

“Drawing” in the Rain



Now that I’m retired, there are so many things I want to do. Among them is learning how to draw. I am fascinated by the ability to create portraits, landscapes, bowls of fruit and so much more from a humble charcoal pencil, and I’ve always wanted to learn how to do that.

I signed up for a drawing class, put on by a local recreation department. It was raining ferociously on that first day as I got out of my car and approached the building in my walker. It was pretty obvious from a distance that the main entrance had stairs in the front, and I assumed there was another, accessible entrance. But as I got closer, I realized that the stairs were the only way into the building. The door was also closed, and there was no sign or anything else saying what to do if you had questions or problems.

So, I dragged myself and my wet walker through the mud and pounded on a window. A gentleman came to the door and said that he was very sorry, but there was no other way into the building. I asked him if he was familiar with the **Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA)** and he said that he was, but that the building was too old to be covered under that law. He also recommended that I look into a junior college on the other side of town.

Given the rather drenching circumstances, I did not feel comfortable getting into a conversation about how the **ADA** would probably actually apply in this situation. But the fact is that although the **ADA** does not exclude older buildings from its requirements – it specifically states that government entities, private businesses, etc. do not have to undergo any construction or alterations that would either cause an undue burden or fundamentally alter the nature of the program or service. It also requires that the government or business consider a variety of ways to include people with disabilities, such as building a ramp or

moving to another building.

I did contact a spokesperson for the organization and told her that I was not interested in any legal action, but just wanted to help start a conversation about alternatives for future classes. She gave me some names, and my plan is to contact those people. But I haven't done that yet, and I think I know the reason: Although I understand the law quite well, I still I feel incredibly self-conscious about the whole thing and I am fighting the feeling that I am a "nuisance" or "overly demanding."

It is so easy for people with disabilities to feel inferior and undeserving, despite what the law says. And it's particularly interesting that even someone like me, who actually teaches disability law, would feel this way. But that is the precise reason why I feel that I must follow through and start making those phone calls. That's the best way to reclaim my legal and personal dignity. And you can also learn more about the [ADA and public accommodation](#).

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