

Interview with Moya (Seymouria)

Aliya: Hi! What's your name?

Moya: My name is Seymouria!

Aliya: How old were you when you had your first child?

Moya: I was 17 when I got pregnant and 18 when I had her.

Aliya: How did you feel when you found out you were pregnant?

Moya: I was actually so excited. At the time I was living on the street, I was living in a youth shelter, but I was so excited. I literally had nothing to my name but I was so happy that I was going to be a mom.

Aliya: That's beautiful. What was something that you heard from others when you told people you that you were pregnant?

Moya: One comment that stuck to me was that "You're going to ruin your life", which you hear all the time. It stuck to me because it was my mom who actually said it. So I figured, what? Did having me ruin your life? Did having my siblings ruin your life? so you know, she said "Don't have too many kids because it's going to stop you from doing what you wanna do". A lot of the time people tell me "Oh why? You're so young! You're going to ruin your shape!". I don't care about my shape. A lot of things. It's more so because it came from people that were close to me, who I thought would be there for me. There are basic things you hear like, "why? kids are this, kids are that". Well you know what it's my choice, I wanted to, you know? At the end of the day, once you know, and if I tell you I'm having a baby, then the baby is already here, there is nothing more you can really do about it. If you know, then there's no stopping it.

Aliya: It's just supporting that choice that you made, which is insanely important. Who was there for you as support during this time, and was there anyone who wasn't?

Moya: My really close friends at the time. I was going to school in Scarborough, it was Mary and David Thompson. So I had my clic, my three girls and they were the best! Throughout the whole pregnancy they were like "Oh I'm Auntie!", babysitting, even until this day we still rock with it. They were a big support, I already knew they were going to be amazing. Even though it wasn't the life that they chose for themselves, you know they didn't want kids at that age but they were like "Mouria you're the perfect person to be a mom right now. I'm so happy". They were there, taking me out to eat all the time, going out for brunch, those are my girls. Even the girls I was rocking with since like grade 9 when I was living in the west end, everyone who I thought was going to be there was mostly there. My sister-in-law Jasmine, she was amazing. Out of the family I feel like she was my number one supporter because her first thing when I first told her I was pregnant, her first question to me was "Are you happy?". She didn't care about anything, she didn't care how young I was, she didn't care about where I was living, I loved that, all she cared about was, "Are you Happy?". And I said yes, and from then on it was "I'm happy for you!". Even when I had Naiyah, she was like "Are you Happy? Is this what you want?" and I said yes. So then she said "ok then girl do it!".

Aliya: I love that

Moya: I love it too, even to this day it brings tears to my eyes, because she's so sweet.

Aliya: It's so important to have those people in your life no matter what you're going through, it's huge. Did anyone say anything that was unkind or that was surprisingly kind? Anything that kind of shocked you that you heard once you had given birth?

Moya: Nothing that really shocked me, lots of the time people were telling me “No more after this, no more after this”. If I wanna have 20 kids I’m going to have 20 kids! It’s my life, it’s my body! It’s always family telling me “don’t do this, don’t do that. You and your boyfriend are not going to make it.”, all of that negative talk.

Aliya: That’s really interesting. Has your experience with motherhood effected you and your life in any way that you never expected it to?

Moya: No not really, I would say that I’m more outgoing. Well maybe not more outgoing, I was always the type of person who would just tell you how it is, I didn’t care about hurting your feelings, but now I pick and choose my battles. Before I would be quick to bounce back and retaliate but now I’m like, it’s not worth it, I have my kids, and it’s not worth losing them. Especially if I’m with my kids, I’m not going to go out of my way like I would back when I didn’t have my daughters. It matured me, because it helped me realize that life is short, you’re not always going to be able to just run around with your friends and stuff like that. It opened my eyes. I was doing a lot of foolish things before I had my kids. I was just skipping school, I was smoking every day, I didn’t really care, I’d barely go into work. When I found out I was pregnant, I was like “No”. I want a better life for her, I know exactly what I wanted for my kids. It pushed me. I made sure I went to my prenatal classes, I made sure I had my place before I had her. I wanted all of these things to be set in place so that my daughter would be great, and I wouldn’t have to worry about anything.

Aliya: That’s amazing, it really shows how it forces you to grow up.

Moya: In a good way you know?

Aliya: Absolutely, in a great way! Do you struggle with Mental Illness, did that effect your pregnancy or after giving birth?

Moya: I’ll be honest with you, I never really knew much about mental illness, it was something where even if I was going through it, I probably wouldn’t know. I did have my postpartum depressions here and there with my first, not so much my second. I currently feel like I might be because my sister recently passed so a lot of things are going on, but I’m ok I have a great support system, my boyfriend is amazing. He helps me whenever I need to, whenever I need a day to myself he watches the girls for me. Even my mom, our relationship is better so I have an amazing support system. No matter what, I’m never alone.

Aliya: I’m glad that you have all of those people who are there for you because that’s everything. What are common preconceived ideas and stereotypes that you’ve heard from others on young parenthood while you go through it yourself that you found to not be true for you?

Moya: The biggest thing was that “Your life is over, your life is ruined, you’ll never be able to do anything. Single moms don’t finish their education”. It’s completely not true! I was in grade 11 when I got pregnant with my first daughter and of course I dropped out of school. I stopped going to school because I was pregnant. I was still trying to go to school with her when I was pregnant but I was in and out. After I had her, life was more consistent, I reconnected with Jessie’s Centre. For those who don’t know what Jessie’s centre is, it’s called The June Callwood Centre for young women. It was founded by June Callwood. It’s basically a place for young women who are parenting, pregnant, or who think they might be pregnant. They’ll help support you with every aspect. So I connected with them and I’m currently on my last credit for high school, so I will be graduating this year! In February I start my Police foundations course, because I want to be a Police Dispatcher. All the people who told me I wasn’t going to do anything, that my life was over... my life just started when I had my kids. It was the push I needed, and look I’m doing better than ever.

Aliya: That’s amazing and that’s such a cool career! So you are a mother, but you are a lot of other things as well, how else would you describe yourself?

Moya: Funny and independent! My mom always instilled in me independence. I'd ask her to help me with something and then she'd say "what if I wasn't here? I'm not always going to be here so do it yourself". So that was one thing she instilled in me. Very independent, very outgoing, responsible, I'm a cool person, I'm chill, and I love life. I enjoy life, you know? I'm always happy. People always say I'm always smiling always bubbly! Of course from my children, but I just enjoy life, I don't like being around negative people! I'm always open to new things, even something you could get in trouble for doing, lets do it! I'm a person, often times people look at you just as a young mom, and think you're irresponsible, but I'm a human being, I still deserve respect, and I still respect people. I'm just a person.

Aliya: I love everything you're saying, it's fantastic. How do you think people can support their friends and family and help to challenge other's stereotypes and judgements on the experience of young parenthood? Specifically young motherhood?

Moya: The number one thing would be just to support them. Even if it's not what you wanted for them, or how you saw their life going, remember that it's their life. As long as they're not doing anything that's going to get them in trouble or kill them, let them live their life, be happy for them and support them 100%, unconditionally. Second, support other people you see too, a lot of times I'll be on the bus or the train and people are looking at me weird, or my kids are crying so people will say things like "oh your kids are hungry". My kids are not starving! I know my kids are tired and fussy, but they always think that because your child is crying they have to be starving and you haven't fed them for days. No, my kid is crying because she is tired and she's trying to fight her sleep, so I'm going to let her cry it out! If you see that in person, then try and go to that person and say "hey are you ok? do you need any support right now?". Or even just to be that person who is looking out for them. For me, I'm a breastfeeding mom. I always say breastfeed if you can. I'm an advocate for breastfeeding without having to cover yourself up. I hate when people start to say something, and I'm already like "no I do not! [need to cover up]". So if I see someone on the train and they're breastfeeding, then I'm always scouring the train wondering who's going to say something because I'm ready to stand up. So be that person. You don't have to know the person being harassed, you just have to say "leave them alone!". Vouch for them, advocate for them.

Aliya: Did you use any resources from organizations or groups to help you through your pregnancy and beginning of motherhood? If so, did you find them helpful and accessible?

Moya: In the beginning, when I had my first daughter Egypt, I was barely using their resources. When I first walked into Jessie's, they gave me the toy they give to everyone and then I didn't walk back in. I didn't really know what to expect when I went there, I wasn't comfortable because I didn't know anyone there so I didn't really go often. But when I started to go, I started using everything! To this day I use everything. They have a room in there, they call it the swap shop, so you can bring things yourself if you want, but you're not obligated to. It's a room where they get donations for clothes and toys for your baby, and sometimes yourself. I swear half of my children's clothes came from there! Sometimes they'd get donations from H&M, Carters, this cute stuff! I've also used their housing program, they helped me when I was with Egypt's father when things went south with him. I wanted and needed to move. I reconnected with their housing worker there, and she helped me get the place I'm living in now. So it was amazing. I've used their PCC, which is their Parent Child Centre. Basically it's a drop in day care, I'm in and out of there, they know Egypt by heart, Egypt loves that place. I've used their counselling centre. It's kind of like in school how you have your guidance counsellor. That's your one person you connect with all of the time if you need anything. My counsellor has been so supportive, honestly I love Reggie, she is amazing. No matter what I need help with she's there. When I needed court for custody of my daughter, she was there, when I needed support just to talk to someone, she always listens to me. Any papers to get faxed or signed she would drop what she was doing and help me with what I needed to do. Even if she had a deadline, she would say "no, you come first. My clients come first." She's honestly amazing, she's the best person and I'm so grateful for her. I'm currently in Jessie's school program, and the teacher there Linn is amazing! I just love Jessie's! Everyone at Jessie's has done so much for me and my family. Linn has been so supportive. Jessie's is geared to how you learn so you can learn 5 credits in 1 month, or 2 credits in 3 months, it's just based on how fast you learn and what you need. Everyone can be doing their own thing, everyone can be doing their own thing, she teaches about

twelve courses so everyone's doing a whole different course. It's all based on you, and she [Linn] has been so supportive, anything I need, if I have doctor's appointments or I'll be coming in late, she's totally cool and flexible, I love it. So that's really been helpful in terms of helping me reach my goals. I'm a mom, so I'm always going to be late because my kids will get food on their outfits so I'll have to change them again before leaving the house, or they wake up sick, or I need some days off.

Aliya: I'm so glad this resource has been so fantastic.

Moya: I know! I'll be on the bus and I'll see a young mom, and I'll be like "How old are you? Do you know about Jessie's?"

Aliya: That's amazing I love that! What advice do you have for young moms who are expecting?

Moya: I say if you're 19 years of age or younger, apply to Jessie's. Call them, even just walk right in and say "Hey I want to be a participant". They're so supportive they'll even see you on the spot if they have the time. But also, do what you want to do. Live your life, don't care about what anyone else has to say, and negativity. It could come from your parents, it could come from people who you love and who've supported you your whole life. Do what makes you happy, you're the only person who can live your life. You know what is best for your child or your potential child. Don't let anyone, even doctors, don't let their opinions of you or how you should be living your life effect how you live your life. Be confident in yourself. Be confident in your parenting style. You know what is right for your child, you know what is right for you and your life you know? Don't let anyone try and tell you anything.

Aliya: Is there anything else you'd like to share?

Moya: Don't be stuck in the mindset that you have to be married or with the father of your child because you want your kids to grow up in a 2 parent household. Don't be stuck in that mindset because it limits you, you could be taking in abuse and that negativity and that toxic relationship just for the sake of your kids. It's not going to benefit your kids at all. I left a toxic relationship, and yes my boyfriend now is not the father of both of my kids, he's the father of one. He's not biologically my first daughter's father but he *is* her father because he is here for her, supporting her and loving her as if she was his own. I'm so much happier now than if I had stayed in a horrible relationship. So be open to the fact that it's not always going to go as planned, nothing goes as planned. Have a plan and a goal but know that it might not play out the way you planned it, and I feel like if my life went the way I planned it, it wouldn't be as great as it is right now. Thank you!!

Aliya: Thank you so much!