

## **Celebrating a Disability Rights Milestone: Ed Roberts' 504 Victory Speech**

**“We will assure a future for the millions of people who are not now disabled.”**

*Following is an excerpt from a speech by Ed Roberts at the 504 sit-in victory rally in San Francisco, April 30, 1977. The San Francisco sit-in, still the longest such action in a U.S. federal building, was part of a national cross-disability protest to force the Carter administration to sign regulations to enforce Section 504 of the Rehabilitation Act of 1973. Section 504 made it illegal for any federal agency or other entity receiving public funds to discriminate against anyone "solely by reason of ...handicap."*

All Right!

It was just three and a half weeks ago that we got together to talk about something we knew we could do. We didn't come into this with weakness. We came into this movement to show strength, to show what we really are. Which is people who have learned, from being people with disabilities, from being people considered weak, from being people who are discriminated against daily; we've learned how to be strong, and we've demonstrated that to the people of this country.

We knew it. And now they know it. And we have learned that through the struggle we gain tremendous strength.

Winston Churchill once said, "Never have so few, done so much, for so many." And this example of people loving each other, committed to something that is right, is one that I will always remember. And there is nothing like building a movement on success. Whenever we have brought ourselves together, whenever we have joined various disabilities together, we find our strength. Our strength is in our unity. And our strength is in our righteousness. Because this is a cause that we've all invested our lives in.

What we need to do is raise the consciousness of our fellow Americans with disabilities, to help them come out from the back wards, from the institutions, from the garbage heaps of our society. We have to stop the warehousing, the segregation, of our brothers and sisters. We have a long way to go. But we have one giant step ahead.

We have begun to ensure a future for ourselves and a future for the millions of young people with disabilities, who I think will find a new world as they begin to grow up. Who may not have to suffer the kinds of discrimination that we have suffered in our own lives. But that if they do suffer it, they'll be strong and they'll fight back.

And that's the greatest example: that we, who are considered the weakest, the most helpless people in our society, will not tolerate segregation, will not tolerate a society which sees us as less than whole people. But that we will together, with our friends, reshape the image that this society has of us. We are going to see attempts to divide us so that we can easily be conquered. But we will not allow that to happen.

I want to say to all of you that from the beginning I knew we could win this. And I didn't see any of you waver. We knew that we had set a course that we all were gonna follow. We knew the only thing we could tolerate was victory. We are victorious. We are strong. And we will march ahead together. And nothing will stop our achieving equal opportunity, and the right to move about freely in this society.

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We will storm the schools and open them up. We will be sure that each person who has special needs has what they need to move into the mainstream of society. **And we will assure a future for the millions of people who are not now disabled. You know, you come to think of it, we are assuring a future for a lot of people we don't know at all, and who don't know that their future may be very similar to ours.**

I couldn't be prouder of us together. And I couldn't be happier. And I cannot think of a better way to go into tomorrow, but with rededicating ourselves to the struggle that's ahead, to open up more doors, to create choices for people, not the choice of segregation.

I thank you. I join you. I celebrate with you. I rededicate myself to work with you, to ensure the future.