



Benton  
Hospice  
Service

## **TRUE GRIT**

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When I met her at the hospital in February, Jenny True had a big smile, easy laugh, and can-do attitude despite near constant pain for six months. She was at the hospital yet again for management of that pain, which now confined her to bed. It was that last hospital visit when the doctors had discovered cancer and referred Jenny to Benton Hospice Service. I had come to meet Jenny as her hospice social worker. Jenny told me that she welcomed hospice care and was not afraid to die. However, she very much wanted an end to her pain so that she could be comfortable at home and sit up again for short periods.

Jenny accomplished that and much more! As her social worker, I have marveled at how she improved from visit to visit. Jenny remembers, "My pain was practically gone three days after coming home!" According to hospice nurse Gay Gruber, adjusting Jenny's medications was a team effort involving oncologist Steve Fu, anesthesiologist Lance Caddy, pharmacist Jeff Chiavini, and hospice nurses Heather Eblen and herself. Successfully addressing Jenny's complicated pain issues required the joint expertise of all these people—not unusual in hospice care. Though medications do not completely eliminate Jenny's pain, they keep her comfortable most of the time.

Once Jenny's pain was well-controlled, BHS physical therapist Elizabeth Bolte worked with her on sitting up. Jenny was determined to get stronger. When I next came to see her, Jenny was sitting in her wheelchair on a special cushion to minimize pressure—a huge step forward from lying flat in the hospital.

Jenny then started thinking about the possibility of enjoying the sunshine just outside on the landing of her second-floor apartment. When she herself opened the door for me a few weeks later, I knew she had succeeded. Next step—Jenny requested Elizabeth's help in walking downstairs by herself. Since learning to navigate the stairs, Jenny has visited friends, gone to dinner, and gambled at a casino. She has put up several flats of strawberries for jam. She has spent a weekend at the coast and is planning a trip to Reno!

When Jenny, Gay, and I talked recently, we shared laughter as well as some tears. Jenny is quite aware of her terminal diagnosis. The cancer has not gone away, but Jenny's quality of life is much better than it was a year ago. She explains, "Some days it is difficult to think about dying, but I am not afraid of pain anymore. I know Gay will help manage it." With a big smile, she talks about the continued support and encouragement of her hospice team. Jenny says, "I could not have imagined that I could do so well. I now live each day as it comes, and I have a lot of things I still hope to do."

Jenny has never been one to sit still. Having *provided* care for others in nursing and private homes most of her life as a nursing assistant, she often finds *accepting* care difficult. The jokes and encouragement that each hospice team member offers her on each visit are often as important as the care they provide. Jenny also appreciates the support that the team provides for her life-long partner, Fred, which makes her worry less about his well-being. When the time comes, she knows that Fred will receive bereavement help, too, another source of comfort.

Jenny agreed to share her story as a way to give hope and encouragement to others. Jenny's experience embodies what hospice care is about—effective pain management, team work, supportive relationships, and improvements in quality of remaining life. As a member of Jenny's hospice team, I have been privileged to share Jenny's triumphs since last February, and we will continue to walk beside her on her personal journey.