Cindy Bentley (Milwaukee, WI)—Rights Restoration

When Cindy Bentley was released from the institution, her guardian didn't know all the things she could do. Her guardian was told things about her by the institution and that became the truth about her. The guardian was told by the institution that Cindy had to go to the sheltered workshop. It took her awhile to learn the truth. When Cindy's guardian got to see what she could do, she changed her attitude. But Cindy had to prove herself first. Her guardian started with the assumption of "Cindy can't" rather than "Cindy can." Years later, Cindy's guardian apologized to Cindy saying she was "Sorry I didn't listen to you. I listened instead to the institution."

In Cindy's own words…Jan Fitzgerald was my legal guardian. I had to have a guardian to get out of the state institution back in 1984, that was the rules. My family wasn't fit to be the legal guardian according to the courts. And so Jan was my guardian from 1984 to 1987. In spring of 1987 I found out I could vote but couldn't vote if I had a legal guardian. I asked Jan could I vote and Jan thought it was good idea if I became my own legal guardian. So she supported me through that. So we went to Milwaukee county court. I don't remember the judge name but he was very nice. The judge asked me a lot of questions! He asked if I could take care of myself. He asked safety questions about if someone came to my door will I let them in. I said absolutely not. Jan said she will always be in my life and I was like family. So the judge talked to Jan and Jan thought I was capable and the judge did also. That made my day! I found out in August of 1987 that I was my own guardian and I could vote in the next election. There is not always a happy ending like mine. I have a lot friends with legal guardians who is trying to lead their lives. Guardians are there to protect us not to control us.