

FATHER, MOTHER & SON, for just seven days
(A True Story)



“Life is like a roller coaster ride.”

I couldn't agree more to whoever said that. Life is indeed full of ups and downs... of zigs and zags... of twirls and turns.

Yesterday, you saw people beaming with so much happiness laughing so contagiously and shaking hands or exchanging high fives with everybody around them. Today, the same people maybe crying a river in a desolate room smarting from the pains inflicted by something or someone. How about tomorrow? Nobody knows! They would have already licked their emotional wounds and emerge from that desolate room, learn to smile again and gradually laugh their way out of whatever bad experiences they had. If not, then we could surmise that they may have decided to stay in the shell of their grief and plummet deeper in the unfathomable depths of despair.

Perhaps everything may depend on whatever twists and turns that were laid down by the grand designer of the tracks where our personal roller coasters run. We may desire all that we want to alter the course of our roller coasters and wriggle out of the undesirable whirls in the switchback. But that's impossible.

Eventually at a certain age, whether we like it or not, we begin to take control of our lives. That's when the ride starts. Choose a car in the coaster train. There's no turning back. All that we can do is to make sure that we're buckled up. Expect the turns, ups and downs. Be ready to be twizzled and twined. Accept that you could not avoid the spirals and the slammers.

Generally, the way my roller coaster zipped through the tracks have both enthralled and frightened me. There were times, when I was younger, that I wished the joys I was experiencing wouldn't end. There were moments also when I thought I would not be able to wiggle out of the depths of despair and sadness but my faith in God (that I believe exists) and my unwillingness to succumb to challenges kept me afloat.

One of the most difficult parts of my journey in the tracks happened in one eventful week in my life. Those days in my life were both exciting and frightening. Perhaps that stage of my ongoing rollercoaster ride – that chapter in my life – could have been the most emotionally draining and exhilaratingly suspenseful.

It happened when an angel dropped from the clouds and gave me the privilege of becoming his father (and my wife his mother) for seven days. That's right – seven days only. I wanted it longer. But from up there in the rollercoaster tracks where my car was (and up there I felt enormous joy). I was pulled down. That was a very steep slope. Then I felt passing through a twist and a turn and when my roller coaster made a sudden stop – the angel was gone.

What happened in those seven days?

Allow me to share what happened in each of those days.

DAY 1 - TUESDAY

Yes, an angel came from heaven, transmogrified himself into a baby boy and presented himself to someone I would just refer to as ate Baby. Ate is how we call in Filipino a sibling (or any woman) older than us.

That Tuesday morning, while I was preparing for work, ate Baby came. Even without me seeing the one calling out my name from outside of our house, I was pretty sure it was her. That bass booming voice was so familiar.

As I opened the front door leading to our terrace, what greeted me was like a scene from a movie – an old frowzy woman standing cleaving to a new-born infant slovenly swathed in an old blanket. She inquired if I still wanted to adopt a child and entreated me to get the baby she was clutching.

Of course, I and my wife wanted so badly to have a son or a daughter. We have yet to have one at that time. We wanted so badly to hear in that house the reverberating cries and the timorous laughter of an infant. But that notwithstanding, I just could not grab that lovely angel from the hands of ate Baby. I wanted to make sure that there was no monkey business involved. I needed to do some investigation. Besides, I wanted to discuss it seriously first with my wife.

I then told ate Baby that we will inform her later in the day about our decision regarding the infant.

My wife was still in bed, probably half asleep, when I re-entered our room. Before leaving, I informed her about the baby. I saw her eyes sparkled in excitement and told me that I should have woke her up when ate Baby came.

I told her not to make any decision without us talking about it. Besides, at that time, I was talking to another party regarding a 7-month old baby named Niña whom I saw when I brought my students to an orphanage. Then I left hurriedly for I did not want to be late for my work.

But as I was having a meeting with my colleagues in the college where I was working, it was almost noontime then, I received a call from my wife. She told me that another party was interested in taking the baby, thus I have to make up my mind. I told her to give me until evening to decide. But she was adamant demanding that I had to decide as soon as possible.

That's her, what she wants, she should get immediately. It has always been like that. She told me a mouthful – about being indecisive and the likes.

I tried to figure out how to best navigate around her pressuring me. I called her back and told her that personally, I had second thoughts. So, I would leave the decision to her. But, I assured her of my support for whatever she wanted to do. I ended the call telling her that it was my turn to report in the meeting we were having. The truth is I was already done reporting. Had I not done that, she might have continued talking and we would be coming full circle.

As far as I could recall, she had never made a major decision. I doubted if she would do so that time. She never made a big decision for our family. It has always been me making decisions.

After a couple of hours, I called my sister-in-law and asked what was my wife's decision on the baby. To my surprise, she told me that my wife had already brought the baby home.

It was a mixture of emotion that I felt. I was **WORRIED** but **EXCIED!**

Worried because she made a major decision without us seriously conferring with one another. That wasn't me. It would normally take time before I make a decision. But I was excited too. I felt an inexplicable excitement. There was seemingly a magnet pulling me home. Indeed, it was different because in the past how I wished that I could just stay in the office and work a little longer. But that time, I know that there was an angel at home and I would like to be acquainted with him as soon as possible.

I have not clutched a baby I could call my own for a long time. The last time was when my girlfriend when I was in college gave birth to my first son two months before I earned my undergrad degree. We eventually decided to live separate lives and took our 2-year old son with her.

Anyway... on my way home, I whispered a prayer that may He make me and my wife ready for whatever responsibilities and challenges we were about to face.

When I got home, the baby was sleeping under the staircase - in the daybed where I would be lazing off while watching TV in our living room. Seated beside him was my wife, all smiles and so enthusiastic essaying her newfound role as a mother.

I approached them, knelt and gazed at the baby. He had fair skin, softer than cotton. I kissed those rosy cheeks. He reacted and what a wonderful sight I beheld – his skin turned crimson and let out a short shriek probably feeling delighted by what I did.

I visited ate Baby in their house after dinner. It was an angel she brought to our doorsteps and words are not sufficient to express my gratitude for such. However, I had to tell her about my reservations. Firstly, I made it very clear that I don't like that the parents of the baby live just nearby. It would make our situation, and most especially that of the baby, so complicated if the real parents are just around. Lastly, I don't like that anyone, not even her, would take advantage of our situation – childless for a long time – and play with our emotions. As it is, the long wait for a child of our own is already emotionally distressing, and if the one given to us will be taken away for whatever reasons there may be, the pain will be much more.

I told her that I could rebound easily from emotional distress stressing that I am a tough hombre. But it may be different on the part of my wife.

For all those, ate Babe said the magic words - "Trust me." Then she told me that I need to accompany her the following day to the midwife who attended to the mother of the baby. After that, I went home happily armed with an assurance of a person saying I should TRUST HER.

Many "firsts" happened that evening. There were no disagreements that transpired between me and my wife. We ate happily together. We talked. We planned together. We woke up together to attend to whatever our baby needed. I would say it was a miracle – a miracle that happened because of the presence of an angel. And that was only the baby's first night with us. We also had a lengthy discussion about how should we call him. We decided to name him MARC ANDREI and his nickname Santino.

I slept approximately a couple of hours only. I could have gone sleepless and I would not complain.

DAY 2 - WEDNESDAY

My emotional rollercoaster was still at the highest point in the tracks. Life taught me though that it will not remain up there. I wanted to cheat. I wanted to put a stopper. I wanted my rollercoaster to end its journey right there. I didn't like my ecstasy to end. The ecstasy that having Marc Andrei brought. If ever I'll be drowned I'd like it to happen in the lake of overwhelming joy, not in the quicksand of despair.

As I head out of the neighborhood, I passed by both well-wishers and hecklers. The well-wishers expressed their happiness that we finally have a baby at home. I didn't mind the gibes and taunts of the hecklers. They were unsuccessful in demolishing my resolve of embracing Marc Andrei as my own. They did not even succeed in uprooting the joy that the baby planted in my heart.

The hecklers don't understand the simple truth that to be a parent, your son or daughter need not be biological. That's probably the simplest way to explain it.

The whole day of Wednesday that my emotional rollercoaster traveled in a plane of happiness on top of the tracks. There were no bumps. It was a joyful ride, indeed, making me forget momentarily to anticipate that anytime there may be an unexpected twist or bend or I may reach the end of the plane and then plummet down.

I thought of a lot of things for Marc Andrei. He instantly became an additional source of inspiration. Like an excited first-time father, I informed my colleagues and friends at work about my baby, my son, our son.

Some of them warned me to proceed cautiously in handling matters related to Marc Andrei.

In the evening, accompanied by ate Baby and ate Claire (a first-degree cousin of my wife), I went to the lying-in clinic where Marc Andrei was said to be born. It was something that I wanted to do the other day before deciding whether or not we will take Marc Andrei. But my wife hastily made a decision which at the end, as a husband, I respected and supported. Actually, I admired what she did.

I listened intently to the midwife. From her accounts I learned that the mother of Marc Andrei is a 19-year old student from Manila whose pregnancy was kept from her parents. She did not intend to keep the baby for it would complicate matters for her and her family. She wanted badly to finish her studies and having a baby will be a hindrance. Thus, she wanted the baby to be given to a childless couple for adoption.

I thought I was listening to a synopsis of a story. It was too familiar. I read a story (or is two?) that is similar. I teach literature and how many have I told my students that “Literature is a reproduction of life.”

But I have no choice but to believe the story.

I believed the midwife (or shall I say I didn't care whether it was the truth or a lie she recanted for I was so blinded by my yearning for a baby). Besides, the midwife is a distant relative of my wife and a close friend of ate Claire who happens to be a midwife also.

When I asked that a document be prepared and signed by the mother, a document expressing her willingness to give the child to whoever, the midwife said it was unnecessary telling us that we can rest assured that there will be no legal impediments that we would be facing much as the mother was not keen on keeping her son. I felt uncomfortable when I heard that but what choice do I have.

The midwife also added that I need to pay P6,500 for her services and requested that an amount be given to the mother. She did not specify how much and pointed out that the mother just needed a little financial assistance having spent so much in her effort to hide her pregnancy.

I promised to pay the midwife and give the biological mother of Mark Andrei a certain amount as soon as possible.

I was exhausted upon reaching home that evening but seeing Mark Andrei gave me a different kind of high. I planted a kiss on his cheeks and my exhaustion was gone. I was still in cloud nine.

Then I thought of the financial obligations that parenting would require. I just closed my eyes at that instance and murmured, “God will provide!”

A couple of hours before midnight, I prepared everything needed by Marc Andrei – the bottles, the milk, the diapers, and the cotton. That was something new in my routine and I think I did it so well.

On the bed, I sat beside my wife, and recounted what transpired in the lying-in clinic. She just listened. I noticed that the enthusiasm she had the previous night was gone. Probably, it was due to exhaustion and lack of sleep.

Then she said something that almost made my world cave in. She wanted us to return Marc Andrei to ate Baby. She realized taking care of a baby was difficult. Then suddenly my emotional roller coaster hit a twirl and a bend then started to plummet down.

I rarely blow my top but when I get angry things could go ugly. I bombarded my wife with harsh words. I have never spoken to her that way since we got married. I told her to imagine how shameful it would be if we would turn our backs on Marc Andrei. That was exactly the reason why I was telling her that we needed to be careful in making the decision, but she did not listen. And when she experienced how difficult it was to take care of a newly-born infant, she wanted to give up so easily.

I asked her many times if she would not reconsider her decision. She responded negatively.

I felt a mixture of emotions.

I was so sad. I was facing the specter of losing my son. I wanted to think that my wife was just kidding. I was already so emotionally attached to Marc Andrei at that point.

I was also infuriated. The fickle-mindedness of the lady of my house is unbelievable. Marc Andrei is not a toy that could be dumped just that. If she actually gave birth to our son I would think that it postpartum depression. But it wasn't. I wanted to think that she probably got overwhelmed doing things she wasn't accustomed to.

It was hard to imagine the heckling we will receive from the people in the neighborhood. Should that happen, I was sure we would be the topic of gossips for months to come.

How would Marc Andrei feel if in the future he'll get to know about this unfortunate event in his life? What will a grown-up Marc Andrei and the well-meaning people around us think about my wife... about me?

DAY 3 - THURSDAY

The joyful ride from Tuesday to most part of Wednesday abruptly ended when the lady of my house was ready to give up her one-day old motherhood. My heart bled for Marc Andrei.

He was born into this world that fateful Monday night (11:04 PM), but abandoned by the mother. Presented to me at around 8:00 AM that Tuesday, but I initially rejected him for I needed time to decide. Deprived of privacy and much-needed rest necessary for a newly-born infant when made like the object of a carnival-like spectacle. Scrutinized by the entire neighborhood whose desire for something to gossip about is unbelievably insatiable. Taken by the lady of my house. (I was not sure of her reason - she craved so much to be

a mother or she was just afraid someone else would take away Marc Andrei). Briefly found a home and the warmth of loving parents but not yet totally shielded from the prying eyes of the people in the neighborhood. And when he was starting to settle down in an abode where he felt he was welcome, suddenly, one fickle-minded spirit would again thrust him back to the limbo of uncertainty.

Marc Andrei! What a beautiful and wonderful being. Truly an angel, but unwanted. Marc Andrei did nothing wrong to deserve the kind of treatment he was getting. But what can I do, I can't be the mother and the father at the same time. I need to work, I can only take care of him at night. I thought of bringing him to my father's hometown but it was not as simple as I initially thought it would be. I even thought of hiring a nanny and get for her and Mark Andrei a place to live.

And so, my emotional rollercoaster plummeted so fast in the tracks. On its way down it wriggled through treacherous dips and spins. From the lake of tremendous joy, I was submerged again in the quicksand of sadness and despair.

With a heavy heart, I dialed the number of ate Baby that Thursday and told her about the bad news. Still, I would like to shield the lady of my house from the harsh criticism she may be receiving should people know about her decision. Thus, I told sister Babe that just in case people in our neighborhood would ask, let it be known that it was me who made the decision.

As always, I prayed that may the best thing happen to Marc Andrei that day.

My wife called up when I was in my workplace and asked what time would ate Baby be coming to get Marc Andrei. I told her around noontime.

If in the previous day I was ecstatic telling everyone in the workplace that I have a new son, that time I just stayed glued in my seat in the office and contemplated. Then I got my phone and uploaded the pictures of Marc Andrei to my desktop computer. I had his first picture as my screen saver. It was a sight to behold but looking at it was a bad idea for it made me feel sadder.

I received several text messages from my wife that day. She tried so hard to explain her side. I decided to respond just once telling her that if indeed she was hell-bent on giving up on Marc Andrei, then she must make sure that I would no longer see our son when I arrive home. Then I turned my phone off after saying that.

I talked to a couple of trusted friends and told them about the situation. I really didn't like to do that for it was like making my wife look bad. But I had no choice.

I was supposed to be home by 5:00 PM. But how would I feel in a "Marc Andrei-less home" and seeing there the fickle-minded spirit that caused his disappearance. At around 6:30 that afternoon, I walked towards the center of the town. Luckily, I chanced upon old friends in a food stall. I begged that they accompany me at least for an hour and listen to what I had to say. They did so.

They said it was time to drink. So, I ordered, not wine, but soft drinks and some finger foods.

They did nothing but listen. I recounted to them the events in my life the past days, as silent tears were rolling down my cheeks. Good, it was dark in the place where we were so they may have not noticed it. But my cracking voice could not hide my sadness and disappointment.

I thanked them for bearing with me. They wished me the best and after they delivered that oft-repeated phrase said too people burdened with problems – “We’ll pray for you!” – we parted ways.

I was home before 8:00 P.M. anticipating the worst that may come that night.

Marc Andrei was still there, sleeping soundly in the daybed, the same place where I saw him first when I arrived home Tuesday afternoon. My wife explained that ate Baby came that morning but she was out of the house and has not returned since then. Thus, our baby was still there. I did not say a word to her, I did not even kiss her as I usually would upon arrival from work.

I gave ate Baby a call and she arrived 10 minutes later. We had a brief chat. I set the “damage control scheme.” I told her to say whenever asked that we needed to return Marc Andrei because we have an obligation to take another baby who we were really eyeing for adoption, that it was I who decided to let go of Marc Andrei, not the lady of my house. Like a knight, I must protect my fickle-minded damsel in distress.

My wife cried profusely when ate Baby carried Marc Andrei out of our house. Was it love or guilt? I was not sure. I accompanied ate Baby back to their house. I stayed there for an hour. I told her that it was the most painful thing that my wife did to me, it was simply unforgivable. Ate Baby told me to understand my wife but I said I have forgiven her many times for the pains she caused me (the way she forgave me also in the past for all my wrongdoings) but this one is different, this one is hard to forget and that I may not be able to forgive her for it.

When I got back home, my wife was crying. She asked for forgiveness and understanding. I saw guilt written all over her face. I just nodded and told her that from that night onwards, a lot of changes might happen.

I went to our bedroom and contemplated about the things that I needed to do. The worst plan I cooked up was to leave the house the following day.

When she entered our bedroom, to my surprise and amazement she asked me to go back to ate Baby and get Marc Andrei back. What I heard did not make me happy but rather annoyed. Angrily that I told her that Marc Andrei is not a toy that you throw away then pick him back up when you realized you still want to use him.

Not five, not ten, but more than twenty times that she pleaded that we take Marc Andrei back. I did not say a word anymore, I just responded by shaking my head.

DAY 4 - FRIDAY

From the last hour of the previous day up to the first minutes of the following, my wife constantly bugged me about getting Marc Andrei back. She pleaded repeatedly but I did not budge. Then my rollercoaster

hit another spin, the fickle-minded lady of my house asked me to accompany her to get Marc Andrei back from ate Baby. Then I looked at her and saw the sincerity of her intentions. I got excited at the prospect of getting my son back, I felt my emotional rollercoaster slowly climbing up. But again the tracks upon which my rollercoaster runs is so unpredictable, I may just pass through another twist then suddenly from up, I will again be brought down.

I wanted to make sure of how my wife was really feeling at that time. She probably was just conscience-stricken. She probably was thinking about what I said that things will never be the same between us after what happened. Or it could be a combination of both. Whatever were her reasons, I didn't really care. What's important for me was the prospect of Marc Andrei returning to us.

My few minutes of contemplation resulted to a plan. I thought of testing the resolve of my wife in getting our son back. Then I told her that if she really wanted to be a mother to Marc Andrei once again, she should go by herself to ate Baby and convince her to give the baby back to us.

It was actually a tall order for her to do that. I know my lady so well, she has a lot of good qualities but she would never swallow her pride. She would never undo things she has done.

Then I tricked her when I said that before I left ate Baby's residence, there was a couple who came to take a look at Marc Andrei. It was a lie that I had to say to put pressure on my wife in case she was really intending to get Marc Andrei back.

She went out of our bedroom immediately after hearing that. I was not sure where she was going. I did not bother to check. I just heard the creaking sound of our front door downstairs. I presumed that she either went out, cast her pride aside and proceeded to ate Baby's house and get Marc Andrei back. Or she's just seated in our terrace getting a whiff of fresh air.

I don't know how long she was out, but I felt it was an eternity. But as always, I believe that people get rewarded for their patience. I didn't mind waiting for long. I didn't mind if it was a jiffy or an eon that passed by. What's important was the next scene that I saw in the silver screen of my life was a MOTHER tenderly caressing a BABY.

After a few more minutes, my wife, her eyes like a well of tears, entered our bedroom, lovingly clutching Marc Andrei. She sat by my side, still embracing our son, and sobbed unabashedly and repeatedly asked him for forgiveness.

Another spin, another twist, my car in the rollercoaster then climbed up again reaching perhaps the top of the tracks. Never have I felt so ecstatic. But I did not let her notice it, I pretended to be indifferent. I really had my reservations, I know I have married and loved one fickle-minded soul. What I could be witnessing was just a flash in the pan. But it was not.

MOTHERHOOD became my wife in the first hours of that Friday. Marc Andrei kept crying that time, not unlike during his first night with us when he would only be waking us up when hungry. My wife didn't put

down Mark Andrei on the bed, she just let him stay in her loving lap from the wee hours of that Friday morning up to time that light slowly took over from the darkness of the previous night.

My wife didn't know that each time Marc Andrei would cry I would be jolted from sleep but pretended to be asleep, I intentionally let her do everything for Marc Andrei that night, I made her feel how difficult it is to become a MOTHER and see if the following day she would give up our baby for good - keeping of course my fingers crossed that she would not.

Each time I would wake up during those wee hours of that Friday morning, what a sight I would behold - a mother lovingly taking care of her baby. My wife didn't know that I heard her talk to Marc Andrei saying how sorry she was for her briefly giving him up. My wife also mentioned that she knew that the reason Marc Andrei was crying was because he felt unloved. She asked our baby for forgiveness and for a chance to prove that she could be a good MOTHER to him.

Then again at work, that day, I resumed on bragging that I have a son. Some were scratching their heads saying, "How is that? One day you have a son, the following day you lost him, then the day after you have him again." One of them even naughtily quipped, "What about tomorrow?" That made me pause for a while and contemplate. What if tomorrow I lose my baby again?

When I went home that Friday night, there again was Marc Andrei, soundly asleep in the daybed. My wife, smiling, was seated nearby. It was a scene I thought I would no longer see again. I knelt and reached for Marc Andrei's cheek and there planted a kiss. Lo and behold, his skin turned crimson again, he opened his eyes and let out a brief shriek as if acknowledging my presence.

My emotional rollercoaster stayed at the topmost portion of the track and brought me to the depths of ecstasy again. It was a wonderful night, I and my wife avoided talking about events of the previous day, we just laid out plans for Marc Andrei. Our son had a peaceful sleep waking us up only once for a milk.

At one point when I prepared his milk, I looked at him and whispered to myself, "Will my son be mine for good?"

DAY 5 - SATURDAY

My car was right on top rollercoaster track and I know that soon, after a twist, or a bend, or a spin then down again I'll go. But while my emotional rollercoaster was traversing a plane at the pinnacle I tried to enjoy the ride.

In the wee hours of Saturday morning, I took care of Marc Andrei, I allowed my wife to have a well-deserved sleep. It was a crash course I took up that time – Babysitting 101. I put milk on a dispenser reading carefully the instructions in the can (from the original milk given by ate Baby we decided to buy a better infant formula – SIMILAC – that was prescribed by the Pediatrician who checked Marc Andrei that day). I happily attended to Mark Andrei's need that night. I hummed softly to his ears songs to put him to sleep (I think he liked best the "hummed" version of "NOBODY"). I clutched him gently in my arms whenever he would not stop crying. But when I felt that Marc Andrei's back was wet, I was forced to wake my wife up to change our son's

diaper. Well, I have not tried changing Marc Andrei's diaper yet, so I paid attention to what my wife was doing at that time because I wanted to do the honor of changing Marc Andrei's diaper the next time around.

My wife went back to sleep, she had not had a good one in the past days, I followed shortly thereafter when I was sure that Marc Andrei was safe, secured, and comfortable.

I didn't get much sleep that day but I worked all day inspired. There were no classes but I went to school to finish paperwork that piled up in the past three days. With so much enthusiasm, I recounted to some colleagues who were also in school our experiences the past days.

Then night came. While Marc Andrei was deep in slumber in the daybed, I and my wife had dinner. She was obviously perturbed, she was seemingly not minding what I was telling her about my plans regarding Marc Andrei's papers. I sensed trouble. I was afraid my rollercoaster would soon hit another spin, another twist, another treacherous dive. I just hoped that it would not be so trenchant a fall that could throw me off my car in the rollercoaster.

After dinner, we sat separately at both ends of the daybed, March Andrei was between us. Then I asked my wife to drop whatever bomb she wished to explode.

What she told me left me dumbfounded.

My wife told me that the mother of Marc Andrei is not a 19-year old student from Manila but rather a woman from Bulacan. And of all places, the mother is from our own community, right in the neighborhood where we are residing, and living just two houses away from us.

Down went my car in my emotional rollercoaster. How I had wished I was just dreaming at that point.

My wife told me that it was whispered to her by very reliable sources – by well-meaning people who thought we deserve to know the truth. But ate Baby is a woman not capable of DECEPTION. I know I could TRUST her. Like my mom, who was born in Lal-lo, Cagayan, ate Baby is an Ilocana. We would normally speak in Ilocano when there were no other people with us who could not understand the said dialect. We are both officers of our homeowners' association, I was the President and she was the Vice-President. I had to give her the benefit of the doubt. I believe that she perfectly understood what I told her that Tuesday night when we had a serious talk about Marc Andrei.

But just the same, I have to act on the matter divulged by my wife. After dinner, I started piecing together things said by my wife and the information I gathered clandestinely from our neighbors, especially those who were residing nearest to the reported real mother of Marc Andrei. Then I talked to ate Susie, my confidante in our neighborhood, who, like me, can speak both Ilocano and Ibanag.

Ate Susie could not believe what she heard. She doubted that ate Babe would deceive me and my wife in that manner. I asked ate Susie (and she agreed) to drop by ate Baby's house and see how the latter would react if she would tell her that we are again thinking of returning to her Marc Andrei because we already know who the real mother is.

Notwithstanding the situation that emerged, our love for Marc Andrei remained. My wife and I talked about all possible eventualities. She made it so clear to me that even if the real mother lives just nearby, she wouldn't mine. Marc Andrei is hers and nobody could take him away from her.

Then at almost midnight, I received a text message from ate Susie saying that ate Baby denied knowing who the mother of Marc Andrei is.

DAY 6 - SUNDAY

I attended mass by my lonesome. My wife had to stay home with Marc Andrei. The horizon looked gloomy, we were again facing uncertainties. My emotional rollercoaster have made a sudden stop at a certain angle in a spin not knowing if when its journey resumes I would be pulled up or rolled down.

I have discussed with my wife the previous night what might happen if it is true that Marc Andrei's mom is that woman residing two houses away from us.

The family of that woman is known for their scheming ways. I should know, we live in the same neighborhood. With that, I could not afford to make it appear on paper that we are the real parents of Marc Andrei as suggested by the midwife in the lying-in clinic. I became afraid that in the future that may be used against us. How would Marc Andrei feel when finally we need to tell him of his being an adopted son and that his real mother lives only nearby? What emotional wound that would create in him. What about if seeing daily Marc Andrei just around the corner the real mother would develop fondness of the child then later on would demand that he be returned to her? Who would the court favor in case a case will be filed?

At the end of our conversation the previous night, my wife just said that not under any circumstances that she would surrender Marc Andrei to anyone - that she is comfortable coexisting with the real mother in the same neighborhood - that as Marc Andrei grows up she would constantly watch him and keep him out of the real mother's reach.

As I waited for the mass to start, I recalled what transpired that Wednesday night when we went to the lying-in clinic. The midwife suggested that we would make it appear in the registration that we are the real parents of Marc Andrei. That she suggested because according to her, the real mother was apparently not willing to have herself appear on paper as Marc Andrei's mother. Additionally, the real mother would not like to put her name on the dotted lines of any documents. The midwife said that even a simple deposition indicating that she was voluntarily giving us Marc Andrei could not be issued by the supposed "19-year old student" who gave birth to our son.

We consented with such a wrong scheme they perpetuated for we were so blinded with our longing for a baby, and for Marc Andrei's sake.

Then I also recalled how vehemently she refused to help us in registering Marc Andrei because she did not intend to make it appear in the paper that it was in her lying-in clinic where the baby was born. It appeared to me that she did not like her name to appear in any document that will be created out of that scheme she herself was perpetuating.

Good that my wife's cousin, who was with us when we went to the lying-in clinic that Wednesday night is also a midwife. For Marc Andrei's sake, she volunteered to help in the registration and make herself appear as the one who assisted in our son's birth.

I entered the church's chapel of the saints and prayed to the Divine Mercy as I would always do after a Sunday mass. I fervently prayed for whatever is best for Marc Andrei – that may the truth come out – that may He guide me in the decision that I'll have to make in case it is true that the real mother of Marc Andrei is that woman in our neighborhood. I resolved that the next decision we make about Andrei would come from me.

Before heading home I visited ate Claire, the midwife-cousin of my wife who's a colleague and relative of the midwife who owns the lying-in clinic where Marc Andrei was born. I told her about the rumor circulating - that the real mother of our son was our neighbor which she happens to know also. Ate Claire could not believe what she heard. She promised to talk to the midwife.

When I returned home, I carried Marc Andrei while feeding him. On the daybed, I sat beside my wife who was blankly staring at the figure of angels she cross-stitched which was mounted on the wall. She took away Marc Andrei from my arms and warned me about giving up our son.

At around 4:00 P.M., the lay ministers my mother-in-law invited for Marc Andrei's prebaptismal rite came. With two in-laws serving as god parents, our son was dedicated to the Lord. We planned to have the official baptismal of our son on December 5th, my wife's birthday.

We did everything that we planned for Marc Andrei. Notwithstanding the specter of losing him again perilously hanging overhead like Damocle's sword, we continued to essay passionately the role of parents.

Then night came. ate Claire arrived and broke to us the bad news rather gently. The midwife divulged to her that the mother of Marc Andrei is not a 19-year old student from Manila but that woman in our neighborhood. The story was concocted in cahoots with ate Baby and the grandmother of Marc Andrei – that ate Baby was there when Marc Andrei was born – that Marc Andrei was intended not to be kept by the family because it would create some undesirable complications for the mother and the family in general – that indeed, I and my wife were victims of a grand deception.

My emotional rollercoaster started to move again, yes in a downward sharp spiral. My wife cried while clutching Marc Andrei. She kept kissing our son while saying repeatedly "It's not true." I cried too. I tried to console my wife by running gently my hand in her back.

Then I recalled the person who said I must TRUST her... ate BABY.

DAY 7 - MONDAY.

Plain and simple, we were deceived by the midwife, by the (un)real mother and (un)loving grandmother of Marc Andrei, and by (of all people) ate Baby. Never mind the first two... but my oh my, not sister Baby.

Not her, not ate Baby, I have respected her tremendously. I admired her courage as a leader and integrity as a person. I was hoping that what my wife's cousin had confirmed was not true. Ate Baby would not allow

herself to be a part of such a deception. She would not do that to me. We're friends. We're both officers of the homeowners' association. We're both Ilocanos.

The MIDWIFE? What wrong have we done to her? HELPING MOTHERS GIVE BIRTH is what she does, not ACTING. I believed her story. Yes, her story. I forgot that a story could either be a real or just fabricated. Fiction. Did I just say fiction? I did. Fiction is a product of the imagination. The TRUTH, indeed, is stranger than FICTION. In the lying-in clinic that Wednesday evening, in her own turf, she was the most credible person. I know that every professional is bound by ethical standards. I wondered what ethical standards a midwife like her follows. Was she not taught that it isn't RIGHT to DECEIVE a CHILDLESS COUPLE so that the BABY of a HEARTLESS MOTHER will have security? Or could it be that the midwife has a problem with SEMANTICS. She probably thought that the word LYING in her LYING-IN CLINIC means telling something that misleads or deceives.

The (un)real MOTHER and (un)loving GRANDMOTHER. Well, what they did to Marc Andrei speaks volumes of what kind of people are they? They are like moon jellies - BONELESS, BRAINLESS & HEARTLESS.

I recalled that my wife told me that the grandmother kept batting in when she and ate Baby were talking that Tuesday afternoon when she brought home Marc Andrei for the first time. The grandmother kept reminding ate Baby about money matters in the lying-in clinic. At that juncture, my wife wanted to ask if ate Baby and the grandmother were both in the lying-in clinic when Marc Andrei was born.

I woke up that morning without my wife and Marc Andrei by my side. They were already downstairs. When I went down I saw my wife lovingly clutching our baby while humming a song.

We had a serious conversation again the previous night about our situation. She vigorously opposed my plan of giving up our son telling me that we should have just given him up entirely the first time around – that I should have not allowed her to be so attached to Marc Andrei if I would just surrender him after all. For whatever reason, she said, nobody should take away her son from her.

The tables were turn. It was her turn to say that everything between us would no longer be the same should I give up Marc Andrei.

My emotional rollercoaster continued its downward spiral. It was so steep a fall.

I tried hard to make her understand the same things I told him the previous night. That the family of that woman is known for their scheming ways. With that, I could not afford to make it appear on paper that we are the real parents of Marc Andrei as suggested by the midwife in the lying-in clinic. I became afraid that in the future that may be used against us, given the reputation of the family of that woman. Besides, how would Marc Andrei feel when finally we need to tell him of his being an adopted son and then he'll discover that his real mother lives just nearby? What emotional wound that would create in him. What about if seeing daily Marc Andrei just around the corner the (un)real mother would develop fondness of the child then later on would demand that he be returned to her? Daily that we would be in pins and needles hounded by the thought that anytime, our Marc Andrei will be snatched away by the (un)real mother or any member of her family. And if and when the court of law would be asked to intervene, who would the honorable judge favor?

In making whatever decision, I told my wife that it should not be our feelings we should consider but rather the implications on Marc Andrei and to us as a couple in the long run.

That day, some of my colleagues at work asked questions about Marc Andrei. My response was a simple – “He’s doing fine.” I could not tell them the dilemma we were facing at that time. I wore a mask of happiness pretending that everything was fine.

My wife sent me several text messages that day at work imploring that we should not be giving up Marc Andrei. Exasperated, I responded once and said “We won’t give up our son if you will agree that we will bring him to my hometown in Batangas!”

She rejected the idea. My offer was serious, I really thought of it. I can easily find a job in Batangas, what was important with me that time was keeping Marc Andrei. And that was our best option then.

I saw a glimmer of hope that my wife was beginning to understand the situation when she told me through a text message that if ever we would give up Marc Andrei, we won’t be returning him to Ate Baby but to someone else – to any of those who have shown interest in Marc Andrei that Tuesday afternoon and not to any of those who designed the scheme to make fools out of us.

At nightfall, I asked Ate Baby through text message to come to our house for something very urgent. She came after 10 minutes, announcing her arrival through her trademark boisterous laugh and bass booming voice.

We waited until she got settled in her seat. I and my wife were just quiet. Ate Baby was not used to that kind of reception from me. Usually, when she’s loud, I would be louder. She probably sensed trouble which prompted her to ask if there was a problem.

Not wanting to beat around the bush, I told her that we have discovered that the mother of Marc Andrei was that woman residing two houses away from us. Thus, we were giving up Marc Andrei for good.

Upon hearing my firm declaration, my wife cried while looking at Marc Andrei who was soundly sleeping in the daybed not aware of how sad things have been turning unfavorably for him. My wife kept shaking her head. I didn’t know why. Did she get hurt by my decision? Or she could not believe that we were deceived in that manner.

My wife gave me a stare that was beyond description. I could not say with certainty if that was a gaze of an angry person or a look imploring that I reconsider my decision. Or was it a combination of both. I was suddenly reminded of how I felt about her when suddenly she changed her mind few nights back and wanted to give up our baby. That stare made me feel that she is accusing me of cowardice. She was seemingly demanding that I explain why we need to give Marc Andrei up and not keep him at all cost.

Ate Baby appeared surprised and confused. She asked who told us so. She claimed that she was even unaware that that woman was pregnant. (Reliable sources told me that she was one of those who brought that woman to that lying-in clinic... and yet she made that claim.) I said that after hearing unconfirmed reports about the DECEIT committed against us, we conducted our investigation through the help of some people. But I did not drop names.

I asked her pointblank if she knew that the mother of Marc Andrei was that woman. I asked her if she was part of the plan to DECEIVE us. Unbeknownst to her that we already know everything, Ate Baby swore by heaven that she did not know who the mother of Marc Andrei is – that she would never do that to me. She kept denying knowledge of that woman’s pregnancy and stood pat on the story they made us to believe - that the mother of Marc Andrei was a 19-year old woman from Manila. She denied as well (and vehemently) complicity to the attempt to deceive us. The bombastic that she is even warned that she would confront the grandmother saying that if what we said was true then she herself was a victim of the deception.

When I told her that the midwife herself admitted everything – that she was there when Marc Andrei was born and she knew who the mother is – that she took part in weaving the lie that the midwife told us – she began to weep. She talked like a sheepish dog caught in a corner and has no more place to run. She, however, maintained innocence and promised to talk to the midwife and clarify things. She continued to cry and tried to convince us that she had nothing to do with that hanky-panky.

After a few minutes, she said that she went there only to get the baby when the midwife called her and told her that there was a mother who gave birth but would give away her baby. But she never met the mother.

I cut short the story of ate Baby, not wanting to hear the end of another tall tale that she was beginning to spun. I did not intend to get stuck again in another web of her lies. I told her that we will not return to them our baby. That while we were not keeping Marc Andrei because of certain complications, we will ensure that our son would not be exploited and humiliated further.

When she recollected herself, she said that she would bring Marc Andrei back to the midwife and ask for explanation. I stood firm that they would never get Marc Andrei back, despite all her protestations.

Then I called the relatives of the couple, childless like us, who have also shown interest on getting Marc Andrei.

When they arrived, my wife started weeping again. I could see how sincerely she did not intend to give up our son, making me feel really guilty. I recalled how she suffered when we quarreled because she suddenly gave up being a mother to Marc Andrei that Thursday night. She more than redeemed herself from that fickle-mindedness and have proven that she could be a good mother. Indeed she is. I am a living witness to that. And I reflected for a moment then and asked myself, “Am I the one becoming a bad father?”

I am no moon jelly, not anymore. The decision I made was a product of reflection and prayers. The decision I made was an offshoot of the consultation I did with not just one but many people. All of them I deemed have wisdom, more than the little I have.

I could not possibly hurt Marc Andrei. I became a bad father twice already – twice I was a moon jelly. The first time was when I allowed my girlfriend to take our son away from me. The second time... how I wish I could tell you. Marc Andrei was my path to redemption. My ticket to salvation. I have been rectifying things with my a son. But what is painful is that I could no longer do that to my second child, supposedly a daughter.

People around me don't know. I never told them. I was afraid to tell them, that such is the main source of my sadness, not the problems of the family where I came from, not their imperfections of the lady of my house, but my imperfections... particularly from my failures as a father.

Then when it was time for Marc Andrei to go, my wife did not hide her grief. She would not let go of our son.

Then I recalled Bertolt Brecht's play entitled "Caucasian Chalk Circle" where there were two mothers each claiming to be the mother of a baby boy. The funny thing is the real mother was not there to join the tug of war for Marc Andrei. The other party who wish to lay claim on Marc Andrei was not there also. It was only the mother of Marc Andrei for seven days – my wife.

In the play aforementioned the king drew a huge circle with a line at the middle where he put the baby. Those claiming to be the mothers were told to race to the middle and grab the baby. Whoever succeeds in getting to the baby first would take him home. When the king gave the signal that the two women can begin only one of them moved to grab the baby. When the king asked the other woman why she did not move she said that she'd rather see her son taken away by another woman than to endanger his life and limb. Then the king issued the edict that that woman who did not try to grab the baby should have the baby for she's the real mother.

The circle was drawn in the mind of my wife. She could either grab Marc Andrei from the middle of the circle or let him be taken away and grow up in a better physical and emotional environment.

While biting her lips and tried unsuccessfully to control her tears, she gave Marc Andrei to the relatives of the couple to whom we're entrusting our son.

Upon learning that Marc Andrei will be brought that night to the next town then the following day to Manila, the still teary-eyed ate Baby volunteered to bring them to the next town using her vehicle - that they just needed to wait for a while for she must be informing the midwife that our son will be taken by another couple.

Before ate Baby left, she promised me she would clear her name. I chose not to respond.

When she was gone, I warned the relatives of the couple who would take care of Marc Andrei not to allow sister Babe to know exactly where our son will be brought because if the family of the (un)real mother of Marc Andrei would know then they may encounter problems. They heeded my advice and I told them that I would take care of Sister Babe when and if she still would have the nerve to show up in my house.

Before they left, I and my wife took turns in saying our painful goodbyes to Marc Andrei. Both our eyes welled with tears. Losing Marc Andrei was painful to both of us. But I could say that between us, it was more painful to my wife.

When I gave back Marc Andrei to our visitors, he cried. And while they were moving out of our residence, our son did not cease crying as if pleading me to take him back. Have I become a bad father again?

Our visitors walked through the same terrace where I saw sister Babe standing seven days ago clutching Marc Andrei. My wife ran to the bedroom upstairs when I closed the front door. She locked herself up. I had a key but I decided to leave my wife by herself and respect her grief over the loss of our son. Besides I also wanted to retreat to my room of despair and perhaps cry a river.

I went back downstairs and slept on the daybed where my son – MARC ANDREI – used to sleep. I closed my eyes and vividly saw the face of my son becoming crimson whenever I would kiss him in his cheeks, then I heard his shrieks and cries.

My emotional rollercoaster was not through yet with its descent. But I trust the grand designer of the tracks where my emotional rollercoaster is mounted. Soon I would climb up again and even there maybe more twists and spins and turns, I know I will never be thrown off the tracks for I always fasten my seatbelt called faith tight.

It may take time before my wife would understand why I needed to decide that way and forgive me for it.

My wife and Marc Andrei, MOTHER and SON... I and Marc Andrei, FATHER and SON - for just seven days.