

From the team who brought you *Before I Do*,
What Am I To You, and *Before I Do Anthology Volume 1*

THE CRAZY FIRST YEAR



A collection of *real*, funny, heartwarming,
and sometimes heartbreaking stories from exhausted
first-time parents during their first year on the job.

THIS IS NOT A PARENTING BOOK

KATH C. EUSTAQUIO-DERLA



“If my areolas are the size of China,
I could probably describe my nipples
as the Taal Volcano in Tagaytay because
they’re not protruded enough.
Peanut couldn’t latch on properly!”

KATH C. EUSTAQUIO-DERLA

*Breast Is Best And The Medela Pump
Drama At NICU*

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and sometimes heartbreaking stories from exhausted
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THE CRAZY FIRST YEAR

Aideleenn Wong-Bajandi | Ava Banzuela Esplanada | Celia Alamo-Jacob
Dorothy Joy Cartagena-Monton | Jendee S. De Guzman
Jet and Kath Derla | Joshua Cu | Mapet Tuazon | Maria San Juan
Marycor and Raymond Valencia | Patricia Dulay Petines
Patricia and Mike Peñalosa | Ramona Jessica Nadong
Reese Molina-Guevara | Rovie Divinagracia Peralta
Shayne G. Punsalan | Sid and Apple Ongkingco
Antoinette Sto Domingo Escario | Vince Bunuan
Yovah Moscoso Lizardo

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KATH C. EUSTAQUIO-DERLA

THE CRAZY FIRST YEAR

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Katherine C. Eustaquio-Derla

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The 24 parents who participated in this project dedicate this book to their babies, hoping they would get to read it 10 years from today, September 22, 2019.

We also dedicate this book to our spouses, parents, siblings, grandparents, relatives, and friends who helped us through the crazy first year and beyond.

We raise our boobies, feeding bottles, breast pumps, and sippy cups to all of you!

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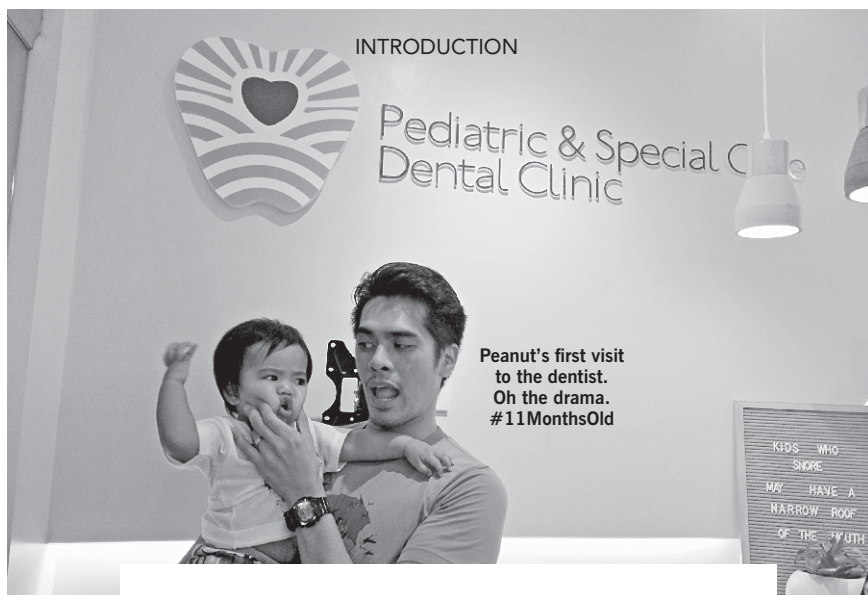
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to the dentist.
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#11MonthsOld

DO YOU HAVE FUNNY, FIRST-TIME PARENT STORIES?

BY KATH C. EUSTAQUIO-DERLA

*aka Tiger Mom**

If only kids could understand the sacrifices we go through as parents, especially first-time ones. If only babies could see how batshit crazy and terrified-of-almost-everything we become as parents...maybe, just maybe, we'd have better chances of building stronger, closer relationships with our adult children someday.

But science isn't on our side.

According to some research, children aged six can remember some events that happened before his/her first birthday, only to forget them during adolescence. What a shame! The first 12 months of a person's life are filled with many rewarding milestones—first bath, first explosive poop, first toothless and toothy smiles, first grin, first tooth, and more. This is also the time when parents, especially the newly minted ones, are thrown into the arena whether they are ready or not.

You can read all the baby books you want; attend all the free and paid classes you can find; listen (or not!) to your parents and grandparents about the dos and don'ts of newborn care; join all the parenting/breastfeeding/mommy groups you

**I call myself Tiger Mom because I'm a Thomasian. I graduated from the University of Santo Tomas in 2006.*

INTRODUCTION

can find online and transform into a “keyboard warrior” while discussing inverted nipples and nipple confusion; and you can yoga, Zumba, and Lamaze your way into childbirth but nothing—and I mean absolutely nothing—can prepare you for the chaotic (in a good way) arrival of your child into this world.

The “crazy” first year is filled with many firsts for you and your child (also for you and your partner and/or family). Wouldn't it be fun to share and immortalize these funny, heartwarming, and emotional anecdotes into a book for all of us to read 10 years from now? After all, life will only get busier and we'll soon lose the small details to time, aging, and the sheer busyness of life. Don't let the stories slip away.

Let's write about them while the smell of their first, nasty, explosive poop is still fresh in our noses. Let's write about them while our screams during labor and childbirth still reverberate in our heads. Let's write about these stories while we are still living them so we have more than just photos to share our adult children someday.

Science may not be on our side because babies can't make long-term memories. But self-publishing is. The book you're holding in your hands is the first of our **DearPEANUT** line of books. We invited people to join and 24 parents made the deadline. At PaperKat Books, we believe that everyone has a story to tell. This book is proof that anyone can write a book and self-publish it—they just need an editor, a printer, and a marketing team. And that's who we are.

As founder and CEO of PaperKat Books (the self-publishing arm of HS Grafik Print, our design-and-print family business), I couldn't be more proud to present this book. I hope you enjoy the stories as much as we did editing and producing it. Have fun walking down memory lane! And if you're expecting, here's a preview of what's to come.

Kath Tiger-Mason

*Founder and CEO, PaperKat Books
COO (Child Of Owner), HS Grafik Print*

On the next page, I want to share with you the **DearPeanut** blog entry that served as inspiration for this book project.



Can you still remember your first year on the job?



TOO YOUNG TO MAKE MEMORIES

BY KATH C. EUSTAQUIO-DERLA

First published on the Dear Peanut Blog on December 7, 2017.

Dear Peanut,

We have so many things to tell you. So let me write a quick blog entry about a *kurot-sa-puso* moment I had a few minutes ago. Your daddy said he'll take a power nap first but you cried and he picked you up from your crib. He placed you on top of his chest, where you like to sleep, so you can calm down. I entered our bedroom and saw the two of you sleeping.

You're so tiny. Your entire body could not even cover the length of your father's torso. Your outstretched arms are hugging your father's chest, trying to cover as much area as you can. *Nakadapa ka sa chest ng daddy mo*, so your nappy is facing upwards and your tiny face is secured under your daddy's chin.

I just wanted to get the phone charger but I slipped my 5-week-old postpartum body beside your daddy and stared at you two for a while. You're still half awake, trying to see where the light is coming from (I opened the lights when I entered the room). Your lips are moving and I wonder what you're thinking.

For a while there, I wonder if you'll remember any of these moments when you grow up. I wonder if you'll remember that your parents have chosen shared

parenting. I wonder if you'll remember the little things and little moments that make every sleepless night worth it. I wonder if you'll remember all of these so that you can appreciate them in the future.



Of course, you won't remember any of these details because you're still too young to make long-term memories. I can't even recall my earliest memory as a baby. I don't have memories of wailing during the wee hours of the night; of my nappy getting changed; and of me being bathed, cooed, and fed. I don't have memories of being held in my parents' arms—not because they didn't happen, but because I was too young to make memories.

I was too young to remember the extent of my parents' joy, fear, pride, disappointments, and the overwhelming sense of happiness that your father and I are relishing right now.

And it makes me wonder, if only children can remember all the things their parents have sacrificed for them during the first few hours, days, weeks, months, and years of life, our relationships with our parents would probably get better, best even.

If only children could remember the late nights and all the little things parents do for them when they were still babies—scared and helpless—we would probably look at our parents more lovingly and with more understanding eyes when the time comes that they need our help most during old age.

If only children could remember all the sacrifices their parents have made,

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make, and will continue to make for them right from the very start, we would probably understand our parents' decisions all the more and won't ever double guess if they give us unconditional love.

And that's the point of this blog.

SC (Supreme Commander or simply SC, your father's preferred blog alias) and I want to document all these little things because you're too young to make memories now. And we also want you to know that as new parents, we make a lot of mistakes, and sometimes, it's so easy to snap and cry because of the combination of fear and sleep deprivation.

We are always afraid that we're doing things wrong. It's a new ball game for us and even if we've read the rules, we are still crafting our gameplay. Parents are born as soon as their babies are born. And it feels like we're pushed into the ring without much of a prep. We want you to know that we're learning, and we're learning fast.

Lastly, through the blog, we want you to know that sometimes, we lose our shit. We're just often good at hiding it using self-deprecating humor.

XOXO,

Tiger Mom Kath's preferred blog alias.



Your Profile Photo vs. Your Tagged Photo



What I hope my child sees vs. His reaction

Our Stories



“During the operation, I heard my baby cry. *Yehey! Lumabas na ang baby ko at bigla sinabi ni doc, baby girl daw! WTF! I thought, ‘Doc, wait, baka sa ibang nanay yan. Boy po ang anak ko as per the ultrasound.’ Kaya lang groggy na ako kaya hindi na ako makapagkasalita masyado.”*

AVA BANZUELA ESPLANADA

My Crazy First Year As A Mother Of 4



MY CRAZY FIRST YEAR WITH LUKE



BY AIDELENN WONG-BAJANDI



While strolling inside the mall, I felt a sudden gush of water. My pants were semi-soaked. I went home with my husband, took a quick shower, and proceeded to the hospital. That was around 7:00 PM on April 1st—Hello, April Fools' Day! We were just joking about April Fools' Day and my water broke!

I am a doctor by profession. I already finished my residency training before we decided to get married and start a family. During my training, I didn't get enough sleep. My diet was mostly unbalanced and I was under stress most of the time. Okay, all the time, due to the nature of my work. I don't own my time unless I file a work leave. Whenever there's a patient that requires emergency treatment, I would leave everybody at home and go to work.

OUR BB (BEFORE BABY) LIFE

Before we became parents, my husband and I had a very active lifestyle. I've done a lot of half marathons. My husband did trail biking. Despite my busy schedule, I still find time for 2 to 3 hours of training. I must say that I was at the peak of my health during this time, despite the lack of sleep.

OUR FERTILITY JOURNEY

At age 33, I got married. Right after our wedding, my husband and I flew to South Korea for our honeymoon. The following month, I was pregnancy test (PT) positive. My first pregnancy was a twin gestation. Sadly, at 9 weeks, a miscarriage happened. It took us exactly one year before we got pregnant again. It was not easy. Every month, having my period was like a stab to my whole being. Can you just imagine an OB/GYN who had a previous miscarriage was now having difficulty of having another pregnancy?

I underwent a lot of tests and ultrasounds and everything came back with normal results. I did a lot of fertility diets, drank a lot of fertility tea, practiced yoga, slept as much as I can, went to Japan for another honeymoon, laid off clinic hours to give way for the fertile weeks, but still, nothing. Desperation continued to set in. And then, when we decided to consult abroad (and right before I said we'll visit Obando, Bulacan for the fertility rites), a miracle happened.

HOW I FOUND OUT ABOUT THE PREGNANCY

Since we were already preparing for this pregnancy, each event was well noted: the time I took ovulation pills, follicle monitoring, and even the dreaded Two Weeks Wait or TWW. So, five days before my next menstruation, I was so eager to take the first pregnancy test using my first-morning urine. And it was the slooooooowest test I have ever done. It was the slooooooowest one minute of waiting time for that super faint positive line. It was such a miracle that I thought my heart sprung out of my body! I cried, jumped, and screamed all at the same time for happiness. I was an early morning scene. My husband's reaction: so ecstatic!

HOW I TOOK CARE OF MYSELF DURING PREGNANCY

I am one of the lucky pregnant women who don't have any symptoms at all. No nausea, vomiting, or even odor sensitivity. When I was pregnant with my son, I didn't have any food restrictions because, well, I'm an OB and I know what to eat and what not to eat. I went to regular prenatal checkups. I had my own prenatal mommy book. My OB, who is also my best friend, didn't charge me for every ultrasound done (perks!). So I make it a point that I go to her clinic (our clinic) as a regular patient and patiently wait for my turn. No VIP treatment!

I did a lot of walking but no more hard training for marathons. During that time, we had a lot of international vacations already booked in advance. At 9 weeks

age of gestation (AOG), I was trailing the Great Wall of China. I loved the food there! At 14 weeks AOG, we were at super busy and super warm Bangkok. At this point, was still loving all the long walks. At 24 weeks AOG, we were in Boracay and I still enjoyed the walking bit, hehe. I still went to work and delivered babies up until my 34th week of pregnancy. I didn't get to drink prenatal milk because I didn't like the taste. But I was taking all my prenatal medicines religiously, along with milk tea and coffee but in moderation.



MY FOOD CRAVINGS

There was one week when I craved for Jollibee's mushroom burger. There was also a full week when every meal I ate had to be burger steak from Jollibee. I also craved for Max's *pancit malabon*. Yes, not just any *pancit malabon*, it had to be from Max's Restaurant. And yes, I knew the difference. I didn't have a lot of cravings, aside from these two. Oh, there were also some days when I craved for fishballs and *kwek-kwek*. I ate a lot during my pregnancy but I didn't have significant weight gain. I guess I got lucky. But the postpartum weight is a different story, ugh!

OUR FACEBOOK PREGNANCY ANNOUNCEMENT

Sometimes, when you're too excited to announce your pregnancy to the world, you'll post it right away without thinking, even with just a photo of your pregnancy test. During my first pregnancy, the good thing was I got a lot of prayers from my friends and relatives. The bad thing was I had to announce it again, but this time, I needed to say that we had a miscarriage at 9 weeks. So the second time, we waited until 19 weeks before we posted a picture of an ultrasound announcing the pregnancy and revealing the gender. Before the announcement, only the closest of our closest friends and relatives knew that I was pregnant and continued to pray for us the entire first trimester. Even if we were posting a lot of pictures and I was eating a lot, my tummy was quite unnoticeable.

Halfway through the pregnancy and when we were very sure with the gender and baby was complete with "good *kapi!*", we decided to share our journey in social media. I got a lot of "Hala! Nasa Beijing ka lang nung last time ah!" and "Were you in Bangkok just last month?" Hahaha!

OUR BABY'S NAME

Even during the first trimester, we called our baby “Baby Summer” because he was bound for delivery around April, which is summertime in the Philippines. Before knowing the baby’s gender we already bought a year’s supply of onesies with *Star Wars* character prints on them. We told ourselves, if we would be blessed with a baby boy, all the onesies will suit him. If we would be blessed with a baby girl, we’ll just put ribbons on them or use a girly background.

We came up with the name Luke Daniel as a tribute to Luke Skywalker from *Star Wars* and Daniel from the Bible. The name Luke was supposed to be lifted also from the Bible but the real story was it came from the movie. If the oldies ask us, we’ll just say both names were taken from the Bible, hehe.

OUR BABY SHOWER

I took care of my baby shower. I have Type A personality and don't do much with surprises. I love that everything suits my taste and goes according to my plan. Most of the decor, gifts, and souvenirs for my baby shower were DIY.

I had my baby shower at Max's Restaurant and the package that I got was actually for christening. So, *ninong na agad si Max's!* But no, I didn't get *pancit malabon*, haha. We occupied one hall that's good for 100 pax. We have a big family and big sets of friends, so it was impossible for us to just invite a few people. The baby shower was overwhelming. I was on my 32nd week of pregnancy already and was tired from being pregnant. But everything was perfectly executed from the program to the games to the diaper raffle and souvenirs. We got a lot of good stuff too. The diaper raffle was a hit! We had a supply of diapers up until the baby's size is XXL! Imagine that! We were super happy!

MY LABOR PAIN EXPERIENCE

I was admitted at 34 weeks for pre-term labor. At that time, my cervix was still closed but since I was a few weeks away from term pregnancy, I was put on bed rest for two weeks. At 36 weeks, I came back to the clinic and did on-call procedures and operations at work. At this time, my cervix was already 2cm dilated. I told myself if I'm bound to deliver at 36-37 weeks, so be it! *Ang bigat na kaya!* At this time, I was also “pregnantly tired”, a term I coined in one Facebook post because I was so tired of carrying my big tummy already. At 37 weeks, my cervix was already 5cm dilated. With no contractions, I just went on walking, working, and still waiting.

Finally, at 37 and 3/7 weeks, while strolling inside the mall, I felt a sudden gush of water. My pants were semi-soaked with water. I went home with my husband, took a quick shower, and proceeded to the hospital. That was around 7:00 PM on April 1st—Hello, April Fools’ Day! We were just joking about April Fools’ Day and my water broke! I called my BFF OB/GYN and told her that I was on my way to the hospital. I also said that if we can still wait until it’s April 2 to give birth, that would be better.

MY CHILDBIRTH EXPERIENCE

Just like any other patient I used to talk to every single day of my life, we prayed for normal, spontaneous delivery. Reasons? First, so I can back to work as soon as I can. I’m a workaholic and I have so many patients who were waiting for me to get back to work, too. Second, so we can have baby #4 and baby #5 ASAP! The twins were babies #1 and #2. Luke is baby #3.

As an OB/GYN, I always encourage my patients to prepare a birth plan. While I was on bed rest, I created a group chat with my OB, my pediatrician, and my anesthesiologist for the birthing experience that I want. Number one on my list was a normal, spontaneous delivery under IV sedation only. No epidural. I wanted to experience all the labor pains that most of my previous patients underwent and successfully overcome. Second, I wanted the baby’s cord blood to be collected and banked. Third, I wanted to practice *Unang Yakap* and exclusively breastfeeding. Other birth plan details included the antiseptic to be used, regulation of my fluids, and the medicines I should take. In other words, I almost instructed everyone how to take care of me. Thanks to all my doctors!

When I was admitted, my OB/GYN was still busy attending to her other patients that I regulated my IV fluid with uterotonics. I installed an app on my phone and monitored myself accordingly. I got sedated in between and experienced the sleep/wake cycle of patients while on labor. I was admitted with 5cm cervical dilatation and a ruptured bag of waters.



At the 13th hour of labor (Yes, it was a super long and lagging labor. And yes, it was already April 2nd!), when I was fully dilated when my OB/GYN instructed me to push, but the pain was so real and it felt like every contraction was tearing me and

my whole soul into pieces. I couldn't even bear down (exert downward pressure) because I was concentrating hard on not feeling the pain. I was so grouchy. It felt like the devil in me reveals itself with every contraction. The crying and cursing were all real. And so everyone on the team (my OB/GYN, the OB assist, my two pediatricians, my two anesthesiologists, and my husband) asked me for consent for the epidural because it was already taking too much time. So I gave my consent for an epidural and as it took effect, it was such a relief. There was NO PAIN at all. And I was smiling throughout the remaining birthing journey, haha! After three minutes of pushing and fundal pushing, a healthy baby boy was born!

MY FIRST BREASTFEEDING EXPERIENCE

Okay, I think this is the most grueling experience of my life. And I think most first-time parents can relate. Even before I gave birth, even way back to med school, I was already familiar with breastfeeding. When I got pregnant, I armed myself with all the knowledge about breastfeeding. I joined most of the hardcore breastfeeding mommy groups on Facebook and, let me tell you, I am 100% prepared for exclusively breastfeeding my child.

At 32 weeks, I was already taking *malunggay* capsules, eating *malunggay* leaves and *bunga* for my milk boost. I don't have any problems with nipple size or nipple anatomy (small nipples or inverted nipples). So I thought breastfeeding would be very easy for me. I educate all my patients about correct latch and position, how to check for tongue tie, and that everything is based on DEMAND and SUPPLY.

It was on my birth plan that I wanted to practice *Unang Yakap*, whether its normal delivery or Cesarean delivery (C-Section). Luckily, this *Unang Yakap* was executed properly. Thanks to my ever competent pediatricians who are certified lactation consultants, too. My very supportive husband and my parents, mostly my dad, are all breastfeeding advocates. My dad even quoted that from the Bible, toddlers still breastfeed at age three.

During the first night at the hospital, or should I say my first zombie night with my son, I offered both breasts for feeding, consistently, almost every hour for 15 to 20 minutes. See? Hello? Sleep where are you? Despite the lack of sleep, it was a peaceful night. The second night, my son became fussy; he couldn't sleep and he cried consistently. I had to go through everything—checking for pooped diaper and temperature, giving hugs, and just carrying him, but he kept crying now and then. My husband even told me that I might be overfeeding him because every time he cries, I just offered boobs for milk.

Finally, I was discharged and the next two nights were the hardest. During this time, whenever Luke cries, I would cry too. It was during these nights when I asked what was wrong with me as a mom. I underestimated most of my friends who said that this time would be the hardest. For two nights, I think, I battled postpartum depression. I believe I did. There was a moment when I didn't even want to carry my son and I thought, why is every one asleep but me? I don't like to be a mother if motherhood is really like this. This is way more difficult than going to a 36-hour duty and with all the stress from working. It was one of the hardest times.

On Day 5, my son turned yellow. He was not producing enough urine to the point that his diaper already had yellow-orange brick stains due to dehydration. It was his checkup time. He weighed below the expected weight at his age. There was a physiologic loss but there was also some gain at that time. His pediatrician did the computation and he was weighed below the expected weight. I cried. And so, my milk was not enough.

Here's one hack I learned from this journey: when you buy newborn diapers with a "wetness indicator", it only reacts to urine. The two things that will tell you that he is getting enough milk from you is when he is gaining weight and when he is producing enough urine. I thought Luke was producing enough output because he pooped a lot during the first few days. I was wrong. So we bought diapers with a wetness indicator and changed his nappy every four hours. The wetness indicator changes color when full and then we would know if he was producing enough urine. After the checkup, I was recommended formula feeding as supplementation. Take note that it's for supplementation only because my baby was moderately dehydrated at that time. My husband went to the store and bought milk and water. I had little knowledge about formula feeding because I was a hardcore breastfeeding mom. I didn't bother to read or study formula feeding during my pregnancy.

So my husband prepared for it. We had bottles and a sterilizer from the baby shower, which were all untouched until the time we needed to use it. And so my son had his first formula milk and as he drank it, my tears were already falling, not because I felt that I wasn't enough, but because I felt I was a bad mom for letting him go hungry and become dehydrated. My heart was so sad because I must admit, I used to judge all those moms who are giving formula milk to their babies. And there I was, feeding my son formula milk.

For the first time since I gave birth, my son and I had three hours of undisturbed sleep. And that was the start of me being a mixed feeding mom. For the next two weeks, we were breastfeeding first and formula feeding next. My supply

was increasing amazingly and my baby was gaining weight. His jaundice slowly subsided. On our third week, we were back to exclusively breastfeeding. At 6 weeks, I was pumping, latching, and feeding him expressed milk, especially when I returned to work. I suffered from engorgement, excessive let downs, milk fever, and all. I resorted to drinking all the *malunggay* tea, increasing the dose of my *malunggay* tabs, eating *malunggay* leaves with omelet noodles and all our *ulam*. I ordered lactation cookies, brownies, coffee, and chocolates online. I even ordered fenugreek from the US just to boost up and support my milk supply. From time to time, I give Luke formula milk especially on days when I have clinic days or operations and if all my pumped milk stash has been already consumed. Luckily, we didn't have any problems with latching or nipple confusion. At 2 years and 4 months, we were still breastfeeding.

UNFORGETTABLE FIRSTS: SLEEPING

We practiced co-sleeping. During his newborn period (0 months to 3 months) we never slept on the bed. A few days before I gave birth, my mom bought me a recliner and rocker type chair, which was, by the way, my lifesaver. At night time, we do dream feeding and unli-latching. So my husband slept on the couch while we slept on the La-Z-Boy. This went on for the first three months. Every time I put Luke on the bed, he will automatically open his eyes, cry, and become fussy. Even if most people advised to put the baby on the bed when he is “semi asleep”, it wasn't effective for us.

So to give him more sleep, I carried him and we slept together. This way, I can also rest more. At three months, my back was already hurting because he was growing heavier. We started sleep training and continued dream feeding side by side until he got the hang of it. I learned that diffusing essential oils helped a lot. Even today, we use lavender and peppermint as our staple essential oils. At 7:00 PM, after his warm bath, only a small light source was turned one, no other sounds, only a bedtime story and lullaby, and my son automatically dozes off after five minutes.

UNFORGETTABLE FIRSTS: MILK FEEDING

The stress is real but FED IS BEST. I still encourage patients to exclusively breastfeed their babies. I am still a believer of breast milk but hey, I don't judge mothers (not anymore) who are formula feeding. You know, being a mother is one hell of a job. Soon, you will feed your child with fast food, those are all junk foods, you know. Mothers should support other mothers. No to mommy shaming!

UNFORGETTABLE FIRSTS: SOLID FOOD

Luke's first solid food was a squash. I would love to feed him an avocado, but it's a seasonal fruit. I fed him local vegetables and fruits and they were all okay. His favorite up to now are watermelon popsicles. Sometimes, he can go all day even with just watermelon.



BABY'S HEALTH AND SAFETY

During my prenatal checkups, I always had a separate checkup and would patiently wait for my turn. When I became a mother, this became standard practice. We religiously follow all his vaccine schedules and wait for our turn during checkups. Yes, I don't just buy vaccines and inject them directly to my son. I let his pediatrician do that. Yes, even when I've done injections to my patients a million times, I just can't be a doctor and a mom at the same time. I am a mom first.

At 4 months, he had his first colds. At 11 months, he had his first fever. Thankfully, he had never taken any antibiotics because most of the time, the symptoms were due to allergies. I think we boosted his immune system well, not just because we are breastfeeding (and all the wonders of it) but I think, with the vaccine, with a clean environment, and proper hygiene practice.

SEPARATION ANXIETY AND BACK-TO-WORK WOES

I am a working, doctor-on-call mom. The downside of being a doctor mom is you cannot just put aside your patients. Most of the time, they come first and, as much as I would love to have a fixed schedule for everything, I just can't. At 8th day postpartum, I went back to work. See, patients cannot wait. It was the very first time that I left my son to do a major operation. And it was the longest 3-hour procedure I ever did. My breasts were suddenly engorging. I was still bleeding at that time. It was also when I first tried hand expression. Days went by and we continued unlatching, pumping, and storing milk.

When Luke was 2 months old, I came back to my clinic. I think my milk supply then was already stable. I would come home at lunchtime to breastfeed and pump after. If I missed one session, my breasts would become engorged and I would feel the pain all the way to my back part. You can't even twist your whole body as if it was spastic. This was also the time when the pain from my breast duct contractions was

really hard. I did the pumping routine when I was at my clinic, usually before or after I start calling a patient. I could collect an average of 4oz per session from both breasts. So when I got home, I usually have *pasalubong* for Luke. After consuming all my pumped milk stock, we supplement with formula milk. It helped save my sanity from the continuous pumping and sterilizing, especially during night time. This was the only time I can have my rest. I told myself, I have to take care of myself, other mommies, and their unborn babies, too. So I gave myself a break during night times. Well, not really a break since my son was still dream feeding. *Grabe*, I couldn't believe the intensity of the sleeplessness and the exhaustion from being a mom and a doctor!

FUNNY, HEARTWARMING STORIES

One of the most heartwarming stories that I experienced was during our breastfeeding journey. It was the time when I was able to donate some of my breastmilk to a baby who really needed it. It was almost 1:00 AM and right after I fed my 3-month-old son that I got a call. The call was a real emergency. It was about a pregnant patient who was in a very critical condition due to hypertension. On my way to the hospital, roughly a 5-minute drive, it was Code Blue already. This is when a patient needs immediate resuscitation. I prayed hard that both the mother and baby survive. I did the fastest C-Section delivery I could because the patient and the baby were very unstable. As soon as I took the baby out of the mommy's tummy, he was also limp and had a flat line. The pediatrician took care of the baby and after a few minutes of resuscitation, the baby finally cried. I almost cried but I had to finish closing up because the mother was still unstable.

At the ICU, the patient was still comatose. I visited the patient and relatives. I honestly primed them that only miracle could help us at that point. The baby needed breast milk since he was born premature and the mother was still on coma. I asked the pediatrician if I could give some of my milk. Never have I expected that I am capable of giving breast milk since I was just an average pumper and I was not able to store a large amount of milk. But for a pre-term newborn, my one bag of 4oz breastmilk could go a long way. He was feeding about 10cc per hour per oral tube. So one bag could feed him for about a day. And it was a lifesaver for the baby. I donated bags good for a week. Days passed and my patient slowly recovered. Both mother and child were discharged well and safe. You see, being a mixed feeding mom is a case-to-case basis. Some opt to exclusively breastfeed their child and some opt for formula. But whatever it takes, we are all parents who want all the best for our child. So no matter what, just be kind. No to shaming!

OUR FIRST FATHER'S/MOTHER'S DAY

They say that once you become a parent, you will surely appreciate how your parents survived their journey with you being newborn, together with your sibling from different phases of childhood. I guess we are made up of great intelligence and power that we can juggle all responsibilities and still be the better version of ourselves. Sometimes, we can't just help but miss our old selves—carefree, no big responsibilities or worries about health and wealth.

Indeed, a mother always thinks twice—one for herself and the other for her child. Ever since I became a mother, there was never a time when I didn't take one step ahead in favor of my child. I became more cautious and more vigilant. I started adding life insurances and taking better care of myself. I became very cautious with my work too, because this time, it is not only my future that's at stake. It's for the future of my child as well.



CHRISTENING

It was a very memorable christening for us. We booked the church and had solemn christening rights for Luke. It happened on a Sunday and it was also this time when it was announced that there would be no more special baptisms on Sundays. This means you have to join other parents and babies who are there for christening. But we were lucky that day and we were the only one in line.



The christening theme was baby elephant. I'm sure you've read the motivational story of an elephant and a dog who got pregnant at the same time. In the story, the elephant carried a baby for almost two years. The dog was mocking her because of her long pregnancy whereas the dog had given birth a lot of times and the puppies are already grown-up dogs. The elephant said that when her baby hits the ground, the earth feels it and that humans will stop and watch in admiration. The mother elephant said that what she carries will draw attention and is mighty and great. This was a very touching story that I held in my heart since the day we had a miscarriage

and faced difficulty conceiving for another. It saved me from losing faith, mostly when I see others receive answers to their prayers. I kept thinking that my time will come and just have faith. So, when Luke was baptized, the decor carried the elephant theme—from the cake to the souvenirs. It was a quick get together and lunch at TGIF for family, ninongs, ninangs, relatives, and closest friends. And of course, it was all DIY.

FIRST BIRTHDAY

We wanted a very simple celebration and who wouldn't be delighted with a children's party at Jollibee? We were able to push our semi-Star Wars theme with Jollibee. They were kind enough to let us display our Star Wars-themed cake. It was a pretty cake. The banners, decors, loot bags, souvenirs, and prizes were all Star Wars. It was an amazing day for us. No, we didn't invite Darth Vader or Yoda, but we had Jollibee for the win! All the kids and even the



adults were all happy! Everyone was full, some even had takeout food. Plus, we didn't have to break our bank accounts. The splurging during the baby shower and the christening was the exact opposite with his first birthday.

LETTER TO MY PRE-BABY SELF

Dear Denn,

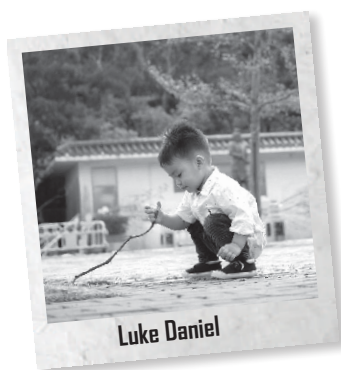
Before Luke, I thought you are the strongest person I know—like you own the world without any complications. Now, you're still the strongest and but also the weakest when it comes with your son. Before, you were very carefree, taking all the time in the world. Now, 10 minutes inside the bathroom is a luxury. Before, eating at fancy restaurants amazes you. Now, you get the same dining experience with fast food, where everything is “chew a bit and swallow”.

Before, your bag is small that can fit a phone, wallet, and lip gloss. Now, it's a diaper bag that has all Luke's things and one pocket with your phone and wallet. Before, your phone gallery consists of selfies, pictures of you and your husband, pictures of whatever seems to interest you. Now, it's all baby pictures and videos. Before, going to the mall means shopping, meeting with friends, and having “me time”. Now, it's just grocery and quick shopping in the infant section.

Before, staycations mean duvet and bacon. Now, you have to ask if the hotel room has a duvet, if there's bacon, and if their pool is heated. Before, traveling means escaping the daily routine. Now, it means packing all the things and just changing location. Before, you are just you. Now, you are what your son will become later. He always defines you, your words, your actions, and your character. Before, it was all easy and happy. Now, it is all difficult and full of adjustments. But amidst all things that are challenging, your life now matters most. Do you remember how you prayed hard just to have even one child? You just didn't pray for a child. You prayed that your life be changed and yourself not to be changed into a monster but a "momster" who is full of affection that nobody thinks you're capable of.

And I congratulate you for pulling all the things this way. Not perfect but enough. Continue loving yourself and giving yourself a break from time to time. Remember, a well-rested mom is equivalent to a healthy family, too. Well, what rest? Revise that, a well-loved mom is equivalent to a healthy family, too.

Love, Denn



LETTER FOR MY BABY

Dear Luke,

From the time that we knew that you are growing inside of me, it was an instant joy—a gladness in our hearts that no words can describe. From the time I pushed you out into the world, your endless cries and demands, your first solid food, your first step, and first words, we are happily

documenting all the developmental milestones. We are your very first fans and supporters. No matter how hard and challenging those nights were, they were always considered as growth spurts.

Soon, you will be a big kid, sooner you will be an adult. Depending on what career you choose, we always pray that you grow up God-fearing and kind. Soon, you will develop your own character, your own interests, and make your own choices and will. You will fall in love and deal with broken hearts. Life will always be full of ups and downs, and will never be fair. So, we hope we brought you up to be always prepared.

Here are some things that are very important that we want you to always carry inside your heart. First, always be yourself and always be true. In a world that is full

of pretensions and trendsetters, always stick to what you know is true. The world may seem perfect but always remember that it is not, and will never be perfect. So always be true to yourself and everyone else. Second, do not expect much from others. To prevent you from disappointments, you simply don't expect. When you stop expecting from people and you don't set high standards for people, it will be easier for you to like them.



You see, you don't need a perfect friend or family, you always give yourself and others room for improvement. Third, live your own dreams. You don't have to follow our career paths or anyone else's, but make your own journey and enjoy every challenge. Do what makes you happy and fulfill whatever that can make you complete. Fourth, you save for yourself, maybe invest for your future kids, too. Don't expect your kids to make a living for you. They are not your retirement plans. Save for yourself and teach your kids to save for themselves, too.

Lastly, always be kind. Regardless of the situation, you always carry kindness in your heart. Treat everyone with politeness and kindness, not because they are nice, but because you are. Again, we don't live in a perfect world. You don't discriminate and you always help others who need special care. It's not because they are unlucky or they are not healthy, but you are. Always extend understanding. You see, if everyone in the world is kind, we are building a better world for our next generation. You will always be our son, and always remember that we love you unconditionally.

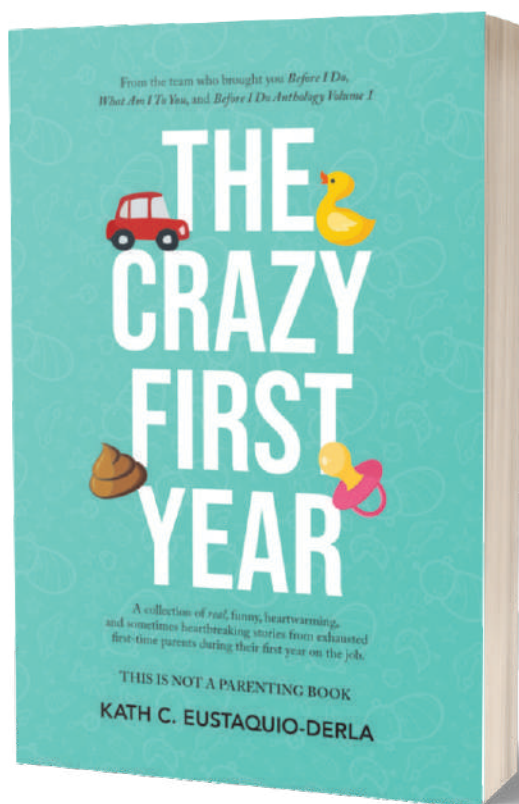
Love, Papa and Mama



ABOUT AIDELENN

Dr. Aideleonn Wong-Bajandi is a 37-year-old Obstetrician and Gynecologist in Dasmariñas City, Cavite and has an experience of 8 years in these fields. She completed Doctor of Medicine from De La Salle University Medical Center in 2008.

PHOTOS BY AIDELENN WONG-BAJANDI



END OF TEASER

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