

## MOM MAHOGANY

**The rain was coming down heavily as wind pounded on the side of the house. New mom Mahogany was inside trying to soothe her 3-month old baby boy Josiah.** She had just started to get his routine down — knowing when to feed him and put him down to sleep. Tonight, they were just trying to get through the night. The town would soon be underwater. Hurricane Matthew was hitting eastern North Carolina, and on its way to cause devastation in Lumberton, where Mahogany lived with her family. Water started to leak through Mahogany's ceiling. She tried to put towels down on the floor, but could not keep up with the amount of water coming in.

At 8 PM, she called the police for help. Mahogany smelled gas and knew she had to get herself and her baby out of there. Hours later at 1:30 AM, firefighters showed up in front of her house with a lifeboat. One brave firefighter waded through the water and came to her door. He reached out to carry baby Josiah — wearing a onesie, nestled inside a blanket — and tightly carried him on his chest. With Mahogany close behind, they waded in the water and walked down the street to board the lifeboat.

Once they arrived at the shelter, Mahogany stressed that she couldn't stay at a group shelter for fear of her baby getting sick. She persuaded a courageous stranger to drive through the flood and give her a ride to her mom's home.

Hurricane Matthew would be one of the most damaging hurricanes to hit North Carolina in recent history. The storm destroyed Mahogany's home, and her family lost most of what they owned.

Mahogany was distraught. In the days following the storm, she got a call from her Nurse-Family Partnership nurse Stephanie asking if she was ok and what she needed for her and her baby. Nurse-Family Partnership gave her a car seat and other resources provided by The Duke Endowment and Compassion For U affiliated with FaithHealth NC.

Stephanie continued to visit her wherever she was living. Two months later, she was able to get her own apartment.

"Nurse Stephanie has always been in my corner," she said. "It's a good feeling, having someone come to my home to check on us."

Having a newborn had been an exciting and overwhelming experience. With Stephanie's guidance, Mahogany had felt prepared for childbirth. She knew to time her contractions and when to call the

doctor. Stephanie checked in on Mahogany daily in the days leading up to delivery.

Her pregnancy had been hard on her body. When she was swollen, nurse Stephanie helped her monitor for signs of preeclampsia. Luckily, Mahogany did not have this serious condition, but she took steps with Stephanie's advice to stay off her feet and hydrate with water. "You and your baby come first," Stephanie would tell her.

When Mahogany found out she was pregnant, she was 20-years old and had just gone in for a doctor's visit to treat a sore throat. "I wasn't planning on becoming pregnant," she shared.

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“And I didn’t know how to take care of a baby. All I knew was that I was going to be a mom in 9 months.”

Mahogany soon met nurse Stephanie, who helped her through every step.

During pregnancy, she decided that she wanted to breastfeed her baby. However when baby arrived, it wasn’t so simple. She tried and tried to breastfeed during the first 15 hours after he was born, but he just wouldn’t latch. After a series of tests, the doctors discovered that he had swallowed an excessive amount of amniotic fluid and they pumped her baby’s stomach. Finally, he latched instantly.

Mahogany met her goal to breastfeed her baby, even after going back to work. Today, Mahogany continues to breastfeed her 18-month old son, and is working on weaning him off.

The first couple of months of motherhood –

including right before Hurricane Matthew hit – Mahogany described it as like living in a gray cloud. “A lot of mothers don’t want to talk about it, but so many like me go through postpartum depression,” she shared. “Stephanie helped to get me through it. She would tell me she was only a phone call away. And she would always pick up at first ring.”

It was just her alone taking care of her new baby all day, while her son’s father was at work. It was a big change for Mahogany.

“It took a lot of courage for her to open up to me and know when to reach out when she needed support,” said nurse Stephanie. “Mahogany was determined to stay positive for her baby, despite not feeling happy. When she needed more support, our visits increased. I was there when she needed me.”

Mahogany works two jobs: Monday through Friday at a local college bookstore, and Saturdays and Sundays at a home fragrance and bath store.

Nurse Stephanie recently brought Mahogany materials she had requested to learn about being a lactation consultant, a skill that Mahogany wants to share with other new moms.

“A lot of women don’t breastfeed where I live,” shared Mahogany. “They don’t understand the importance of it, and know that there is support out there.”

“Mahogany is true to herself,” said nurse Stephanie. “She is a great mom and has stayed open to learning new things to be the best mom she can be for her son.”

“I’m 22-years old and it’s bittersweet to be a young mom,” she shared. “I see my friends from high school and they will be graduating from college next May. Yeh, I’m supposed to be graduating from college too. But I put my life on hold. It’s not bad. It was for a good reason... Now I know what I want to do with my life and I will graduate when I am supposed to.”

Mahogany’s story was recently recognized in Parents magazine for partnering with nurse Stephanie to help her through pregnancy. She hopes more expectant women will find out about Nurse-Family Partnership to give them the support, advice and information to help them through one of the most challenging and rewarding experiences yet – being a new mom.

**Mahogany is an NFP mom with the Nurse-Family Partnership program at Robeson County Department of Public Health in Lumberton, North Carolina.**

