

The English Voice
of LLL Greece

My breastfeeding Story



My breastfeeding story starts from the strong impressions that I had as a little girl listening to the stories of my grandmother breastfeeding her children. Very often my mother told me that my grandmother breastfed her four children up to four years and that she even breastfed her neighbour's child for a year, out of compassion for the baby, because the mother had no milk and the baby's health was thus endangered (she had already lost her previous child for the same reason). Of course the story was told in a tone to show how self-sacrificial my grandmother was for her children and heroic she was (which in a way she was! Both in the Second World War and the civil war has acted heroically and was nominated with a medal). But I've never heard a word about the joys of breastfeeding which I was about to discover later myself. My mother could not really talk about them, because she didn't know them. She breastfed me for only three months, maybe less, al-

though she was breastfed for years herself. The medical establishment in the '70s disempowered women and promoted formula milk as better. My mother handed her power and the old knowledge to the experts with of course a big price for her and her family to pay and a big compromise to the health of her children. I was very often ill with ear infections, cold and flues. When I became pregnant with my son, I always visualized breastfeeding my baby as an act that is peaceful, warm and loving. I was given a lot of information in England from the NHS (National Health Service) about the benefits of breast feeding and I have done a lot of research in relation to psychological bonding and attachment and the benefits of breastfeeding. And in my work as a psychotherapist I would always encourage the women visiting me with post natal depression to breastfeed their children because it naturally strengthened the bond and the mother could respond more ap-

propriately to the needs of her child. With this information and the stories of my childhood I was naturally led to decide to breastfeed my son. I was planning a natural birth and later a home birth in order to ensure that the baby would stay at all times with me and that no other milk other than mine would be given to him. I kept this image in my mind but other than books I had no other experience or contact with mothers and their newborns. So I didn't really know how it would happen. It was when I came to LLLLeague through Eutokia that I started gradually having an idea of the whole process. Just seeing mothers with babies of all ages breastfeeding was a mind-opening experience for me. The mothers and babies looked happy and breastfeeding was just normal and accepted from this small community as the most natural thing. It was like a little paradise for me, and it strengthened my determination for a home birth and breastfeeding. It was the role modelling of breast-



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feeding mothers in LLL that kept me going in the difficult first months and through the whole period of breastfeeding until the 4th birthday of my son. My first role model as a mother was my sister-in-law who is also a midwife in Switzerland and a LLL member. When I saw her breastfeeding her son it felt so warm and loving. Without these women I realised that I would not have been inspired enough to carry on breastfeeding through a very difficult beginning and to continue up to a time my son started naturally weaning himself.

Everything looked so natural and easy that I did not think more about learning how to breastfeed. I bought the LLL book, but just looked at it quickly without reading it thoroughly. After I gave birth at home to my wonderful son Theophilos, I was taken aback by how long it took me to actually help my baby to latch on correctly. I did not realise that one of my nipples was inverted and started bleeding very quickly. Unfortunately I did not receive any help from my birth team in identifying and treating the problem. The pain was extreme, almost unbearable, and having a big hungry baby crying for food made it even more difficult to support my decision to breastfeed. I was very close to stopping breastfeeding, when I received a very simple piece of advice from my sister-in-law. She told me to go bare-breasted for a



few days. It took only one day and my nipple was healed and my baby could latch on comfortably. What a relief that was... and what pleasure and peace to have my baby on my breast giving him my love, tenderness and warmth in the way I had envisioned it.

On the third week after the birth I travelled to our summerhouse on an island and there I had my first and so far only mastitis. It lasted only one night and I was treated homoeopathically (by my husband who is a homeopath). Although I raised a very high fever for a few hours, I felt better than before, once

it was gone. These first experiences with breastfeeding made me feel very humble and compassionate with other mothers deciding to stop breastfeeding, although they started out with the best of intentions.

I realised that although breastfeeding is the most natural thing in the world for mother and baby, we do not live any more according to our nature. Moreover, it is the natural nowadays that interrupts the unnatural way of living! Natural ways have no support in our society.

Women used to support one another, as can be seen in the story of my grandmother. She had a big farm to



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run and four children of her own to care for, and she would still find the time to breastfeed the neighbour's child for a year. It was due to the quiet presence of La Leche League that I had the strength to continue breastfeeding, even if that meant making big adjustments to my life and the way I was working. In past years the care of the mother and baby was a community affair in Greece where the whole village was contributing in one way or another to support the new mother. But since that does not exist anymore, we need to create our own supportive community around us. After a difficult and turbulent beginning, I experienced mostly the pleasures of breastfeeding. Breastfeeding has connected me with Mother Nature and female intuition. It slowed down my pace and gave me more time for daydreaming, singing, more time for being rather than doing. Breastfeeding gave me the opportunity to review my life and the choices I have made, while the natural endorphins released made me more responsive to the needs of my baby. These endorphins also provided me with endurance and strength to face the physical and the psychological demands of motherhood. I never thought I would breastfeed for four years, but I realised that breastfeeding helped me not only to give my son the best nourishment for his developing brain and body, but also to strengthen our emotional bond and to connect and respond more intuitively to his needs. It was due to breastfeeding that I was able to respect his need not to eat solid foods until he was 14 months. He

looked healthy and vibrant on just breastmilk. So every time he refused the mashed food and creams, I was able to accept it and go with his need to self-wean at his own pace. He went straight on eating food like we did by himself from the plate. Because he was breastfed I also knew that he was very close to his nature and that he could select the best food for himself and so he did. One of his first favourite foods was lemons (eating them whole) and greens. Now I understand that children who breastfeed can choose their own food and they should be encouraged to do so at their own rhythm. So it felt the most natural thing to let my son to self-wean himself completely at four years. I sometimes miss this instant physical, emotional and spiritual connection of union and love that I experienced with him. I would come back from work and the moment he would come to my arms to breastfeed our connection was complete at all levels without words. Our love was fully present with the smell of sweet milk, warm arms and loving eyes. When he was ill, which was rare, I was not anxious because I knew I could offer him the best nourishment and medicine: my milk. On the few occasions he had fever, it would subside immediately after breastfeeding. The LLL gatherings continued to support me with the lovely presence of all the women and children. I was thus encouraged to breastfeed publicly feeling comfortable myself and nobody ever complained or gave me negative feedback about it – on the contrary, I got frequent compliments and encouragement and many women would remember and share their breastfeeding stories with me. For me, it became the most natural thing in the world and I would not

compromise this basic need of my child for any reason.

Now, that I am breastfeeding my four months old daughter Amaryllis I feel so blessed for the joy and tenderness that we share in our peaceful breastfeeding moments. Again, I feel so grateful that I can offer her through breastfeeding not only the best nutrition, but also my love and devotion in a physical and spiritual way, as well as the legacy and the role model as a mother which I did not have. Sometimes when I see my son “breastfeeding” his baby doll, there is no need to tell him that this is what mummies do. I know that through his experimentation he is rehearsing his future role as a loving father. A father that will be sensitive to support the mother of his children to breastfeed them as my loving husband did with me. After all, he can only extend this love he has received.

Thus, I feel deep gratitude for the role modelling that all women at LLL provided for me with their loving presence and invaluable offer that no book or theoretical knowledge could provide. As a mother and as a psychotherapist I firmly believe that breastfeeding is one of the greatest guides for raising children in a more peaceful and loving way.

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