

NURSE JOY

Nurse Joy offers much more than health care, education and guidance to the moms at Nurse-Family Partnership® (NFP) at the Southern Nevada Health District in Las Vegas. She's a role model with hard experience in many of the challenges and anxieties first-time, low-income moms face.

She was selected to be filmed for Roadtrip Nation's "A Single Mom's Story," which took single moms around the country to explore career opportunities and meet other successful single moms. The PBS project features a [documentary](#) film along with online features, including [one on nurse Joy](#).

Joy's story will be shared with students from middle school through college who are interested in a similar career path and want to learn more about what it takes to become an NFP nurse.



Joy, an NFP nurse, was selected to be filmed by Roadtrip Nation's "A Single Mom's Story." (Photo courtesy of Roadtrip Nation)

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Joy, who was barely 20 years old when she gave birth to her daughter, now 10, vividly remembers feeling alone and isolated when faced with the responsibilities of being a mom.

The youngest of nine children, Joy assumed motherhood would come naturally. "I just thought I would be a great mom, that it would be no big deal," she said. "I thought breastfeeding would be easy. I thought everything would be easy."

Then Adelyne arrived a month early.

Joy's marriage was disintegrating. The baby struggled to latch to her breast. And the pay from her job as a receptionist at a car dealership was woefully inadequate.

"I was 100 percent unprepared even though I had eight months to plan," she said.

Adelyne spent nine days in neonatal intensive care to gain some weight and receive treatment for jaundice and other complications. Joy had to pay \$1,000 in deductibles under her health insurance plan, and that wiped out her savings.

“I didn’t want to waste money on gas driving home from the hospital, so I just stayed there,” she said. “I sat in a metal folding chair, and I stayed overnight all the time.”

An older nurse noticed what was going on and started to look after her.

“I was just this young, clueless, broke mom sitting in the NICU with my tiny baby,” Joy said. “I was scared to death. I didn’t tell my family what was going on with my husband, who left right after the delivery. I felt terrible about myself. I was embarrassed and felt very alone.”

The nurse noticed that Joy was sleeping in the chair and wasn’t eating. She would encourage her to leave the NICU and go to the cafeteria, but the young mom insisted she wasn’t hungry.

“I didn’t want to waste money on food,” Joy said.

One day the nurse handed her a fistful of vouchers for the cafeteria.

“From then on she always made sure I ate and told me I had to take care of myself and my daughter,” Joy said. “She was so important to me that right then I started thinking about how I could one day give back.”

After Adelyne was released from the hospital, Joy returned to her apartment and her failing marriage. After a couple of months, she accepted that it was over and finally told her parents that she needed help.

When her mom, a nurse, realized how desperate Joy was, she mobilized the family. Joy’s brother arrived with a truck to help her move out of her apartment and back to the house where she grew up.

She enrolled in a nursing program at the Community College of Southern Nevada, continued to work full time and rebuilt her life. Her parents and her brother provided childcare.

Joy was accepted into a nursing apprenticeship at a local hospital, earned her certification to be a registered nurse and completed her bachelor’s degree through an online program at Grand Canyon University.



Joy’s daughter, Adelyne (shown right), now 10, grew up watching her mom studying to become a nurse. She is now proud of her mom’s job to help others.

She was working on the medical surgery floor when her mom suggested she consider a career with the Southern Nevada Health District. When she applied, she heard about Nurse-Family Partnership for the first time.

“I thought, ‘Wow. People get paid to do this?’ I thought this was the best job ever,” Joy said.

After two and one-half years with NFP, Joy said she realizes that she is especially well qualified for the job. Her work at the hospital gave her confidence and burnished her skills in assessing patients and delivering care. The NFP training enhanced her ability to communicate effectively.

But the value of her personal experiences is golden.

“Marital issues, financial issues, moms with their own health problems or babies with health problems – I could connect with them and understand where they were at and help them make change,” she said. “I knew I was made to do this.”

For young moms, she is more than a skilled nurse and trusted advisor, she is proof that they can make a good life for themselves and their children.

She has encouraged others interested in nursing to consider working at Nurse-Family Partnership.

“Most of the time, people view nursing as a field of needles and curing people of physical illness. However, with NFP we get to see the whole person, not just the physical side,” she said.

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WE HAVE TIME TO SPEND WITH OUR PATIENTS AND GET TO KNOW MORE ABOUT THEM PHYSICALLY, EMOTIONALLY, SPIRITUALLY IN SOME WAYS, AND WE FIND OUT ABOUT THEIR LIVING SITUATIONS, HOUSING, JOBS AND SO MUCH MORE. WE ALLOW THEM TO FIND ANSWERS WITH GUIDANCE AND WATCH AS CHANGE OCCURS.

“This field also allows for each nurse to self-reflect and become the best person he or she can be. We are held to a different standard as our clients watch us as examples, as we lead them,” she said.

On the Roadtrip Nation tour, Joy said moms could see what it means to be a community health nurse.

“One of the moms was considering becoming a nurse and she was afraid of the blood and guts ... I was able to show her a completely different field of nursing that was so rewarding,” Joy said.

Her experiences rebuilding her life also have had a big impact on Adelyne.



Roadtrip Nation will share Joy's story with students who are interested in a similar career path and want to learn more about what it takes to become an NFP nurse.

“My daughter grew up watching me study, and she saw how hard it was,” Joy said, remembering how they both couldn't wait till she could afford her dream car, a Ford Explorer with air conditioning.

Six months after graduation, Joy and Adelyne picked out the car.

“This is ours? We get to take this home?” Joy remembers Adelyne saying. “I told her that this was our reward.”

But the real reward is much bigger than the car. It's the life.

“Adelyne knows she can rely on me,” said Joy, now 30. “I have this great career. She knows we'll be ok.”