FINDING THE RIGHT FAMILY for Every Baby

For Tammi and Marc Kotarski, meeting baby Sofia was love at first sight. Angie and Dan Bateman firmly believed that “whatever child was placed with us was meant to be.”

Many of our readers know that The Cradle is the only U.S. adoption agency with an onsite infant nursery. Or they know that old-time celebrities such as Bob Hope and George Burns adopted their children through The Cradle. But what makes The Cradle truly unique is our commitment to finding a loving family for every baby entrusted to us – including babies who are born with significant special needs.

Cradle counselors who work on special needs placements have had a particularly busy caseload this year. According to adoption counselor Kathleen McShane, a special needs placement can involve roughly four times the work of a regular case because it requires the resources of so many people on our staff – including a special needs committee which reviews and discusses adoptive family profiles before they are presented to birthparents.

Sometimes a baby will stay in the hospital until he goes home with his adoptive family. A baby may be placed temporarily with a medical foster family because her special needs – such as the requirement of supplemental oxygen or a feeding tube – preclude her from coming to the Nursery. Even though those Cradle babies aren’t physically onsite, our Nursery director closely monitors their progress while our counselors work with their birthparents and work to identify a family for them. In some cases The Cradle may have to network outside the state if there isn’t a family on our waiting list who is able to adopt a child with serious issues.

Last November The Cradle placed a baby boy who was born with Prader-Willi syndrome with a couple in Louisiana who were familiar with PWS because a child in their extended family had the disease. Six months ago, twin boys who were born extremely prematurely (one weighed just 1 lb. 9 oz.), went home with a family in Highland Park following a lengthy hospital stay. Both boys underwent heart surgery just weeks after their birth and both are at high risk for health and developmental problems.

(Continued on page 2)
“With special needs adoptions,” Kathleen observed, “even before a placement occurs, the adoptive parents see the child as their own, so whatever challenges may lie ahead, it’s okay because they are already a family.” Two families who adopted baby girls with special needs in recent months are prime examples of this.

Baby Sofia was born on April 17 with Down syndrome and a heart defect. At one month she had cardiac surgery, and on May 28 she was discharged from the hospital to a foster family because she needed an NG tube for feeding. Several hundred miles away, on the outskirts of Buffalo, NY, lived a couple who more than anything wanted to be Sofia’s parents.

Tammi and Marc Kotarski had been together for nine years and longed for a child to complete their family. They were preparing to adopt privately when then saw a posting about Sofia and immediately contacted The Cradle.

“Tammi and Marc felt a bond with Sofia’s birthparents even before they met. “They read our letter and saw our pictures and said that they didn’t know us, but they recognized us,” Marc said. After meeting, the couples discovered they had same favorite movie. The Kotarskis also learned just how profoundly Sofia’s birthparents loved her, but couldn’t give her the life they wanted for her.

The moment Tammi laid eyes on Sofia “an unbelievably fierce love” took over. Tammi’s mom, Carol, gave her a bracelet with the engraving “miracles do happen.” This beautiful baby is even bringing some of their family back together. “Every single difficult moment has led up to this,” Tammi reflected. “We will forever be grateful to The Cradle.”

Angie and Dan Bateman planned on having four children. After their son Mitchell was born in 1996, however, they found that conceiving another baby would probably never happen. Like Sofia, Mitch was their “miracle child.” So they looked into adoption and decided that they were more comfortable adopting internationally. Working with another agency, they brought an 18-month-old boy home from Guatemala in early 2008 and let Mitch pick out a name for his little brother: Trevor.

Prior to adopting Trevor, the Batemans had also attended an information meeting at The Cradle. “Once we brought Trevor home and realized that this little boy wouldn’t have any contact with his birth family, we realized that we really wanted to do a domestic adoption for our next child,” Angie affirmed. They selected the Sayers Center program, finalized their home study and went on the waiting list.

Over the next two years there were 14 potential matches and “a lot of tears along the way.” Because the couple was open to a wide range of special needs, their profile was presented more often. The 15th match was baby Kei’anna.

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“I first talked to Tammi and Marc on the Friday before Memorial Day,” Kathleen said. “I kindly denied them when they called because they didn’t have an agency home study and I had many responses about Sofia. But they were persistent. On Tuesday, Tammi called back to say they had gotten an agency home study over the weekend. I thought, ‘those are the kind of parents I want advocating for Sofia.’”

The Kotarskis moved heaven and earth to meet The Cradle’s requirements. “I emailed Kathleen about 15 times,” Tammi said, “and I lived at Office Max getting our profile ready.” She and Marc also contacted the FBI directly in order to expedite their background check. By Friday – just one week after their initial call to The Cradle – Tammi and Marc’s profile was presented to Sofia’s birthparents. The next day, they were selected, and on Monday they were on the road to Chicago.

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At six months, Kei’anna now weighs 12 pounds. She has impaired vision and tremors in her legs, and may have cerebral palsy in her arms. Her physical and cognitive development are delayed. She has seen many doctors and specialists and is currently receiving physical therapy. She is also smiling and vocalizing. Although Kei’anna’s long-term prognosis is uncertain, her parents are ready to meet her needs. They also hope to have some type of contact with her birthmom one day.

“We kept the name the ‘Kei’anna’ so she’ll always have something from her birthmother,” Angie explained. “We chose ‘Grace’ as her middle name because by the grace of God she became our daughter.”
A SNAPSHOT OF SUMMER

THE CRADLE CLASSIC Suits Players to a Tee

Sixty-eight golfers + eighteen holes + 85° with sunshine = an exceptional day on the green! For the second year, North Shore Country Club in Glenview was the site of our annual Cradle Classic golf tournament and reception. Play began at noon on June 11 with a shotgun start and included contests at various holes throughout the course. After their round, golfers retired to the clubhouse for cocktails, dinner and an award ceremony. Event chair and Cradle dad, Greg Kaczmarek, spoke to the group about adopting his three Cradle babies. Thanks to the generosity of tournament participants and sponsors, including lead sponsor The Northridge Group, the 12th annual Cradle Classic raised nearly $60,000 for Cradle programs and services.

A happy foursome: Pausing at the 18th hole to pose for a picture are, from left, Darryl Stackhouse, Cradle dad Bob Soderstrom, Tom Kearney and Bill Lenz.

DAY AT THE RACES is a Real Topper

Gentlemen arrived in straw boaters and Panama hats. Unique fascinators and elaborate derby styles graced the ladies. The kids got in on the fun, too. For the first time, a hat contest was part of the festivities at The Cradle’s 12th annual Day at the Races at Arlington Park on June 24. Lunch, horse racing, a photo booth and Kids Corner activities were some of the afternoon’s other highlights. Organized by The Cradle Associates professional board, this year’s outing drew 250 guests of all ages and generated over $47,000 for The Cradle. Cradle Associates and Cradle parents Bobbi Ann and Barry Fulk (Renata ’01) and Jeannie Weaver (Braylen ’09) co-chaired the event. Hats off to them for a great day!

Members of The Cradle Associates – along with a couple of Cradle kids and their friends – show off their fancy hats.

CRADLE FAMILY PICNICS Dish up Food & Fun

On August 4, a hot and sunny Saturday, Cradle Connections hosted three simultaneous picnics at parks in three Chicagoland locations: Deerfield to the north, Oak Park to the west and Homewood to the south. A total of 75 Cradle families attended. Joy Cody, mom to Cradle babies Edith, 4, and Freddy, 6 months, posted on Facebook, “We had so much fun at The Cradle picnic today. I feel so lucky to be a part of such a wonderful extended family.” Cradle mom Andrea Charest, whose daughter Vivienne, 3, is friends with Edith, commented on Joy’s post: “We are still feeling the glow, too (or is it heatstroke?!).” Four-year-old Dani’s mom, Gineen Hecht, agreed. “We had a great time,” she posted. “Adoption rocks!”

Cradle pals Dani Hecht-Sander, Vivienne Foy and Edith Wanat had lots of fun at the Oak Park picnic.
FULL CIRCLE: Two Cradle Babies Give Back

Cradle alumni Robert “Rob” Bracken and David Herbst are separated by around 12 years and 10 miles. Both live in the Los Angeles area and have an aviation connection. Both men have also included The Cradle in their estate plans.

Rob was placed with Margaret and Robert Bracken of Frankfort, Indiana in January of 1957. A few years later the couple adopted Rob’s sister, Sarah, from an agency in Vermont, where Margaret had grown up. Rob’s dad, now 91, and his mom, 87, still live in the same house where they raised their kids.

“I never remember not knowing I was adopted,” Rob said. “My mother told us at a young age that we were adopted and that we were deeply loved. My neighbor would tell me stories about my father walking me in a stroller up and down the street, his face beaming.”

Following a 25-year career in sales and marketing for Air France, Rob, 55, stays quite busy in his “retirement.” He conducts phone interviews as part of the RAND Corporation’s survey research group and is a west coast alumni engagement specialist for Interlochen Arts Academy High School, his alma mater. One of his favorite activities these days is giving private swim lessons through a company called Happy Swimmers.

Rob visited The Cradle ten years ago when he was in the Chicago area. “The living room and the Nursery were exactly as I pictured them,” he said. He had heard stories about The Cradle when he was growing up and the Bracken family always liked to read the newsletter. When asked why he decided to leave a bequest to The Cradle, Rob replied, “I partially credit my parents simply because The Cradle has been a part of my life forever, and it has always been shared with me. When something is important to you for your entire life you want to be a part of it for eternity.”

David’s parents, Jean and Dale Herbst, would tell him the story about picking him up in The Cradle Nursery and bringing him home. That was in May 1969 and Joliet, Illinois was home. David’s brother Michael, also a Cradle baby, joined the family in 1971. The Herbsts moved to Washington state when David was five and settled in southern California as he was entering eighth grade.

“My mom told me that there was a process involved with my adoption,” he said, “a whole infrastructure around making sure the placement of kids was done thoughtfully, and well. It was very clear to me that The Cradle was much more than a place to pick out a kid and leave – it had a holistic approach.”

The Cradle was also the place where Bob Hope adopted his kids, David was told as he was growing up. That bit of his history came in handy when David was an undergrad at Loyola Marymount University and attended a dinner where Dolores and Bob Hope were guests. When he reached the couple in the receiving line, David declared, “Mrs. Hope, I am a Cradle baby.” She hugged him and pulled him and her husband out of the line. David told them how much his mother admired them, and the next day a pair of black and white photos, inscribed by Dolores and Bob to Jean Herbst, were delivered to campus.

Dale Herbst passed away in September 2011 following a long battle with Parkinson’s disease. In his father’s eulogy, David said, “The day I was adopted was the most important day of my life because it led me to all the other great days I’ve had.”

At 43, David is married with three daughters (and a fourth due this month!). He is Chief Corporate Officer for Mercury Air Group, a worldwide aviation services company.

“I am extraordinarily blessed,” David feels, “because out of The Cradle came a great set of parents and that led to all the other blessings that I have had in my life.”

Including The Cradle in his will was an easy decision for David. “I think about where I began,” he reflected, “and that makes it important to go full circle and give back.”

To learn more about making a planned gift to The Cradle, call Brooke Voss at 847.733.3204 or visit www.cradlefoundation.org/plannedgiving.
The Cradle Newsletter

"Safe & Sound," The Cradle’s recently published 2011 annual report, discusses some of the threats to ethical adoption practice today and highlights The Cradle’s exemplary programs and services. It also shows how the agency has taken a leadership role in advocating for sound practices by all providers of adoption services. “The Cradle is committed to adoption practice that is in the best interest of children,” states Julie Tye in the report’s introduction. “Quality practices are essential to ensuring positive outcomes for everyone involved in the adoption process.” In the second half of the report we list the many generous donors and committed volunteers whose support last year helped The Cradle do its important work – the right way. You can view the annual report online at www.cradle.org/publications or, to have a hard copy mailed to you, contact Heidi Bloom at 847.733.3240 or hbloom@cradle.org.

FOUNDATION BRIEFS

SWAP your Stuff!

A group of Cradle moms have come up with a terrific way to support The Cradle while decluttering their homes – the first annual Cradle SWAP! Bring your gently used children’s clothing, toys, books and gear to one of five drop locations (including The Cradle). Then, on Saturday, September 22 from 11 a.m. to 3 p.m., The Cradle will offer “swappers” the chance to browse the collected items and search for treasures for their family.

A donation of $30 per swapper will help support The Cradle’s Sayers Center for African American Adoption. For details go to www.cradlefoundation.org/swap or contact mkelly@cradle.org, 847.733.3230.

A Ball to Remember

Guests at the 18th annual Cradle Ball are in for a real treat. Held in past years on a Saturday night, this year we are moving our black-tie gala to the evening of Friday, September 28.

What a perfect way to end the work week and begin your weekend... with gourmet dining, dancing to a live orchestra, upscale auctions, a raffle to win $3,000, and Jamie Lee Curtis! The admired actress, adoptive mom and author will be our celebrity guest. Frederick H. Waddell, Chairman and CEO of Northern Trust Corporation, is the Ball’s Honorary Chair.

Once again, the elegant Ritz-Carlton Chicago will be the setting for the Ball and Cradle Board members Erin Dickes and John Luce are co-chairing the event. The evening begins at 6 p.m. with cocktails; the last dance will conclude at 11 p.m. Tickets are $350 per person. For more information, visit www.cradlefoundation.org/ball.

Preserving Ethical Adoption

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PARENTING WORKSHOP
at The Cradle

AFTER BABY JOINS YOUR FAMILY – The Impact

Saturday, October 20, 2012, 9:30 a.m. to 11:30 a.m.

Bringing a child home can have quite an impact on your family life. Learn what to expect and some tools to manage the impact. Participants will learn:

• How to create a bonding environment
• How to assess your own emotion reaction and needs as a parent
• Practical planning around support and help
• How to prepare siblings

Guest speaker Becky Carter, LCPC, is a licensed therapist, a Cradle adoptive parent and an adult adopted person.

2 hours of DCFS Foster Care Training/Hague Aligned

Workshop is open to the community. Fees: $20 per person per workshop, $10 for second family member; non-refundable. Pre-registration and pre-payment are required. Register online at www.cradle.org/adoption-workshops or by calling 847.733.3208.

MESSAGE FROM A Cradle Family

Venessa González and Justin Mayer took three-month-old Shae Matthew home from The Cradle on May 26, 2011 after a nearly two-year wait to be matched with a child. In May of this year the family attended our “Class of 2011” reception at The Cradle Open House, and in July, Venessa and Justin – along with Shae Matthew’s birthmom, Miranda (who was featured in the last issue of the newsletter) – participated as speakers on a panel of adoptive families at Adoption 101. Following is an excerpt from the thank you note they sent to The Cradle after the class:

We enjoyed being on the other side of the spectrum (being an adoptive family, sharing our story with prospective adoptive families). When we were in the same shoes in 2009, we found it very helpful to hear other families share their journey and reflect on what their open adoption relationship looks like. Despite having reservations about openness at the very beginning of our journey, hearing about it directly from the mouths of an adoptive family, and birthmother, helped reveal to us just how important an open relationship would be to us and our child.

Since our placement, we’ve felt like we won the lottery. Not only is Shae Matthew such an awesome gift to us, but we also reflect daily on how fortunate we are to have his birthparents as a part of our family. We understand that not everyone has the opportunity to have an open relationship with their child’s birth family, but hope that those that do, would see it as a precious gift, a complete package, a part of who their child is, and take an interest in the value of their new and unique family (child and birth family included).

CELEBRATING A DECADE
of Adoption Learning Partners

Adoption Learning Partners (ALP) began as a vision: How could The Cradle provide adoption education anywhere, anywhere? Prospective adoptive parents must complete a certain amount of training before they adopt a child, and adoptive parents often need support as their child grows up. While The Cradle has many skilled professionals, we could only reach so many clients in person.

The Cradle created ALP so that our clients – as well as adoptive families and adoption professionals beyond our service area – could take high quality courses online rather than in a classroom setting. “It’s helpful for the parents because they can have access to the courses for as long as they want, wherever they want,” explained Ben Mueller, Director of Technology for ALP.

AdoptionLearningPartners.org launched its first online course in July of 2002. There are now 25 courses available on the site on a wide range of adoption-related topics. ALP also works with more than 200 participating agencies, helping to prepare adoptive families throughout the U.S. and around the world, and support them after adoption.

In 2010 ALP began offering a series of timely and topical webinars on subjects including nutrition, attachment, school success, and special needs. Webinars give participants a chance to interact with the experts and get a real-time response to their questions. For those who can’t attend a particular webinar, they can find a recorded version on the ALP site.

“Adopted: the Identity Project” is ALP’s newest course. Launched in August, this course offers parents a unique view into the hearts, minds and souls of the adopted person experience by guiding them through a series of adoptee stories in video format. “In the next ten years,” said Adoption Learning Partners Director Noreen Bigelow, “ALP will continue to expand our reach and play an even larger role in post-adoption education and support.”

Plans to do this are well underway. Adoption Learning Partners is in the pilot phase of an exciting project: the creation of Adoption Parenting Pathways, a portal to connect parents with a national database of post-adoption resources. Look for updates about the portal project in future issues of the newsletter.

Through ALP, The Cradle hopes to keep adoptive families learning for a lifetime. Thank you to our Cradle family for your support over the past ten years! For more information about ALP courses and webinars, visit www.AdoptionLearningPartners.org.
CRADLE Calendar  FALL 2012

09/19  ADOPTION AND CLASSROOM SUCCESS: BEYOND THE BASICS
ALP Webinar
www.adoptionlearningpartners.org
7 p.m. CT, 8 p.m. Q&A

09/28  THE CRADLE BALL
The Ritz-Carlton Chicago
160 E. Pearson Street
6 p.m. to 11 p.m.

10/13  AUTUMN MOON FESTIVAL
Furama Restaurant
4936 N. Broadway, Chicago
3 p.m. to 6:30 p.m.

10/20  AFTER BABY JOINS YOUR FAMILY
Parenting Workshop*
The Cradle, Evanston
9:30 a.m. to 11:30 a.m.

*Open to the community. Fee: $20 per person per workshop, $10 for second family member; non-refundable. Register online at www.cradle.org/adoption-workshops or by calling 847.733.3208.