

To a transplant nurse, Hello!

I am one of the very fortunate people in this world that have benefited from a liver transplant. I want to thank you and all transplant nurses and coordinators for your dedication and contributions in this process.

I was diagnosed with "Non A Non B Chronic Active Hepatitis" (now identified as Autoimmune Hepatitis) in October 1970 when I was 15 years old. My disease was managed through medication for many years. In 1981, after relocating to Ventura County, California, I had the good fortune of becoming a patient of my local gastroenterologist, Dr. Stephen Covington, in Ventura, California. During my first consultation Dr. Covington said to me "you are going to be a transplant candidate some day".

The five years prior to my transplant were difficult, but being a motivated person, I continued to work, married and adopted a special needs child. I was placed on the transplant list at UCLA in 1986. This was rather early in the days of therapeutic liver transplants. I developed very close relationships with 2 transplant nurse coordinators at UCLA, Barbara Nuesse and Debra Besbris. They were wonderful. I worked and waited for that pager to go off. For me, my attitude was the key to my success. I truly felt I was going to be fine after the transplant. I was not afraid, but ready! Finally on October 16, 1987 the pager went off and I was helicoptered to UCLA. I was prepped in ICU by several very qualified nurses with great senses of humor - a scary process made tolerable by wonderful nurses. The surgery proceeded, I was fully opened up, but the donor liver was not able to be used. I was devastated, but the alternative would have been worse. Good things that resulted were a big liver biopsy, having the pain of surgery in the first operation and six months later getting the "right" liver.

March 3, 1988 I was paged for the final time...I was grocery shopping at Vons at about 6:30 p.m. By 9:00 p.m. I was again delivered by helicopter to UCLA and off to surgery by 11:30 p.m. This time I was prepped on the liver transplant floor of UCLA. I specifically remember the nurse telling me that this was going to be a BIG operation, post transplant people were pretty ill and sometimes not so cooperative or nice. She said, please try to remember to be nice to the nurses after the transplant. I was back on the floor after the transplant, 8 days later, and tried to be nice! In 1988 I was 32 years old (17 years after initial diagnosis), and was out of the hospital in 17 days, record breaking in those days. I was able to return to work 3 months later.

In 2007 my sister donated a kidney to a friend of hers in Iowa. The surgery occurred at Nebraska Medical Center and I was able to be with her during the process. What a wonderful facility! My sister had an uneventful recovery and her recipient is doing great.

I am grateful for everyday that I have. March 3, 2008 was the 20th anniversary (liversary) of my transplant. I celebrated by spending a week in Paris in April and then in August hosted a party to thank all my family and friends who supported me over the years. How lucky am I? I have been able to enjoy my family, friends and be healthy. I have had extremely good luck - no overnight stays in a hospital since 1988.

Thank you for your dedication to making lives better. You are very special people!

With gratitude and thanks,

Debra Reeves

Debra Berry Reeves
Ventura County, California