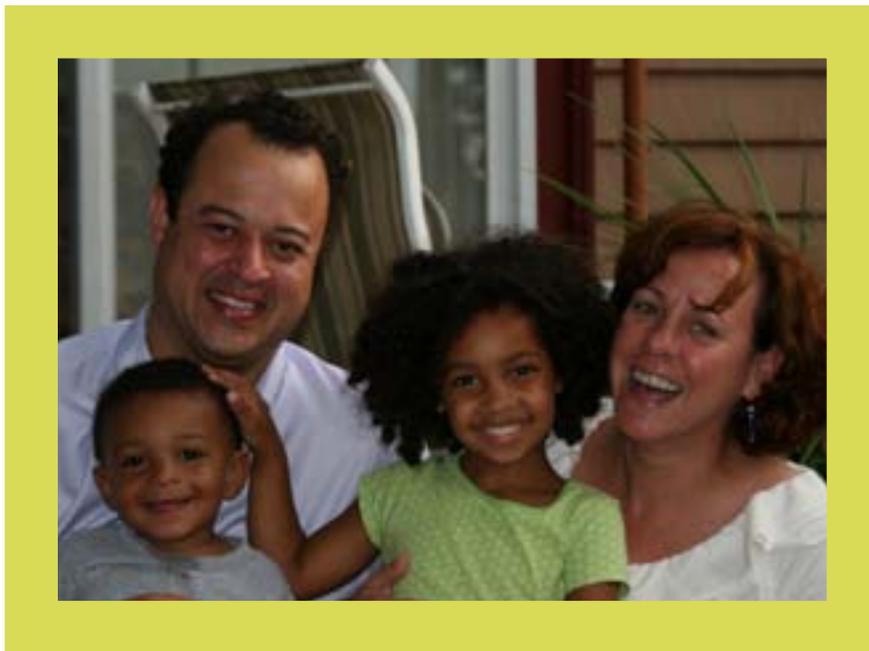


## **Pact Family Stories**

### **Long-Distance Pact Story - The McMullens**



Amanda and Quentin McMullen live in Rhode Island, where Amanda was born and raised. She jokes that to a Rhode Islander, any place that takes more than ten minutes to reach is considered "far away." So it took a tremendous leap of faith for them to decide to work with Pact, based on the opposite coast in Oakland, CA. But the more they explored their options, the clearer it became that Pact was right for them.

After confronting infertility and choosing to pursue adoption, Amanda and Quentin had to figure out what was most important to them. Amanda wanted the experience of raising a child from infancy. Quentin, who is biracial, wanted a child with whom he could share the racial experience of "balancing between two worlds, two cultures." They both wanted to know as much as possible

about the child they adopted and didn't want their child to grow up disconnected from the value of their birth heritage. It became clear that domestic open adoption was the best way to create the family they wanted.

As they attended adoption conferences and classes, they began to notice that whenever the topic was children of color, Pact was invariably mentioned. They went to one workshop on the subject where all the materials came from Pact. Still, California seemed impossibly far away. They began to work with an agency in the Midwest, but the agency wasn't really set up to work with out-of-towners. They decided to contact Pact.

From the beginning, Amanda recalls, "we could tell we were a Pact family." After completing an

initial questionnaire, they had a two-hour phone conversation with Pact staff, who clearly laid out the steps of how they would work with Pact long-distance. Quentin and Amanda were struck not only by the thoughtful way the matching would work, but by the insightful questions they were asked. For instance, Quentin says, "I told them I am a slow, deliberate decision-maker. They pointed out that sometimes adoption decisions need to be made very quickly, so I needed to think about how I would handle that."

And so Quentin and Amanda's bicoastal adoption journey began. Their home study and adoption preparation classes were completed in Rhode Island. Meanwhile, they worked closely with Pact to put together their "dear expectant parent" packet. They read books from a Pact-recommended list. Pact staff provided coaching on how to explain open adoption to their own families.

Shortly after their file was activated, the call came from Pact: they had been matched with a biracial girl who had been born one month earlier. As much as Quentin and Amanda had been anticipating this moment, they were stunned by the news. So much for careful, deliberate planning—their baby was already here! Soon a hundred pages of medical records were spewing from the fax machine at Amanda's office. When a page appeared showing the baby's footprints, she began to sob.

Hurricane Ivan hit just as they were preparing to fly to Mississippi to meet their daughter, delaying their arrival by a week. When things finally got back to normal, Pact helped Quentin and Amanda explain the concept of open adoption to the birth mother's agency, who considered their desire to meet the woman "an interesting experiment."

In what they describe as a "surreal moment," Quentin and Amanda finally met their daughter Zoe in an Olive Garden parking lot, where she was handed to them by her foster mother. Then they went inside and met Zoe's birth mother and grandmother. They talked for hours and took lots of pictures. The grandmother said, "I thought this would be sad, but this has been a really, really happy day." As she was leaving, Zoe's birth mother turned to Amanda and said, "You are her mother. Don't let anyone tell you otherwise."

After Zoe turned two, Quentin and Amanda began seeking a second child. Following a yearlong wait, Pact called to let them know they had been matched with a woman in Florida who was seven and half months pregnant. They were about to leave for a vacation in Florida, so they were able to visit the expectant mother and father. Just a few weeks later, they got a second call: the baby was arriving early! They rushed back and were able to hold their son twelve hours after he was born. As all his parents gathered around, the conversation turned to choosing a name. When Quentin and Amanda suggested Cameron Matthew, his birth mother's face lit up: she loved the name Cameron and Matthew is her brother's name. Of all the people to whom they told the story of Cameron's naming, they feel it was Pact staff who best understood the importance of this moment.

Zoe is now five and Cameron is almost two. Amanda says, "Pact continues to be a part of our lives." She and Quentin have gotten advice from Pact on how to navigate communications with their children's birth parents; what to do when crises arise in the birth families' lives; what to tell their first child during the process of adopting a second; and how to answer their children's questions as they get older. This Rhode Island Pact family has yet to travel to California or meet any of the Pact staff in person, but one day, they say, "we really want to come to Pact Camp!"