

local

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Krista Ramsey: A lesson in compassion from 21 years ago

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Mother's Day ... with a little help

Mady Gordon's foundation gave this family and others a reason to celebrate [Page B4]

Sean Gill and Katie Gill of Fairfield Township, along with their son Brayden, who is held by Mady Gordon, who started the Gift of Life Foundation. THE ENQUIRER/JEFF SWINGER

COVER STORY



MEET MADY AND BRAYDEN: Listen to Madeleine Robinson explain how her foundation helps families have children, in a video at Cincinnati.com.

This Mother's Day gift was given last year



By John Johnston
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For years, Mother's Day meant heartache for Madeleine "Mady" Gordon. "I dreaded it," she says in her Walnut Hills home. "And while I try to approach life in a positive way, it was one day that created a hurdle that I could not overcome."

As a young teacher, surrounded by youngsters, she took for granted that she would one day have children of her own. When she couldn't get pregnant, she and her husband, who have since divorced, spared no expense on state-of-the-art fertility treatments. But in 15 years of trying, her one pregnancy, in the mid-1980s, lasted only three months because the fertilized egg implanted outside the womb.

Today, though, she no longer looks at Mother's Day as a painful reminder of might have beens. Rather, it's a day to share the joy of nearly four dozen couples whose dreams of children have been made possible by the Madeleine Gordon Gift of Life Foundation.

Katie and Sean Gill of Fairfield Township are among those couples. She is a special education teacher; he, a pipefitter. They married in 2007 and began trying to have a baby a few years later. "Little girls dream of their wedding day," Katie says. Her dreams went further. "I wanted to be a mother." But she couldn't get pregnant, so her doctor prescribed fertility treatments, none of which brought success.

As friends and co-workers announced pregnancies, Katie offered smiles and congratulations. But inside, she felt "heartbreak on a daily basis. Especially on Mother's Day."

The Gills, both of whom are 30, knew their best hope was in-vitro

fertilization, or IVF, in which an egg is fertilized outside the woman's body and then implanted in the womb. But a single attempt, including medications, can cost \$10,000 to \$12,000 and there is no guarantee of success. "It's a big financial burden," Katie says.

Gordon saw it firsthand while sitting in doctors' offices in the 1970s and '80s. She met desperate couples who had mortgaged homes or sold wedding rings to undergo the procedure. Those couples came to mind as she was approaching age 50 and heard a rabbi's sermon urging people to find something in life to be passionate about.

So at her 50th birthday party in July 1995, she announced the formation of the Gift of Life Foundation. She partnered with the UC Center for Reproductive Health, which writes off about one-third of the cost of IVF; the foundation covers one-third, and each couple pays one-third.

Dr. Michael Thomas has worked with the foundation since its start. The team now also includes Dr. Julie Sroga and Dr. Krystene DiPaola, who is medical director of both the foundation and the UC center.

About 15 percent of U.S. couples experience some form of infertility, Dr. DiPaola says. But fewer than one-third of such patients have insurance coverage for therapies such as IVF.

A small advisory group, consisting of Gordon and three mothers, interviews couples who apply; the doctors review their medical histories.

The Gills learned about the foundation from Dr. DiPaola, who told them they were good candidates.

"We were thrilled to pieces to hear there's somebody amazing like Mady Gordon who's willing to help people like us with the greatest gift that God

can possibly give us," Katie says.

Her first IVF attempt in February 2012 was not successful: "I don't think I've ever cried so much in my life. But I knew I was not giving up."

The foundation provides for a second attempt, if needed. And that resulted in a call from the doctor's office one day last June: Katie was pregnant.

Brayden Patrick Gill was born Feb. 13. "The greatest day of my life," Sean Gill says.

He and Katie say they're grateful not only to Gordon and the medical team, but to "fairy godparents" from New Orleans who helped by making a generous donation to the foundation.

Every year around the December holidays, Gordon sends out cards seeking donations. "Every time I meet someone new, I put them on the list," she says. It has grown to 2,700 people.

She says it's amazing what her "little bitty shoestring foundation" has accomplished.

Katie Mulhollen was the first child born with foundation help, in 1997. Since then, there have been 46 more.

Gordon's work has not gone unnoticed. She was a 2006 Enquirer Woman of the Year, and she has been featured in national publications.

But for "Aunt Mady," the real reward has been the relationships that have formed. She has taken Gift of Life children to Children's Theatre of Cincinnati and the "Nutcracker" performances. In turn, she has accepted invitations to baptisms, soccer games, dance recitals and birthday parties.

And every August, she gathers the whole group for a party. "When I see them in numbers like that, my heart feels like it's going to burst," she says. "There is no question, that is my Mother's Day." ■

TO PARTICIPATE

To be considered for the Madeleine Gordon Gift of Life program, a couple must be married at least two years; have no children together; have undergone no in-vitro fertilization (IVF) cycles; have medical records demonstrating need; have family income less than \$80,000; be in good health; and have lived locally at least three years. To apply, send a letter requesting consideration to: The Madeleine Gordon Gift of Life Foundation, P.O. Box 6945, Cincinnati, OH 45206. Website: www.gordongiftoflife.org. Information: Send an email to info@gordongiftoflife.org.

WHAT THEY ARE SAYING

"After struggling with fertility and the roller coaster of treatments, the Gift of Life made IVF a possibility for us. We were blessed with our beautiful daughter, Madison (born Aug. 3, 2012). There isn't a day that we are not eternally grateful for this amazing organization."

— Mike and Michelle Tabben, Florence

"My very first outing with my new baby boy was on Mother's Day 2010. Our little boy was just 4 days old. He was healthy and beautiful! He completed me! And every time I look into my little man's eyes, I think the Gordon Gift of Life Foundation."

— Brandy Sowders, White Oak