

Michelle E. Smith



I am proud to nominate Stacia Bartolomei Hays as my family's personal Transplant Avenger. Like most people, the lucky ones, I had no personal knowledge of the transplant process. I cannot say this any longer, and though it has been an extremely difficult and painful journey, my family has been very fortunate to have had Stacia at our side, as well as out in front of us in our battle, and behind our backs to hold us up as we fought to save my son. Stacia has spent many hours not just explaining and managing Alex's deteriorating condition of Primary Sclerosing Cholangitis, but helping me to research options in other medical facilities where he would be best served due to his difficult medical situation. Her calm reassurance was literally my lifeline as Alex headed down the path from his first to his second liver transplant.

We first met Stacia after Alex's first liver transplant in St. Lois in 2005. We returned to Florida, where we had family, and were directed to the Hepatology Department at UF Shands in Gainesville, Fl. Alex and I loved her instantly. Not only was she very knowledgeable about Alex's disease and the post transplant process, she has this wonderful friendly and approachable way about her, that just made the whole situation less scary. I felt that I had a partner to help guide me to make the right decisions without feeling that I was uninformed, because she did inform me. We had a really hard time with Alex's liver with rejection after rejection, then reoccurrence, of his autoimmune disease, followed by septic infections, and repeated attempts to avoid retransplantation with bile duct stints, all to no avail. We were in the hospital all the time, and it was horrible, but our Avenging Angel would be there to help clear up the latest medical emergency and provide a link between the Hepatology and Immunology Departments who were jointly managing Alex's condition. Some of our stays in the hospital were weeks long, and Stacia even brought homemade soup to our room. Those thoughtful gestures are typical of our favorite Transplant Nurse.

We had obviously had transplant nurses before and since then, as Alex did receive his second transplant in Pittsburgh, but Stacia has been our shining star. I now can say that I have quite a handle on the transplant journey, and I can also say that much of what I learned about how to navigate and survive was because of our great fortune in being matched with Stacia Bartolomei Hays as our Transplant nurse. I am also proud to say that I have been able to help advocate for other families going through this process, so her knowledge and care just keeps getting paid forward.