person being carried by the arms? The activists who participated in the Capitol Crawl had a range of physical disabilities/mobilities. Some boosted themselves backwards up each step. Some crawled forward on a combination of arms and knees. Some did assisted lifts like the man and the girl on the left.
- What is the symbol on their tee-shirts? The circle with the line through it is the symbol of the Disability Rights group ADAPT. In historic photos, the circle is white on a blue tee-shirt.

Discussion Questions:

- What does it mean to have a disability? What kinds of disabilities can you see? What kinds are less visible? Consider blindness, deafness, reading disabilities like dyslexia.
- Think about this building. If there were no elevators, ramps, or wheelchair accessible bathrooms, it would be hard for someone in a wheelchair to join us today. How can we make our schools and/or society more inclusive and just?
- In the picture, camera persons are broadcasting the action on television. What role does media play in making change? How do you think it moved the politicians to pass the ADA?
- Ableism is a term for discrimination and social prejudice against people with disabilities or who are perceived to be disabled. Where do you see this in our community?

Find more information, discussion questions, articles, documentaries, and more at:

www.paceebene.org/coloring-pages

**Artwork by Leah Parsons Cook
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