

A full-page background image featuring a silhouette of a man lifting a child into the air. The scene is set against a warm, orange-hued sunset sky with a bright sun low on the horizon. The man is on the left, leaning back, and the child is on the right, being tossed upwards. Some dark foliage is visible in the top right corner.

Anderson Hernandes

the life of
an adoptive father

the adoption of a child
from a father's point of view

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original version in Portuguese – A vida de um pai adotivo – A
adoção de uma criança pelo ponto de vista de um pai

The life of an adoptive father

Anderson Hernandes Batista

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The adoption of a child from a father's point of view

1st Edition

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ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

I cannot start without thanking my two wonderful children who were the inspiration for this book.

I thank my wife and companion who have been by my side for 12 years and who has helped me build such a wonderful family.

To my mom and brothers whom I love dearly and who always shared in the happy moments with my children.

To my dad who left us in 2004, but who caused a deep impression in my life and unfortunately did not have the chance to meet his grandchildren.

PREFACE
ADOPTING ADOPTION

I have not always understood the grandiosity of loving a non-biological child, loving, that is, not as if the child were biological, but with much more love and dedication.

I came to the point, a long time ago, of considering adoption with harsh prejudice. I believed that adoption was a solution only for those who could not have biological children. It is evident that those who cannot have biological children have the adoption as a solution. However, many of those in such situation do not choose to adopt or, if they do, they procrastinate such decision for so long or they make so many choices as to how the ideal child should be that they end up not adopting, and by doing this, they deceive themselves into thinking that they really want to adopt.

I have learned what it is to love a non-biological child with the hundreds of adoptive fathers and mothers that I have met since I started working as a judicial psychologist, and more specifically when, for some reason, I got involved in the case of an adoption support group. I confess that I do not know why I became involved in this. But I felt that there was something missing in the adoption work and that this hole needed to be filled with a support group.

The life of an adoptive father

When the group started, there were no others than some fellow workers from other entities and I, who worked with adoption. We decided to create a group that, as we thought at that time, somebody else would eventually take care of. Evidently, some of our partners, especially adoptive parents, joined us and started to adopt the group with us. In reality, we have never abandoned our child: the GEAA-SBC, we have been caring for it until this day, with the same care and dedication as if to a child: an adoptive child.

With the GEAA-SBC, we truly understood the suffering of a child who is neglected by all. We also understood the suffering of those who cannot bear their own children and who start to, symbolically speaking, for a long time, expect a child --- a child that nobody knows when will be born and to whom will resemble. What a joy it is for mature and experienced couples that have already raised their own children and later choose to be parents again, but by adoption. And what a joy it is for a child, that perhaps for the first time, instead of calling the most loved person in life aunt or uncle, can now say MOMMY or DADDY.

Believe me, this is not all insignificant. As I said earlier, I do not know why I got involved in the adoption support cause. I just know now that I do not intend to leave this job. Besides being able to help many people make sensible, necessary and legal decisions and making possible that such decisions happen with the least suffering and the most dose of happiness and gratification possible, I feel that a bit of each happy and satisfying moment and of each successful encounter stay with me, even though my participation in promoting them may have been very little. The suffering and deception of a child without the chance to have a family is also something that, at least in part, stays with me. Exactly for the fact that I am able to feel, imagine, and see in my mind's eye, at least a

little, the pain of a child, and in order to help other children not suffer the same rejection and pain, I continue in this fight. This is why I adopted adoption.

Marta Wiering Yamaoka, judicial psychologist of the Forum of São Bernardo do Campo, technical coordinator of GEAA-SBC – Group of Studies and Support of Adoption of SBC, specialist in Judicial Psychology by CRP 06, with extensive experience in therapeutic and community groups.

POEM
“BEFORE BECOMING A FATHER”

Before becoming a father, I used to sleep all night and did not know
how important this is

Before becoming a father, I did not use to step on the toys lying
around the house and I used to be jealous of my belongings

Before becoming a father, I used to enjoy the happy hour at the
end of the afternoon after a whole day of work

Before becoming a father, I rarely went to the doctor in the middle
of the night

Anderson Hernandes

Before becoming a father, I could eat every time I was hungry

Before becoming a father, I did not even know one children's fairy tale

Before becoming a father, I did not know that Backyardigans, LazyTown and Barney existed

Before becoming a father, I used to look at other people's children and wonder how they could be so badly-behaved

Before becoming a father, I did not imagine that a child could be so intelligent or have feelings

Before becoming a father, I never imagined that a child could love me so much regardless of all my faults

Before becoming a father, I did not know that someone so little could bring me so much joy by saying the word "father".

Anderson Hernandes

INTRODUCTION

I always wondered how I could help people be better acquainted with the challenges, the experience and the joy of adopting a child through the point of view of someone who has fought a lot to reach this objective.

Accordingly, this book is part of a personal project that aims to inform and encourage the adoption of children. In it, I share the happiness and challenges that I have had in the past few years with the adoption of my two children.

I have two adopted children that today are three and four years old respectively. The difference in age between the two is only seven

months. That is why we consider their upbringing as the upbringing of twins.

Although my two children are not related by blood, since they were born from different biological parents, they resemble each other a lot physically. They have the same skin tone, hair color and height. They are also very united.

However, their personalities are very different and we have to educate them in a personalized way to meet the needs of each one of them.

A great number of couples suffer with the impossibility of conceiving a biological child. They do not know how to adopt or they fear adopting a child thinking that they will not have the same feelings that we develop for a biological one. For this reason, I hope that by sharing the joy of these wonderful moments I have spent with my children, I can help couples make the same decision that I have made and consequently, gain the same joy.

The life of an adoptive father

To me, since my children give me so much joy, it would be unfair to say that I have adopted them; so I tend to say that I was adopted as a father. This is the reason for the title of this book.

I hope you enjoy my experience and happiness because my experience is just one of the millions found among parents who, one day, had the opportunity of being adopted by their children.

CHAPTER 1

MY CHILDHOOD

“The foundation of every individual is built during childhood. Consequently, by dedicating our time and effort, we will be giving him the best for his future.”

Anderson Hernandez

I am the middle son of a family of three siblings, in which our age difference is seven and nine years respectively. My brothers and I had a normal childhood, full of expectations and with a wonderful upbringing from my parents.

We never had access to the luxuries that other children enjoyed in those years. In spite of this, we never lacked anything. My father saved a lot and this reflected on the entertainment we had access to, such as video games, bicycle and others.

I remember a lot of details from my childhood, even things that are so common to our children today, but that deeply impressed me. I remember, for example, when I got my first toy. I considered it really wonderful. It was a box of *Play Mobil* with 11 figurines. For months I was amazed at them.

I also remember the first time our father took us to McDonald's. It was an event. I was about 10 years old and spent weeks planning

that day. Until that moment in my life I had never been there. Our father did not use to take us to eat out --- something that is so common nowadays --- so up to this day I remember the details of that event.

My Mother

My mother had a fundamental role in the upbringing of our family, since she spent most of the time with us, caring for my siblings and me. Our values and principles were molded according to the education we received from her.

Since very early in life I used to visit the *favelas* (shanty towns) close to my house, because I had many friends who lived there. As a result, I never had any reservations or were prejudiced against such places. I had access to a great variety of families and problems; poor and miserable couples that raised their children precariously. Despite my early age, I already understood the economic inequalities and I felt a lot of pity for those children.

My Father

The life of an adoptive father

My father was always an example to us in many aspects. What often comes to my mind is the fact that he was very hard-working, and he motivated me to work since I was very little. He used to say that a young man needs to start working early in order to receive responsibilities. This helped me become a responsible person very early in life. At the age of 12 I already used to do some informal work and at the age of 14, I was formally employed at a company as an *Office-boy*.

In 2004 daddy left us, victim of a hit-and-run accident. Today, while I am writing this chapter, it has been four years since that happened and I still miss him very much. It saddens me the fact that he did not have the happiness of meeting his grandchildren, since he followed our fight and our waiting to adopt them. Our second child was born before my father's death, but as we adopted him years after my father had left us, he never had the chance to meet our son.

His death was something that shook me very much and I have dedicated a whole chapter later on to speak in more details about it.

There is no way to deny that what we experience in childhood plays a vital role in our life. That is why I place a high value in my children's childhood, because it will be the basis for their future. A lot is said about giving our children the best education, enrolling them in the best schools, but nothing substitutes the time dedicated to and the talks we have with them. For this reason, we have to offer our best in this regard.

CHAPTER 2

DREAM:

“TO HAVE A CHILD”

I got married very young --- at the age of 20, following my pattern in life of being precocious. To many people, getting married too early is one of the factors that lead to unhappiness in marriage, because since the couple has little experience in life, difficulties may arise which are hard to deal with. This, however, was not our case, because I appreciate responsibilities. I always enjoyed a normal married life filled with happiness and good moments along with, like any other couple, little bits of difficulties.

After a few years of marriage, my wife and I considered the possibility of having a child. As we had enjoyed many happy moments by ourselves, we thought that there was something missing and we decided: she was going to become pregnant. Consequently, we stopped the contraceptive methods and waited. We had heard that the effects of birth control pills could last many months, so even after one year, we were not surprised with the fact that she was not pregnant. But, time passed by and the so desired pregnancy did not happen and we became very apprehensive with the situation.

The life of an adoptive father

After some time, my wife started looking for explanations for her not getting pregnant. She did lots of tests to investigate the possible causes. None of the tests were conclusive so as to point to the real reasons. Therefore, I took a decision: check if the problem was with me.

After doing a test I found out: I was the one who had a problem. The doctor explained that it could be treated and he prescribed medications and some recommendations. But time passed by and we saw no results, consequently, we went to see other specialists.

Every time we went to see a new doctor, we had to repeat some of the tests and this made the situation even more painful. To treat infertility problems in men is much more difficult than in women, since the medications available, most of the time hormone based, not always provide the expected results.

A very common first mistake among people who look for fertility treatment is to go see doctors that are not specialists. This happened to us, until one day, my wife read a book from one of the best specialists in human reproduction in Brazil. Looking for

solutions, we got in touch with him and set an appointment. This very attentive professional asked for more tests and thirty days later we had the results. We set another appointment with him and after evaluating the tests, he gave us some hard news: our chances of becoming pregnant, even by the assisted methods, were less than 5%. At that moment, the world fell on our heads, we left the doctor's office disheartened and we could not understand how this could have happened to us. It seemed like we had a happy life, but we just felt that the presence of a child was missing.

As all the other doctors had given us a different view from this specialist, we were shocked with that diagnosis, thinking that the doctor was wrong. But his explanations were very convincing.

I remember crying many times, alone, at the edge of the bed, for not being able to have a child and besides, for being the one responsible for the problem. This frustration even triggered a psychosomatic skin disease for which I spent many months in treatment.

The life of an adoptive father

Similarly, my wife also went through a difficult period. She became very sad and almost got into depression. In one of our conversations, I brought up the hypotheses of adoption, but that revolted her. It was as if I had proposed that we commit a crime together. I understand how difficult it must be for a woman not to be able to bear and breastfeed a child. The word “child” is directly linked to pregnancy and not to raising a child. TV commercials usually focus on mothers breastfeeding, because this is what reminds us of the link between parents and children. For this reason, I understand how a woman feels in a situation such as this.

After some time, my wife woke up and said: “Let’s start the paperwork for the adoption.” I was surprised because it had been a long time that we did not talk about the subject, but since my option was for adoption, I did not hesitate and started the steps for the registration.

But before sharing our experience, I am going to talk a little about adopting in Brazil.

CHAPTER 3

THE ADOPTION IN BRAZIL

Those who have decided on adopting a child know that the adoption process is not an easy task. It involves a lot of documents, interviews and medical attestations. All this serves to select candidates who are capable of fulfilling the needs of children whose reality, in general, are very different from children who are raised by their biological parents.

Very often, when children are available for adoption, they have already passed through different phases that marked their lives regardless of being newborn babies or not. Besides, why would a child be put up for adoption if there were not for the major family problems the child has experienced? Therefore, abandonment, rejection, ill-treatment, domestic violence, hunger, excessive poverty, moral aggression, and sexual abuse are some of the things that happen in their lives. The mistreatment of children includes a number of things that are absurd to us. Many are victims of physical abuse, which includes aggression and torture such as burning with cigarettes butts, squeezing of the fingers with pliers, spanking and much more. Some children are held house hostage, chained or tied indoors or simply left alone without any kind of supervision. Other little ones watch their parents have intercourse

or are even victims of sexual abuse in their own house. Besides, there are those who are abandoned in shelters or who have even survived the attempt of being killed by their “parents”.

People are horrified when something like this is broadcast by the media, but such episodes, contrary to what one may imagine, are very common. We just need to visit children shelters to find this reality. Studies show that 18% of children are victims of abandonment and 12% of mistreatment --- not to mention those who are victims of emotional abuse. These biological parents have no idea of how damaging it is to submit these little creatures to such abuse. Very often, their whole lives are compromised. For this reason, many children need a psychological follow-up for a long period after the adoption.

When the public authorities are finally able to take these children from their houses, they are usually sent to children’s institutions or shelters with the objective of, in a short time, being conducted to new adoptive families that have gone through the process of registration and approval of the Forum.

Brazil is a country with huge social-economic inequalities. Consequently, there are families whose standard of living is well below the poverty line. Simply put, some do not even have food to eat. The low level of education combined with poverty proves to be a fertile ground for the appearance of uninterested parents or parents without basic conditions to raise their children. It is common to see children and adolescents simply living on the streets for not being given neither attention nor care by their families.

The State has a social obligation of taking care of children and adolescents, and this is guaranteed by law. But the reality is different, since there is not enough structure to take care of all who live in subhuman conditions. Consequently, when a family recognizes that they cannot give their children the needed care and that they cannot give them to the State either, they end up mistreating them. This happens especially in the states with more social differences.

Moreover, there are two sides to this problem in Brazil; on one side, prospective parents who cannot have children, and on the

other side, children who do not have parents. In between, there is a huge gap with waiting periods, difficulties and bureaucracy. To exemplify: to adopt a girl, white, up to six months old, without any physical or mental problems --- standard preference among prospective couples --- the waiting period can be of up to ten years.

Since the majority of those who plan to adopt in Brazil are those who could not have biological children, they have already spent years waiting. Only after this they think about the possibility of having an adopted child. This happens because campaigns that promote adoption do not always exist. This is sad, because when the case of an abandoned baby is broadcast by the media or adopted children are shown in soap operas, there is a substantial increase of prospective parents looking for the adoption process.

Between the children without parents and parents without children there is a slow and bureaucratic process. Hence, it is lamentable that to adopt a child, the prospective adopter has to wait for so long. The process is so long that, very often, the candidates even lose hope of being able to adopt. But the reason for the long delay is not because there are no children available, but rather because

the children spend years in the shelters before being able to be adopted. A biological father or mother who mistreats a child, in general, only loses the child's legal custody after it is being proven that the child's life is in danger. Even in cases such as this, the parents have an ample period of time to defend themselves. As a result, children sometimes spend years in the shelters and only when they are much older, the process of looking for adoptive parents starts. Since the favourite age group of the adopters is children up to two years old, the remaining of the children have greater difficulty in being adopted by a new family, and some are never adopted. Studies have proven that 61% of the children in shelters are between the ages of 6 and 15.

Even after the adoption process has started, its conclusion can take a long time to come. This makes the adoptive parents very apprehensive. Besides all the care that the parents need to have with their new child, during some time, they also live with the possibility of losing this child to the biological parents.

In view of all this, we can affirm in a concluding way that adopting a child in Brazil is not an easy task and that it requires patience, love

and a lot of courage. I often hear people state that they would like to adopt a child, but they do not even know where to start. Even to us, who were already well informed before registering for adoption, it took around four months just to gather documents and being approved to be on the waiting list. Parents with less financial resources, little access to information and help of the lawyers have more difficulties reaching a legal adoption. Despite all obstacles involved in a legal adoption, always opt for it because it will give you future guarantee against any lawsuits from third parties respecting the child in question. To accept that someone gives you a child without a legal guarantee is very risky, because once bonds of love have been established the pain of the separation can be irreparable.

Due to this scenario, the only thing left to do is to hope that the changes to be introduced with the new national adoption waiting list register will facilitate the access to children especially in the states with the bigger concentration of prospective parents. I believe that with this new register we will have significant achievements in this social problem and in the happiness of parents and children.

CHAPTER 4

THE DECISION FOR THE ADOPTION

It is common that couples who wish to adopt create a stereotype of the perfect child. Having this in mind, they visit the shelters and there they find dozens of children, in average four years old, dark skinned, with short hair (to avoid lice) and dirty because they spend the day playing in the recreational spaces of these locations. Many of these children have a delay in their development because they do not have enough individual stimulus in this phase of their lives, which is so important. The lack of attention and love is something evident. When people visit these shelters for the first time, they get surprised and sensitized with the fact that so many children ask for cuddling. For this and other reasons, when many prospective couples see these children, they have the impression that none fits their patterns. Unfortunately this really gets in the way of the possibilities of happiness between adoptive parents and adopted children, because the stereotype of the perfect child is a mistake that prevents happiness.

Those who have adopted know that the happiness does not depend on the race, color, age, or physical characteristics. A month after these children are adopted and taken care of, they resemble in

nothing to what they used to be, because there is a transformation in their lives that make them become different.

For this reason, in order to adopt a child it is necessary, above all, to prepare the heart, because one thing is true: they will be children of the heart. It is necessary to be prepared to face challenges and deal with uncertainties. It is necessary to be deprived of high expectations and be prepared to give love, a lot of love, because lack of affection is what they most have.

Any father or mother knows that raising a child is an enormous responsibility and that it requires dedication. But, raising an adoptive child requires even more because the expectation is higher and the lack of affection is such that, very often, the parents feel drained. Therefore it is imperative that they are prepared to give the best of themselves and to be super-father and super-mother.

The search for our child

When we had our registration process approved, we were informed that the adoption process of a child with the physical characteristics that we requested would take around three years. We tried not to be too demanding because this could slow down the process. At that time, we had already been waiting for our child for eight years and the thought that it could take another three was something that did not please us. But we did not have another alternative, so we decided to wait.

After that, I started to get the most information I could about adoption and people who had adopted. I ended up by reading a lot of *blogs* and the stories of lots of families, including of some who had adopted children outside of the state of São Paulo. Consequently, we made some contacts with people in the states of Minas Gerais, Bahia, Maranhão e Rio Grande do Sul, searching for a younger child available to be adopted immediately. The idea was that, if we did not succeed, we had the guarantee of being called in São Paulo and by doing this, we felt that we had nothing to lose.

Some mothers who cannot or do not want to raise their children give them away to other families informally. But this was not our desire in adopting, because we wanted to adopt legally.

In one occasion we received a call about a child that apparently was available for adoption in the countryside of São Paulo. We promptly traveled during the night of the following day, but when we got there, we found out that the newborn baby girl was HIV positive and that she was not even free for adoption.

That day we spent the morning in the city and we got to know a shelter. There we found many children and we met four siblings, three boys and one girl, with one year of difference between each one of them, in other words, they were like a little “ladder” of children.

We went to the Forum and there we were informed that we could adopt them if we accept to adopt them all, because the judge did not accept to separate them. We thought it was too much for inexperienced parents and we said no. I confess that I was touched by those children. Nonetheless, I did not consider an easy task to

raise four children without any previous experience and this would require a lot of preparation and dedication. Today, I am sure that we took the right decision. Some months later, the Forum called offering to separate two of children, but we had already adopted our daughter. So, we explained our reasons and they looked for another family.

The question of separating siblings or not is a hindrance that exists to make the adoption of more than one child faster. Since only a few are willing to accept to adopt more than two children, they stay there waiting for other couples or for the possibility of being separated to different couples. That was exactly what happened in the case of those children.

We made different attempts in both near and far places. In many instances, I followed the possibilities that came up and we initiated contacts with many people in different states, some whom we knew and some whom we did not.

During a certain time, we started a contact in the state of Mato Grosso. It was a contact suggested by one of my wife's aunt, Ana,

who by being very touched by our search, tried to help. She was even more hopeful than we were, because to us, it seemed to be just another contact among all the other contacts that we had made. We were informed that a certain mother had three children victims of mistreatment and that she was about to lose their custody. Since the children needed immediate care, they were looking for different couples to take care of each one of them. The judge was willing to separate the children, which for us seemed to be something almost unthinkable. Our contact, a lady whom we did not know, was the intermediate between the Conselho Tutelar and us for the procedures regarding one of the children. We were even asked which one of the three children we wanted to keep. It seemed too easy to believe that it would work out. Despite this, we opted for the youngest, the one that was just a few months old. We did not have much information, nor did we talk to the authorities, but we did what our contact asked us to do and because of the desire to adopt, we sent a declaration via fax in which we indicated that we would accept to keep the youngest child the way she was: without any mental or physical problems, only in need of immediate care.

Today, thinking it over, I do not even know how I accepted to send that fax. I just know that, since we were trying to find a child, it was one of the many attempts we made. But we did not have further news and we even lost hope of receiving an answer after one month without any news.

Until one certain day, more specifically on April 13th, 2005, we received a phone call that changed our lives. But before talking about it, I want to go back one year in time.

CHAPTER 5

ONE YEAR BEFORE --- A TRAGEDY

It was the morning of April 15th, 2004 and everything seemed just like any other day. I was working and around eleven thirty I left for lunch. All the details of what happened that day are still very well alive in my mind. My mother had left a message asking me to return her call with urgency, and so I did as soon as I got back from lunch. It was then that she mentioned: “Andy, daddy hasn’t come back...”

Well, in order to understand the meaning of this sentence, I am going to talk a bit about my father. He was born in 1943 and in 2004 he was 61 years old. His physical appearance did not correspond with his age, since he rode an average of 20 kilometres by bicycle daily. Because of his encouragement and also to spend some time together, I used to ride a bicycle with him three times a week. The week of April 14th was an unusual week in our weekly exercises. For some inexplicable reason, I went biking alone twice that week and, on the Thursday, the day that I used to go with him, I ended up not going.

Our usual route was near a highway close to our house where many other people used to be. So he went alone. At the moment when

my mother told me that daddy had not come back, I felt something very cold inside of me and I immediately had this feeling: my father died. Then, I immediately started my phone calls to the highway patrol and to hospitals to know if there had been an accident in the proximity. Thirty minutes later, I got the information that an accident had happened and that the victim had been taken to a nearby hospital. I dropped everything and went running to the hospital and after meeting with the doctor, it was confirmed: my father had been hit by a car and killed.

It is incredible how we all know that we can be victims of unforeseen occurrence, but at the same time, it is hard to accept it. My father had always been my partner and at that moment in life, I was living a phase that I had not experienced with him in years, because we were talking a lot and were very close friends. Lots of uncertainties haunted me for a long time, such as the fact of not having had contact with him that week, and the fact that the way the accident happened was not clarified. Death is hard for us all. However, when life is interrupted by an accident and other unexpected factors, the feeling is that the pain is even bigger.

Anderson Hernandez

Today, after these few years after his death, I have learned to live with his absence. My mother, who seemed to be the person less likely to deal with everything, was the one that most served as an example and we admire her a lot for this.

In any case, all the memories that I keep of my father are very positive and I hope to pass them on to my children.

CHAPTER 6

THE PHONE CALL THAT CHANGED MY LIFE

On April 13th, 2005 we received a call that changed our life, exactly two days before completing one year of my father's death. On that day, our contact called us and said the following words: "Anderson, you need to come to Mato Grosso today, your daughter is waiting for you at the hospital." It is very hard to explain what went through my mind at that moment. The only thing I was able to do was to get the name of the city and to say I could not travel on the same day, but that on the following day, I would take the first flight there.

The adoption of a child in these circumstances is unusual if compared to the normal circumstances of regular adoption processes. Usually, the prospective parents are called to meet the child, initiate the bonding process and then make the decision of becoming candidates for the adoption or not. In my case, I simply received a call and I had to decide with my wife if we would adopt or not. I did not know the child's health situation, age or any other information. We only knew that it was a girl, about five months old, malnourished, who was at a hospital under medical care, but who did not have any significant physical or health problems.

I hung up and left to get plane tickets. On my way, I called my wife and said: “Ana, are you sitting down?” On the other side of the line I heard the negative answer. “So, sit down because I’m buying tickets to travel to Mato Grosso to pick up our daughter. Ana simply became static, without action.

Since we did not know what would be the end of this story, we decided not to tell anyone, not even our parents. We simply packed our bags and we said that we were going to travel.

On the following day, we took the first flight and we arrived at the capital Cuiabá. After that, we headed to the city, where, because of being so far, we arrived only on the night of the 15th. There, we were received by our contact and we went to the hospital. The place was precarious and the nursery was a room of approximately 30 square meters. There were about 15 mothers with their children. At that moment, I witnessed one of the most exciting scenes of my life. Our contact took us to the crib of a little baby and when we got closer, we saw a helpless five-month-old baby who weighed only 3,800 grams. Her face was of hunger, reminding us of children who come from African countries. She was as light as a

newborn baby, did not have any hair, looked as if she had suffered, and was only in her diapers. But beside all that we saw, to us, she was the prettiest baby in the world. The words I heard that moment still resounds through my mind: "This is your daughter."

That person had no understanding of the meaning of those words. It was the fulfillment of a dream and the end of along waiting period. For a few minutes, I kept looking at her face and it came to my mind that I should register that special moment. So, I took a picture with my cell phone.

During a few minutes, my wife held her in her arms and after that, she gave me the baby, so I could hold her. We had a good look at her little body and we saw that she was well, but she was a bit weak and had a strong pneumonia.

At the moment I took her in my arms, everything changed. It is hard to explain, but it was as if she had just been born and were our real child. I could not accept to leave her there helpless.

The life of an adoptive father

It is hard to explain how things happen in the mind of someone who adopts a child, but the feeling is that she had always been our daughter since the moment she was born. This is strange because I did not have time to learn to be a father. Birth parents have nine months to plan each detail, from furniture to baby's clothes; even with which blanket the baby is going to leave the hospital is planned. At the hospital, mother and baby receive friends and they go home surrounded by personal care. We were thousands of kilometres far from home, in a place which we did not know, and yet we were suddenly becoming parents and thinking how we would get back home and take with us a baby who did not even have a name.

Despite all these uncertainties, on the following day, I went shopping early in the morning and I started to buy everything for this baby. Even though she was five months old, the newborn baby clothes were sometimes too big for her. People asked me: "Why does the baby weigh so little?" and I had to explain from store to store. After some hours of shopping, I arrived at the hospital with all the items and there I stayed for some hours waiting for the custody counselor who would give us further information. Then we

started to feel a bit scared because there was no guarantee that we would be able to keep our baby. She asked us if we were really willing to have the baby. I asked myself if she did not imagine that if we had traveled so much, there would be no reason for doubt. I think she was not completely sure that she could count on our desire to adopt that girl, so we were emphatic and she gave us an authorization to keep the baby.

I signed the papers and asked if I could immediately take the baby from there. She looked at me surprised, and I continued explaining that I had reserved a room at a private hospital. And to the hospital we headed. She stayed there for two other days.

After a few days with the baby, we decided on her name and we started calling her Giovanna. As soon as we left the hospital, we were very scared of losing our Giovanna. We did not know how to bring her to São Paulo, because the Forum was dozens of kilometers from where we were. We looked for some lawyers and one of them was very attentive, so we decided to hire him. The first step was to go to the Forum, and so we made an appointment. When we got there, to our surprise, we got to know that the judge

had already given us the temporary custody of our daughter. We left amazed with the news, because we could not believe that we already had her custody. We took a copy of the process paper and traveled back home.

It was only then, with the assurance that things were more certain, that we called our relatives to give them the news. Everybody was happy and surprised. On the following day, we were back home.

Mom had gone through a very difficult year and it was still a delicate moment in her life. Honestly, judging from what I knew of my mother, I did not think she would be able to bear the loss of my father, but she surprised everyone and has overcome all the problems she has been through.

My mother was the first person to meet our daughter when we came back home. She waited for us for more than one hour in front of our house. She could not believe her eyes and became very emotional when she saw our Giovanna.

It was a relief when we finally got home, because we felt protected against the possibility of someone taking our child from us. Soon enough, people started to know that we had adopted a girl and we started to receive visits. Even some neighbours, who previously were not very friendly, began treating us much better from that day on. But that was just the beginning of everything.

CHAPTER 7

THE FIRST YEARS WITH MY GIOVANNA

Giovanna is an amazing child. I remember when she was in hospital and the doctors said that she would have some sequela due to malnutrition. Those doctors could not have been further from the truth, because she is now a normal three-year-old child who, contrary to the information given by the doctors, is ahead of the children of her age when it comes to communication skills. She is able to argue her point the way a much more mature child is and she has a quick reasoning that is very surprising.

We decided that we would name our daughter Giovanna --- name that was not determined by the Justice on the original birth certificate. It is very common that adoptive parents change the name of their children. In many occasions we had to provide some explanation, such as when we took her to the doctor and other places. The same happened when we enrolled her at school. It is only when the adoption process is finalized that the judge makes it official at the registry office to make a new birth certificate. And it was not different with Giovanna. Today, I am very happy to be able to have in my hands the new birth certificate with the name we

chose for her, along with the grandparents and parents's names. This process took three years to be completed.

During a long time, Gigi had problems with her hair growth. Even after putting on weight significantly, she was still bald. This was a reflection of the weakening caused by malnutrition. Today she has long hair and has proved that she is going to be a handful when she becomes a teenager regarding "hair irons". Today, however, the only thing that we have to live with is her crying every time we have to braid her hair, because it becomes very tangled after the shower.

Since very early in life, Gigi has shown that she is going to have a very strong personality. At the age of three, she already chooses her own clothes and decides with whom she wants to sleep. But even though she is like this, when we discipline her, she becomes very sad with herself and promptly says she is sorry. Very often, she asks us questions such as if we are happy with her, probably looking for an approval for being the daughter she is.

When I think of all the effort we made to adopt her, I feel that I would do everything again if I needed to. The joys that we have had with her are priceless. Even though she is very little, I admire her a lot. She brings us a lot of joy. When she is sick, she looks at me and says she is going to get well soon. I get emotional just by thinking she almost could not have survived.

I learned with Gig that bonds of blood have no direct connection with the relationship between parents and children. Even though she was not conceived by us, we have such a close relationship that goes beyond my expectation of how it would be to have an adopted child. Hence, all I have to say is that the privilege of adoption is something unique that can transform the life of a couple.

The life of an adoptive father

CHAPTER 8

“Menina”

Since the day we adopted Giovanna, she has had a rag doll that I gave her and which received the name of “Menina” (girl). Menina is her daughter. Everything we do with Giovanna, from cuddling to education and discipline, she transfers to Menina. If we discipline Gigi, she right away asks for Menina and starts crying with her.

She talks a lot with Menina and Menina talks a lot with her --- of course in Giovanna’s imagination or, sometimes in the voice of a third person, who in this case is me. She talks to Menina as if she were talking with a real person. We can never forget Menina when we go out. One day, we were traveling in Florianópolis, Santa Catarina, and we forgot Menina in the taxi for some careless reason. We became desperate because Giovanna was sleeping and she was going to look for Menina as soon as she woke up. Fortunately, I found the taxi driver’s phone number and I had to pay a cab ride for a doll. Tough to believe, but Menina is almost a person.

In another occasion, Giovanna lost Menina in a hotel in Bahia. I became so distressed with her despair that I even cried with her.

She went from table to table asking: “Sir, have you seen Menina?” After a few hours, to our relief, Menina reappeared. After this episode, we started to pack a “backup” Menina in our luggage.

Since we realized that Giovanna developed a motherly feeling towards Menina, we started to use the doll for many things. So, when Giovanna does something wrong and we need to discipline her, we say that Menina is grounded, instead of Giovanna. It seems that it hurts more in Gigi because it is Menina who is grounded than if it were Giovanna herself.

We were always concerned about how to tell Giovanna that she was adopted. Perhaps it is difficult for a child to understand the fact that she did not come from her mother’s belly. We realized that Menina would be useful in this regard. As a result, to familiarize Giovanna with the adoption, I started by transferring her story to Menina. We started by saying that Menina used to live in Mato Grosso, that she was very tiny and that one day, Giovanna went there, adopted her and started taking care of her. I did that by mimicking Menina talking to Giovanna. One day Giovanna asked where she had been born. I told her that she had been in Mato

Grosso, then, she looked at me and said that Menina had been born there, too. We showed her a photo of hers as a very tiny baby and that brought Menina's story to her mind, which facilitated her comprehension. This also helped her understand her origins and today she tells people very openly that she is the daughter of our hearts.

Menina became old and for this reason, she was given some twin sisters and now we have a family of Meninas. This makes it easy when the "official" Menina is drying on the line. However, she always says: "Daddy, I only like the old Menina."

In any case, I already learned that we actually became Menina's grandparents.

CHAPTER 9

MY SECOND SON “CLAUDINHO”

It was March 2007. Giovanna was developing very well. We were very happy with everything and due to all the work involved in the upbringing of a child, we decided not to adopt another child --- at least, for a few years. But our names were still on the adoption waiting list in São Paulo and, one day we got a call that changed all this. A social worker informed us that our turn on the waiting list had arrived and that there was a boy in a nearby shelter that we could go meet, if we wanted. At that moment, I thought of refusing that, because Gigi was only two years old and we were enjoying that moment with her. But I became curious of meeting that child and I suggested my wife that we go there without any commitment. And this is what we did...

Those who have already had the opportunity of visiting a children shelter know how difficult it is for those in charge of such places to deal with so many difficulties. They need to have a self-sacrificing spirit to be able to meet the needs and legal requirements of caring for children. As soon as you get to one of such places, children simply come to your arms, ask to be cuddled, for affection and much more. Some hide themselves, but not all. As we arrived there,

we had two children in each one of our arms and two other ones grabbing each one of our legs.

From far we were informed about our prospective son. It was a three-year-old boy who had been abandoned and had other siblings who were already being adopted. We got close to him, but he did not even look at us so shy he was. We stayed a while trying to see if he would look at us, smile, but it was in vain. As we left, we were informed that we could go back on the following day if we wanted to continue with the bonding process. And this is what we did. We went back during many days following that day and he always stayed far from us and did not even talk to us. Although he did not talk, every time we arrived there, we used to say that his mother and father were arriving. This way, we started to create a bond with him.

The way other children behave when a visitor is doing the bonding process is interesting. The second time we went to the shelter, they already started to say that we were the boy's parents. Their desire of leaving the shelter is such that even the other children support the bonding process. On the other hand, some are jealous and

mistreat those who are going through the process. There are those who ask us to be their parents, too. This touches us, and to this day, I feel like going back there and adopting some other three children that touched me very much.

The bonding process can last little or a long time, depending on the factors involved. In the case of older children, it usually takes a longer period, because the adaptation is more difficult. Before the temporary custody is authorized, it is necessary that both sides, the child and the adoptive parents, are sure that they have bonded together, in order to avoid problems. If parents are able to go there everyday, as it was in our case, the process is faster.

In all the shelters I have visited, I noticed that the children do not have anything that belongs to them exclusively, everything is collective. If we want to give a child a toy, it is better to take the toy there and bring it back for the next visit, because if we leave it there, it gets lost. The clothes are obviously transferred from one to the other according to their growing up. The shelters depend a lot on donations to be able to cook different things, so besides staple

foods, comfort food, desert, fruit and other items are always welcome.

Once we accepted to initiate the bonding process, we started visiting the boy everyday, and after two weeks we received an authorization to bring him home on the weekend. Giovanna welcomed her brother in a surprising way. On the first day that she went to visit him, she even scared him with so many hugs. She called him “little brother” and showed him affection. Her presence helped a lot, because at home he had somebody with whom to play, and to her it was excellent, since she became more childlike, because before she used to live with too many adults.

After about 40 days of comings and goings, the judge finally gave us the temporary custody of our son, whom we started calling Claudio. He liked the name. Today, after a bit more than a year with us, he changed a lot compared to what he used to be.

Today he resembles in nothing to that child who almost did not speak and was very shy and quiet. Now, after a year and a half of adoption, he talks a lot, so much that sometimes we have to ask

him to speak less. He is very agitated and gives us a hard time to go to bed, since he wants to take every minute to play. He likes to give sarcastic answers to others and we enjoy ourselves a lot with him.

While I am writing this chapter, Claudinho has his foot in a cast. A gate fell on his foot while he was playing with Scooby, his dog. Well, the doctor said that he would have to rest, but he was able to do that for just a few hours. After that, he started walking and today he is literally running with the cast. We have found, this way, that nothing can hold him back.

We decided to give them a dog, but it was Claudinho who liked Scooby better. Scooby is a Labrador which today is six months old and looks like a bull. By the way, having a dog did him very good. He used to be afraid of everything and today is more self-confident and secure. He lets the dog lightly bite him and plays a lot with him and is always close to Scooby when we are at home. I think we made a good decision for him. Now, when it comes to Gigi, she does not really like a dog licking her very much.

The life of an adoptive father

I am very happy I adopted Claudinho too, since he completed our family. I confess that the adaptation was another challenge, but the joy that I have in seeing them so united is something that surpasses everything. During a long time, he erased from his memories that he one day had lived in the shelter. When we used to show him the photos, he simply asked where that place was, even just after a few days that he had left the shelter.

One day he looked at me and said he did not like to live in that place, because there he did not have a father or a mother, did not have a bedroom for himself and some other things. This surprised me because I really thought that he had forgotten the time he lived there, but in reality, unconsciously, he was protecting himself from the memories from that time.

When it had been a year since we adopted him, we threw a little party to commemorate one year of new life. He was very happy and received his friends and biological siblings over. To this day, he asks us to show the video of his little party.

We always leave him comfortable to talk to his biological siblings whenever he wants. As a result, from time to time, they see one another and talk on the phone. But we always explain that each one of them has their daddy and mommy. He understands and we are happy with this relationship among them. I think it is important that they keep in touch, since this makes him happy and it will be useful in the future, by avoiding that he becomes apprehensive concerning his past.

When I think about all the progress that he has made from when we met him to today, I feel very happy and fulfilled, because we have done a good job as parents. The feelings that he demonstrates as a son is a reflection of the love we give him. To notice that he has learned to say that he loves us and that he cannot stand being far from us is rewarding. Of course, we many times, become tired with all the routine of raising two children of the same age, but as I never tire out saying, we have nothing to complain about, because the benefits surpass the challenges.

The life of an adoptive father

CHAPTER 10

DOES PREJUDICE EXIST?

Unfortunately I have to admit: some people are prejudiced against adopted children. I know they are not evil people, but to some, it looks like we are raising aliens. When I adopted Claudinho, a certain person with four children told me that she admired the courage I had to adopt a second child. It's funny because she had four children and nobody found it to be courageous. Very often I was asked if I did not have the desire of having a biological child as if an adopted child were not a real child. Now the most frequent question is if I am scared that my children will revolt against me for being adopted. Well, what to say to people with such thoughts? I prefer to ignore them.

There are many reasons for the prejudice against adopted children, in the majority of cases, these reasons are misunderstandings. Many think that the children can revolt against their parents when they get to know they are not their biological children, but this can be avoided by always telling them the truth. Sometimes, prejudice can even come from people who are close to you, such as your relatives. When we said we would adopt another child, I remember that some relatives were very concerned about it and we heard some negative comments about our decision. Today, I know that, in

reality, they did that for not knowing all the factors involved, and by the way they like my son, it just shows that the comments were nothing but misunderstandings.

On the other hand, the reaction is quite different when the adoption actually happens. There are commendation and empathy for the cause and many say that they would like to have the same privilege. They look at my children and recognize that they are two wonderful and happy children.

I find it funny that when people know that you are going to have a baby, they compliment you and say beautiful things to the mother, congratulating for this event. However, the same does not always happen when you say that you are going to adopt a child. Very often, people look at you surprised as if you had just said that you decided to do something wrong. Then, they almost always say something negative, mention how hard the adoption process is in this country and ask why I did not try other treatments to have children. Just imagine if I had listened to these comments, today I would not have my two children, who only give me joy.

The option for adoption, in the majority of cases, is considered an alternative for those who were not able to conceive their own children. I confess that I talked about it for the first time when I received the news that I was sterile. But I remember very well that when I was 12 years old, I used to look at abandoned children and say to myself: “Someday I am going to adopt one of them”, without imagining that I would not be able to have a biological child.

Another group of adopters is composed by those who already have children, but these have grown up and have left home. These parents often come to the conclusion that they can do a lot for a child by giving them a home, this way filling an empty nest.

But, I still have to cite another group: the one with people who adopt children simply because they choose to do so, without having any problem to conceive. And this is commendable!

It is for these and other reasons that I affirm that many things still need to be done in order to change all the existent prejudice. I always defended the idea of adoption, explaining it to people who have negative ideas towards this subject. Actually, I am very proud

to say that my children are adopted and to show people how happy they are for having such a wonderful family. Moreover, I am against omitting the children from their origin, and I am also against their finding out the truth somehow only when they are adolescents. I believe that we need to raise our children with total transparency, because this will help them face any future questionings.

CHAPTER 11

THE CHALLENGES AND THE JOYS OF ADOPTION

Having an adopted child is as challenging as having a biological child. But some details can make it a bit harder for adoptive parents. The older the adopted child is, the bigger the efforts will be for the adaptation. A two-year-old child brings with him more trauma than a newborn baby and the trauma tends to become bigger as the child grows up and spends more time in the shelter. With Giovanna, the age factor was not preponderant in relation to the education that we had to give her. Since she was adopted very small, this contributed to our educating her the way we expected to. However, to adopt newborn babies is almost impossible today because of the long waiting list.

While I am writing this chapter today, it has been a bit more than a year that we adopted Claudinho and he is now turning four years old. Looking back one year ago, the impression we have is that it has actually been five years, because so many things have happened that it did not even seem that it was only one year. We had lots of difficulties, the biggest was our adaptation, not because of his fault, but because a three-year-old child, lacking so much affection, requires much more of his parents. My wife Ana felt

drained. It was as if he wanted to compensate for the lack of a mother during his first three years of life in only one year.

As it seemed, Claudinho's dream was to have a mother. Probably, he thought Ana was only his. This exhausted her a little. Very often, even her privacy was limited, since he wanted to spend most of his time by her side. We did not have time to go out by ourselves for months. One day, when we had specifically planned to go out as a couple, he started screaming for his mother when he realized that we were going out. That broke our hearts and made me feel remorse. I remembered his past and I gave up going out.

Today, I can affirm that all this has changed a lot and few are the problems we have in this regard.

However, I learned that apart from the necessities of caring for children, biological or adopted ones, couples have to set time aside for themselves. If we dedicate time and efforts only to our children, the relationship between the couple can be affected, that is why we always plan activities in two. This contributes to keeping the unity, love and the flame of marriage.

Raising two children so close in age of each other is a double challenge. It is comparable to raising twins, because both require similar work. They are in the same grade, have the same height and always play together. However, the differences between the two are evident. They resemble each other very much physically, so much that when they hold each other's hand and walk in the shopping mall, it is not uncommon for people to ask if they are twins. In other aspects, they are very different; like the time they wake up and go to bed, their personality and developed personal skills. From the point of view of social development, Giovanna, who was raised by us since she was a baby, is ahead compared to Claudinho, and this is justifiable, because the more time someone spends in a shelter, the slower the development will be. Claudio, however, shows much better motor skills, being able to perform outdoor activities and sports easily, besides of having an acute photographic memory.

Adoptive parents need to have knowledge of the role that they play in the formation of their children, especially in the beginning of their children's lives. Accordingly, we have to help when they, for

instance, have difficulties expressing affection, as if they did not know what it is to love a father or a mother. Parents need to build a relationship of affection with the child, through actions that demonstrate what it is to love. By hugging, talking, playing and investing their time with them, and above all, by not pressuring them with exaggerated expectations on what they can offer, they will develop bonds of affection with time. A child that has never received motherly affection will probably take a certain time to respond, through actions and words, to what we do for the child.

Similarly, insecurity in children is very common if they have been victims of abandonment. They tend to be extremely scared of being abandoned again. We need to inculcate in their minds that from now on, they have a family and they can be sure that this family is lasting. For this reason, I defend the idea that a couple has to be completely structured in their marriage before adopting a child, because to allow a child, that has already been abandoned, to live with a broken family is very sad.

Little actions and words can help in the building up of this feeling of security in the child. Parents need to explain to the child that they

have to go out, but that they will come back and when they come back, reassure the child that they always will. They also have to reassure their children by saying that they are very happy that they are their children, because this strengthens the love they develop for us. I also find it important to talk to them about the time they spend in the shelter, which in some cases, can be years, and explain to the child that this was part of the past.

In both adoption processes, our children did not have any problem in the adaptation. I confess that it sounds strange to receive a new member home and, from that day on, introduce him to his new bedroom, bathroom and family. From the point of view of a child that never had anything, everything that we offer is probably more than anything that was ever offered to him in his life. For this reason, when children are adopted, they do not have many difficulties in adapting to a new family.

Perhaps the major difficulty in the adaptation happens in the case of the separation of siblings when these are adopted by different families. In such cases, they find it hard to understand the reason why they cannot all go to the same house. This happened to us,

since our second child has two siblings who were adopted by other couples. How should we deal with a situation like this? Every couple has to define the better alternative for the child. We opted for letting him keep in touch with his siblings. I remember when we disciplined Claudinho for having done something wrong. He, then, turned to us and said he was going to move to his sister's place. Promptly, I separated some of his clothes, took him by the hand and said: "So, I am going to take you to your sister's house." On the stairs, he started to cry and said he was sorry. Needless to say, that was the last time he did that. Although we know that he has suffered a lot in life, I cannot allow him to say or do whatever he wants, that is why we have to make clear the authority of the parents.

The major adaptation difficulty is that of the adoptive parents. In general, there is not much time to get prepared to raise a child, contrary to when a mother is pregnant and nine months pass before the birth. In Gigi's case, we had 36 hours to get ready and I confess it was a radical change in our lives. My wife, for example, had to quit work quickly and I had to change all my routine, which involved an excessive load of work, for a routine that would allow

for more time with my family. We did not have any experience with children and suddenly, I was making bottles and changing diapers. I usually say that I went to bed one evening and woke up a father.

Since our five-month-old daughter was in an advanced malnutrition state, she had the body and weight of a newborn baby. But in the following two months, she put on 75 grams in average per day and the clothes became small in only a few days. I used to be impressed to see my daughter drink milk every two hours, so hungry she was. By the way, to know that she went through so much hunger in her first months of live still makes me emotional.

When I look at my children, I notice that some things continue just the same. When Claudio cries, he cries the same way he used to before he was adopted; it seems he has not lost his origins. And Giovanna makes the same face that she used to make when she cried because of hunger. These little things serve to remind me of their origins and to make me fight to give them a different future from what they would have had if they had not been adopted by us.

When we adopted Claudinho, we were a bit lost regarding little details of our routine and privacy. We were, for example, worried about if we could discipline him when he did something wrong or even if we could change in front of him. But even in these details, he was wonderful. To him, everything seemed so natural, that we started to realized that they were just “our own created phobias” and that those things did not make him uncomfortable. As a result, the best thing to do is to be the most natural possible.

The challenge of adopting, raising, educating and building the future of a child is not easy task. But, if on one hand, the challenge is big, on the other hand, the joys are rewarding. Without realizing, our children give us enormous joy through their actions, looks and little words. I have heard, many times, things such as: “Daddy, I love you so much that it hurts my heart.”, “Daddy, you are wonderful.” and so on.

Considering everything that I have learned with my children, I feel that I have gained more with adopting them than they have gained with having me as their father. To observe their progress in all aspects is very gratifying. This enriches you, because it reassures

you of having accomplished your duty. I do not know what my life would be like today if I had not made the decision of adopting them, but I am sure that they fulfill my life more than anything else.

I have never had a biological son and, for this reason, I do not know how to describe the differences between a biological and an adoptive child, but I know that a conceived child is not always a choice. Many mothers simply get pregnant by accident and have to care for their children after they are born. In contrast, an adoptive child is always planned. After we are invited to meet the child, we can decide for the adoption or not. In my visits to children shelters, I had the chance to meet some three-year-old children who were visited for more than ten parents invited by the Forum, but who were declined adoption. I even found out that some of the people in charge of these shelters do not say that a certain child was previously visited, in order not to make other couples indecisive. In any case, adoption is something facultative, and for this reason, it becomes a very noble act.

When I consider the circumstances in which we were able to adopt them, I think we were privileged, because we have two wonderful

children, without any health problems --- with the exception of some common allergies, for example. Things do not always happen this way. Normally children need, at least, psychological care for all the trauma they suffer. In any way, the reports from adoptive parents go beyond the challenges faced in the adoption.

I believe that, when our children become mature enough to understand the process they went through, they will recognize everything we have done for them. Anyway it is part of our education project to emphasize that. I try to take them to places where people of very low income live and show them the other side of life, in order that they do not develop the impression that the world revolves around them. Once, our son made some comments at school about his toys and his bedroom, putting his friend's belongings down. Promptly, we corrected him, so he could understand that the fact that he owns these things do not make him different from his friend.

Time flies and that is why we have to enjoy it the best way we can with them, not to regret it in the future. What we do not see passing or do not register simply gets lost and we cannot

recuperate it. For this reason, I try to spend time with them, even if it means doing something trivial like watching TV.

One day when my daughter was still very little, I composed a poem to her, which summarizes everything that I feel towards the happiness that I receive from my children. I will share this poem with you and this is how I end this book:

THE ADOPTIVE FATHER

“I always thought that every day could be just like any other day. But a phone call can change everything, indeed, not only one day, but all the others that will then follow.

I always thought that an opportunity comes up at the right time. What I did not imagine is that along with it, uncertainties would also come and the feeling of not knowing anything anymore about what may happen.

I always thought that eight years can be a long time to wait, but I found out that a single day can seem to be much longer than many years.

I always thought that having an objective means determination; determination means courage, but that courage is all you need at a moment like this one.

I always dreamed about the day that I would see my child be born. But I did not know that a five-month-old baby can be born to a father.

I always imagined what it would be like to spend nine months preparing myself to become a father; what I did not know is that you can wake up one day and find out you are already a father.

I always thought that there was a manual about what a father must do; but I found out that the manual is within ourselves and that one day, we simply get to know what we need to do.

I always thought that a day would come when we would be introduced. What I did not think is that a sentence would always echo in my mind and I would never be able to forget it: "This one is yours." It was at that moment that I understood that everything had really changed in my life and that all the waiting time made sense.

I always thought about how people are funny. Everyone looks at you and think that your life is perfect and that you lack nothing. They think that pain is something that we feel when we lose

something, and not when we fail to have what we want. Then, they fail to see the emptiness inside the one who simply wants to hear: “daddy”.

I always thought that, in life, at every moment, we learn lessons. I was right because:

- I learned that having a child is in the heart.
- I learned that you can spend the whole day simply thinking about the moment you will get home and see a smile.
- I learned that there is no effort that does not pay off.
- I learned that the more we think we love someone, we realize that there could be somebody else that we can love even more.
- I learned that the adoption is not a gesture of love towards a child, but yet a gesture of love from a child towards his parents.
- And finally, I learned the most important of lessons; that I was not the one who adopted Gigi and Claudinho as my children, but rather, that they adopted me as their father.”

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