

Rosemarie Facilla

I lost my sight from Retinitis Pigmentosa, while living in Salt Lake City Utah, shortly after moving there from Long Island, New York.

Because of my loss of vision, I was forced to change educational goals and occupations. I became blind at age twenty-three.

I applied to state rehabilitation along with Social Security Disability since I had worked. I had access to the trust fund for my education. I was asked what I thought I could do and I said I could talk to people. I became a Social Worker

When I didn't care for the blind rehabilitation I went to the regular rehabilitation services and later transferred only after standing firm on that I would pick the person who would work with me.

I was fortunate to interview the two counselors available and picked a gentleman who was blind from the same eye disease and he became my mentor and support.

After obtaining my first dog guide, I had challenges in accessing public places. I had an issue at the local airport in 1976 where they wouldn't allow my guide to go through security and insisted I leave it there. I told the person I was going to the phones and call the local news station to inform the public how blind people with dog guides were being treated at the airport. Before I was able to dial the number, the airport manager was at my side and spoke to the security people. After that I was never told that again. I had to advocate for myself to be allowed in restaurants with my dog. I usually had to explain the law to the proprietor and a couple of times the law was involved. This got better with disability rights, but a couple of years ago ran into an incident here in Muskegon and the police were called and they informed the proprietors they were in the wrong and explained the law.

At work I had again to work with the EEO to obtain an evaluation for my job and work station so recommendations could be made to make work easier. Technology has always been a huge challenge as assistive technology isn't well known by IT people and when the computer wouldn't work because of software issues I had to work these out by again standing firm on my needs.

Life with a disability can be challenging, but fulfilling with the right supports, technology and the ability to stand your ground and what your needs are to make it in this world independently. As a result of many standing strong together blind people now have the ability to go to the polls and cast their ballot secretly with the aid of a voting machine that speaks to you and allows you to select the candidates and print your ballot. Without advocacy and strength in numbers advances can't be made and our ability to function independently is impaired.