

BATTLING A BABY'S BREATH,

At nineteen years old, my world shifted on an axis of pure survival. What was supposed to be a joyful arrival became an immediate battleground when the umbilical cord wrapped around my daughter's neck, cutting off her oxygen and forcing an emergency C-section. For ten agonizing days, she lay in the Neonatal Intensive Care Unit. The doctors handed me grave warnings of developmental delays, gave us infant CPR training, and essentially prepared me to accept a broken statistic.

But they didn't know the fire of a Black mother.

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THE BUREAUCRACY: A MOTHER'S BOND, & THE BOLD FIGHT FOR BELIEF

Fear and uncertainty collided with a fierce, ancestral determination I didn't even know I possessed. I looked at my baby girl and resolved right then that she would never be reduced to a tragic label or a forgotten category in a broken system. She was a rarity, an individual, and she deserved the world.

That hospital room was where I buried my girlhood and found my warrior's voice.

As she grew, the battlefield shifted from the hospital to the school system. My daughter faced real academic struggles, yet several school districts shut their doors to extra help because her test scores weren't "bad enough" to qualify. She was drowning in the gaps, trapped in the purgatory of underperforming but not severely underperforming.

So, I became her fiercest advocate. I flooded their inbox, disrupted their meetings, and forced my way into their conferences. The administrators hated to see me coming—because they knew I arrived armed with accountability, questioning every flawed process and pointing out every single failure.

And my voice broke through. I forced the district to bring in additional staff, secure individualized support, and implement extended test-taking times—accommodations that ultimately uplifted not just my daughter, but an entire classroom of children the system was prepared to leave behind.

Looking back, I know I was operating in raw survival mode, growing up alongside my child and learning the rules of warfare as I went. But I wouldn't trade that fire for anything. My age was young, but my calling was heavy. In fighting for her right to breathe, learn, and thrive, I discovered my own unstoppable strength. I didn't just raise my daughter; I became the woman I was always destined to be.

I am Natalya Jones TS#26 of 52 of The Soutltown Magazine. I want to thank you all for having SOUL! ☺