

Pass It On®...

A Hero for Accessibility.

How an 8-year-old girl captured the attention of the nation and motivated Congress.

This is the story of Jennifer Keelan, a young girl who had dreams of one day attending college and living a fulfilling life. She did graduate from Arizona State University with a degree in family and human development. But her life has been anything but typical.

At age 2, Jennifer was diagnosed with cerebral palsy, a condition that affects the motor cortex of the brain and leaves her using a wheelchair. Jennifer was a bright and courageous girl, yet when she attempted to attend school with her peers, she was relegated to separate classes for students with disabilities, regardless of aptitude. She found herself unable to attend some school functions, use transit systems and access government buildings.

Jennifer accepted the limitations of her physical life, but not the limitations of the physical world around her. She became active in campaigning for the Americans with Disabilities Act. She engaged in peaceful protests and, at age 7, was arrested in Montreal, a moment in history that shocked North America.

At age 8, Jennifer traveled to Washington, D.C. The shy, unassuming, yet determined little girl caught the attention of the country when she crawled unaided up the Capitol steps. It worked. Jennifer met with Congress, and President George H. W. Bush signed the Americans with Disabilities Act into law.

Jennifer remains an activist today, making sure all people with disabilities are treated fairly and have equal access to public places, schools and businesses. The only barriers that remain are those of perception.

Jennifer wants all of us to know that physical disabilities are not a barrier to friendship, career opportunities or love. Jennifer is 39 years old and still sharing the message of inclusivity. For her, like all of us, making a difference begins one step at a time, no matter how hard it is.

By The Foundation for a Better Life®

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