



Administrative Office of the Courts



Tonya and Sameer Muhammad

An Adoption Story: the Muhammads

By Jeff Stidham | The 13th Judicial Circuit

Three weeks before their fifth anniversary, Ali and Tonya Muhammad began preparing for a new arrival: a baby boy destined to become one of their own. They welcomed young Marcus on Nov. 5, 2010, three days after his birth. Their anniversary.

And so began a two-year journey toward adoption that concluded Nov. 16 on National Adoption Day, when Marcus, now called Sameer, became part of a “forever family.”

Tonya Muhammad, who works for the 13th Judicial Circuit and is the mother of two girls, had always wanted a boy. Ali, the father of four, agreed to become a dad again.

But when their youngest child first came to live with them, they didn’t realize he would one day be their son. They did it for his birth mother. “It was all in the hope of helping out Mom and coming to her rescue,” Tonya Muhammad says.

Tonya and Ali came to know the woman through their mosque. Their close friends, Alec and Wanda Muhammad, even became godparents to the birth mother’s sons, Kahlid and Yusaf. The families together sought to help the woman through troubled times.

But within a year of Yusaf’s birth two years ago, the state removed the boys from their mother’s custody. She was seven months pregnant. Alec and Wanda took the boys in as foster children, but they didn’t know what to do about the coming baby. They turned, as their adoption agency says, “to their family in faith” – Ali and Tonya.

“When I looked at him in his crib and thought of him in foster care, it used to break my heart, with no family to embrace him, to envelope him in love,” Tonya says.

The two couples hoped the birth mother would be able to care for her children, but they soon realized that would not be possible. The fathers of her three children – Khalid born to one man, the other two to a second – were not as receptive. Eventually she failed to meet the requirements of the court, and Hillsborough Kids decided to seek to terminate the parents’ rights. An adoption agency, Devereux Florida, in partnership with Eckerd Community Alternatives, began to work with both families. Two years later, the adoptions are finalized.

Tonya is grateful for her co-workers who helped her in the early days after Sameer's arrival. They came to her aid with diapers, wipes and other gifts. "Most people have nine months to prepare for the birth of a child," she recalls. "I had three weeks."

National Adoption Day proved a milestone for both families. The publicity it generates has true power, Tonya says. "It is awesome. I feel that in spite of the length of time it took to go through this process, the day is absolutely necessary. The publicity it gets encourages other people to want to participate."

Her belief in adoption is so strong that if the birth mother becomes pregnant again, she would consider taking in that child. "I wouldn't want that child displaced. I'd want him or her safe. That outweighs the inconvenience or the extra financial burden."

But for now, she's happy with her newly adopted son.

"We're blessing him," Tonya says. "And he's a huge blessing to us."