It was a vigil of love and commitment. Every day for nearly three months, 67-year-old Georgene and her husband Mike made a two-hour round-trip journey from their home in north suburban Chicago to Evanston. They came to be with their great grandniece, Anabelle, one of the babies being cared for in The Cradle’s onsite Nursery.

Anabelle’s birth mom, Michaela, was young and struggling. She was already raising two children on her own and dealing with health issues when she became pregnant. Michaela had always been very close to her great Aunt Georgene, so she turned to her for support during this stressful time. Georgene recommended that Michaela consider adoption and referred her to The Cradle.

“My husband and I had been foster parents for years, and had cared for more than 35 children in our home,” Georgene said. “Our four children came to us through adoption – they were biological siblings who had been in our home as foster kids when we decided to adopt them, so we knew the power of adoption. I knew about The Cradle for years, and loved The Cradle’s philosophy of supporting women to make the decision that is right for them and their baby.”

Georgene was in the delivery room with Michaela when baby Anabelle was born in August 2014. Shortly after her birth, the family learned devastating news: Anabelle was diagnosed with Aicardi syndrome, a rare genetic disorder that causes blindness, developmental delays and seizures. There is no cure, and the prognosis is uncertain. Cradle social workers began to search for a family who would be prepared to help Anabelle reach her fullest potential.

Baby Anabelle came to The Cradle Nursery, and Georgene and Mike were not far behind.

(Continued on page 2)
Naturally, she also realized how much she would miss the daily visits with her great grandniece. “Had we been 20 years younger we would have adopted her in a heartbeat,” Georgene said. “I knew Mike and I had the love and dedication, but it just wasn’t possible at our age.”

The placement day in November, nearly three months after Anabelle had come to The Cradle Nursery, was bittersweet for all concerned. Georgene recalls the day: “We asked Mark and Jenny if Mike and I could be there, and they graciously agreed. We had no standing at all to be there, but they generously allowed us in. I asked if I could read a prayer, which I wrote specifically for the day. It was an absolutely beautiful moment and I am so grateful they allowed us to share it.”

Ten months later, Anabelle is thriving in her new home. Jenny reports that she is healthy, with no signs of seizure activity which is a common complication of Aicardi. She adores her big sister and has started crawling. Her first word was “Mama.” Jenny and Georgene stay connected through Facebook. Georgene admits the first few weeks after placement were very tough on her and Mike (“My arms would just hurt because I couldn’t hold Anabelle”), but seeing photos of Anabelle and reading the family’s updates on Facebook were very helpful.

“Mike and I are so grateful to have been part of her life for even the short time we were,” says Georgene. “The Cradle’s Nursery staff and counselors provide such loving and compassionate care to the babies and their birth moms.”

As Cradle President Julie Tye explains, “We have had an increasing number of medically fragile and special needs infants referred to us in recent years. Other adoption providers that operate more like businesses are not willing to take on the care and find families for babies like Anabelle. We are fortunate to have donors who care most of all for the children, so we are able to accept any baby and find the best possible families.”

To see more photos of Anabelle and her family, visit cradlefoundation.org/anabelle
Dear Friends,

I hope you have had a safe, healthy and enjoyable summer. Here at The Cradle, we have been busy organizing a variety of special events – a few of which you can read about on page 4 – caring for more babies than usual in The Cradle Nursery, and planning for our future.

As I write this, there are ten little ones in the Nursery’s care. Our Cuddler Coordinator added an 8-10 pm shift to assist the nurses and infant aides who work nights. Many of our volunteer Cuddlers had a chance to feed, rock and snuggle baby Anabelle, featured in our cover story. During her 11 ½-week stay in the Nursery last summer and fall, this special little girl also had daily visits from her birth mom’s great aunt and uncle. We are happy to be able to offer a comfortable, nurturing space for birth family members and prospective adoptive parents to spend time with an infant.

Maintaining our one-of-a-kind Nursery has always been a priority. In the Annual Report issue of the newsletter, we talked briefly about the strategic planning process that was initiated last fall. Our Task Force has done a great deal of work in the past year, carefully assessing Cradle programs and operations internally, while also looking outside the agency at dozens of other nonprofit and governmental organizations that work in adoption, foster care, advocacy, behavioral health, education, training and other related areas. While we don’t have any major announcements to make just yet, I can say that we have identified several exciting opportunities that will enhance and expand Cradle services.

One multi-year initiative, “Raising Black Children,” will include a series of events and educational offerings designed to address the parenting needs of families that are raising black children, especially parents in transracial adoptions. We will discuss this and other opportunities further in the coming months.

We want to hear your thoughts! Would you please take a few minutes to complete the survey on page 5? You are an important part of The Cradle community and your feedback will help us ensure that our newsletter is the best it can be. Thank you.

Warm regards,

Julie S. Tye

CLAS Update

The Cradle’s Center for Lifelong Adoption Support has a new space – and a new face.

Mandy Jones, LCSW, JD joined The Cradle in June as the newest member of the post-adoption therapy team. A licensed clinical social worker and licensed attorney, she has advocated for the best interests of children in the child welfare system through legal work with the Cook County Office of the Public Guardian and the Michigan Attorney General’s Children and Youth Services Division.

Mandy is also certified in Theraplay, a child and family therapy for building and enhancing attachment, self-esteem, trust in others and joyful engagement. In a Theraplay session, the therapist guides the parent and child through playful, fun games, developmentally challenging activities and tender, nurturing activities. This creates an active, emotional connection between the child and parent or caregiver.

“Adopted children may experience feelings of loss or separation that can be really hard for them to overcome,” says Mandy. “Through this work my goal is to help foster attachment and solidify bonds within adoptive families.”

And now we have the perfect place for Mandy to work with children and families: an inviting new room at The Cradle that was beautifully decorated by staff along with Cradle Action Team volunteers.

“In Theraplay, there is a lot of movement and interaction. With this room we have the space to play and interact freely during a session,” Mandy explains.

Go to cradle.org/lifelong-support/counseling-sessions to learn more about CLAS counseling services. Also, we are in need of games, toys and books for our new therapy room. These items can be found on the “Cradle Nursery Wishlist” on Amazon.com. Thank you!
SUMMER EVENTS on the water

Our 15th annual Cradle Classic golf tournament on June 23 was an extra special event, in many ways. The weather was perfect. The setting – Lake Bluff’s Shoreacres club perched above Lake Michigan – was spectacular. And for Cradle parents Tom and Sarah Jensen, at left in the photo, it was a harbinger of even more beautiful days ahead. Just one month later, on July 24, they took home their second Cradle baby, Emilia. Big sister Natalie was placed with them in 2012. Friends Cathy and Don Larson made up the other half of the Jensens’ foursome.

Seventy-five golfers participated in this year’s Classic, which raised nearly $50,000 for The Cradle. We are especially grateful to lead sponsors The Northridge Group, and Phyllis Thomas and Alan Curtis, for helping to ensure the day’s success.

The Sayers Summer Soiree is just three years old, but has quickly become a highly anticipated party that grows more popular each year. The over 100 guests in attendance on July 16 at Chicago’s River Roast Social House enjoyed good food and drink, dancing to tunes spun by one of Chicago’s most popular radio DJs, Maurice “ICE” Culpepper, and the company of those who support The Cradle’s Sayers Center for African American Adoption. Thanks to Soiree attendees, sponsors and a dedicated planning committee made up of Sayers Center parents and Cradle Board members, the evening raised nearly $17,000 – a 30% increase over our 2014 event.

Above, from left, Sayers Center parents Nkem and Pat Iroegbu, volunteer Ursula Tatum and her husband John, and Sayers dad Ted Hamer

To see more photos from these events, visit cradlefoundation.org/events

FUNNY LADIES TO HEADLINE THE CRADLE BALL

Guests at The Cradle Ball, coming up on Saturday, October 17 at The Ritz-Carlton Chicago, are in for a treat, times two. Honorary Chair and guest speaker Julia Sweeney is an author, actress, director and comedienne who created the character “Pat” as a cast member of Saturday Night Live from 1990-94. Ball Emcee Kathy Hart entertains legions of fans throughout Chicagoland every weekday morning as co-host of the Eric & Kathy Show on 101.9fm THE MIX. Both of these talented ladies are also adoptive moms. Kathy brought home her Cradle baby, Allen, in 2008, and Julia adopted her daughter Mulan from China.

Cocktails, dining, presentation of the 2015 Silver Cradle Awards and dancing to the music of Greenlight are just some of the evening’s other highlights. Guests will also have a chance to bid on fabulous items such as a one-week stay for four at a villa in Italy and a team-autographed Blackhawks hockey stick in our auction. Kim Simonton, a Cradle mom and Board member, is chairing the 21st annual Ball.

For event details and tickets, go to cradlefoundation.org/ball
Your Opinion is Important to Us

The Cradle is reaching out to you, as a valued friend, supporter and reader, to invite your feedback on our print newsletter and how we might make it better. Please take a few minutes (less than 10!) to complete this brief questionnaire and return it in the enclosed envelope; or, you can fill it out online at www.cradlefoundation.org/survey.

Thank you for your help!

Gender:  □ Female       □ Male

Cradle Affiliation:  □ Adoptive Parent of a child age 0-10       □ Birth Parent
                    □ Adoptive Parent of a child age 11-20       □ Cradle Grandparent
                    □ Adoptive Parent of a child age 21-35       □ Relative
                    □ Adoptive Parent of a child age 36-50       □ Friend
                    □ Adoptive Parent of a child age 50+       □ Other (please specify)
                    □ Adopted Person

How often do you read The Cradle Newsletter?

□ Always       □ Sometimes       □ Rarely       □ Never

If you answered “rarely” or “never,” can you please let us know why? ____________________________

How much of the Newsletter do you typically read?

□ Cover to cover       □ Most of the articles       □ Some articles       □ None

How would you rate the overall quality of the Newsletter’s content and format?

□ Excellent       □ Good       □ Fair       □ Poor

How relevant do you find the information in the Newsletter?

□ Very       □ Somewhat       □ Not at all

Which kinds of stories are most meaningful to you? Please rank in order of interest from 1-7.

____ Stories about babies and families
____ Stories about adult adoptees
____ Stories about birth parents
____ Informational content, such as expert advice on parenting adopted children
____ Profiles of Cradle donors or volunteers
____ Profiles of Cradle staff members
____ Coverage of fundraising events
____ Other ____________________________
Have you ever shared a Newsletter with a family member or friend or recommended a story?

☐ Yes    ☐ No

If so, why did you want to share it?

________________________________________________________________________

________________________________________________________________________

Does reading the Newsletter make you feel:

Informed about The Cradle’s work?    ☐ Very    ☐ Somewhat    ☐ Not at all

Connected to The Cradle and our mission?    ☐ Very    ☐ Somewhat    ☐ Not at all

Inclined to support The Cradle financially?    ☐ Very    ☐ Somewhat    ☐ Not at all

Has reading the Newsletter ever prompted you to make a donation either via the enclosed reply envelope or online through a link published in an article?

☐ Yes    ☐ No

How could we modify the Newsletter to help you feel better informed and connected to The Cradle?

________________________________________________________________________

________________________________________________________________________

________________________________________________________________________

Which are you more likely to read?

☐ Print newsletter    ☐ Electronic newsletter    ☐ Both    ☐ Neither

Your feedback is very important to us, and we thank you for your time and candor. Our primary purpose is to keep you interested, informed and engaged, and to strengthen your connection with The Cradle.

Feel free to email any additional comments you may have to cradlefoundation@cradle.org.

You can also access back issues of The Cradle Newsletter on our website at www.cradle.org/about-us/publications.
Holly and Brian Hesse’s two Cradle babies, almost-eight-year-old Jaxon and two-year-old Ella, are the best of friends. Their adoptions, though, were quite different – a short wait and direct placement for Jaxon; a long wait and placement from the Nursery for Ella. In between the two, the family relocated from Illinois to Kansas. But it was “all well worth it,” Holly says. She and Brian speak adoringly about their children and maintain close relationships with both of the kids’ birth families.

They have also made supporting The Cradle a priority, becoming monthly donors and including the agency in their estate plans. “The Cradle allowed us to become parents,” they acknowledge with gratitude.

The couple’s journey to parenthood was a learning experience. Initially frightened by the concept of open adoption, Holly and Brian began to change their minds after hearing an adoptive family and birth family speak at The Cradle’s “Adoption 101” class. “We started feeling comfortable and wanted openness,” says Brian.

The Hesses had the opportunity to experience this firsthand when, just one month after going on the waiting list in August 2007, they were chosen by Jaxon’s birth mom. After the baby was born in late October, his birth mom took him home. Holly and Brian met him for the first time at one week, held him, and tried to keep their expectations in check. It was very hard.

A couple weeks later, on November 17, Jaxon’s birth mom entrusted her son to Holly and Brian. Her mother and aunt were there, too. “I was not even close to prepared for that moment,” Brian recalls. “It was very emotional for everyone,” adds Holly. But soon they settled in as a family, and when Jaxon was 2 ½, a job change took them to Kansas City, where Holly and Brian had grown up.

In 2011 they began to explore adopting a sibling for Jaxon. After researching local agencies, they decided to return to The Cradle. This time, however, they would wait two years.

Things moved quickly once they received a call in early April 2013 that they’d been selected by a young couple. The match meeting went well, but the birth parents didn’t want openness. “I told them our story about Jaxon and how wonderful our relationship is with his birth family,” Brian explains. Like the Hesses, they were persuaded.

Holly and Brian got to the hospital a couple hours after Ella was born, and visited her in The Cradle Nursery every day until she went home with them on May 13 – the day after Mother’s Day. Jaxon was especially excited, kissing and cuddling his new baby sister.

Today, both of the children’s birth families are, as Brian describes them, like in-laws or one big extension of their family. They exchange lots of photos and emails and have periodic visits. Each of the birth families sends gifts to both children on their birthdays and at Christmas.

Brian and Holly are naturally philanthropic and like to give back through their church and other organizations. Giving to The Cradle made sense to them. “We believe very strongly in what The Cradle does, but more importantly, how you do it. The Cradle does it the right way, and creates amazing families.”

To learn more about making a recurring gift, visit cradlefoundation.org/monthlygiving

HELP MAKE THE HOLIDAYS BRIGHTER

Every year The Cradle organizes a Holiday Gift Drive for the children of Cradle birth parents. Many of these families are financially stressed, and the holidays add pressures as parents try to provide for their kids. Donors can sponsor an individual child or make a monetary gift that will be used to purchase Walmart or Target cards for the family. If you would like to help, please email cradlefoundation@cradle.org, call 847-733-3230 or visit www.cradlefoundation.org/giftdrive. Thank you!
CRADLE Calendar FALL 2015

09/24 TIRED OF TIMEOUTS: TAKE 2
ALP Webinar
7 pm or 10 pm Central Time
adoptionlearningpartners.org

09/26 INS & OUTS OF NEGOTIATING AN IEP
Parenting Workshop*
10 am – 11:30 am
Theraplay Institute
1840 Oak Avenue, Evanston

10/17 THE CRADLE BALL
6 pm – 11 pm
The Ritz-Carlton Chicago

10/17 LET’S TALK ADOPTION:
AGES, STAGES & COMMON CHALLENGES
Parenting Workshop*
10 am – 11:30 am
The Cradle, Evanston

11/14 ANXIETY & DEPRESSION IN ADOPTED CHILDREN
Parenting Workshop*
10 am – 11:30 am
Theraplay Institute
1840 Oak Avenue, Evanston

12/05 CRADLE HOLIDAY PARTY
9:30 am – 12 pm
The Cradle, Evanston

*For fee and registration info, go to www.cradle.org/adoption-workshops