



Community

Rockford resident rebounds after devastating illness

By [Alyssa Krekelberg](#)

Jenny Nichols, a 2005 graduate of Rockford High School, was the picture of health before her world went spiraling out of control.

Jenny was found unconscious in a snowbank on March 17, 2013, after suffering from an apparent seizure. She was rushed to Methodist Hospital in St. Louis Park, given anti-seizure medication, and then sent home. Hours after leaving the hospital, Jenny suffered another seizure, showing that the root of her illness was caused by something more sinister than the doctors had originally thought.

In May 2013, the Crow River News informed the public about Jenny's rare and serious illness called anti-NMDA. This disease is an infection in the brain, which is usually caused by cancer at the cellular level when cells create anti-bodies that then attack the brain's nerve endings. Some symptoms of this disease include hallucinations, catatonia, personality changes, memory deficits, and speech dysfunction. Anti-NMDA was discovered in 2007, and at the time Jenny's symptoms began experts estimated that only 1,500 patients had been diagnosed with this disease. Due to the behavioral effects of this disease, experts believe that hundreds of people have been incorrectly diagnosed with psychological disorders instead of anti-NMDA and have therefore received incorrect treatment.

It took thirty-five days after Jenny's first seizure for the doctors to diagnosis her. After performing a spinal tap, the doctors realized that Jenny suffered from anti-NMDA. The Mayo Clinic had seen less than a dozen cases of this disease at that point in time.

During those thirty-five days, Jenny had deteriorated both mentally and physically. She lost a significant amount of weight, and her cognitive condition declined to the point where it was almost impossible for people to communicate with her, and for her to communicate with them. Not only that, but the disease had given her fierce hallucinations that she experienced on a daily basis, multiple times a day. As more time passed without correct treatment, Jenny's

hallucinations lasted longer and became much more physical. Jenny's loved ones could only watch helplessly as she went through this nightmare.

The Nichols family has written a book about their experience with watching Jenny suffer from this disease, which is titled "The Girl on the 6th Floor." The book is written from the perspective of Brian Nichols, Jenny's father. The summary on the website promoting the book states that Jenny's "family and friends were forced to stand by and helplessly watch as she deteriorated from a healthy and active 26-year-old woman, to someone who's physical and mental capacities resembled a newborn baby...By the time her condition was diagnosed, Jenny could not talk, eat on her own, or walk."

This book evokes many wide ranging emotions in the reader: fear, frustration, and sadness, but also hope. While reading this book, the reader goes on an emotional rollercoaster ride right alongside the Nichols family and friends.

Since the last article in the Crow River News about Jenny, she has gone through rehabilitation and is improving faster than her doctors first believed she would be able to. During the time that Jenny initially began gaining more control over her brain function, her family realized that she had no memory of the events in the last months since her first seizure, showing how detrimental this disease is.

However, the Nichols family did not have to face this disease alone. The Rockford community stepped up to help them, whether it was through Meal Trains to keep the family fed while they rushed back and forth from Methodist Hospital, reading posts from the Nichols family on Jenny's Caring Bridge site, or donating money to the Nichols family for Jenny's medical expenses.

On June 1, 2013 a benefit was held for Jenny, and the money made at this benefit helped pay for Jenny's mounting medical expenses.

"The outpouring of support from the entire community...was amazing," Brian Nichols writes.

Hundreds of people gathered in the commons at the Rockford Elementary School and donated their time and money to support Jenny. At this event, there was a silent auction, a spaghetti dinner, t-shirt sales, wristbands, a bake sale, a musical group performance, a beanbag toss game, and a scrapbooking center to document the event for Jenny, who was not able to attend.

"The memories of that evening will warm my heart for the rest of my life," writes Brian Nichols.

Jenny was able to leave the rehabilitation facility on June 17, 2013 and came home to Rockford with her family. Since that time, Jenny has made amazing progress in both her cognitive and physical functions, and continues to improve.

There is no doubt that the Nichols family is extremely grateful to the family, friends, and community that helped them when they were struggling. That kind of dedication and compassion

shown by the Rockford community towards the Nichols family and, most importantly, towards Jenny is not something seen in all communities, and is what makes the city of Rockford so remarkable.

If interested in delving more into Jenny's story, "The Girl on the 6th Floor" is available for purchase on the website: www.thegirlonthe6thfloor.com.

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