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Photos by Diana Pineda



I briefly lived with my son's father right after my son was born. It was the worst month of my life. He would scream at me, telling me I was nothing. Less than a zero. That no one would ever want me. My son would wake up and cry, and finally I just picked him up, carried him outside and called 911. I ended up moving into a shelter. I never want to be in a situation like that again. I was terrified.

It took me a few years, but I was able to get a day job while the shelter provided child care. I eventually saved up first and last month's rent to get my own place.

My son is my whole world. I work during the days and look after him evenings and weekends. COVID-19 has been a major challenge because I'm not able to work if schools are closed.

I was recently diagnosed with multiple sclerosis (MS). Ten years ago, I lost my vision for a short while. After I had my son, half of my face was paralyzed for days. But I didn't see an MS specialist until about 2 years ago. Getting a diagnosis is like taking on another part-time job with all the appointments and testing you need to do. This is a struggle in my situation.

For example, I needed to get an MRI before I could start MS treatment. But it kept getting scheduled when I had no

child care. I would get the appointment notification in the mail, and I would call the booking line and ask to move it to a weekday. I would then get another letter in the mail with it being scheduled again on an evening or weekend. This went on for almost 2 years across about 10 appointments.

I kept explaining my situation but quickly realized that the system didn't see me as a single mother working to make ends meet. I developed a reputation at the MRI department as a "difficult patient." My specialist started to think I wasn't taking my diagnosis seriously.

I am terrified of being sick. But I am also a mother. I don't know why the health care system makes me choose what is more important to me. But if you make me choose, I'm choosing my son every time.



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