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but I knew one thing for certain:
I fiercely loved her.
She became my first teacher
in navigating systems of care.”

SHAWNEECE'S STORY

Strengthening My Voice — A Mother Becoming

I had advocated for families for six years when she was born in 2001. I was excited because she was the one who made me a mother for the first time.

During my pregnancy, I went to prenatal appointments with my beloved, and we learned about sickle cell anemia—a condition that disproportionately impacts the Black community.

We looked through our family medical histories, and it was not on our radar.

So, we did what we do when potential news comes that is not desired.

We prayed.

And we prayed often.

We were hopeful that this would not be true for us.

Nothing prepared me for becoming her mother and for the life she was going to live. Looking back, it was also a defining moment for me as a woman—a Black woman. I was no longer a Black Girl.

Two days after her birth, through newborn screening, we learned that our daughter had sickle cell anemia.

I was scared of the future, but I knew one thing for certain:

I fiercely loved her.

She became my first teacher

in navigating systems of care.

I learned to research, ask questions, work with doctors and teachers, show up at hematology appointments, ensure her Individualized Education Program (IEP) was honored, and bring resources to help others understand what she needed.

I advocated for her when she was in too much pain to speak for herself. At the same time, beginning when she was very young, I started preparing her to understand her health, ask questions, and eventually use her own voice.

Sickle cell made her strong, even on her weakest days.

And through the hard times and joyful mornings, I grew stronger too.

She taught me that advocacy begins with love, grows through showing up, and becomes purpose.

Over time, something I once prayed would not be part of our story became part of what shaped us.

Thank you, sickle cell, for helping me find my way.

It is the gift that shaped my empathy and compassion.

It is the gift that gave birth to a daughter who would later enter the medical field.

It is the gift that allowed her to share her story and help others diagnosed with sickle cell anemia.

And it is the gift that shaped my social work practice and how I show up for people and families navigating systems of

care.

This is our shared lived experience, and yet it has been experienced differently—as mother and daughter.

Now, I watch it shape another chapter of her story: motherhood.

She is navigating motherhood as a woman living with sickle cell. There are still hard days. There are still moments when her body reminds her to slow down.

But she remains strong on her weakest days.

And now, her daughter—my grandbaby girl—gets to witness that strength.

She gets to witness her courage, her voice, her tenderness, and her greatness.

And I get to witness something else too—the woman she has become.

Dedicated to Zariah Stevenson-Li and Azaela, now 3 years old.

I am Shawneece Stevenson. TS#36 of 52 of The SoulTown Magazine. I want to thank you all for having SOUL! 🌟



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