



TEARS AND TRIUMPH

"I got my freedom and my rights back," Jenny (with lawyer Jonathan Martinis) said in a Dec. 5 speech before a disability-rights group in Washington, D.C. "I got my life back."



FRIENDS AND FAMILY

"I don't want her ever to lose her independence, but I want her to feel protected and loved and a sense of belonging," Morris says. Says Jenny: "I'm going to be here for a long time."

'Every day I thank God I'm not in the group home. My life is better with Jim and Kelly'

—JENNY HATCH

Kelly and Jim," Jenny says. "They helped me when everyone else treated me like a child. They always make me feel happy." In turn, Jenny brings joy to Jordan, Morris's 15-year-old daughter, who has cerebral palsy. "I've never met anybody with as much love in her heart as Jenny," Talbert says. "She's an example to all of us."

She never set out to be a role model. Raised mostly by her mom (her parents are divorced), Jenny graduated from a mainstream high school, volunteered on political campaigns and loved riding her bike. But she had a difficult relationship with her mother, and at 27 got an apartment with a friend for a time. In 2012, after sustaining a back injury while cycling, she moved in with Talbert and Morris to recuperate at their invitation. Five months later her parents placed her in a group home. "We thought she'd be safe there," says Jenny's father, Richard Hatch, 53, who lives in North Carolina. (Jenny's mother declined comment.)

To Jenny, the group home felt like a prison. "They took away all my rights," she says of the 24-hour supervision with no access to her computer, the church where she sings in choir or the sales-clerk job she's held two days a week since walking into the store and filling out an application five years ago. Hearing how unhappy she was, Talbert and Morris came up with a plan to help Jenny secure her ultimate independence.

Today Jenny is enjoying life with the family she chose for herself—going out to the local Olive Garden, baking cookies with Morris, helping Jordan with her hair. "I am very proud of Jenny," says Hatch. The couple's guardianship expires in August, but their embrace of Jenny is open-ended. Not surprisingly, Jenny knows exactly what she wants: "I don't want to live anywhere except with Jim and Kelly. I'm so happy to be home."

By Cathy Free and Jill Smolowe