



Kids As Self Advocates

Remembering What Is Important

by Christina Mills

Christina Mills shares her personal experience as a young person going to school when the ADA was first enacted.

The school bell would ring at 11:50am and all my classmates would run off to lunch, laughing cheerfully, as if the best part of the day had finally arrived. Myself, on the other hand, would roll four rows down to the nurse's office during that time, because children like me were not aloud to eat or play on the playground? My fun and excitement was to go from eating my lunch in the nurse's office to then having one friend join me in the school library.

My third grade year at, South Oceanside Elementary, I will never be forgotten. In 1986, only a few years before the Americans with Disabilities Act was signed, I was treated as an outcast. I was always getting strange looks and never feeling quite comfortable because of the way the school had portrayed my disability to my classmates. I was eleven years old when the A.D.A. was finally passed and like most people, I had no idea what this A.D.A. meant to me?

Slowly, the schools I attended began to change and sort of except me. It was the warmest feeling I had felt in all of my education, thus far. I was finally able to play four square, handball, and all the other fun playground games that all that "normal" kids got to play. I was even aloud to hang out with more then one friend at a time! Of course, I still had no idea that this was all because of the A.D.A., but I was so happy to feel as if I fit in for once.

Without the A.D.A., I would not have been able to join my High School swim or water polo team because of the able-body vs. adaptive sports segregation that use to be okay. I would not have been able to ride the local bus to the mall or beach because they would not have to be equipped with lifts for wheelchair users. I would not have been able to get into most public places because the door of the business would not have had to be widen for my wheelchair. Most Importantly, I would not have been able to write this article because we would not have such willing agencies working with person that have disabilities. There are so many other great things that the A.D.A. has done for persons with disabilities. It is important to remember the value of A.D.A. as we continue our work in the disability movement.

Visit Kids As Self Advocates on the web at: www.fvkasa.org

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Before 1990, when the A.D.A. was put into effect, there was little to no history on persons with disabilities. Instead, you would only be able to find medical information on what the disability you had consisted of and what negative effects it was going to have on your body. Luckily, the leaders of our community realized this was wrong and were able to advocate for our rights under the A.D.A. Two presidents ago, George Bush signed the A.D.A. and since then we have been striving towards equality.

The Americans with Disabilities Act has not been in effect for more than 10 years. It is now our job as youth with disabilities to continue this movement in the right direction. I told you the story of my early education because for many of us it is challenging to talk about how hard things can sometimes be.

In effort to keep the movement in full speed, we must all try to remember what is important and how we got where we are today. We should all stand proud of our disabilities and even prouder of the history that got us all here.

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