

My name is Mona Nozhackum and I am from Taos Pueblo, New Mexico.

Being a mom is everything to me. It's such an important role. It's such a sacred role, especially as Native people, especially as Taos Pueblo people, as Potawatomi people that it is. It's our responsibility to teach our children who we are and how important that is, and that they're able to understand who they are and carry on those traditions and values and customs and cultures. We've had conversations for a long time and just kind of discussing what family could look like.

That was just a really important piece to us to be intentional about it and really create kind of that sacred space to invite a child and call them down from the stars, because that's kind of how we look at it as a very sacred being whenever children are invited into our family and they want to come to our family. And that was really important to me to try and incorporate those traditional birth practices, some traditional teachings into that, because that's definitely gotten lost.

I decided to go with the midwifery route. I really sought out the wisdom and experience of a doula in that Taos Pueblo Dula provided so much information to me that nobody else really knew. I had a normal pregnancy for the most part, it's really difficult to decipher what's normal in pregnancy and what's not because you'll read lots of different things and even just talking to folks who say, Oh, that's normal, when maybe it's necessarily isn't normal.

At about 41 weeks, I noticed that I was experiencing extreme swelling that kind of happened very quickly in my legs, and I brought that up to my midwives and they referred me for more testing. And I was also experiencing kind of a flutter in my chest. It was actually kind of an increased heart rate, and that's when I knew that I was experiencing symptoms of preeclampsia and that I did have high blood pressure as well as protein in my urine. I felt that something wasn't right.

They would need to induce me that night, I wasn't able to pursue the home birth like I had originally planned, and as things progressed then my blood pressure went incredibly high. And so at that point I was unable to even move at all, and I had to just be literally on the bed. I had an emergency C-section which brought out my baby healthy, thankfully, but I continued to have preeclampsia postpartum.

Just days after having my child, I continued to have high blood pressure, and even when I was sent home, I continued to have high blood pressure. So I didn't know how to navigate this, what I was supposed to do moving forward. And thankfully I had my midwives that were still a part of my process. I had a kind of community of support, other ways. I don't know how I would have gotten through that.

My husband was amazing. He's always incredibly supportive of me and I really rely and lean on my in-laws a lot because we're really close to them. I am so happy and thankful that I had my husband right beside me throughout this entire process to really help me think through what was happening as well as be an advocate for me too.

Trust yourself. You are the expert of yourself, of your body, of your experience. And because you're the expert, you have the ability and the knowledge to really advocate for yourself. And if somebody is not listening to you, then talking to somebody else and saying this doesn't feel right, and understanding the power and the strength that you have that you can advocate for yourself in order to get, you know, the equitable care that you deserve and you should have.