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For Love Of Maria

SACRAMENTO, CALIF., July 1 (PinoyGlobal) - It all started when Mark Sanford and Maria Belen Chapur met eight years ago. It was an innocent encounter just like what happens to a lot of people. And as what happens to people meeting new acquaintances, they exchanged email addresses. It was the start of an Internet friendship between Mark, then a former congressman from South Carolina, and Maria, an Argentine from Buenos Aires who was then covering the 9/11 attacks as a reporter for Argentine TV station Canal America.

In their kind of friendship, distance was not a problem. There were no reasons to have closer and personal contact between them. After all, they were both married. It was -- or so it seemed -- just a casual "keep in touch" long-distance friendship . . . for seven long years.

Then in a sudden turn of events, they became lovers. What could have caused the sudden change in their platonic relationship? Could it be a case of that mysterious malady -- seven-year itch -- which afflicts some men in their mid-life? Or could it be true love?

By the time they started their romantic liaison a year ago, Sanford was the governor -- elected in 2002 -- of South Carolina. He was on top of the world: he had a loving and politically savvy wife; four promising sons; and was Chairman of the Republican Governors Association, a position that earned him a "ticket" for a possible run for the White House. Had he played his cards right, he could have been the

front-runner for the Republican presidential primary in 2012. But for love of Maria, that dream was shattered . . . forever.

Who is this woman Maria Belen Chapur who captivated a man who could have become the president of the most powerful nation on Earth? Maria is a 41-year old mother of two sons from a previous marriage. She was described by a neighbor as a "beautiful brunette who plays tennis, goes jogging, and has large eyes." A bar owner also remarked that he watched Sanford and Chapur "kiss and cuddle over the weekend." He described Maria as having green eyes, dirty blonde hair and a "banging body."

But this was hardly what Sanford said when he confessed -- tears in his eyes -- to his extramarital affair with Maria when the scandal exploded over the news networks on June 24, 2009. He said that he spent five days "crying in Argentina" with Maria. However, he did not elaborate what he was crying about. Was it a cry of joy or a cry for the mess that he got himself into? Indeed, it has become a big "mess" because he happens to be the highest government official in one of the Bible Belt states.

Born Marshall Clement Sanford, Jr. on May 28, 1960 in Fort Lauderdale, Florida, his family moved to a 3,000-acre plantation near Beaufort, South Carolina. He received his B.A. in Business from Furman University in 1983. After graduation, he worked as a real estate agent while he pursued an MBA at the University of Virginia. After graduating in 1988, he pursued a career as a financial analyst.

In 1990, he moved to Charleston, South Carolina where he founded his own real estate investment company. In the early 1990s, he moved to Sullivan's Island, South Carolina with his family.

In 1994, Sanford ran for Congress and won. He promised to serve only three terms. And his constituents elected him three times until 2000. While in Congress, Sanford -- a Bible-quoting social conservative -- earned a reputation as a staunch conservative.

The following year, Sanford met Maria in New York City during the 9/11 attacks. The circumstances of their first encounter remains a mystery. However, Sanford admitted that Maria confided to him that she was separated from her husband. He said that he provided "comfort" and counseled her to get back to her husband for the sake of her two young sons. He told her that "marriage is sacred."

But like the errant preacher who says, "Do what I preach, not what I do," Sanford didn't follow his advice to Maria about the sanctity of marriage. After seven years of communication by email, their Internet friendship blossomed into an affair of the heart. They became lovers and Sanford went to see Maria in Buenos Aires twice last year.

It didn't take too long for Jenny Sanford to discover her husband's infidelity. Jenny moved out with her four sons and took refuge in a coastal home in Sullivan's Island. In an interview with the media, Jenny said that Sanford even asked her permission to visit Maria months after she discovered their affair. She told the media that she absolutely said "No" to her husband. "It's one thing to forgive adultery; it's another thing to condone it," she said.

When Jenny found out that Sanford went again to Argentina and not to the Appalachian Trail which his staff told everyone -- including Jenny -- who inquired about his whereabouts during those five days in June, she was devastated.

For love of Maria, Sanford's promising political career was damaged beyond repair. For love of Maria, his dream of occupying the White House someday was shattered forever. For love of Maria, his marriage was destroyed beyond redemption. And, for love of Maria, his life took a detour into the unknown. And not knowing what the unknown might be could be the most terrifying experience in life.

Quo vadis, Mark Sanford? You dishonored your state's highest office which the people entrusted you with. You disappointed the Republican Party who supported your political ambitions and looked up to you as a "shining star" who could someday redeem it's glorious past. You broke the heart of your wife and let your sons down.

However, I am pretty sure that your wife and sons will survive the havoc you wreaked upon them. But how about you, Mark? How can you survive the humongous disaster you got yourself into? For love of Maria, you took the road to perdition. But you can still redeem yourself by resigning from the office that you dishonored. To stay longer as the governor of your state would further erode whatever is left of the respect you have earned during the past six and a half years as their governor. However, there is no guarantee; only a slim chance that your constituents might forgive you.

But this I must say: for taking a big risk that you would not be caught when you sneaked out of South Carolina to rendezvous with Maria in Buenos Aires, you are a brazenly brave man. So take stock of yourself and bravely face the music. It's time for you to resign from office and move on to rebuilding your life.

As for Maria, don't cry for her Argentina.