

# COUNTLESS ADVOCATES, DIFFERENCE

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have made a  
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with disabilities.

## The Empowerment of the Americans with Disabilities Act

By Mark Johnson

By the time you read this article, we will be coming up on the 25th Anniversary of Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA) on July 26, 2015.

We have been celebrating, commemorating and bringing attention to the ADA over the past year, and it is important to recognize what the ADA has accomplished.

The answer lies with each individual who chose to participate. When Eric Jacobson copiloted the ADA Legacy Tour Bus with Tom Olin, this part of his journey made me smile.

*“Gosh, did we have a great time with Tom (Olin) on our ADA25 tour! We got a lot of media coverage of the events and the ADA. I can tell you that best of all was spending so much time with Tom and hearing about history and his experiences. I truly count it as one of the highlights of my life as far as memories I will hold. While I have been an advocate for years, this time something new has stirred in me.”*

On February 14th, 2009, I had emergency surgery. Six years later, I published my memoir, *I Love Today: A Story of Transformation*. As I reflect on the ADA 25th anniversary and all it took to get people with disabilities to have equal opportunities, it reminded me of this moment when I saw the world as one, cohesive community – the vision behind the ADA.

*I shut my eyes and relaxed again. This time I began to see a slideshow of images and faces. I saw Susan, Lindsey and other people I loved. There were friends from various times in my life and people I had worked with in the past, including Wade and Justin. I saw scenes from my advocacy work, a collage of images from ADAPT actions, speeches I'd given, the Shepherd Center, and groups I'd worked with. Eventually the scenes began to change. Now I watched as dozens of pictures of people started flashing across my mind, only this time I didn't recognize any of them. They were from all races and ethnicities, every country around the world, representing all religions and with all levels of ability. All were equal. All had value, and all were coming together to celebrate. Faster and faster, the pictures started coming at me, forming a human kaleidoscope, until they started to come together to form one cohesive community. Watching them, I had this image of myself looking up, back arched, with this stream of positive energy flowing into my body. It was beautiful.*



**MARK JOHNSON** is the director of advocacy for the Shepherd Center, the top spinal cord & brain injury rehabilitation hospital in the nation. Johnson also serves as the national chair for The ADA Legacy Project.

*Making a Difference* will feature five guest columns by Johnson on the legacy of the ADA and how national and state groups are commemorating the anniversary. This is the fourth installment.



For more information on *I Love Today: A Story of Transformation* by Mark Johnson, visit <http://amzn.to/1FLnHND>

ADA25 reminded me of this vision, and it was beautiful.

Justin and Yoshiko Dart were advocates that changed the face of the disability rights. Activists and advocates for people with disabilities, they worked tirelessly to pass the Americans with Disabilities Act of 1990 and co-founded the American Association of People with Disabilities (AAPD).

The Darts embarked on two Road to Freedom Tours, nationwide trips that brought attention to the importance of equal rights for the disability community. As the ADA Legacy Tour went around the country this past year, I was reminded of the advocacy and the fight that got us to where we are today.



Before the ADA Legacy Tour Bus, Mark Johnson remembers the fight for disability rights and looks forward to continuing the work for the next 25 years.



Photo by Tom Olin

Yoshiko and Justin Dart advocate for people with disabilities.

So where do we go from here? From the achievement of the ADA, Dart believed in a culture of individualized empowerment. It formed the idea that people are allowed to make their own choices and create their own successful lives based on the development of their best personal abilities fulfilling their self-evident responsibilities to the interdependent quality of democracy.

Countless advocates, for over 25 years, have made a difference for the lives of people with disabilities. And as we celebrate, we must continue the work of our pioneers for the next 25 years so we, as a community, can live in inclusive and independent communities with self-determination.

# HAPPY 25 ADA!

*Beloved Colleagues in Justice:*

*I love you! Justin loved you and continues to love you!*

*It has been our distinct honor, privilege and profound happiness to be soldiers in the struggle for justice, especially for the ADA alongside with you. Thanks to you, we have made a lot of progress in many areas. Yet we are keenly aware we must keep moving forward and upward vigorously toward a realization of the Dream.*

*Justin was writing his manifesto, vision for the next step, FROM ADA TO RIE – Revolution of Individualized Empowerment to inspire a culture where people make their own choices.*

*I hope and pray you will be able to feel/hear his love and cry. Thank you all from the bottom of my heart for your leadership, dedication to the cause of justice, and friendship and love! It will be my privilege to continue our struggle together until my last days. I love you!*

**POWER OF LOVE AND TRUTH!**

**POWER OF UNITED ADVOCACY!**

**POWER OF GLOBAL SOLIDARITY FOR JUSTICE FOR ALL!**

**RIE! REVOLUTION OF INDIVIDUALIZED EMPOWERMENT!**

*Yoshiko (and Justin) Dart*

**FROM ADA TO RIE – Revolution of Individualized Empowerment.**

[www.mouthmag.com/justin/empower.html](http://www.mouthmag.com/justin/empower.html)