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## **Hand to Hold Honors the Strength and Super Powers of NICU Families and their Premature Infants in 2014 Premie Power Photo and Essay Contest**

### **Contest Names Nine Winners from California, Texas, Ohio, Michigan, Georgia, Mexico and Israel**

AUSTIN, Texas (December 16, 2014) – Families from 32 states and three continents shared personal and inspiring stories about how their premature and medically fragile infants continually demonstrate super hero qualities while facing a range of physical and medical challenges in Hand to Hold’s [fifth annual Premie Power Photo and Essay Contest](#). Hand to Hold, a nonprofit that supports parents of premies and babies who spend time in the neonatal intensive care unit, [announced nine winners ranging in age from 5-1/2 months to 19-years-old](#), including five-and-a-half-month-old Asher Norvell, from Herlong, California, named Premie of the Year Overall Winner. His family received the grand prize, which included a Samsung Galaxy Camera 2 and Galaxy Tablet 4.

Asher was born at 26 weeks gestation and underwent [more than a half dozen surgeries and procedures by the time he was four months old](#). His mother, Charlene, nicknamed him “Lil Warrior.”

“What he has overcome in his short life is nothing short of miraculous and I am so honored that God blessed me with such an incredible little boy,” says Charlene. “His determination through every obstacle he has faced, and continues to face, is a testament to how much he wants to be in this world, and he is going to do something great.”

Among the entries were stories from Israel, Canada, Peru, and Mexico, including that of six-month-old Avigayil Shore from Jerusalem, Israel, who was recognized in memory of Thurston Mossholder, one of the first Premie Power honorees in 2010. The “Thundering Thurston” Award is given to a Premie Power contestant who receives the most votes during the online voting period, while other winning stories were selected by votes and a panel of neonatal professionals and NICU parents from across the United States.

According to her family, Avigayil, known as “Smiley Gayily,” faces every day with “super strength and determination,” despite a long list of complications that are familiar to premies such as gastric reflux, pulmonary hypertension, anemia and osteoporosis. Children born before 37 weeks gestation may face a wide range of medical challenges that require additional procedures, surgeries and therapies, and families with infants in neonatal intensive care see many super hero qualities in their fragile children.

“Despite her hard life so far and having to fight for every breath, Avigayil treats every person who comes near to a giant smile with her generally sunny disposition,” writes her mother. “She loves people and makes friends wherever she goes. We hope that she keeps that love of people and love of life with her always as she teaches us every day just how valuable life can be.”

In the United States, nearly half a million babies, about [one in eight babies](#), are born too early (before 37 weeks gestation) and others are born who require specialized care in a NICU after birth for other medical reasons. Worldwide 15 million babies are born too soon each year. Premature birth, the most prevalent reason for a NICU stay, is traumatic and a leading cause of permanent disability and death, yet many of these babies beat the odds against them.

“We are grateful to our Premie Power families who share their children’s stories with the world, because their young lives demonstrate courage, strength and joy,” says Kelli Kelley, founder and Executive Director of Hand to Hold and mother of two preemies. “Hand to Hold connects parents with children in neonatal intensive care to other parents who have been through similar experiences and who can relate to the uncertainty, anxiety and highs and lows that come with it. Their little super heroes are battling so much from their first days and may face many challenges as they grow. Our families tell us how they rejoice in celebration of little and big milestones their preemies achieve. This contest gives voice to the amazing accomplishments and resiliency of each child.”

#### **2014 Premie Power Photo and Essay Contest Winners**

- Five-and-a-half-month-old Asher Norvell of Herlong, Ca., located in eastern California near the Nevada border, received top honors in the 0 to 6 months age category and also landed top honors as Premie of the Year as the Overall Winner. “Lil Warrior” was born at 26 weeks gestation weighing 1 pound 14 ounces and spent 125 days in the NICU and an additional 21 days in the pediatric intensive care unit (PICU).
- Nine-month-old identical twins Owen and Bryce Christy of Abilene, Texas, were chosen the winners in the 7 to 12 months age category. “Outstanding Owen” was born nearly 10 weeks early, weighing 3 pounds 13 ounces and “Bionic Bryce” followed his brother weighing 3 pounds. The two brave brothers underwent a number of medical challenges and spent six weeks in the NICU while their father was stationed in Afghanistan.
- Fifteen-month-old Savannah Grace McClary of Canton, Ohio won recognition in the over 1 to 2 years age category. “Savvy G” was born at 27 weeks, 5 days gestation, weighed 1 pounds 2 ounces at birth and stayed in the NICU 109 days, and an additional 120 days in the PICU.
- Jonathan McMullen, 2, of Holland, Michigan, was named the winner in the over 2 to 5 years age category. “Jonny McDash” was born at 23 weeks gestation weighing 1 pound 5 ounces and spent 150 days in the NICU.

- Kali Linn Ramirez, 5, of Grover Beach, California, was chosen as the winner in the age 5 years and over category. “Hero of Hope” was born at 28 weeks gestation and weighed 2 pounds 10 ounces at birth. She spent three months in the NICU.
- Six-month-old Avigayil Shore from Jerusalem, Israel, was born at 33 weeks gestation, weighing 1.6 kilos (about 3-1/2 pounds); she spent 101 days in the NICU. “Smiley Gayily” received the most votes – more than 843 - and was recognized with the Thundering Thurston Award.
- The Staff Favorite award was presented to nine-month-old Alonso Reyes, “Alonso Big Cheeks,” of Mexico City who spent 154 days in the NICU in Austin, Texas after his early arrival. The Executive Director’s Awards were awarded to "Our Fighting Princess" Kimberly Hammett, 16, from Stone Mountain, Georgia, and “General Grant” Grant Miller, 19, from Roswell, Georgia.

Judges for the contest included the finalist and winners of the recent 2014 [NICU Heroes Award](#), an award program that recognizes NICU health care professionals for their compassion and dedication to improving outcomes not only for medically fragile babies but the entire family. Judging Preemie Power this year were Stephanie Hall, NICU Nurse Practitioner and NICU Heroes Winner (South Carolina); Dr. Stewart Lawrence, neonatologist and NICU Heroes Winner (Idaho); Kathy Knoll, NICU Nurse and NICU Heroes Finalist (Colorado); Michelle White, NICU Nurse and NICU Heroes Finalist (Alabama); Katie Talkington, NICU Parent (Texas) and Kristin Knight, NICU Parent (Texas).

Hand to Hold is grateful to sponsors Mead Johnson Nutrition, makers of Enfamil, and Timeless Medical Systems. Winners and finalists received Preemie Power super hero capes and prize packages of varying values including prizes sponsored by Neotech Products, Sundance Solutions, and The Boppy Company. The Overall Winner’s family will also choose a NICU to receive a one-year subscription to Hand to Hold’s [NICU Resource Library](#), educational resources endorsed by the National Perinatal Association.

#### **About Hand to Hold**

Hand to Hold, a nonprofit organization serving NICU families nationwide, provides comprehensive navigation resources and support programs to parents of preemies, babies born with special health care needs and those who have experienced a loss due to these or other complications. Hand to Hold’s core service is matching experienced peer mentors with new parents who have had a child in the NICU to offer support and equipping parents with education they need to care for their baby, family and themselves. Hand to Hold was the 2012 recipient of the Becky Hatfield Family Support Award, given by the National Perinatal Association. All services are offered without charge. For more information, visit [www.handtohold.org](http://www.handtohold.org) or call toll-free 855-H2H-NICU.

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