

# The *Gift Of Hope* For Infertile Couples

by meredith knight

Today Terry Hughes heard something he thought he might never hear. His one-year-old daughter, Hope Elizabeth, called him “DaDa”. Like many American couples, Terry and his wife, Laura, spent years trying unsuccessfully to conceive a child. Oral medications to increase ovulation resulted in two ectopic pregnancies—a pregnancy where a fertilized egg implants outside of the uterus where it can’t survive.

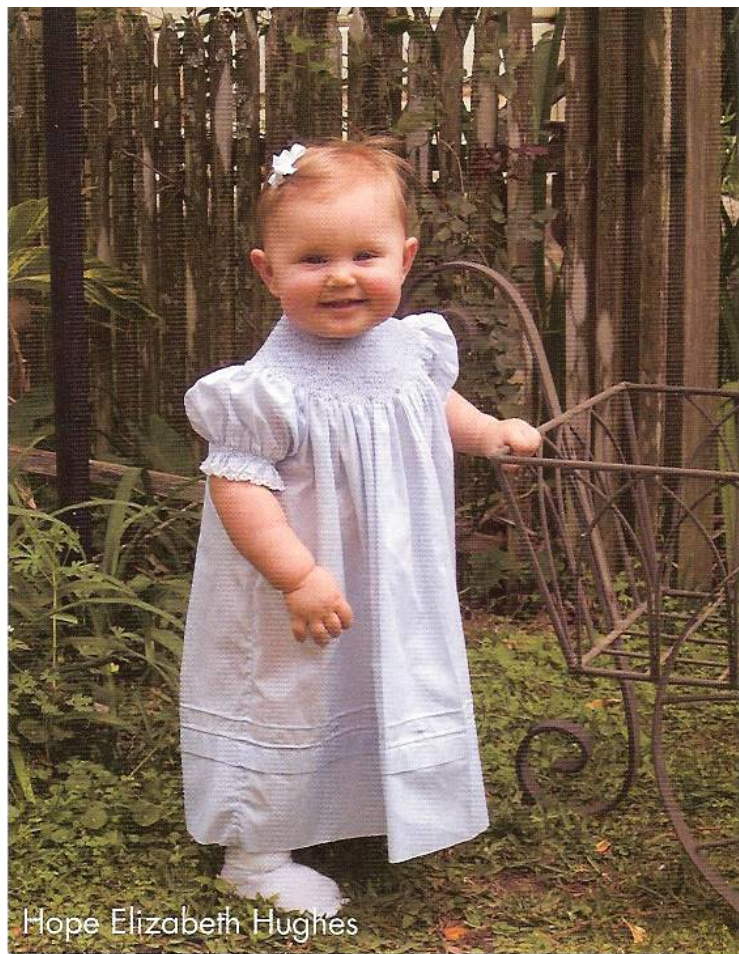
Then, after five years of disappointment, they were given the gift of hope through a program co-sponsored by fertility specialist John Storment, M.D., Fertility & Women’s Health Center of Louisiana, Women’s & Children’s Hospital of Lafayette and Sheridan Healthcare. Today they’re counting every day with Hope as a blessing and still marveling that their daughter is actually here.

“For five years everywhere we went it seemed like we were the only ones without children,” Laura said. “Everybody we knew had kids—my sister, my brother, all our friends. We read up on in vitro fertilization but it wasn’t covered on our insurance and was out of reach for us financially. After the second miscarriage, we decided to stop trying. It was easier to just be okay with it and stop setting ourselves up for disappointment. If it happened, it happened.”

One in eight couples in the U.S. who attempt pregnancy are unable to conceive a child. That figures out to about six million people of reproductive-age. While infertility is a medical condition, the psychological aspects can be devastating.

Infertile couples often struggle with feelings of depression, grief, stress, isolation, powerlessness, shame, inadequacy and anger. In vitro fertilization (IVF)—a process where a woman’s eggs are removed from her ovaries and fertilized with her husband’s sperm in a laboratory then transferred to her uterus to achieve implantation and pregnancy—is a viable option but the total cost is currently between \$10,000 and \$15,000 per cycle and multiple cycles may be required before a woman becomes pregnant.

Since few insurance companies cover the procedure, it’s a prospect that’s financially unattainable for all but a few couples. In fact, in this country only 1% of infertile couples take advantage of the option every year.



Hope Elizabeth Hughes

“Nobody plans to be infertile,” Dr. Storment said. “Couples dream of getting married and starting a family. Then they discover they can’t and it can be devastating. Knowing that an opportunity exists to conceive a child through in vitro fertilization (IVF) but realizing that chance is out of their reach leaves them feeling all the more frustrated, depressed and even unfairly discriminated against by their insurance company.”

While some states mandate that insurance companies cover IVF, Louisiana is not one of them. So Dr. Storment and his wife, Amelie, came up with the idea of underwriting a free IVF cycle for one deserving couple each year.

“John got a letter from a national organization asking him to participate in a program that offers free IVF to qualified couples who can’t afford it,” Amelie said. “They’d choose a couple somewhere in the country then fly them here for the free cycle. We liked the idea but it just seemed like there were people right here in Louisiana who needed IVF. Why couldn’t we start our own program locally?”

So that’s what they did. Gift of Hope was born in 2006 as a program for easing the high costs—both financially and emotionally—of infertility treatment for one Louisiana couple a year who demonstrates both financial and medical needs for IVF. Dr. Storment who is a board certified reproductive endocrinologist and one

of the partners at Fertility and Women's Health Center of Louisiana agreed to donate his portion of the cost. Women's and Children's Hospital of Lafayette and Sheridan Healthcare agreed to do the same and an application process for couples was developed (See sidebar for 2008 qualifications.)

"Giving away free medical services to people who can't afford them isn't a new idea," Dr. Storment said. "Doctors and hospitals do it all the time. We're happy to be able to offer this opportunity to couples who deserve it and only wish we could have chosen all the applicants." The program was launched in 2006 with forty couples applying. An independent committee considered each applicant carefully and selected the Hughes as the couple with the best chance of successfully conceiving.

"We'd been told they'd call the winner first thing in the morning on a certain day," Laura said. "I was at work and watching the clock. It got later and later. Finally it was four in the afternoon and I told myself whoever had won obviously deserved it and I should be happy for them. But I couldn't help but think, 'Here we go again. We've put ourselves out there for one more disappointment.'"

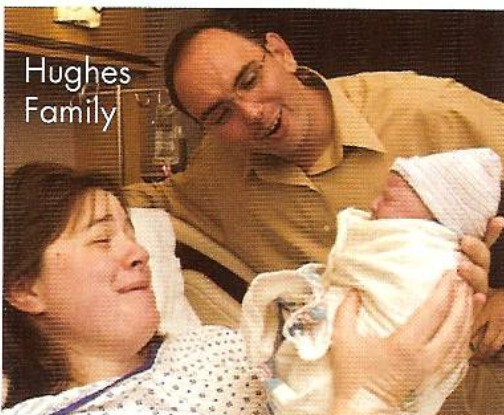
Then Dr. Storment called Laura with the news that they'd been selected as Gift of Hope recipients. "He called me at work and I started screaming," she said. "I called Terry and he called everyone we know. I didn't even get to tell my family," she laughed. "By the time I called my mom and sister, Terry was so excited he'd already called them."

"We felt numb for awhile," Laura said. "Dr. Storment was careful to tell us all the statistics on our success rate and tried to keep us grounded." The cycle was successful. Laura conceived twins but lost one at ten weeks. Throughout the pregnancy Terry had to administer daily shots in her stomach to ward off a miscarriage. "It was harder on him than it was me," Laura said. "I'd have taken a hundred shots a day, if I had to."

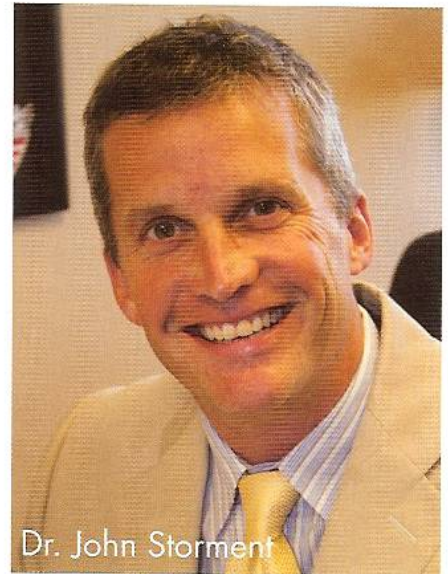
Laura carried the baby full term and on April 14, 2007, Hope Elizabeth was born with ten fingers and ten toes, beautiful, plump and healthy. "I was in labor for twenty-four hours," Laura said. "Terry and my family tell me how much pain I was in but I honestly don't remember. I was so focused on the baby getting here."

The Hughes are still adjusting to the idea that their dream of a family has come true. "We look at Hope every day and can't believe she's sitting there," Laura said. "She's starting to talk now—saying DaDa, MaMa and BaBa and starting to pull herself up on the furniture. We ask ourselves all the time what we ever did before we had her. Not a day goes by that we don't appreciate what we've been given."

Gift of Hope selected two couples to receive the free in vitro fertilization cycle in 2007. One conceived but unfortunately miscarried and the other is addressing some medical concerns before IVF can be attempted. Gift of Hope applications are being accepted now for 2008. Visit [www.FertilityAnswers.com](http://www.FertilityAnswers.com) to obtain an application. 📞



*A new baby is like  
the beginning of all  
things—wonder,  
hope, a dream  
of possibilities.  
Edna J. Leshan*



Dr. John Storment

In order to qualify to be a GIFT of HOPE recipient a couple must:

- Earn less than \$80,000 per year
- Have no insurance coverage for infertility
- Be tax-paying residents of Louisiana
- Have a documented medical need for in vitro fertilization
- Have insurance coverage for prenatal care
- Be able to describe in their own words the compelling nature of their need for fertility treatment.