

# JENNY'S STORY



by Jo Wilmshurst  
Illustrated by Sean Hatherill

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Guillain-Barré Syndrome Support Group  
of the United Kingdom



Jenny had a cold on her seventh birthday. It didn't matter because she had a lovely party with all her best friends. Mummy and daddy gave her a new bicycle. Even better, her younger brother Ben was much more poorly that day and he stayed in bed all through the party. Jenny had a wonderful time.

Two weeks later when Jenny was out on her new bicycle, she realised that it was harder to cycle than normal. She could hardly keep up with daddy. Daddy thought Jenny was being lazy and teased her. He was worried though when Jenny said her legs hurt and her back felt sore. They walked the rest of the way home and Jenny had to lie down as soon they got back.

The next day Jenny's legs felt like jelly. They didn't seem able to hold her up.

Mummy looked very worried and she called the doctor who seemed very puzzled.



He sent Jenny with mummy and daddy to the local hospital.

Jenny quite enjoyed the attention she received at the hospital. She was seen by lots of people who seemed very interested in her. She wasn't so happy when she realised she had to stay overnight on the children's ward. Mummy stayed too. The nurses made a huge fuss of Jenny.

The next day Jenny didn't feel any stronger and became very frightened when she dropped a drink. It was most unlike her. Ben was the only one who made a mess and dropped things.

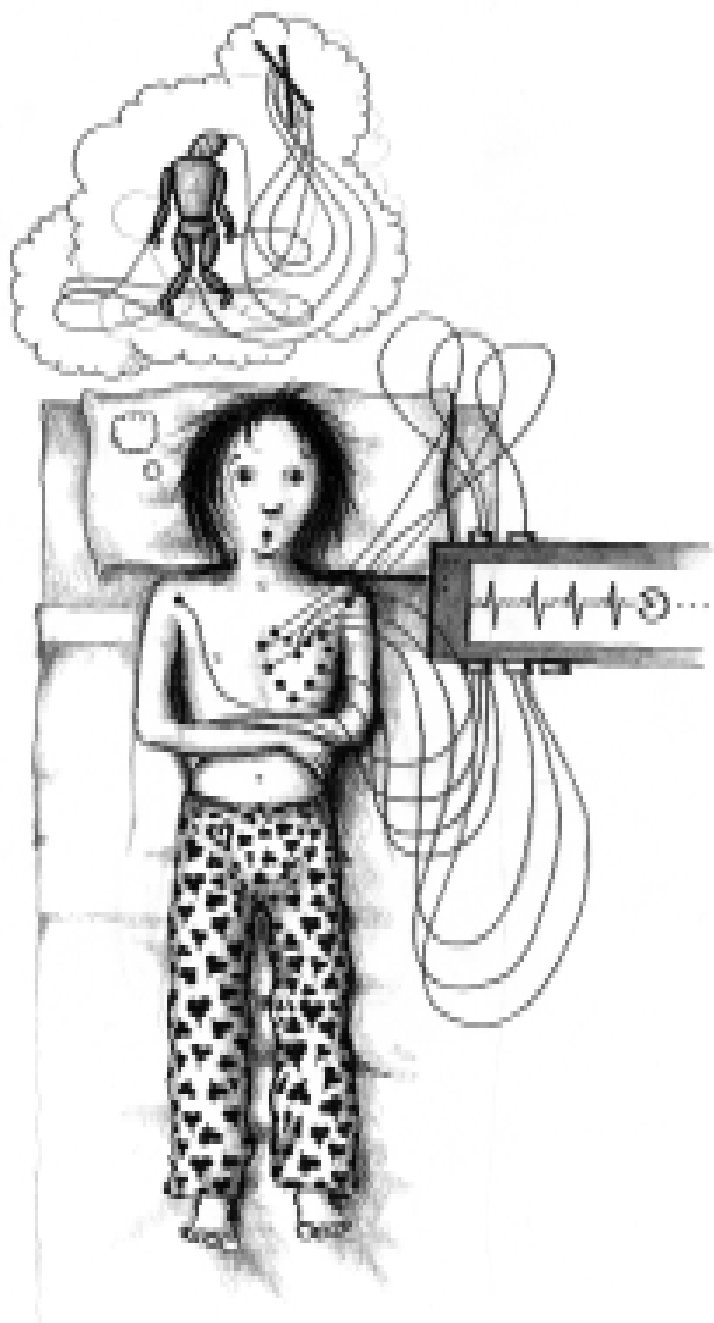
Later that day the doctors took mummy and daddy aside while Jenny's favourite nurse played with her. They looked very serious when they came back. Jenny started to cry for she was sure she must have done something wrong for mummy and daddy to look so sad. Daddy quickly told Jenny that was nonsense, but he didn't look any happier. Jenny wanted to know what the doctors had been saying and she wanted to go home.



Daddy said they were all going to stay at another bigger hospital which looked after children with Jenny's problems all the time. He promised they were going to try and make Jenny better. The doctors thought Jenny had something called Guillain-Barré syndrome or GBS. Jenny actually wasn't surprised as she'd heard the doctors and nurses talking about it when they forgot she might be listening. She still didn't understand what it was all about.

The new hospital seemed very big and busy. Mummy and daddy got lost several times until a kind person showed them where to go. They had lots of bags as they didn't know how long Jenny would be staying. They'd also brought Hairy Horace, Jenny's toy monkey, to help look after her. (Jenny loved him because he always seemed to smell of home.)

Jenny's new bed was in the middle of the children's ward. Mummy had an old chair beside her. Jenny's special nurse was called Claire and her doctor was called Dr Tom. They



both seemed very friendly. Jenny and her parents were asked all the same questions as before, and a few more. Jenny got very bored. Dr Tom spent ages trying to see how strong Jenny was. She was cross as she couldn't show him how strong she usually was. He also spent ages tapping her joints with a hammer and frowning when nothing happened. Claire put some sticky buttons on Jenny's chest attached to long wires. Jenny couldn't leave her bed when they were attached. It was very irritating. Mummy insisted it was important Jenny didn't pull them off. They were to listen to Jenny's heart beating.

Jenny also had to have a little plastic tube put into the back of her hand. Dr Tom called it a drip. Jenny was worried in case it would hurt terribly. In fact nurse Claire put lots of numbing cream on Jenny's hand and she didn't feel a thing.

Mummy said she thought Jenny was the bravest little girl she ever knew and was very proud of her.



Then Jenny had numbing cream on her back and she had to curl up in a ball. She hugged onto Hairy Horace and mummy while Dr Tom did something called a lumbar puncture. Jenny had to stay very still. She could feel Dr Tom pushing against her back but it didn't hurt. He talked to her all the time he was doing it, telling her how much longer he was going to be. Jenny wasn't frightened even though she couldn't see what was happening.

Jenny had another test to measure how well her nerves were working. She went to a new department in the hospital with daddy and nurse Claire. The test didn't hurt. Jenny just felt a funny tapping each time the machine was turned on. The doctor put little rubber bands round her wrist and then feet for each test. He smiled at the end and said Jenny had done very well. Daddy was very pleased with her too. When they got back to the ward, Claire gave Jenny a bravery rosette and mummy put it on her pyjamas.

Over the next few days Jenny continued to



get weaker and weaker. Her voice sounded funny, just like Donald Duck, and she kept dribbling. It was very embarrassing. Mummy had to feed her and Jenny felt silly.

Things seemed to be happening all the time. Jenny was convinced at least a hundred different doctors came to look at her. She didn't know why but they were all friendly and made her laugh.

A week after Jenny had first felt weak and wobbly, she realised she actually couldn't swallow. Food made her cough and splutter. It was horrible, especially as Jenny was hungry and she liked her food. She had to have a tube put down her nose that went into her tummy. It wasn't very nice when it was put in. Once it was down, Jenny forgot it was there and all her food was put down the tube. Jenny was happy to have a full tummy again.

Sally was Jenny's physiotherapist. She came and tapped Jenny's chest and it sounded like a drum beating. She also stretched and



exercised Jenny's arms and legs and taught mummy and daddy to do it too.

Jenny liked all the attention. Everyone was very nice and she especially enjoyed not having to share mummy and daddy with Ben. He was staying with granny and grandpa. However Jenny did find she sometimes cried for no obvious reason. Mummy was worried until Dr Tom told them GBS often makes people much more sad than usual.

Jenny tried to work hard with Sally but she still got weaker until she just couldn't walk at all. Doctor Tom and the other doctors talked to mummy and daddy, initially on their own and then with Jenny so she didn't worry about them talking about her. Dr Tom explained there was a medicine that he felt Jenny needed as she didn't seem to be getting better quickly enough. He said it was a liquid that he would put really slowly through the drip in the back of Jenny's hand. She would have to have the medicine several times over the next few days and Claire was going to have to keep

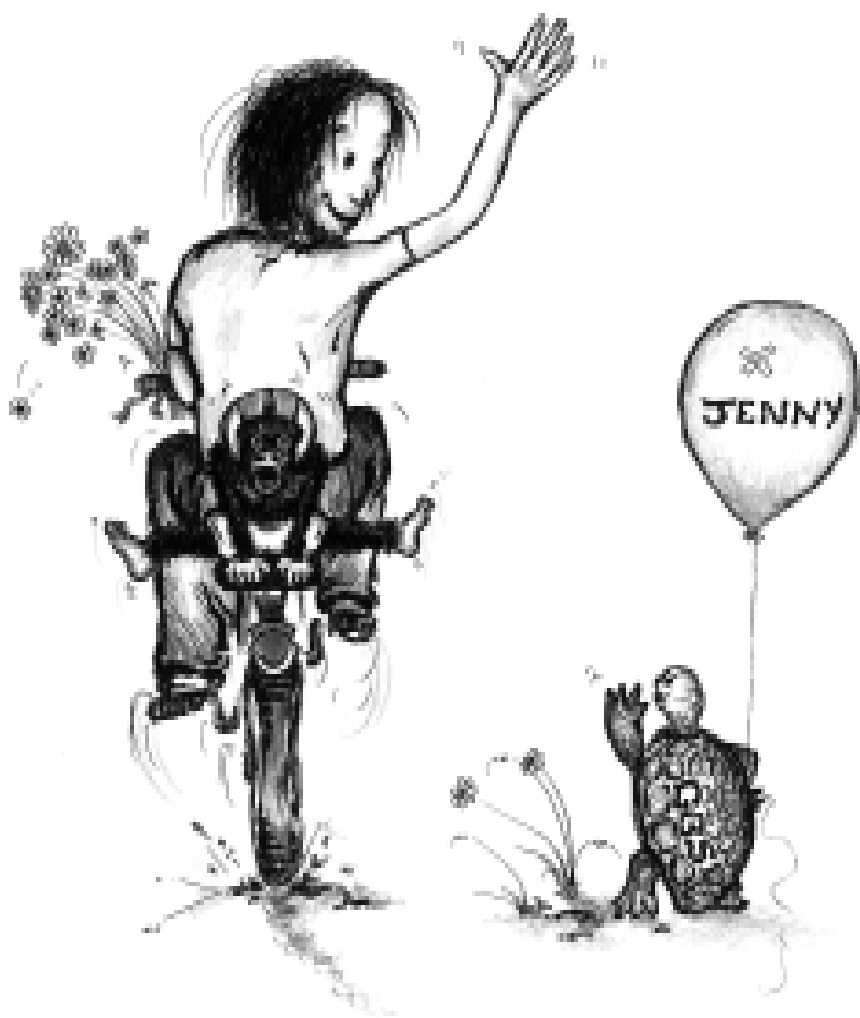
JENNY



checking Jenny over, watching her pulse, blood pressure and temperature.

Jenny asked mummy what would happen if she didn't get better. Mummy was very certain Jenny was going to get back to normal soon. She did however warn Jenny she may get a little worse first. Jenny might even need some help with her breathing, but she was not to worry. Mummy said Dr Tom had explained everything that would happen. Mummy could stay with Jenny all the time.

For the next few days nothing seemed to happen and Jenny was bored. She even missed Ben. Then one morning when Sally was doing her exercises with her, she suddenly got very excited. Jenny was definitely stronger. Over the next week, Jenny slowing started to get better. She no longer needed the tube down her nose as she could swallow. Mummy bought her special ice-cream as a treat. When Jenny took her first steps, Dr Tom said she could go back to the hospital near home and continue getting better there.



Jenny and her parents were delighted to be going back. However they were very sad to be leaving all their new friends. Jenny promised to write to the girl in the next bed who had hurt her head and was still recovering. Mummy promised to write to nurse Claire.

When they got back to the children's ward at the local hospital, Miss Smith, who was Jenny's teacher, had arranged for Jenny's classmates to write her lots of 'get well soon' cards. They were all over her old bed. Miss Smith had also brought lots of homework for Jenny to do. Jenny still had a long way to go before she would be strong enough to go back to school, so until then Miss Smith didn't want Jenny to get bored or behind with her work.

Jenny was very fed up until she saw her first project was to write about her visit to the big hospital. She could tell her friends about the last few weeks because so much had happened!

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