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The ADA at 25

“The Americans with Disabilities Act of 1990 spells OPPORTUNITY. It gives us the opportunity to achieve what we have sought for years—communication accessibility.”

—Rocky Stone

This July, we celebrate 25 years since the passage of the landmark legislation, the Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA). Your organization was there.

In March 1989 Brenda Battat, advocacy coordinator for SHHH (and later executive director of the organization now known as HLAA) described the first meeting between Senator Tom Harkin in his new role of chair of the Subcommittee on the Handicapped and the Appropriations Subcommittee on Labor, Health and Human Services and more than 100 advocates for people with disabilities. In that meeting, Senator Harkin declared that his major objective was to fight for the passage of the Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA).

Members of SHHH were asked to write letters to their members of Congress, joining other people with disabilities in the fight for passage of the ADA. In July 1989, Brenda reported the White House switchboard lit up with calls to the White House Chief of Staff John Sununu, urging President George H.W. Bush to publicly support the ADA. Several hundred people with disabilities walked and rolled in wheelchairs from Capitol Hill to the White House, ending with a candlelight vigil.

On July 26, 1990, Senator Harkin and disability advocates around the country could claim victory when President Bush signed the ADA into law.

In the November/December 1990 issue of what was then called the *SHHH Journal*, Founder Rocky Stone urged our members to put themselves “in the picture.” Appointed by President Reagan, Rocky served on the Access Board whose members wrote the regulations for the ADA. If it weren’t for Rocky, there would be little or no accommodations for people who don’t hear well. There surely would be sign language but thanks to Rocky and SHHH members at the time who let their needs be known, assistive listening devices are required and are considered a reasonable accommodation. Eleven years after establishing SHHH, Rocky understood then what is true now, 25 years later: the ADA has great potential to change the lives of people with disabilities, but only if people with disabilities know about and assert their rights under the law.

25 Years Later

HLAA still takes calls and emails from individuals with hearing loss who have been left out of the picture: they have no idea what their rights or responsibilities are under the law.



President Bush signs the ADA into law on July 26, 1990



Senator Tom Harkin of Iowa received the HLAA Advocacy Hall of Fame Award at the Opening Session at the HLAA Convention 2015 this past June. Along with Senator Bob Dole and others, Senator Harkin authored the Americans with Disabilities Act of 1990.

We receive calls from people who don't know what accommodation to ask for in the workplace, who don't understand why a venue isn't looped or has FM or infrared technology, or why a performance doesn't have captioning or CART, even though they have not made that request. They hesitate to complain when the venue doesn't provide access, or they are harassed on the job simply for wearing hearing aids. It's clear there are still many Americans who simply need to know what tools are available to them and how to use those tools.

What is the ADA?

According to the U.S. Department of Justice website, ADA.gov:

The ADA is one of America's most comprehensive pieces of civil rights legislation that prohibits discrimination and guarantees that people with disabilities have the same opportunities as everyone else to participate in the mainstream

of American life—to enjoy employment opportunities, to purchase goods and services, and to participate in state and local government programs and services. Modeled after the Civil Rights Act of 1964, which prohibits discrimination on the basis of race, color, religion, sex, or national origin—and Section 504 of the Rehabilitation Act of 1973—the ADA is an “equal opportunity” law for people with disabilities.

The ADA and other disability laws have proven to be powerful tools. Years ago, we were given earbuds in movie theaters, struggled to find a pay phone on the street that had a volume control that worked and had to purchase a captioning device to decode captions on televisions. We now have access to more and more public places—from movie theaters to museums to airports—that have installed hearing induction loop systems. We are seeing the installation of captioning devices in movie theaters, captioned telephones at home and work, government meetings that include listening systems, and webinars and Internet content with captions.

Are We Done?

Has the ADA created a barrier-free world? The answer would have to be, no, not yet. We still find places of employment that won't provide access to meetings or teleconferences. We still find the listening systems improperly installed or not maintained in public places. Often our request for CART is met with confusion or outright refusal. And there are many hospitals, doctor's offices, schools, even courtrooms that seem to have not learned about the ADA—25 long years after its passage. There are no ADA police, no officers writing tickets each time a violation occurs. It is our responsibility, we the people with hearing loss, to know what our rights are and how to assert those rights. We need to know

A Celebration of Pride, Power, and Promise

Join HLAA Staff and the National Disability Leadership Alliance for the Americans with Disabilities Act 25th Anniversary.

This will be the largest ADA event in the country. For information and to purchase tickets go to disabilityleadership.org/

Monday, July 27, 2015
7 p.m. – 11 p.m.
Grand Hyatt
1000 H Street, NW
Washington, D.C. 20001

how to help employers make their workplace barrier-free, and ensure that every venue we visit, every mode of transportation we use, every service we use that is covered by the ADA adheres to the spirit and the letter of the law.

As Rocky Stone said 25 years ago, “No one is going to do it for us. That requires deep involvement in our own cause.”

For more information about the ADA, see www.ada.gov and <http://askjan.org> **HLM**

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