

BEYOND STEPHENS



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Gift of Life

Madeleine Hirsch Gordon '65 established a foundation to assist couples who struggle with infertility.



Madeleine Hirsch Gordon '65 has accepted the bittersweet and ironic reality: Had she had a child of her own, 47 other children might not exist today.

"Had I had a child, no, I would not be raising funds for infertility," she says from her Cincinnati home.

The Madeleine Gordon Gift of Life Foundation is a non-profit organization 501(c)3 that provides funding to deserving couples who cannot conceive without in vitro fertilization or afford the process. Since 1995, the foundation has helped bring 47 babies into the world, with a 48th on the way.

It's not that Gordon didn't want children; in fact, she refers to herself as "involuntarily childless." For 15 years, she and her former husband struggled to get pregnant, consulting with some of the best infertility experts in the world and trying numerous procedures. It was a painful, lonely experience.

"I never discussed it with friends," she says. "That part was difficult. I was giving myself shots, so they had to be timed perfectly and they silently interrupted personal and professional calendars. There were drugs involved and hormones involved that affected my moods. It was stressful."

Approaching her 50th birthday, Gordon came to terms with the fact she would not be a mother.

That she would go on and help dozens of other women become mothers, instead, began with a sermon.

"It was a rabbi," she says. "It was interesting: He wasn't asking people to give to the temple but instead was asking the congregation to think about what we could be passionate about as individuals beyond our own family and friends, beyond our work. And I started thinking about it. What would I do if I knew I could get pregnant but couldn't afford the process? And I realized it was time to stop feeling sorry for myself and think about others who didn't have the same financial opportunities I had to try to become pregnant. The idea of a foundation became a resolution for me, to move on from my own disappointment. It was an awakening."

Gordon—a former literature teacher, a trailblazer in the Ohio Riverview real estate scene and an arts advocate in her community—gathered 80 of her closest friends together for a birthday luncheon and asked them to contribute to her cause in lieu of gifts.

And in 1995, the Madeleine Gordon Gift of Life Foundation was born.

Today, the foundation is under the auspices of the University of Cincinnati College of Medicine and partners with the Christ Hospital. A team of doctors there

work alongside the foundation, referring couples to Gift of Life who would benefit from in vitro fertilization. These couples are those who can't afford the process and have little or no medical coverage. Potential parents then submit a letter, go through intensive physical and some psychological evaluations, and are interviewed by Gordon and the foundation's advisory board before being selected.

The foundation requires couples to live in the Cincinnati area, although Gordon is hopeful others will use her program as a model and start similar foundations elsewhere. "It is a portable process and I am willing to visit other cities and introduce what we have done to their communities," she says.

The rewards are overwhelming, Gordon says. Many of the families welcome her into their lives, the children referring to her as "Auntie Mady." She's invited to countless dance recitals, baptisms and ballgames, and each year around this time, the families reunite at Gordon's home for a collective pool and birthday party. One couple even named their daughter after her.

"I never thought about what would happen after the foundation helped someone become pregnant," she says. "I had no idea the enduring appreciation these couples would have... I feel this was to be my mission."