

The 'Capital Crawl' that broke disability barriers

“ Jennifer and dozens of other activists abandoned their mobility aids and crawled up the 78 steps of the US Capitol...”

**ERIN
THATCHER**
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On March 12, 1990, Jennifer Keelan-Chaffins was just eight when she climbed the United States Capitol steps to advocate for passage of the Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA). The Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA) was the world's first comprehensive civil rights law for people with disabilities.

Jennifer Keelan-Chaffins was born in 1981 in Michigan, arriving a month premature and weighing just three pounds and ten ounces. At the age of two, she was diagnosed with cerebral palsy. At the time, it was common for people with disabilities to live in institutional settings like hospitals or nursing homes. Jennifer's family chose to support her at home, but challenges were ongoing. She faced discrimination and separation from her peers at school. She faced difficulty accessing public places because she used a wheelchair. These adverse experiences moved Jennifer and her family to join protests to improve public accessibility, rights to an education, and full participation in society.

The "Capitol Crawl" took place in Washington, D.C. Jennifer and dozens of other activists abandoned their mobility aids and crawled up the 78 steps of the US Capitol to demonstrate the barriers that people with disabilities face every day. Jennifer pulled herself up the steps, declaring, "I'll take all night if I have to!". This was a pivotal and memorable moment in the fight for disability rights. This protest helped push lawmakers to pass the ADA, which President George H.W. Bush signed into law on July 26, 1990.

Jennifer graduated from Arizona State University in 2017 with a Bachelor of Science in Family and Human Development. Jennifer resides in Denver, Colorado, with her mother and service dog, Mya. She is an advocate, educator, motivational speaker, and author. Her children's book *All the Way to the Top* details her struggle for inclusion and the fight for equality at school and on the steps of the US Capitol.

