

## **Episode 143: Samantha got a surprise baby**

Do you ever think about the children in your state who are currently in foster care?

Here in Florida, there are about 19,000 children living in foster care. That's a lot of kids. And in that group, there are about 500 children who have no identified families. Can you imagine how scary and lonely that must be, to be a child with no family at all, and only the government to try to take care of you and keep you safe?

There are a lot of different situations that can lead to that. But whatever happened, it's no fault of the child. They didn't ask to be born into a family of addicts, or criminals, or abusers, or maybe just someone who didn't want them. They're already starting off life with a disadvantage. It's not fair.

My guest today, Samantha, learned about the foster care system kind of by surprise. She and her husband, Jeremy, were living their lives and they had three young children of their own which kept them pretty busy. They were a happy family.

They didn't plan to suddenly be dealing with the foster care system – or more specifically, a process called “Family Placement”.

And it all started with an unexpected phone call about a baby.

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### **Scott**

Can you give us a quick summary of Hannah? I understand she's your sister-in-law - your husband's sister.

### **Samantha**

Yeah, Hannah is my husband's younger sister. They were raised in the same household and have the same mother, but different fathers. Growing up, Hannah was always kind of like a little bit of a bad child. She's kind of deceitful - was prone to lying for just kind of silly things. But as she got into high school and into her teenage years, she definitely started to get into substance abuse and the lying kind of veered more towards negative and destructive behaviors. So she got into a lot of trouble with school and was never able to get her license or anything like that. So that was kind of just really something that she struggled with - the substances - from an early age.

### **Scott**

I know a lot of teens go through periods like that, but you kind of hope they mature out of it. But it sounds like it kind of became a life trend.

### **Samantha**

Yeah. It never seemed to phase out at any point. Definitely, if anything, it just continued to get worse and it was kind of one of those difficult things where you see somebody you know continuing to make poor choices and go down a path that you know is not going to lead to anything super positive.

### **Scott**

When all this started, your oldest was in kindergarten?

**Samantha**

Yes.

**Scott**

Can you just describe who your family was at that time?

**Samantha**

So me and my husband Jeremy, we have 3 children. Our oldest, Jamie, was 5 at the time. We have a younger daughter who was 3, Maya, and then we have the youngest, Silas, who just turned 1.

**Scott**

Three little kids.

**Samantha**

Yeah, three little ones.

**Scott**

This was in the spring and you were at a kindergarten graduation. Can you tell us what happened that day?

**Samantha**

We were actually all standing out in line out front of my son's elementary school, waiting to get into a kindergarten graduation which we were all excited about. My dad was there with us. I got a phone call from an unknown number. I actually don't usually answer those, but I was in a good mood for whatever reason, just picked it up and it was Hannah, my sister-in-law, and she was calling to ask if we would consider taking in her 5-month-old daughter while she went to detox and rehab. Her daughter Arianna had ended up in the care of the state and she needed somewhere to go. They had a state meeting and decided that Jeremy and I would be the best choice in the family without having to move on toward out-of-family care.

**Scott**

I know you guys are very family oriented, but what was that discussion like between you and Jeremy? Did you guys just immediately decide to do it?

**Samantha**

Yes. I think, as the people we are— we both really love children and are very caring - so, of course. Regardless there was a baby who needed a place to live, of course, yeah, we'll take her. I mean, we don't even have a vehicle that can accommodate an entire family that large, but we just felt like, "Of course, if there's a baby in need and it's family, regardless of what's going on."

**Scott**

Yeah. I would think anyone who knows about a need like that with a baby would want to help in some way, especially in this case because it's family- right?

**Samantha**

Yeah. Like, you have a niece who has nowhere to live.

**Scott**

What are the considerations you had to think about in taking— because you already had one baby and the family. What did you have to consider in making this decision?

**Samantha**

I remember the biggest thing was the vehicle because we only had a 5-seater vehicle. So if we were to take on another child, we would've to take two vehicles everywhere we went, which is difficult in itself. Also, with childcare, that was really a consideration. We had our 3 kids in with a nanny and she had 2 of her own children as well. I don't know many childcare people who you can just spring on, like, "Hey, do you have room for an extra infant like that?" That's a lot to take on. So that was a really big thing that we had to consider. I mean, ultimately, it was just a baby who needed somewhere to go, so how do you say no to that?

**Scott**

Yeah, I know. I'm the same way. So what was the process? You told Hannah "Yes" verbally on the phone. What happened next?

**Samantha**

On the phone, I was like, "Yeah, I suppose so." I mean, how do you say no to that? She said that a caseworker would probably be in touch within the next day or so to kind of give us more information. So yeah, we had those kinds of questions over that night. The next morning, I actually had just gotten into work and logged in. It was just after 8 o'clock when I got a phone call from that caseworker and things moved very fast. She confirmed that 1) we were willing, 2) confirmed that we actually had a home to live in with enough space. Then, she asked basic background information and questions. She collected our personal information. So they ran background checks on us and did things. Then, she told me that an inspector would be by the house in 2 hours to come to check the home to see if it would qualify for a stay-at-home. So, yeah, that was crazy. Then, my husband got off work and ran home to clean up, not that we were super concerned about it, but it's a little nerve-wracking having a state inspector come into your house when you have 3 young kids and you just left the morning not planning on anyone walking in.

**Scott**

Exactly. Yeah. I mean, it's one thing if the family decides to come over - no big deal - but this is actually an inspection.

**Samantha**

Yeah, and we didn't really even know what they were looking for. We definitely did not have a bed or anything for Arianna or any, like, extra items, but they went ahead. They did the inspection. It was probably just before noon. I got a second call from the case worker that basically went, like, "Cool, everything's cleared off. When can you come pick her up?"

**Scott**

Unbelievable. That is a whirlwind of activity less than 24 hours earlier. None of this was even thought of.

**Samantha**

No, we didn't even know anything about it.

**Scott**

So you passed the inspection. Obviously, it seems like they're trying to kind of fast-track, rush this through. Did you get that impression? Like, how thorough was the inspection?

**Samantha**

Well, the inspection was mostly just them checking to make sure that it's generally clean - like, the general cleanliness of the home. There's no infestations, there's no animal urine or feces in the home. There's running water and functional toilets and a fridge that is stocked with food. Those are really what they check for - the bottom line is what they need. But yeah, it was very rushed because Arianna had actually been in a state nursery for three days at that point, so they were desperate to find a home for her to go into.

**Scott**

So you got a phone call saying, "Okay, when can you come and pick up the baby?" What did you do?

**Samantha**

I mean, I had to finish up what I was doing there at work as quickly as I could. Then, I rushed home and met with my husband, and we got down to one car and drove downtown to the Department of Youth and Families. We walked in and they just handed me a baby. They're like, "You're here for Arianna?" And we're like, "Yeah." Okay. So then I have this little baby in my arms and they had a diaper bag that they gave us. Then, we had to give them our IDs and sign two different things. There's a little real-quick papers and they're like, "All right, someone will be in touch in a few days. Thanks." I had to pause and ask them for a car seat. "Do you have a car seat? I don't have one or didn't bring it. It wasn't planned." If you were planning on picking up a child in a foster situation or something like that, maybe that was something you'd have planned for, but we didn't have anything for an infant.

**Scott**

You had a one-year-old. Would they use the same kind of car seat or is there a different one for—?

**Samantha**

They did, yeah. So, the two infant car seats - the ones you can, like, pull out of the car and tow around.

**Scott**

You said they gave you a diaper bag. Were there any supplies? Did you have anything like diapers or anything?

**Samantha**

The diaper bag had about 5-6 diapers in there. It had, like, a pack of wipes that had been used once or twice. It had a white onesie in there with, like, a basic baby blanket, a bottle, and a can of formula that was partially used. But they told me, "There's this formula, but we think this is, like, upsetting her stomach. We haven't been able to figure out what works best for her, but this is what we've been feeding her." That was it.

**Scott**

From just hearing you tell this, I'm feeling overwhelmed because it just happened so quickly. I mean, a lot of people might think, "Should we foster?" You might have weeks or months of conversations and research and preparation and everything, and here you are the next day with a new baby.

**Samantha**

It was 3 o'clock. We were driving home back to our apartment with Arianna in the car. We were just kind of mind blown, like, "What just happened?"

**Scott**

You had mentioned that, when you got back home, you noticed that Arianna was coughing a lot and you suspected some kind of illness. Did they give you any kind of medical history on that?

**Samantha**

We did not. We were told that she was seen by a state physician, but that was it. But yeah, she had a very concerning— like, it was an alarming cough - very, like, hoarse and wet-sounding - and it would go in fits. Think about it, she was a very small baby at this time. She was 5-month-old, probably about the size of, like, a 3-month-old baby at the time, so very small and frail with just these awful coughing fits. Her face would turn all bright red. So we actually ended up taking her into that urgent care that night. We didn't know what was going on. We just wanted to check her health.

**Scott**

And it's not like you guys are brand-new parents. You've been through this a few times. Kids get sick. You weren't just panicking, like, "What do we do?" You were experienced, so that was good. Let's back up a little bit. How did little Arianna end up in the custody of the state?

**Samantha**

In the following week, when we actually were assigned a state caseworker, she came over to our house to introduce herself and do what we would learn was a regular monthly meeting with her where she would come in and do a home inspection, give us any new information on the case, ask us all this information about Arianna, and how she was doing, and it was really just time to pass information back and forth. So what she told us was that Hannah and her husband, Lance - Arianna's parents - had been living in, like, an RV trailer and had been on the run from Idaho Police for the last few months. Lance had some previous convictions and issues with the law over in Idaho. We're in Washington state, just over the border. They had moved over here shortly after they had Arianna. They previously had been sober and sobriety was actually a very important thing in their life from the last time I had seen them. They had started using again and had really quickly gone down a negative path and were just getting deeper and deeper.

**Scott**

So when they went from Idaho to Washington, I assume it was outside of the guidelines of his parole?

**Samantha**

Yes. That broke his parole. That's why he was on the run - because he was in Washington versus Idaho.

**Scott**

Where were they living?

**Samantha**

They were living on some family's property in this RV.

**Scott**

Did the family know that they were avoiding police detection or do you know if they—

**Samantha**

I don't know.

**Scott**

That's not something you tell people, I guess, when you're looking for a place to stay.

**Samantha**

Right. It's all family and a lot of it was on Lance's family, so I would assume they would have to be somewhat informed, but I don't know what led to those decisions and how it got to that point. But I think it ultimately came down to Hannah and Lance having a baby and nowhere to live, and his family stepping in to just provide a roof over their head.

**Scott**

And you said they were actually dealing with drugs in some way while they were there?

**Samantha**

Yes. In the RV itself, there was production or cooking of various drugs. I don't know very much about illegal substances or drugs or anything really.

**Scott**

I don't either, except I'm picturing the RV from Breaking Bad where they were cooking meth inside.

**Samantha**

Yeah. Probably not nearly that sophisticated. I actually guarantee it's not nearly that sophisticated. But yeah, definitely was the manufacturing of drugs there and the use of them in a very small confined space.

**Scott**

I don't know much about it either but I know, in that production, I saw them always wearing gas masks to protect their lungs from breathing in that stuff. And you've got a 5-month-old baby living in that environment. It's no wonder she came to you with a bad cough.

**Samantha**

Yes. Yeah, exactly. And there was no real reason for the cough other than just the exposure.

**Scott**

So what happened to them?

**Samantha**

Lance had stolen a truck or a vehicle and, while under the influence, was driving and hit, like, a telephone pole, disabling the vehicle. This was all told by witnesses who saw this happen. They were in a house across the street, so they saw him hit this pole and disabled the truck. He got out. They said he looked kind of confused, paused for a second, reached back into the vehicle, and pulled out the infant carrier with Arianna in it. Then, he began to run away from the scene. Then, as he'd gone a few yards, he stopped again. They said he paused there for a while and then he set the baby carrier there on the side of the road and then he took off and ran. The witnesses were kind of shocked by this whole scene and had already been on the phone with authorities reporting what they were seeing. Once they were sure that they couldn't see Lance

anymore and sure it was safe, they went out and retrieved the baby and the baby carrier, and they held onto her until the police or authorities came and took Arianna away. But at that point, no one knew who Arianna was. She was just an unknown baby in the state care for 3 days.

Hannah was kind of MIA at this time. No one really knew where she was or what was going on. Hannah's grandmother got concerned enough in realizing that no one knew where Arianna was that she called the police. Then, somehow, they were able to track Hannah down, and then they pulled her into the office and confirmed identity. That's when they had that meeting where they were deciding— well, obviously we need to decide temporary care for the child. Hannah was also under the influence in the meeting - admittedly so - as well, so there was that immediate need to place a child with somebody because she was in— it's called the Vanessa Behan Crisis Nursery, which is just like a volunteer-led program in our town. It's a wonderful program, but they have huge numbers of infants that come through at all different stages of neglect, abuse, and health ranges. I mean, these babies are just kind of cared for by the volunteers there and passed around until they can figure out what to do.

**Scott**

To me, it's just astounding to be in that kind of a mindset of Hannah where your husband's gone and you don't know where he is, your baby is gone missing for 3 days, and it's someone else that calls the police to find out where the baby is rather than her own mother.

**Samantha**

I have to imagine there definitely got to be, like, shame and guilt in that. Like, you don't want to call and be, like, "Hey, my husband left my baby on the side of the road. Do you know where she is?" But I would definitely think the use of the drugs at the time and the level of intoxication played super heavily into it. I mean, neither one of them, I would believe, were thinking clearly or were straight-minded.

**Scott**

So Lance is gone. He's kind of out of the picture and on the run for 3 months. Hannah's going into rehab. That's when you got that phone call.

**Samantha**

Yeah. Well, in the original pitch, she was going to go into detox first and then go to an inpatient rehab. But going through that whole process— she has to go through and get admitted into these places and accepted, and also get her insurance to cover them. There are a lot of steps that the individual has to do on their own. When you're someone who's in the throes of addiction, you're not as put together to necessarily get those things done in a timely manner. So yeah, the idea was she was going to go straight into those things, but it did take a few months before she got any kind of treatment. Then, at that point, it started with outpatient.

**Scott**

How much of that backstory did she tell you when she first called you? Did you know any of that?

**Samantha**

None. Nothing.

**Scott**

Did you wonder why? When she told you Arianna has been in state custody for three days, you must have wondered, "Okay, what's the story there?" Did she even tell you that?

**Samantha**

Well, no. We didn't know how long she had been in state custody. So all of this happened. We got the call on a Wednesday. On Monday, Hannah's grandma and my husband's grandma, she had sent Jeremy a text or something saying that they didn't know where Arianna was, but we didn't have much contact with that side of the family just because of the lifestyle choices and things. We had a young family of our own, so we had pretty clear boundaries there. So we knew something was going on, but had no idea that it was anything as serious as it really was.

**Scott**

So now you have another little human living in your home. Obviously, you wanted to keep Arianna in a safe, nurturing environment while Hannah was detoxing. But I'm just wondering about the stress that this added to your family. Like, visitation— was Hannah allowed to come and see the baby sometimes?

**Samantha**

Yes. Visitations were allowed. That was something that got set up almost immediately. That's one of the first things the state does - coordinate with the parents - because it is their parental right to have visitations and see their child. That does not include coming to our house or anything like that. We actually aren't allowed to share our location with Hannah and Lance, more of just kind of a protection for the child. So what the state does is there are these different facilities around town that are set up specifically to hold and host visitations between parents and children. These families are split up, so it does create, like, a neutral zone where both parties can come. Depending on the level of monitoring that is necessary, they have staff there that can facilitate different parts. There are supervised visits, there are monitored visits, and then there are just observed visits as well, depending on the level that the state needs to be involved in that. The state would send a driver out to pick up Arianna wherever we happened to be at that given time. They would come, pick her up, take her to the visitation, and then bring her back to us wherever we happened to be.

**Scott**

So you really didn't have direct interaction with Hannah during that at all then?

**Samantha**

None. Hadn't seen her.

**Scott**

How was Arianna's health after that initial— when you thought she was kind of sick with a cough. Did that improve?

**Samantha**

It did. It took a few months throughout the rest of the summer, really. Probably at the end of the summer of 2017, she was back to a much more healthy infant and we wouldn't really notice anything different. We had nebulizers and albuterol treatments that we did multiple times a day, and that drastically changed things for her. It's really cute actually to have, like, a little 6-month-old baby who would get it. She would smile and be happy because she could breathe when she did the treatments. You'd think that kids would hate it or not be cooperative, but she obviously immediately correlated the benefits and she really enjoyed her treatments. So that made a huge difference. I mean, we kept her in our bedroom at night sleeping in her crib there too because she'd get into coughing fits and we'd get up and she'd be purple because she just would struggle to recover from that coughing to be able to breathe again. So we'd have to either go,



like, into the bathroom with the steam or go outside with the cold air or something to kind of change the air density to kind of shock our system back into breathing.

**Scott**

This is overseen by Child Protective Services. How closely did they monitor your care of Arianna?

**Samantha**

They would come to the house once a month and physically have eyes on the child and the environment. I spoke with the caseworker pretty frequently because Arianna was the ward of the state. So, although I was taking care of her and she was in my possession, I had no rights over her. So, if we went to the doctor, I had to have permission from the caseworker because they had to sign all medical documents and do all of those other parts. So there was a lot of communication. It's a lot of voicemails back and forth. It's incredibly difficult to get in touch with a caseworker because she's incredibly busy.

**Scott**

Yeah, they're overloaded too, right?

**Samantha**

Oh yeah. She's so overloaded - always, like, working on a backlog. "Sorry, I got this, this, and this done. Here you go." I mean, on the day-to-day, not a whole lot, they can at any time just come by unannounced.

**Scott**

And that's how it should be really for the protection of the child.

**Samantha**

Yeah. Oh, of course. Yeah.

**Scott**

It's expensive to have a child in your family. You mentioned car seats but, I mean, there's a whole lot of other stuff - food, clothing, and diapers. I mean, diapers can be, like, another car payment.

**Samantha**

Yes.

**Scott**

But foster parents get paid some kind of a stipend or you get reimbursed for that, right?

**Samantha**

Correct, if you were a foster parent. We were not foster parents though. We were family placement. As family placement, we didn't qualify for any additional benefits. Arianna, as a ward of the state, was an independent. Like, we couldn't claim her as a dependent of us because she's a dependent of the state. So she was covered under the state for her healthcare and health insurance. She qualified for WIC, which is Women's Infants and Children, which is a program in Washington state where she would get coupons to where we could get formula and baby food and then bigger, like, more foods once she got older. That was really it. Otherwise, it was on us to take care of it.

**Scott**

That's because you're family. I guess the assumption is that, if you're family, you're kind of obligated to take care of another family member. So you'd get all the supervision and regulations but it's all at your expense or the majority of it is at your expense.

**Samantha**

Correct, yeah. I think, yeah, like you said, there's that obligation to it. But I think it also goes to prevent families from profiting from caring for each other's children in a sense. I mean, that's a really backward, twisted way to look at it, but I think the state has to come at it from that point of view, unfortunately. You couldn't have, like, a family set up where you're like, "Oh, well I'll just give my mom custody and then she'll get paid to have the kid."

**Scott**

Yeah. Unfortunately, I know some people would think that way. You mentioned at one time that some family members kind of resented you for being a good parent for Arianna. Where would that come from?

**Samantha**

Yeah, so one of the things that, normally, you would never have to consider when raising a child is, like, titles. So we're raising an infant who is learning how to speak. She's learning how to make connections. She's learning how to ask for help. I'm learning, like, who the people around her are and those basic bonds in families. She's also being raised with our children. So, they call me and Jeremy, "Mom and Dad", and we treat her like our children. We wanted to treat her exactly the same as our children because that's such a fragile age and the brain is going through so much development that— I mean, any lack of connection or trauma that can happen then can really set someone back lifelong, and we'd never want a child to have some kind of complex. I just tried to put myself in a situation where, if I was a child growing up in a home surrounded by siblings who could call those adults caring for us "mom and dad", but I would be redirected to call them uncle or aunt or some other kind of form of care or title, I feel that would be really confusing. So we really thought it was important for Arianna's ultimate well-being that she would be raised just like she was in any other home. So she grew up calling me Mom and Jeremy, Dad, and our other children were her siblings. It was really upsetting to some other family members to hear Arianna call us Mom and Dad. They didn't understand the reasoning behind it and felt it was more of us just being overstepping bounds versus caring about the long-term effects on the child.

We had an incident where Hannah's family came over for dinner and Arianna just started speaking. So she could say, like, "Mama" or "Dada" or "Hi" - those kinds of things - and they were holding on to her. I walked by and she said, "Mama," and reached out to me. I took her and they were like, "Oh no, Auntie Sam." Then, I corrected them. I was like, "No, I'm mom. For her, right now, that's just her reality." And they left. It was very upsetting. So it's just difficult to think of it from all different perspectives because I also agree, like, I don't want to step on anyone's toes. I'm not trying to take Arianna from Hannah or take that title of mom from her, but that is the role that I'm playing.

**Scott**

You're the one that stepped in and took the baby when she was asking for it. From Arianna's perspective, she's calling you mom but, then, she's being visited by this other person who she also was supposed to call mom. That had to just add another layer of confusion to it.

**Samantha**

There was, definitely, along the visitation. It was confusing. It was complex because, as Arianna aged, her reactions changed. Obviously, she becomes more perceptive, she understands more of what's going on, and she realized she's being taken away to something else and then coming back, but it's something that she also knows no one else in the family does. We were always very open about talking about Hannah and Lance - it was Mama Hannah and Daddy Lance - and we were very honest with the discussion of that. "They just made poor choices. So Mommy Hannah has to go and do some work on herself so that she could get into a place where she could take care of her daughter or herself. Daddy Lance made really poor choices and now he's in prison for a few years."

**Scott**

The other interesting situation here is that Arianna and your youngest child were pretty close in age, so I'm guessing they probably learned a lot of things at the same time like walking, talking, and potty training. Was that how that played out?

**Samantha**

All of it. Silas and Arianna, they're both 2016 babies, literally 42 weeks apart. I mean, it just barely could have been possible for them to be biologically related, but they were very close from the beginning. If you've never seen two, like, infants and toddlers interact with each other in a genuine way, it is the best joy ever. Like, they create their own little language and they play games and communicate and support each other. It's just so heartwarming and wonderful. I absolutely love it - having two children that young at the same time or having twins. I would never wish that on anyone. It is literally twice as hard in every possible way, but that relationship and seeing just that bond that happens between the babies is so magical. They really were connected at the hem. We had our bigs - we had Jamie - and our littles - our Silas and Arianna.

**Scott**

Did it seem like Hannah was making progress in rehab?

**Samantha**

Unfortunately, no. She would go in and out of a lot of programs in that first six months to a year. She really tried her best to get by with qualifying through outpatient programs and doing meetings and things like that to try and qualify to get to meet the state requirements. But yeah, ultimately, she did really struggle to finish any individual program.

**Scott**

So you started planning on adopting Arianna. What did that process look like?

**Samantha**

Yeah. In November of 2018, it'd been about 18 months since the case had been opened. Hannah had, at that point, failed to finish any program, so the state went ahead and filed for termination or petitioned the court to terminate parental rights, and they provided us with an adoption attorney. But we had written up an adoption agreement to Hannah and to present to Hannah and Lance basically saying that we will be taking over custody. It would be open adoptions. Then, there were stipulated, like, visitations throughout that and communications of progress and things as far as that goes with a typical adoption. That was all presented to the court. So this is all in the juvenile court system at this point. So the state is presenting this to them saying, "We want to take this to the state court to actually move forward with filing." At that point, Hannah and her attorney were— it kind of just got Hannah into taking it more seriously at that point. She agreed. She went into an inpatient program and that just kind of started another process of her going in and out of programs.

**Scott**

It sounds like she was trying. It sounds like she doesn't want to lose her child.

**Samantha**

No, she didn't.

**Scott**

But the grip of addiction was just too strong and she'd been that way for too long.

**Samantha**

It really was when it came down to her getting kicked out of programs, it was because of very silly, minuscule things. Like, it wasn't even necessarily that she was discontinuing to use. It was her just continuing to disregard, like, house rules repetitively, and they're like, "Well, if you can't follow the rules, you can't be here."

**Scott**

It almost sounds like self-sabotage.

**Samantha**

It is. It is very much self-sabotage. I mean, at one point, she was doing really well. She had actually completed an inpatient program and was in an Isabella house. It's kind of like a recovery house for mom. It's not a halfway house. They still have all their programs and it's still full care, but she lives there. It's just kind of a little step down. She was doing very well there and had actually gotten on track and was getting overnight visitations with Arianna at that point there at that home. She came back one day with a lighter in her pocket and got kicked out because you can't come back into the house with a lighter.

**Scott**

Was she not allowed to even smoke at all? Or did that indicate use of cocaine? What was the reason for not having a lighter?

**Samantha**

I think they were completely sober. They weren't allowed to have any lighters on premise. So, they are just kind of silly things, when it really comes down to it, which is really frustrating on our side because we want to see finality to this. We just want the constant, like, up and down, like, "Are we mom and dad? Are we not mom and dad? Are we looking, like, five years in the future? Are we looking, like, two years in the future?" And just really trying to find some kind of consistency. Witnessing someone just to have that self-sabotage and make those silly or seemingly silly mistakes that hold them back is really disheartening and really difficult.

**Scott**

This all kind of culminated in the spring of 2020. Of course, that's just as Covid was starting. What happened then?

**Samantha**

Spring of 2020. Again, that had been two years after we initially brought a petition for termination. In early 2020, the court agreed. They said, "Okay, I'm sorry. Enough is enough. You have yet to again complete a full program. We are going ahead and moving this forward to the state court and moving forward with termination." What that just means is that's just going to start another court proceeding. It doesn't mean anything is final by any means. It just moves the

next step up the ladder. So that was really encouraging for us just to kind of see that end in sight.

**Scott**

At that point, how long had you had Arianna?

**Samantha**

Three years. So we'd had her for three years in our home. She definitely was part of our family.

**Scott**

Yeah. That was the family that she knew.

**Samantha**

Yeah, exactly. That's where we were. So we were looking forward to going into that season and just starting that next step of the process. Then, Covid and lockdown happened. As many of us know, the court systems had to close, they had to remove, like, most non-emergent things off of the dockets to try and get, like, priority cases through during those times. So they were trying to go through and really kind of prioritize things, and that went down. Even the Department of Youth and Children or CPS was doing the same kind of thing, looking through their files, trying to whittle it down to a more manageable caseload within new health constrictions. Even with Hannah's inpatient program that she was in— I don't know how many women were living there at the time, but they had to close their doors and they were doing some kind of fast-tracking of progress. I don't know if they were just, like, dumping lessons really fast on these ladies or what really was going on, but Hannah was actually able to complete a 6-month program in 4 months prior to that next court date. So then, since they're looking at things that are emergent and they're like, "Well, she did complete a program, so there's no reason we can't bring it to the state court now because, now, she's complying and it'll just get denied." So all in all, they decided just to go ahead and give Arianna back to Hannah with some loose oversight.

**Scott**

That just had to be heartbreaking.

**Samantha**

Yeah. And it was just quick. It all happened very quickly over one phone call, "Hey, this is what's happening. We're going to do this. We're going to have a call in two weeks with all the different parties involved - like, all the different attorneys and workers - and we're going to figure out a transition back process." It's not healthy to take a child and just, all of a sudden, pick them up and move them to a different place. Like, now this is your home. Typically, they try to kind of, like, go into it slowly - start with weekend visits and maybe two nights, and then it'll be three nights, and then it'll be four nights. Then, over a few months, they kind of just gradually start living at that new home more and more. With the constraints of Covid, we couldn't have her leaving and going into an unknown home with unknown people and then coming back over and over. Unfortunately, it was just a "Pick her up, take her."

**Scott**

How did your other children handle that?

**Samantha**

I mean, it was just heartbreaking, really, for everyone. Like I said, we had been very honest and open with our kids that bad choices had been made and that's why we were in this situation. So they had a loose understanding of, like, responsibility and who was making the right choices

and what a safe home would be. So they really were upset because, also, they didn't agree. They didn't think she was going to be safe and they didn't want their sister to go and not see her again. To go and to be in a bad environment was really difficult.

**Scott**

I know you had mentioned that Jeremy, your husband, feels guilty just because it's his side of the family causing the issues. Was he able to work through that? Because, obviously, it's not his fault.

**Samantha**

No, not at all. But that was a really difficult thing for him to overcome, even from the beginning of the process. I mean, this was so stressful and taxing on us and, like, the whole family and the whole three years, as wonderful as it was. So it was in those, like, difficult times where it would be affecting me and my mental health, and he would be like, "I'm just so sorry. I'm sorry that my sister made these choices or I'm sorry that my family's crazy and is treating us this way." Growing up, like I said, there wasn't a lot of supervision, so he did a lot of raising of his sister. So him having that, like, responsibility over her and then just to see her grow up and continue to make poor choices has been really hard for him to kind of overcome. He had to accept that wasn't his responsibility.

**Scott**

I can see that now though. The way you phrased that, it's like he partially raised her and now it turns out that, as her brother, he was a bad parent in some way,

**Samantha**

Right, yeah.

**Scott**

Wow. Have you had any contact at all with Hannah or Arianna since the day that she left?

**Samantha**

We have not, no, and that's probably one of the most difficult parts. Well, gosh, that's a complicated question to even answer. No, we haven't seen her at all. I would love to see her, but that also is incredibly terrifying. Like, I just don't know. The last time I saw her, she gave me a hug, kissed me, and said, "Bye, mommy. I love you." Now, I would just be coming into it as a different role, which would be difficult for me at this point because it's gone now. It's been three years. I think that's a lot more difficult now. Originally, of course, I would've wanted to, and we did want to. We actually had a schedule of, like, video visits that were going to be part of that transition process but Hannah— I mean, once Hannah got Arianna back, she cut off all ties. I've been completely blocked from everything since then. She has always just kind of perceived me as a threat to her motherhood, which I understand. Like, I really do understand.

**Scott**

I can understand it too. I mean, you were starting legal action to take her child into your family.

**Samantha**

Yeah, I did. And then, I was the better mom for X period of time, which is difficult.

**Scott**

How old is Arianna now?

**Samantha**

She is 6.

**Scott**

And what do you know about Hannah ? Does she live somewhere local to you?

**Samantha**

They do. They are still in the same town. Although I'm blocked and haven't had, like, any direct communication as family, even with the complex family dynamics, we have heard things from others. I do know that there was a long period between 2021 and 2022 when Hannah and Arianna were homeless. They were living in different shelters around town. So that's extremely difficult to know and there's nothing you do about it. Well, I mean, even if you were to call and say something, you can be homeless and not get your parental rights taken away. Like, that doesn't mean that you don't deserve to have your child. It's just difficult to know when you could provide something more or better. I mean, gosh, even that's complicated though too because I want the best for them. I want Hannah to succeed and I want her to be a wonderful mother, but I also want Arianna.

**Scott**

Have you thought about how you would handle it if you just ran into her in public somewhere, like at the grocery store?

**Samantha**

I do. I think about it a lot when I'm driving through town because I drive through parts of town where I know they probably are or likely to be. And yeah, I don't know, it just makes me nervous. I don't know if Arianna would recognize me. I don't know what Hannah would do. I mean, Hannah could put a smile on her face and be all happy or she could, like, make a scene. I mean, it's just kind of unpredictable in that sense. I don't know where she is in her journey right now.

**Scott**

It would be uncomfortable for everyone, it sounds like.

**Samantha**

Yes.

**Scott**

An unexpected encounter anyway.

**Samantha**

Yeah. Yeah, definitely. But a bridge I hope to cross at some point.

**Scott**

Looking back on all that has happened, would you have done anything differently?

**Samantha**

No. It's so hard looking back. There was so much pain in all of it and so much emotion - like, the extremes of all the emotions - throughout the whole process and then really the grief of her leaving. That's been so hard to explain because people will still come by and they'll be like, "Oh, Didn't you have another one?" And I'm like, "Oh yeah, well, I don't anymore." But no, I don't think I would do anything different. Me and Jeremy have really grown close through this - and

our whole family as a whole. We're all very open with each other and vulnerable, and very open with our emotions as a family, which is something that we were kind of forced into going through this process. I mean everything really just happens for a reason. Truly, my faith is really important to me, and I know God has been here through me through all of this and has really helped me and Jeremy grow and given us such a great, like, support group in our community here. It's just kind of, like, a funny thing. Dates are funny - like, how things line up - or, like, coincidences. Me and my husband were actually getting baptized at the exact time that Arianna was being born at the exact same time, which is very just kind of interesting, thinking back, because, I mean, without my faith, I don't think I would've had the grace to get through this. It's very easy or could be very easy to be extremely bitter and angry about all of this. I mean, at points, I still am and different aspects of it, but it really had to just be, like, a selfless love for the child that doesn't matter what I think of it.

**Scott**

Yeah. If Hannah was on track, a good mother, and providing a good environment, you would want Arianna to stay with her anyway, right?

**Samantha**

Yes, I would. Yes, of course. Yeah, that would be great. There's yet proof that that is true.

**Scott**

It's interesting the difference between being a traditional foster parent and you - the terminology which was new to me - a family placement. What's your advice for anyone considering fostering a family member?

**Samantha**

Fostering a family member? I mean, if it's something that could be planned, going into it, just knowing how taxing it is on every relationship in the extended family. It just makes everything super complicated. Roles are challenged in so many unique ways that you don't consider until you're in that position. But of course, if anyone in a family ever needed to care for another family member, if you had the means, 100% do it. I mean, again, you would have to have the child's interest at heart. Don't do it for the parent. You can't do it only if the parent does X, Y, and Z. Like, it has to just truly be unconditional because you can't guarantee what a person is going to do and the choices they're going to make. If anything, they're likely going to disappoint you. So if you went into it really, like, only planning for it to be temporary and specifically looking for an insight, that could be really difficult. We did go into it originally completely just as a temporary thing but, as it goes on, there's so much more to it.

**Scott**

There is a possibility that Hannah might hear this podcast. What would you like to say to her?

**Samantha**

Oh gosh, there's so much love for Hannah in the family. No matter how many mistakes you made or all the bad choices that you've had, just come humbly to people and we'll accept you for who you are. I mean, we would love to be supportive and be able to have a relationship.

**Scott**

Yeah, you guys live close enough. If you got along, you could have play dates with your kids and all that stuff.

**Samantha**



Yeah, we could. All of my kids still talk about her. I think, out of all of this, Arianna is just like a shining star. From the beginning with how sick she was and her physical ailments, she always defied all the odds. She got better quicker than anyone ever thought - all of her, like, developmental delays. She crushed her PT and OT so quickly and she was always able to, like, overcome everything that you put in front of her. She's such a strong-willed child. She knows what she wants. She has a lot of her mother in her. She is unique and she is not apologetic for who she is. As a person, I think she has a great future coming and I am thankful that we were at least able to be there in those first formative years to really help her have a better future and healthy relationships and bonds with those.

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### **Scott**

The show notes for this episode can be seen at [WhatWasThatLike.com/143](http://WhatWasThatLike.com/143) – and you can see some family pictures there, as well as the full transcript of this episode.

Earlier this week I asked in the Facebook group if anyone has been involved with foster care – either as a foster parent, or being in foster care yourself. If you're not in there already, I'd love to hear your comments on that. You can join for free at [WhatWasThatLike.com/facebook](http://WhatWasThatLike.com/facebook).

I've gotta tell you about an experience that I had recently that was pretty amazing. Earlier this month I made a quick trip up to New York City to meet with my ad agency, Glassbox Media. And I also met up with some podcaster friends. But, on the day I arrived, which was a Tuesday, I had that afternoon free. So I decided to try something.

As a backdrop to this, something you need to know about me is that I have a big heart for young people. And more specifically, those who are part of the LGBTQ community. They often have a really hard time, and I see that happening, especially here in Florida, and I just hate that. And what really gets me is when they decide to work up the courage to come out to their parents, and they end up being rejected by their mom or their dad, or both. Or they even get kicked out of the house. As a dad, I cannot imagine ever doing that to my kids, no matter what they told me. But this happens all the time.

So here's what I did, in New York City, on a Tuesday afternoon. I went to Walgreens and got a posterboard and a big Sharpie marker. I folded the posterboard in half, so it was a little easier to carry, and on each side I wrote in big letters FREE DAD HUGS.

Then I took an Uber down to the lower part of Manhattan, to Washington Square Park. This is a huge outdoor area in Greenwich Village, and it's a place where hundreds of people congregate, just to hang out and enjoy the day. And it was a beautiful sunny afternoon.

And to be honest, I was a little nervous because I really didn't know what to expect, or how this would be perceived. I mean, I'm just a guy walking around holding this sign – how would people react to that? I for sure wasn't going to approach anyone to hug them – they would need to see the sign and approach me. So I got out of the Uber, held my FREE DAD HUGS sign, and started walking around the park.

I hadn't taken 10 steps when I heard a young man call out, "Hey, I want a free dad hug!". And he had a friend with him, so two hugs right off the bat. And I thought, "Man, this is really happening." Kept walking, and more people kept coming up to me for a hug. It was absolutely amazing. Sometimes they would be a little hesitant, but I would have my arms out and ready for

them and they just came right in. I asked them if they're doing okay, and I told them they're awesome, and that I hoped that they would have a great afternoon.

And it was clear with some of these young people, some were gay, some were non-binary, it didn't really matter – they were just starving for someone to offer them a little bit of affection. I didn't keep track, but I was there for about an hour and I guess I probably hugged about 50 people that afternoon. It was an incredible experience. I'm probably going back to New York this fall sometime, and you can bet I'm gonna be back at that park with another sign.

And for those of you who like to hear the stories with 911 calls, the newest Raw Audio episode is now live. This is Raw Audio 33, so now you have 33 episodes to binge when you sign up to support the show. And you get the regular What Was That Like episodes ad-free. In Raw Audio 33, you'll hear a man calling 911 because his house is on fire – and he's inside

**Male 1**

I have a fire in my house.

**911 Operator**

There's a fire in your house?

**Male 1**

Yes, there is.

**911 Operator**

Okay. Can you get out of the house?

**Male 1**

I don't think so, no.

**911 Operator**

Okay. Where are you located in the house?

**Male 1**

In my bedroom.

**Scott**

A young man calls 911 to turn himself in –

**911 Operator**

What's the emergency there?

**Male 2**

I'd rather not say.

**911 Operator**

Okay. Well, if you're calling 9 1 1, it's my job to find out. So I need to know what the emergency is.

**Male 2**

I think it's murder.

**911 Operator**

What makes you think that?

**Male 2**

Because I stabbed someone.

**Scott**

And an elderly man calls 911 because he can't leave his house, and he doesn't have any food  
—

**Male 3**

I'd like one fresh cabbage, avocado, 2 bananas and 3 Pepsi.

**911 Operator**

What kind of Pepsi?

**Male 3**

I don't know. Diet stuff.

**911 Operator**

No, I mean, two liters or—?

**Male 3**

The big bottle - whatever that is.

**911 Operator**

And you want three of those?

**Male 3**

Three of those.

**Scott**

You can hear those calls and what happened, along with all the other Raw Audio episodes, by signing up at [WhatWasThatLike.com/plus](http://WhatWasThatLike.com/plus), and use the promo code PLUS to try it out for free. Or if you're an Apple listener, just click on Try Free at the top of the episode list.

Graphics for this episode were created by Bob Bretz.

Full episode transcription was created by James Lai.

Hey, you know what time it is? It's Listener Story time. We have a Listener Story at the end of every episode, and if you have a story, we'd love to hear it! Anything that's interesting that happened to you, that you can tell in about 5-10 minutes, just record it on your phone and email it to me at [Scott@WhatWasThatLike.com](mailto:Scott@WhatWasThatLike.com). I know you have a story like that, because everyone does. And we want to hear it!

In this one, a listener talks about what happened the night before her wedding day.

Stay safe, and I'll see you in two weeks.

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(Listener story)

Hi, Scott. First, I want to tell you, I love your podcast. I went on maternity leave last January and, during nap time, I would binge all of your episodes. I learned of your podcast from "This is actually happening" and I'm so glad that I did. I love the listener tales and I just thought I'd never have anything to contribute. But then, I remembered the night before my wedding and ooh, it was quite a surprise for this Type-A personality girl. So let me just start by saying I am a very organized person in my regular life. So, you can imagine that, leading up to my wedding day, I was pretty on top of every little detail and trying to get ahead of anything that I could possibly foresee happening.

It was a very normal night before the wedding. We had our rehearsal dinner at a local restaurant with just a few of our closest friends and family members. Dinner ended around 9 and I was determined to get back to my room, shower, and hop into bed as soon as possible. I was obviously so excited for the following day and worried that I would not be able to sleep because of it. So, I just wanted to get to bed as early as possible so that I could catch as many hours of sleep as I could. Following tradition, the groom doesn't generally see the bride before the day of their wedding, so my now husband booked a separate room for the night before our wedding. The room I was going to be staying in was also connected to the presidential suite, which we also booked. So when you're in a hotel room with adjoining rooms, there's a door between them just like that. We booked it this way so that, in the morning, I could get ready in there with my girls and also have all of my getting-ready items close by - jewelry, makeup, all that stuff.

When we got home from the restaurant, I kissed my family goodnight, already excited to see him in the morning, and I headed up to my room. So I showered. I blow-dried my hair and headed into bed. I climbed into the clean white sheet already starting to sleepily think of my beautiful wedding day in just a few hours.

However, I noticed a dim light coming through under the adjoining door into the presidential suite. I like to sleep in total darkness, so this definitely was going to be keeping me up, and I did not want that. So I got out of bed, went through the adjoining door to the presidential suite, and slammed the door literally behind me. I was not super concerned because, like I said, I booked both rooms. So obviously, the door must be able to work both ways. I was wrong. It is locked from the inside of the presidential suite. So now, here I am trapped in the presidential suite on the night before my wedding. And if that's where the story ended, you could definitely sympathize that that's a pretty crappy situation, but I am going to make it just one level worse because the truth was that I was going to go to sleep naked, meaning I had left the comfort of my room to go into the presidential sleep suite to turn off that one light and had gotten trapped in there completely naked and alone. I did not have my phone on me or my Apple watch, so I cannot call anyone immediately. My mind is reeling and I am trying to calm myself down to think about how I am going to get out of this situation.

I said, "This is a hotel room. There absolutely has to be a phone in this room." To my great relief, there was just on the other side of the room. So I sprinted over to the phone looking to call the front desk and ask for them to send someone up to rescue me. I picked up the receiver and nothing. There is no ringtone, there is no busy tone, there is nothing. I checked the back of the phone, it is plugged in. I pressed a few numbers. It's just not working great. I remember that one of our groomsmen and his girlfriend booked the opposite adjoining room to the presidential suite. Even though I knew in my heart that he and his girlfriend were absolutely downstairs with my fiance drinking at the bar, I started banging on their door, hoping for one of them to come to my rescue but, same as with the phone, I was met with nothing but silence. So now, the panic is

truly starting to set in my mind - racing. I just keep saying to myself, "This cannot be happening the night before my wedding. This absolutely cannot be happening."

But I quickly snapped myself out of it and realized I absolutely could not just let this happen. I had to get back into my room. In order to do so, I would have to leave this room. Even though, again, I am completely naked, I started to look around the room. The presidential suite is much more like an office space with just a few couches and tables and a minibar. It did have a closet though. I know that hotel rooms usually keep a few extra blankets inside of them. So I looked inside and, unbelievably, I found a nice, huge cushy blanket. I wrapped it around myself and I started to think of a plan. What exactly am I going to do? Am I going to go down to the lobby wrapped in a blanket? Then, I recall that when I stepped out of the hotel elevator earlier that day, I saw that there was a decorative table in the elevator hallway with a phone on top of it. So, that was my plan. I was going to exit the room, call for help, and I wedged a water bottle in the door because the last thing I needed was to get locked out of the presidential suite and stuck in the hallway with nothing but a blanket.

So I ran to the table. To my relief, I found it and I didn't make it up. There really was a phone on top of a table. I picked up the receiver and nothing, again. The phone was plugged into the wall and it was not working. How could this be happening again? Now, I am truly in full panic. I am out of ideas and my only possible next step would be to make the humiliating trip from my floor to the lobby in a literal hotel blanket and nothing else, and ask them to open my door for me.

Mere seconds after my defeat in realizing the phone did not work, tears were literally streaming down my face, mourning the sleep I will not be getting and already embarrassed by what I will have to do next. I heard ding and the elevator doors opened. Our groomsman, Anthony, exited the elevator. His expression was first confused and then immediately concerned because why would he be finding his best friend's fiancée in such an erratic state in the hallway of a hotel? I grabbed him and I told him what happened, and he immediately ran back downstairs to get our card and let me back into my room. I was so, so, so thankful that he showed up when he did, and I still honestly can't believe that any of that happened or that he was there to rescue me, thankfully, at that exact moment.

What's even funnier is that the chaos did not end there. I woke up in the morning of our wedding day and all of my girls were in the room. My mother-in-law showed up and my mom showed up. The bellhop was in there and he was removing all of the dresses from the bellhop or whatever that thing is that they carry. I asked my mom— I was like, "I see your dress. Where is my dress?" She nearly fainted when she realized that it's the one thing that she left at home. So my dad came to the rescue and drove all the way home to get it and back to the hotel.

Later on, we had another lockout faux pas when the photographer took pictures in my room and then, like I did, got locked in the presidential suite. This time I had my key to get back into the whole hotel room. So, I exited the presidential suite. I walked around to the hotel room. I swiped my card and beep, it was being declined. I called down to client services. They sent up a master key and beeped again. The master key was being declined. At this point, I was just laughing because I was like, "This has got to be some sort of sick joke that somebody is playing on me." They literally had to call an engineer to come upstairs to let me back into my room, which, by the way, was vitally important because my wedding dress was in there. My wedding shoes, the jewelry, everything was in there.

Thankfully though, that was the end of all of the unplanned craziness. My then-fiancee and now-husband went on to get married and it was, without question, the best day ever. I will never

forget a moment of that day, including the chaos leading up to it, and I cherish it. I got to marry my best friend surrounded by family and friends, and we danced the night away and had the best music and the best food. We have now been happily married for almost four years. We have a beautiful one-year-old and a perfect little dog. Now, all we do is look back and laugh at the uniqueness of our day and remember it very fondly. I just want to say thank you, Scott, for taking the time to listen to my story.

To the brides and grooms out there planning a wedding, just remember, you can only plan so much and, to go with the flow, it always works itself out in the end.