

FROM THE DESK OF
JANICE HEFLIN

Dear Neighbor,

I am writing to you with hopes of clearing up misinformation spread about my family in 2004. This letter addresses our efforts in helping a baby and his mother.

Talmadge and I came to know the child's mother, Maria, through my sister, Judy Hall, who is a nurse and lives with us. Judy and Maria were employed by a family to provide care for an Alzheimer's patient in the patient's home. Maria and Judy were friends when Maria asked if our family would loan her money so she could get an abortion. Judy and I appealed to Maria to reconsider. We told Maria of our concern for her, as well as her child, and discussed other alternatives. Also, we made a commitment to provide assistance if she decided to raise the child herself. Maria already knew we cared for her, which I think helped her decide to continue the pregnancy.

Jude was born prematurely on December 7, 2002. While his birth certificate states the name Fidel Jr., after his father, Maria insisted we call him Jude in honor of her friendship with Judy. Jude's father is married, but not to Maria, and was not a significant part of Jude's life during the time he was in our care. Jude had health issues and was in the hospital the first two months of his life. We provided transportation for Maria to visit him there on many occasions.

In late April of 2003, the Alzheimer's patient that Judy and Maria were caring for was moved to a facility closer to her family, leaving Maria and Judy unemployed. A friend invited Maria and Jude to share her apartment. We assisted with the relocation. At the time, it seemed we were going our separate ways and that this would be the end of our relationship. However, Maria continued to call us, asking for transportation to and from the doctor for Jude. Maria began to rely on Judy and me for transportation to job interviews and doctor

appointments, and for babysitting. We were happy to fulfill our commitment to help.

Maria soon found a job giving personal care which required her continuous presence from Friday afternoons through Sunday evenings, and asked us to care for Jude while she worked. Again, we were happy to help. In August of 2003, Maria came to us with an emergency. Her friend was moving and she would not be able to afford the apartment on her own. Saying she had no where else to go, she asked to live with us. We provided Maria room and board for almost a year as well as transportation to and from her job, all at no charge. She was never our maid, as some have said, nor was she ever in our employ in any capacity. She never received compensation from us nor did she ever perform work or any other service for which compensation would be expected. She was a guest in our home. She continued working, but her schedule changed and for a while she chose to be at her job 24 hours a day 7 days a week, during which time she might see Jude for an hour or two per week. Later she had weekends off, but would spend most of

her free time with her friends, leaving Talmadge and myself to care for Jude. Maria was very content with the situation, which saddened us for Jude, but we continued to provide for his needs and grew to love him very much.

We asked Maria to sign a medical release allowing us to get emergency care for Jude if needed, similar to what parents sign for their children to go on school field trips, but Maria always refused saying it was not necessary. Jude still had health problems due to being premature and we felt the release form was needed since he was in our care and we were often unable to reach Maria. When Maria announced she was moving to New Jersey to accept a better paying job, but would leave Jude here in our care, we again asked for a medical release and again Maria refused. At this point, knowing she would be in another state, we felt we had no choice but to seek the needed documentation through family court in the form of conservatorship, which would have given the authority we needed to seek medical care for Jude while still preserving Maria's relationship

as his mother. Her departure would have left us without the ability to seek medical attention for Jude while Maria was over 1,500 miles away.

We never attempted to sever the child parent relationship between Jude and Maria. As the mother of a son and the grandmother of two granddaughters, I could not imagine the possibility of Jude getting sick or injured while Maria was away and not having the ability to help.

At this point the situation escalated such that we were no longer able to personally communicate with Maria. What I thought would be a private matter became a public news story. Opportunistic people with no concern or regard for Maria or Jude used the situation to spread mistruths and fabricate allegations in an effort to further their own political agendas.

Maria and Jude's departure from our home was heartbreaking for our entire family. We were only trying to fill a need and have a hard time

understanding how a simple request to be able to legally provide him medical care in his mother's absence was met with such resistance. Even so, Talmadge and I do not regret our involvement, for we are certain Jude would not have been born otherwise. We pray for Jude and his mother, and hope he is growing up in a healthy and loving home.

Sincerely,
Janice Heflin