

MOM ALAZAE

Aaliyah is learning new things every day. She's crawling, pulling herself up and cruising around the furniture, little hands into everything. She's a healthy, happy, inquisitive 15-month-old and a source of endless joy to her young mom.

Someday she'll hear the story of her dramatic arrival into the world. Someday she'll know the story behind her middle name.

Alazae was 28 weeks' pregnant when Aaliyah was born on March 20, 2019.

"I felt normal," she said. "It was the first day of spring break for me and I was planning to go out to eat."

Desiree, her nurse from Nurse-Family Partnership® (NFP) at Any Baby Can in Austin, Tex., came for a home visit and was teaching her about the potential complications of pregnancy.

"That day, we were talking about preeclampsia and the things to watch for," Alazae said. "She asked me if I had blurry vision and I said, 'No, I feel fine.'"

They were nearly finished when nurse Desiree took her blood pressure.

"She kept taking it, thinking it was wrong," Alazae said. "She just kept checking it."



Aaliyah weighed 2 pounds, 3 ounces at birth and spent nearly two months in the NICU. Now she is a healthy, happy, 15-month-old.

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Desiree said she was "blown away" when she measured Alazae's blood pressure at 170 over 100."

Alazae, at that time a sophomore in high school, lived with her parents, but she was home alone that day.

When Desiree confirmed that Alazae's blood pressure was consistently high, she told her that she needed to contact her parents and go to the hospital.

"She was really worried," Alazae recalled.

Alazae's father and her sister came and took her to the hospital, where she was diagnosed with preeclampsia, and tiny Aaliyah was born two days later.

"I was shocked," Alazae said. "I had never had blood pressure problems, so I was really surprised this was happening to me."

But her sister revealed that she, too, had preeclampsia when she was pregnant, indicating a likely family history of the potentially fatal complication that can lead to seizures and organ failure.

Desiree called Alazae at the hospital to hear her birth story and "she was tearful. She said, 'You saved my life and my baby. You were meant to be my nurse.'"

It was not the first time that Desiree had identified a case of preeclampsia in an NFP mom.

NFP nurses, like Desiree, are skilled at conducting

assessments to identify medical conditions and guide moms on how to seek urgent medical treatment.

Desiree also notes that another important part of NFP is to empower moms to realize they are the ultimate experts on their bodies, that they can and should speak up when they need attention.

“Obstetricians and midwives are very important,” she said, “but NFP nurses see moms more frequently and can be there at vital moments to support them.”

Desiree said she knew that Alazae was nervous that day when they rushed her to the hospital, “so I assured her that things would be just fine.”

Aaliyah weighed 2 pounds, 3 ounces at birth and spent nearly two months in the neonatal intensive care unit. Desiree worried about Alazae going home from the hospital with “empty arms,” but the young mom was strong and devoted.

Alazae arranged for transportation to the hospital to make sure Aaliyah had the all-important skin-to-skin contact and she pumped her breast milk and delivered it to the hospital every day.

“She took such pride in giving the baby her gift of breastmilk so she could grow and thrive,” Desiree said.

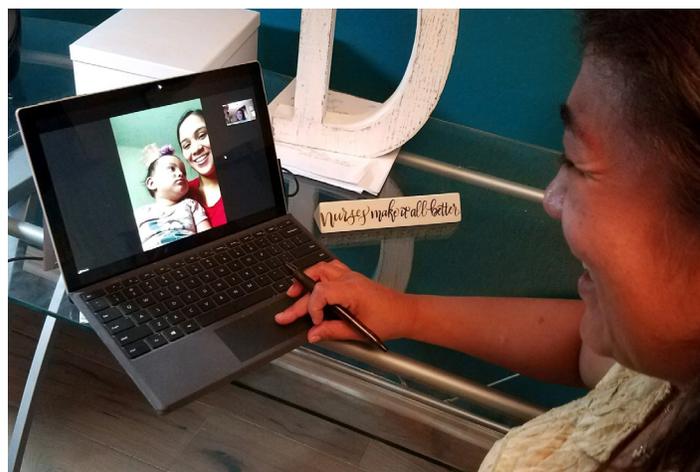
Aaliyah’s dad was nervous about holding his daughter because she was so tiny.

“I wanted to reassure him and shared that my husband, who’s 200 pounds and a big Marine, was once a preemie. At my next home visit, Alazae was beaming and shared that Aaliyah’s dad ‘held his daughter in the palm of his hand and read to her. It was beautiful.’ “

Desiree said the whole family is involved in Aaliyah’s care and that Alazae, 17, is “an awesome mom.”

She is working hard to finish high school despite the challenges created in the COVID-19 era.

“She just recently got a computer through Pflugerville Independent School District, so now she



Nurse Desiree (shown right) meets with Alazae using telehealth during the COVID-19 pandemic to check in and see how she (shown on screen) and her daughter are doing.

can take her classes online,” Desiree said.

Sometimes Alazae gets frustrated with online school, and Desiree encourages her to reach out to friends and teachers for support.

She will start her senior year in the fall.

After high school, she plans to go on to study cosmetology and said she’ll never forget Desiree.

“She has been really supportive through the whole thing,” Alazae said.

During the COVID-19 pandemic, Desiree continues to meet with Alazae using telehealth – with a biweekly video call to check in on how she and her daughter are doing.

Desiree and Alazae said they will always remember the day that tiny Aaliyah was born and Desiree called.

“We talked about everything and then at some point I said, ‘Miss nurse, you didn’t ask me my baby’s name.’ And I told her it was Aaliyah Desiree.”

Desiree said she was touched by the heartfelt gesture.

“I felt so honored. I feel really humbled in this work,” she said. “But this is what we do.”