

The following story has been contributed by Dr. Merri Jamieson. The story is entitled Independence.

We would like to thank Dr. Jamieson for sharing her story about Irene .

During the fall of 1993, I was attempting to figure out where my marriage was going. My now ex-husband and I were having a very difficult time and I had decided we needed to live apart for a period of time to assist with the discernment process. I had never lived on my own and was scared of the prospect. While walking with my good friend, Bonnie, she said she had the answer. Her daughter, Jenny, had graduated from high school and was ready for apartment living; however, Bonnie was concerned as Jenny has developmental delays. What if Jenny and I set up apartment living together? Although unrelated, I had always considered Jenny to be one of my kids. She had spent a lot of time at my house playing with my children and I loved her dearly. Somehow, knowing that I was helping Jenny calmed my nerves.

Jenny and Bonnie found a second floor apartment in the older part of town within walking distance of anything Jenny would need. Jenny had some money and she wanted to furnish the apartment herself. All I had to do was move in.

Bonnie and I talked about Jenny's desire to date and if I should be present if a boy was in the apartment. We decided that Jenny had all the instruction she needed and I could leave if I felt okay with the young man. Jenny's first boyfriend left a lot to be desired. Before Bonnie and I could decide what to do, Jenny dumped him. The second boyfriend, Don, stayed as Jenny's devoted partner for the rest of his life, 20 years.

I was concerned about the food Jenny was preparing and the amount of times her boyfriend ate for free at the apartment. I tried to model good eating choices until I realized that my two "normal" young adults were making the same "bad" choices and that I had let them go. Letting go was the name of the game. As far as free loading was concerned, Jenny told me it was none of my business as he was eating her food and not mine!

Jenny had a job, bank account, a community that knew her, and the determination to make it as an adult. I only had one concern left as the time drew near for me to leave. The old gas stove needed to be lit with a match. I had set the goal for Jenny to light the stove in the proper order 20 times in a row, without error, before she could do it alone. First the match, then the gas, was okay as long as she had the paper with the directions. But what if she lost the paper? We had many successful trials without the paper, but never 20

in a row. Jenny was frustrated. I was frustrated. She really needed to do this independently without error. Right? Wrong. Jenny wanted an electric stove. Her landlord and mom split the cost and I was able to go on to the next phase of my life.

Jenny stayed in the apartment for many years. She had her cats, Don, and independence. She chose who would help her with finances and major decisions. She chose different jobs as her skills improved and she wanted more money. A "friend" led Jenny down an illegal path, and because the police knew Jenny from the neighborhood, they caught the "friend" and did not prosecute Jenny.

Jenny's seven brothers and sisters, as well as her parents, kept in close contact. She is a part of their vacations and holidays. She is a favored aunt to her many nieces and nephews.

As I watched Jenny make good decisions, I too learned to have confidence in myself. I eventually bought a cabin on a lake. Jenny and Don often came out for supper and to fish from the dock.

Becoming Your Best