

Instant Dad

*As if he fell from the sky,
adoptive son changes couple's lives*

Editor's note: Earlier this year, FOCUS staff writer Bob Evancho and his wife adopted their first child, a 4-day-old boy. Ironically, after a lengthy wait on their adoption agency's list, the Evanchos were given slightly more than 24 hours' notice before they brought their new son home.

By Bob Evancho

Ever have one of those mornings? You know . . . when your lifestyle, your priorities, your entire existence change at the drop of a hat? When your sensibilities suddenly take on new, uncharted depths? When all at once you experience emotions of which you thought yourself incapable?

I had a morning like that recently. Instant parenthood will do that to you.

As if he had dropped from the clouds, a fat, fascinating, wondrous man-child named Joe joined me and my wife, Sue, and infinitely changed our lives.

Having initiated adoption proceedings two and a half years earlier, we were confident that our "blessed event" was just a matter of time. But Joe's arrival came as a surprise nonetheless when Sue called me at work that morning. She had just spoken to our adoption agency caseworker.

"She has a baby for us," Sue announced. "We're supposed to pick him up tomorrow."

Up until that moment, this child had been an incorporeal being, a creature of my imagination floating out there somewhere. Suddenly, he was real and he was here. I honestly thought I had prepared myself for the moment that I would really, actually, seriously have to make the transition from leisurely, fun-loving guy to responsible parent. But I had also planned on having more than one day

to make those final emotional and mental adjustments. Somehow the word "tomorrow" precluded such a rational, sober approach.

"Holy cow!" I gasped (a slight change in phrasing; this is a special edition on the family, after all). "Just like that? Tomorrow? As in the day after today? You mean like . . . tomorrow!?"

Indeed it was just like that: a one-day gestation period. My mind was awash with both excitement and fear. I suppose I should not have been so unnerved, but 24 hours isn't much time to get your act together. I mean, aren't you supposed to ease into these things? Don't most new parents, even adoptive ones, get a little advance notice? Hey look! I had never changed a diaper in my life. . . . Besides, I hadn't told the dog yet.

Don't get me wrong. I was prepared to deal with the responsibilities of parenthood. It was just that everything was so, so . . . so fast.

Actually, there was a reason behind our caseworker's little surprise. Five months earlier, an adoption for which we were prepared fell through at the last minute. Knowing we had readied a room and the other furnishings for an infant and not wanting to see our hopes dashed a second time, our caseworker opted to keep silent until the last minute in case this adoption also proved unsuccessful.

But it went without a hitch, and the next day at the adoption agency our caseworker handed us a bundle of blankets that contained our newborn son. He looked like Cubs manager Don Zimmer.

Joe didn't come cheap; we knew that before we started. First of all, because she did not give birth, Sue did not qualify for any leave of absence from her job. As a result, her "maternity leave" consisted of

all her vacation time and a few additional days off without pay. Second, the insurance coverage for Joe's birth, both ours and the natural mother's, was negligible. Our out-of-pocket costs to adopt Joe — lost wages, medical expenses and agency fees — were more than \$5,000.

Joe seemed to like his new mom just fine; I think he had reservations about me at first. Maybe he could tell that children and I have never been what you would call chummy. And as if the initial shock of it all wasn't enough, another traumatic episode awaited me during my first hours of fatherhood. Let me set the stage.

My sister and her family, who live back east, had planned for a year to visit us. By coincidence, they picked the week after we got Joe. Being the gracious host I am, I had arranged to take some time off from work during their stay. When Joe arrived, I simply started my vacation a few days early. Sue, being a levelheaded and thrifty sort, had planned to work during our company's visit, confident I would do my darndest to show them a good time. When we got the call to pick up Joe, I just assumed my dear wife, flushed with happiness over our new son, would drop everything at work (I did, after all) and immediately begin her leave of absence.

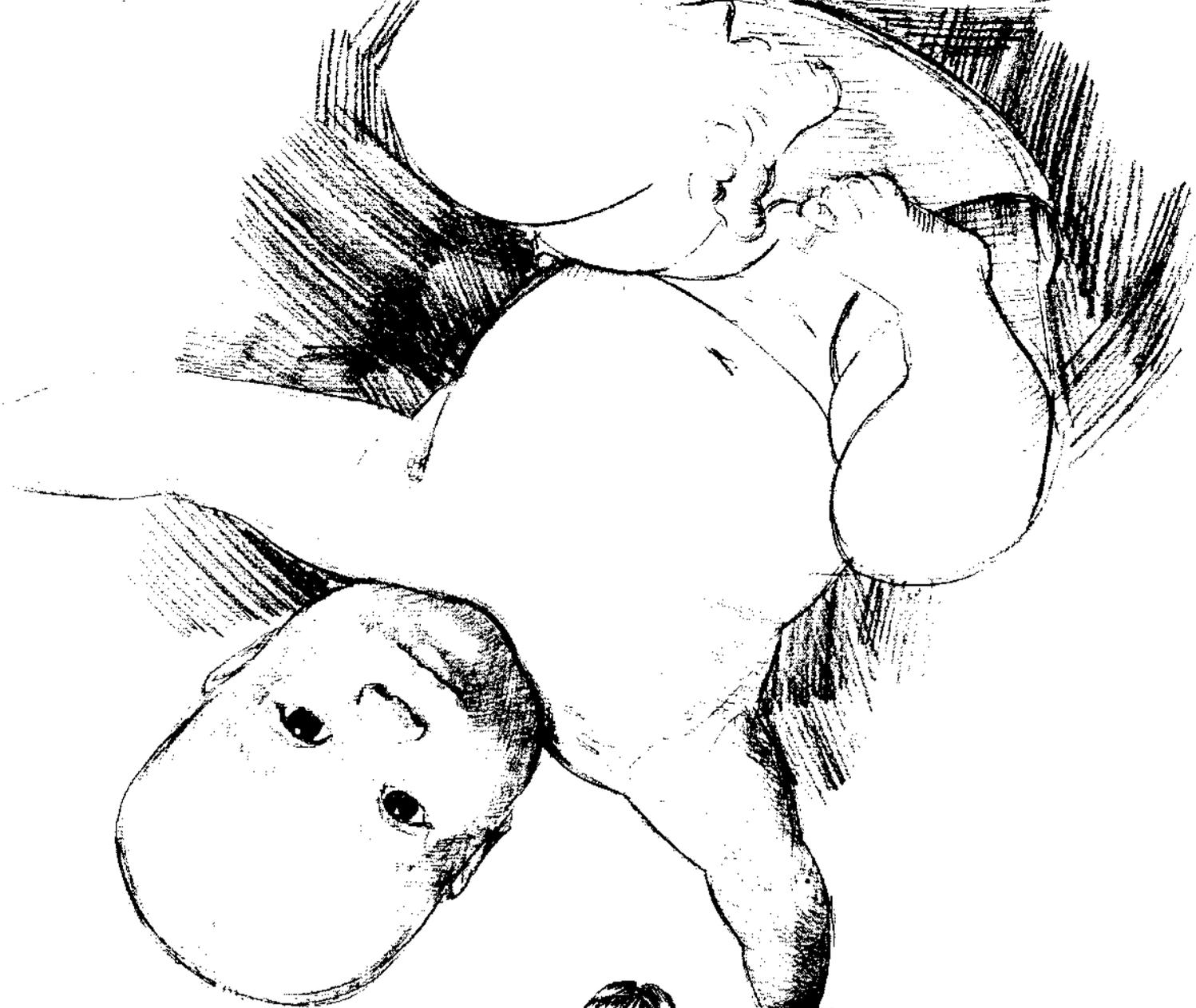
I realized I was wrong — and in trouble — during our first weekend with the baby when I asked Sue when she planned to go back to work.

"Look, bub (another paraphrase)," she said. "I'm going back to work Monday. You're the one who's off next week and I don't get maternity leave. Remember? That means we need to stagger our days off to have somebody with the baby. We don't have any family nearby. Remember?"

"But that means I'll be all alone with the baby. I don't know how to take care of a baby," I whined. "We're talking three and a half days here. My sister won't be here until Thursday afternoon. Think of the baby — pulleezee."

"We have no choice," Sue said calmly. "You'll have to learn quickly. When you go back to work, then I'll stay home. Besides, I'll be home by 4:30 every day."

For 35 years I had managed to avoid the unpleasant task of changing a diaper; somehow I had a feeling my time would be up during those three and a half days. Actually, Joe and I both survived my parental baptism of fire without any major problems. On Thursday my sister



arrived, and when she left, Sue took her leave of absence. I thankfully returned to work.

My traumatic initiation into parenthood was a few months ago. What are my thoughts on the subject now? Well, people who brag about their kids bug me. So, as not to appear duplicitous, I'll address that question to the person this story is about:

Someday, Joe, you're probably going to have plenty of questions about why and how you were adopted. I'm told it's tough on some children when they begin to comprehend the entire picture. The attempt of this story was to humorously recall our first few days together. But in reality, your adoption was serious stuff to your mom and me.

If this story does one thing, I hope it makes you realize this: I'm glad we adopted you. I thank God you're my son. I love you, Joe. □

