I was recently inspired by a notable sports broadcast figure who relayed a story about a moment in his
life that ended up changing the lives of others because he allowed his life to “go off script”. I want to
steal that and adapt it to our story.

In our first Faith Witness Story, I discussed how God used our beautiful daughter Leah to bring us back
to the Church. Leah was always in His plans for us… in His “script” if you will. And when I wrote about our
experience, I said it would take me many more pages to tell the story of how Leah came into our lives.
Well, Deacon Paul asked us to share that story and I promise not to make it “many more” pages. Maybe
just a couple!

Jenn and I wrote our script just like many of us have. Our storied life would start out with marriage, then
a house, a dog, two kids, and someday we’d retire from successful careers and enjoy our grandchildren.
The script was going as planned until suddenly, it wasn’t.

Our family endured the pain of 4 lost pregnancies. Events we’d never dream of writing into our script.
We were understandably demoralized. How could we go on when the biggest part of our plan wasn’t
going to happen for us? But we began, with much strength and family support, to write a new script.

Several months after our final loss, a family member came to us in the midst of an unexpected
pregnancy herself. Feeling like she wasn’t ready for the responsibility of single motherhood, she asked us
to consider adopting her child. We were taken completely off guard. Both Jenn and I had many
discussions long before we were married about the possibility of adoption, but never gave serious
consideration. However, when presented with this life changing opportunity, we KNEW we had to do it.

We immediately contacted the Lund Family Center to begin our application and interview process. For
those of you not familiar with the adoption process; it’s intimidating to say the least. There are several
checks and balances because after all, no one wants a child placed into an unhealthy or unsafe living
situation. So, we began the interviews with the Social Worker, background checks and home inspection.
Mid-way through the process, my family member found the resources she needed to provide herself and
her son the life they deserved. Quick fast forward to the end of that story – he’s almost 11 years old now
and both he and his mom are doing FANTASTIC!

Of course, we were happy that the story was ending well for mother and child, but we were again forced
off script and it took a little wind out of our sail. Nevertheless, we continued through the adoption
interview process. We were challenged with difficult questions we never imagined having to consider.
The biggest of all, could we, beyond the shadow of a doubt, raise a child of a different race? Our initial
answer was, “Of course! A life is a life. What human on earth couldn’t love another human in need of
care and protection?” But the answer wasn’t that simple. We were challenged to ask ourselves; would
we be OK possibly being judged by people of both races? Would we be OK accepting cultural differences
as our child grew? Would we be able to understand racism from our child’s point of view? Would we be
OK not knowing key hereditary answers about our child? Would we be OK with a biological parent who
wanted visitation rights? Ones who wanted to go unknown. Suddenly, we were looking at a much deeper
soul search than we expected. Who’s to know how a person would react to a situation they have no
experience with? Who can predict what events in our lives we’ll face and which ones we won’t? These
simple facts alone helped us make our decision.

Author: Brian Sumner
Go Off Script

If our life had followed the original script, who’s to say we wouldn’t have been challenged? Of course, we would face the unknown. Every parent does. Every child develops into their own person and from a parent’s perspective, you’re going to adapt to it all. The good, the bad, the failures and the successes. So, we decided we would first educate ourselves on interracial families through public panel discussions and any literature we could find. We sought out the advice of friends and family members with experience in adoption. We wanted to be ready not to just handle the moments life would throw at us, but we wanted to UNDERSTAND them better too.

Finally, the end of our multi-month-long application and interview process came to an end and we were granted permission to adopt a child. At the time, we were told because we were open to any gender, any race, and from anywhere Lund had a relationship, we wouldn’t wait very long. The expectation was 9-12 months. That was in early October 2010. My cell phone rang on March 11th, 2011 – less than 5 months after concluding the interview process.

“Brian. This is ‘the call’! There is a little baby girl in Philadelphia waiting for you guys to go get her.” The call happened just as the social worker promised it would; in the middle of a typical, routine day and it would forever change our lives. We were told she was an African American girl born to a single mother who chose us because our profile showed the “perfect life” and because, like Jenn, her name was also Jennifer. Though we never spoke directly to her (as she wished), she asked that we somehow incorporate the name, “Amina” into our daughter’s name because in her religion it meant, “Faithful”. So, we drove to Philadelphia, PA to meet a 9-day-old Leah Amina-Claire Sumner. A strong “Lioness” with “Faith” and “Clarity”.

She was sleeping in a little bassinet, in a small house just outside of the city. An angel of a lady, who had done this HUNDREDS of times before, handed over a sleeping baby girl that instantly wrapped herself around our hearts. In that moment Jenn and I, husband and wife, became Dad and Mom. Titles only months before we thought we’d never own. We were 4-time parents because life begins at conception. However, now there was someone to call us Dad and Mom.

We spent 4 days at the Crown Plaza on the outskirts of the city while Pennsylvania and Vermont exchanged the proper legal documents that would permit us to travel with Leah. We frequented the Target around the corner because as any parent knows, you think you have everything until you realize you need everything. By day 4 the States of Pennsylvania and Vermont gave us permission to legally cross state lines with our baby daughter. So, we made the long drive on a beautiful, warm spring day. We brought Leah home for several days of meeting family and friends. People who had supported us though our tragedies had suddenly become Aunts, Uncles, Cousins, Meme, Pepe, Mema and Papa. Just as she did to us, Leah stole their hearts upon first impression. She was ours. Biological or not. Adopted or not, she is ours 100%.

Leah has been in our lives for more than 10 years now. She wouldn’t be here if we had stuck to our script and declined the notion of adoption. Thankfully, we went off script. And as any parent can relate, she forces us to live off script every – single – day! But what we’ve learned since God and Leah brought us back to the Church is that just because we go off our script, it doesn’t mean we’re going off His script. It’s OK to dream, plan and prepare, but allow yourself to go off script when it’s offered. You’ll never know why He’s asking you until you do. Live with Faith and there will be Clarity. God bless you all. Thank you for reading.

Author: Brian Sumner