

'Lourdes' Angels' Donate Writing Tablets

Julie Santana remembers all too well the frustration and anxiety her 61-year-old mother, Lourdes, felt after cancer took away her ability to speak. The disease forced the removal of her larynx, leaving her without a way to communicate.



From left, Julie Santana, David J. Arnold, M.D., and Christina Santana.

“One day she could talk, the next day she couldn’t,” remembered Julie Santana. “She could never vocalize anything again until the day she passed.”

After Lourdes lost her battle against a multitude of cancers last year, Julie decided to channel her grief into support for others. Noting that there was little public support for cancers

of the larynx, she focused on a plan to donate writing tablets that could help patients in a similar position. She had purchased one for her mother, and, although Lourdes was at first reluctant to use it, she eventually brought it with her wherever she went.

“I realized it made her feel safe because she could communicate,” said Julie, who lives in Cutler Bay with her wife, Christina, and children, Mercy and Will.

Recently, the Santana family, calling themselves “Lourdes’ Angels,” donated 40 writing tablets to surgeon David J. Arnold, M.D., a member of Sylvester Comprehensive Cancer Center, associate professor of otolaryngology, chief of surgery at The Lennar Foundation Medical Center, and chief of head and neck surgery at UHealth Tower.

“This is a great gift, because it is going to let us give patients who have trouble talking for one reason or another the ability to communicate where they might otherwise not be able to,” Dr. Arnold said. “It is a way to mitigate the fear of not being able to interact with everyone around them.”

Dr. Arnold said the donation is particularly meaningful coming from a family who truly understands the challenges his patients are facing.

“They realize the need and what this gift means to a family member,” he said.

The Santanas, who adopted their children shortly after Lourdes

passed, hope to make the donations a continuing family effort.

“I remember Lourdes with the tablet and how helpful it was to her,” said Christina Santana. “I am hoping it can be just as useful to someone else.”

Julie Santana believes this new effort would make Lourdes – a woman who always took time to make those around her feel better – proud.

“She would be over the moon that we are keeping her memory alive by helping others, because that’s who she was,” Julie Santana said.