The LLL Alumnae Association
http://alumnae.llli.org

Continuum

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The following article relates to a stage that a woman may find herself dealing with on her journey in life: becoming a widow. The author, Jeanette Busch, is an LLL Leader who is also a scientific writer for Lincoln University, New Zealand. Her husband died in December 2004. Jeanette's article was originally published in Kaleidoscope, February 2007, Journal for Retired LLL Leaders. It is reprinted with permission from LLL of New Zealand. Note: The spelling and punctuation styles reflect those used in New Zealand.

Travelling Alone: The First Year of Widowhood

The phone call came on Tuesday morning just as the sun was rising. John, my husband of 32 years had lost his seven year battle with leukaemia and I was plunged unwillingly and unprepared into a new life as a widow.

It is likely that many La Leche League members will also face widowhood as I did. In previous generations most women becoming widows would have seen many others face the same dilemma and would know what to do and how to react. Sadly, in Western countries the continuity of memories about grief and mourning has been lost, just as it has with breastfeeding.

I hope these memories of the first year after John died will be helpful to you. Over the past year I have realized that as a society we are not comfortable being around people who are grieving. Our society's expectation, fuelled by the media, is that grieving only lasts a short time before everything returns to normal. This means that when we meet someone who is brave enough to admit that they are not coping too well after a number of months or years we often become uncomfortable and want to take away the other person's pain. We want to "fix" things. Unfortunately, that is not helpful. In my experience, there is usually no way that others can help to ease the pain of grieving (although there are certainly some helpful things people can do) because the only person who could do that is the person who has died. I have learned that grieving is the body's normal reaction to loss. It is normal to grieve and although it sounds like a cliché, the only way out of grief is to go through it, as I have found. To grieve is to learn, to grow. Just as when we were nursing our babies and encountered difficulties along the way, we did not give up until they were resolved and everything settled down again. So it is with mourning. I needed to learn to keep moving forward so I didn't get stuck in my grief.

Grief is chaotic. My memories of those early days are ones of frenetic activity and being constantly surrounded by people, while at the same time being held in a cocoon of supernatural peace. I was torn between my own needs and the needs of family members. I passionately wanted to be left alone to have my own space to come to terms with what had happened. Nevertheless, throughout all the activity and chaos of arranging and making the myriad split second decisions at that time I found the familiar LLL responses kicking in. I took time out to rest, knowing that afterwards I would cope much better. Just like in the early days of looking after a baby, none of these rest periods were long but they helped me to keep going, just as they did years ago.

(continued on p. 2)

Travelling Alone: The First Year of Widowhood *(continued from p. 1)*

I discovered that the pain of grief is incredibly intense, like nothing I had ever felt before. Everything in my life I was familiar with fell apart and I hurt all over. For quite a while I felt so different; I couldn't recognise myself. Now I know what people mean when they talk of a broken heart. I actually felt an aching pain in my heart for quite a while after John died.

I felt a flood of different feelings and emotions that often changed hourly in the early days. It was no wonder I wasn't able to think clearly at times and felt I was one step away from disaster for much of this time. Each new memory about John brought with it a new sense of loss and grief. Thankfully, the intervals of these "grief attacks" have slowly become further apart as the months have passed.

For much of those early days, I was incredibly restless and needed to do practical things to counter this. While it seems logical for friends and family to try to ease what they interpret as a burdensome situation, it is not actually helpful. I can still remember the vigour with which my son and I attacked the linen cupboard and sorted it out. It was most satisfying.

Then after a time, I began to feel very vulnerable. At times I felt as if I had a sign on my head saying, "unprotected." I soon learned that some people feel they now have the right to ask quite personal questions about my life and lifestyle. For example, "Who was that man who answered the phone?" Answer: "My son." And another, "Are you getting married again?" This was asked by a widower about six weeks after John died–I wonder what he had in mind! Fortunately, widowhood has not dimmed my sense of humour but this feeling of being public property at times has been a tad difficult to get used to.

I learned early on that a person in mourning needs to be able to tell their story–again and again and again! This was very healing and helped me accept the reality of John's death. One of the gifts people can give a bereaved person is a listening ear–there is no need to try to solve our problems unless we ask for help. You need to trust us, just as we trusted our babies to know what they needed.

Grieving is the hardest thing I have ever done. It took a lot of courage to choose to face it head on and work toward healing the deep wound torn in my heart. For quite a while I was always unbelievably tired, but not the usual sort of tiredness we're all familiar with from looking after children. This tiredness was a much bigger beast. I have been told it's all tied up with the emotional shock of losing someone. While I could make all the usual day-to-day decisions, anything extra or unfamiliar (and these are huge changes going on) took so much energy that I was exhausted afterwards. I did not feel comfortable as myself for quite a while.

Most people have little idea of the after effects of a major bereavement and do not understand that there is no cure for grief. No wonder they are confused later when you fall apart after seeming fine earlier. What happened to me was that as initial protective emotional overload eased, I started to feel and this was very difficult. At this low point I valued a few visits to a grief counselor where I welcomed the opportunity to tell my story again. I learned that you move on in grieving by grieving not by fighting it and that the feelings involved were not good or bad in themselves.

One unexpected thing I experienced was that I found family gatherings unusually stressful. I used to sob my heart out in the car driving home afterwards until I finally worked out why this happened–there was a John-shaped gap in every gathering because no one mentioned his name. As soon as I realised this, I took the initiative to bring his name in early at family gatherings and from then on it eased. Fortunately, this was never a problem with my own children: we often speak about their father's endearing idiosyncrasies. Reliving memories of someone who has died is really important, if it brings healing tears (and laughter).

Oh, yes, another strange thing that happened was that I could not laugh out loud for quite a while–inside yes, outside, no. My friends found this rather disconcerting!

Throughout all this, my children were so supportive. Just as I did when they were young, they allowed me to tackle things by myself but when I called for help they responded. They now give me back loving guidance and respect just as I gave them.

I am very grateful to my friends who cared and walked alongside me during this time. I learned that grieving is a social process, it required me to have relationships with others in order for me to heal. I am blessed to have friends who know me well enough that they don't need to ask me to explain a cryptic comment spoken out of my pain. These friends were also very good at checking whether I was taking care of myself. Grieving takes quite a toll on your body, ask my dentist! Friends also took me out of myself because they had needs themselves that I could respond to. Grieving is, of necessity a very selfish occupation. For my own sanity I found I needed time away from the situation in order to laugh and play.

No one would wish the death of a life's partner on anyone. But for many of us, widowhood will be our lot. Until you are in that situation yourself you have no idea how messy and incredibly painful it can be. But, strange as it may seem when it first happens to you, you will survive. It will take time, probably longer than you wanted it to, but you will be able to live and laugh again.

(continued on p. 3)

Travelling Alone: The First Year of Widowhood *(continued from p. 2)*

There were two particular times during the first year that were memorable. The first was about two months after John died when a friend was able to recognise from something I said that I was beginning to move along in my grieving. I was so excited about this as I hadn't recognised that myself. The second occurred after about nine months when I suddenly became aware that I was going to survive the experience. This was significant because I had doubted before then whether I would ever be able to hope again. I was delighted by the positive impact this discovery had on me, while accepting that it didn't mean that my time of mourning was over; healing of anything comes from within and takes time–as long as it takes.

I read somewhere that some grieving people spend the first year asking themselves whether they will survive or not (and, as we are all aware, there are some people who do actually die of a broken heart). In the second year, they say, "OK, I can survive, now what?" That was true for me. I will never be able to recover anything of what I have lost but I have and am adjusting to a new life, a very satisfying and happy life, a life that is increasingly feeling "normal," a "new" normal.

I know that I have only touched on a very small part of the grief process as it affected me…As we in La Leche League know so well, it is often helpful to talk to someone who has faced the same situation you are facing.

Some additional thoughts

Most things related to the day-to-day running of the household can be left to sort out when the first intensity of grieving is over. Unless you tell them they will not know. It can take about three weeks before the death certificate arrives and you can't change anything about that. Take your time, remember, you are not yourself. Most changes (legal documents or records) need to be made in person, although I always phoned first and sometimes they were able to change the details then. I didn't take someone with me when I went in person, and in hindsight, I realise I should have done that because it was not an easy time.

In the early days especially, avoid using alcohol or drugs. They can delay the healing process. No matter how good you feel in those early days DO NOT go back to work. Take as much time off as your employer is willing to allow you–you need it.

Try if at all possible to avoid making life-changing decisions for as long as you can.

Grief is a NORMAL reaction to catastrophic loss so if you feel you need professional help make sure you go to a specially trained Grief Counsellor (not one who adds this service on to other counseling–I can't stress this enough).

Be patient with yourself–your ability to multi-task will return.

Be aware that in the first year you will have many significant days that may be harder to cope with than others–birthdays, wedding anniversary, etc. (commonly called "the firsts") so make plans about what you will do on these days before they arrive.

Check out books on widowhood from your local library–I found I needed to narrow the catalogue search down to that [topic] as most other books on grief were too wide in content to be helpful. There are also Internet resources available.

Breastfeeding's Long-Term Benefits

According to *HealthDay News* (April 2009), women in their 60s who have breastfed for more than 12 months over their lifespan were about ten percent less likely to develop cardiovascular disease. To assess whether or not breastfeeding could make a difference in cardiovascular health years later, Dr. Eleanor Bimla Schwarz and her colleagues used data from the Women's Health Initiative that included nearly 140,000 postmenopausal women, with the average age of 63 over an eight-year period. Dr. Schwarz is an assistant professor of medicine, epidemiology, obstetrics, gynecology and reproductive sciences at the University of Pittsburgh Center for Research on Health Care. She reported, "We found that the longer women breastfeed, the lower their risk of heart attacks, strokes or heart disease." About 11 percent of American mothers breastfeed exclusively for the first six months of their babies' lives. Breastfeeding has shown to improve glucose tolerance and the metabolism of cholesterol. In women who had breastfed for a total of two years or more, a previous study indicated a 23% reduction in heart attack risk. However, it wasn't clear whether breastfeeding for shorter periods would have any long-term impact on a mother's health.

According to Schwarz, after six months of total breastfeeding, the trend toward lower heart disease risk became statistically significant. This could be because it "resets the body after pregnancy. There are certain hormonal and physiologic changes the body expects to go through after pregnancy and when those changes don't happen, that leaves certain body systems in a precarious way." Dr. Nieca Goldberg, director of the New York University Langone Medical Center Women's Heart Program, mentions that many factors could be at play. "Breastfeeding really mobilizes fat stores and has an impact on cholesterol. It also increases levels of oxytocin, which can relax blood vessels." However, she cautioned that the study only showed an association, not a cause-and-effect relationship. It could be that women who choose to breastfeed are women who are healthier in general, she noted. She adds that the issue still warrants further study and that it is important for researchers to look specifically at things women do when they're young and how they might affect heart health. (Results of the study were published in *Obstetrics & Gynecology*, May 2009.)

Ginny Braun lives in Harper Woods, Michigan, and has four grown daughters and 17 grandchildren. Her oldest daughter, Beth, has five children, is a retired Leader and an emergency physician. Lynn has four children, is an Active Leader, a District Advisor (DA), and co-leads an LLL Group with Ginny. Lynn also works part time with Beth doing medical research, is a DA, co-leads an LLL Group with Ginny. Amy has four children, runs a small farm and goat business, and teaches evening medical classes. Molly has four children, is an Active Leader in Michigan, Professional Liaison (PL) Area Librarian, and former Area Professional Liaison for Michigan and an Eastern United States PL Advisor.

My Secret Desire to Become an LLL Leader

Ginny writes, "Ironically, the first time I heard about LLL was from my male boss in 1965. I had put my infant on formula when I was forced by economics to return to clerical work. I never dreamed there was any other option! I used to cry at work because I was so sad about missing my two little ones and giving up nursing. My boss also had young children. When I told him I'd breastfed, he said that if I had more babies, I should call La Leche League for help. His wife was involved in a Group in Lansing, Michigan. Unfortunately I didn't call the next time because I thought I'd easily be able to nurse indefinitely since I'd be staying home. However, when I took my three children with me on a stressful emergency trip out of town to assist my ill mother, I developed a cracked nipple, something I'd never heard of. My mother's obstetrician demanded that I stop nursing immediately. Tearfully, I went out and bought bottles and formula, very upset because he said it was not negotiable. Finally, early in my fourth pregnancy in 1971, I looked up LLL in the phone book and attended meetings. With LLL's help, I was thrilled to nurse my youngest for nearly three years and with no real problems. At that point I was a Leader Applicant. But due to a divorce in the mid-70s, I left LLL to again return to work and continue my education. It was when I attended the Rochester, Michigan Group with my oldest daughter in 1984 that I again became involved."

Through the years, Ginny joyfully attended many Michigan Area Conference and LLLI Conferences with her daughters who are LLL Leaders. She even presented parenting sessions at Area Conferences. She says, "I've always longed to get my Leader credentials, which I began to work on in 1972, but with so much going on in my life, it seemed impossible. It took me close to 20 years to get my education while raising my children, some of that time as a single mother. Then I worked for ten years with families as a social worker/therapist, and for 15 years, I taught classes for girls in my church. The older I got, the more impossible it seemed" [to become a Leader].

Ginny attended the spring 2007 Michigan Area Conference. During one evening she was tired from a hectic week. So she stayed in the hotel room. During that time there was an "open mike" get-together. Ginny writes: "The next morning my daughters, Lynn Huber and Molly Bascom-Keller, told me excitedly that they'd shared about growing up in LLL and my secret desire to still become a Leader. I was surprised and delighted to hear there was support for me to do this even now. As the day went on, I was encouraged by other Leaders that there was a need and a place for me in LLL, and that no one thought I was too old! On the drive home, I asked the girls if it would in any way make them uncomfortable if I decided to pursue leadership. They were so surprised that I would really consider it! I explained that I was stepping down from teaching children in my church, so I could consider this if they and their dad thought it was a good idea. At that point, I learned that a nearby Group was going to be closed since they had no Leader. Because Lynn was not currently leading a Group, she said she'd offer to lead this Group while I worked on my credentials. Then we could co-lead when I was ready. Wow! I sure prayed that night for guidance about all this. My husband said he thought I had to do this—I was born to do this and he'd help me in any way he could. Wow!"

Ginny had three primary support people as a Leader Applicant: Marsha Chartrand, ACLA, who was a tremendous help and encouragement, and her Leader daughters, Lynn and Molly. Ginny continues, "A year later, at age 64, I was very honored to have two of the Co-Founders (dear recently deceased Edwina Froehlich and spunky Mary Ann Cahill) present me with my Leader pin at the 2008 Michigan Area Conference! This experience has shown me to never give up on your dreams! You never know–they just might come true, even after 35 years!"

Ginny adds, "I was just dazzled by the amount of information available in both *The Womanly Art of Breastfeeding* and *The Breastfeeding Answer Book*. When I breastfed, I don't even think we used the word 'latch.' We knew the system worked but most of us didn't really know why. No one but hospitals owned electric pumps! We all carried around our navy, dog-eared, scribbled-on copies of *The Womanly Art of Breastfeeding* and couldn't wait for the next meeting to learn more and eagerly talk to other nursing mothers. Many of us didn't know anyone outside of League who breastfed. We felt quite radical! The amount of breastfeeding information available these days is mainly what amazed me. I am challenged to select and condense the best information to provide a mother on the phone. It's like looking at a huge menu in a restaurant when so many items look good! Another thing that has been amazing is the amount of help available on the LLLI and other Web sites that I can suggest to mothers and learn from for myself." *(con't. on p. 5)*

My Secret Desire to Become an LLL Leader *(continued from p. 4)*

"This has been very useful, especially when I don't think a mother is really going to buy or read *The Womanly Art of Breastfeeding*. I can immediately direct her to information on the Internet that is specific to her concerns. The other challenges I have right now are using the computer well enough to do all I want to do as a Leader, and building up my confidence in helping mothers. Both of these challenges will be ongoing for quite awhile, I'm sure. Because breastfeeding is much more mainstream in the United States now, I had expected most young women to be quite familiar with it. I've been surprised at how many mothers still have little knowledge or encouragement to nurse their babies. When I ask new mothers who have latch/positioning challenges, they often tell me they don't really know what breastfeeding is supposed to look like. Two other issues that have surprised me are the practice in some families to pump breast milk and give it only in a bottle, even if mother is available. There seems to be a return by some parents to breastfeeding on a rigid formula schedule (which doctors used to recommend years ago) with methods to get the baby to sleep through the night at an early age. These practices concern me."

Now that she is an LLL Leader, Ginny mentions what she is doing now. "I am very committed to my family. I left my career when my second husband and I had the privilege of helping our oldest daughter raise her five children during her medical training and residency. We still take the children to medical and dental appointments and are quite involved in their lives. Our oldest grandson even lived with us throughout high school due to some special needs. We enjoy helping with all the grandchildren as often as we can, and love going to soccer and hockey games, swim meets, horse shows, dance recitals and school programs."

Ginny concludes, "When I first became a Leader, I was not used to the attention and hugs. It's a dream come true. A dream I thought I could not fulfill. I am blessed to have this opportunity. Hold on to your dreams. They might come true. You might have another chance."

Edited by Fran Dereszynski, California, from a correspondence interview with Ginny Braun.

World Breastfeeding Week Celebrations

World Breastfeeding Week Celebrations (WBWC) are from May 1 – September 30, 2009 when there are activities to raise breastfeeding awareness and funds to support breastfeeding. Celebrations highlight LLL's mission in communities. In support of WABA's (World Alliance for Breastfeeding Action) stand that breastfeeding is a vital emergency response, this year's theme is *Breastfeeding: Prepared for Life*. It recognizes the importance of supporting mothers with solid breastfeeding information so they can be successful at any time, especially in any emergency situation such as flooding, earthquakes or wild fires, or personal emergencies such as house fires, loss of a job, or public health emergencies like an epidemic. World Breastfeeding Week (WBW), August 1–7, celebrates the signing of the Innocenti Declaration, produced and adopted in 1990 by participants at the WHO/UNICEF meeting on "Breastfeeding in the 1990s: A Global Initiative on the Protection, Promotion and Support of Breastfeeding." The document lists the benefits of breastfeeding, plus global and governmental goals. World Breastfeeding Week is celebrated in 120 countries on various dates. You are invited to join this celebration and support WBWC 2009. Looking for a WBWC in a city near you? A listing of celebrations by state, Registered Groups, Chapters, and other participants is at: <http://www.lllusa.org/wbw/eventsmenu.php> For more information log on to: http://alumnae.llli.org

Book-A-Buck Promotion for Alumnae

At Platypus Media, we share LLL's commitment to support the breastfeeding family. We are excited to introduce our latest book, *Breastfeeding Facts for Fathers,* and a special offer to Alumnae! The 38-page book has a lovely color cover and answers questions that new fathers ask. Log on to: http://platypusmedia.com/node/42 for details. It is entertaining, easy-to-read and provides fathers with critical information about the breastfeeding process and addresses a new father's typical concerns. Consider it as a great gift from a grandparent or to a new dad. Our Book-A-Buck promotion is for a limited time: each book is $1 each, plus $6 for shipping, up to 10 booklets. Retail price: $5.95. Shipping on all orders starts at $6 then is 8% of order, when above $6. With this offer, Alumnae save on the book and on shipping. As an added bonus, 10% from each sale will be donated back to the Alumnae. Ordering options: call 1-877-752-8977, email Info@PlatypusMedia.com or order at www.PlatypusMedia.com via our secure server. For online orders, use the coupon code: **AlumBuck.** The offer ends July 15, 2009 and has a maximum of 10 booklets per person. Platypus Media wants to set the precedent that we always support LLL Alumnae.

Dia L. Michels
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BFF: Best Friends Forever

"Best Friends Forever." That's a childhood cliché that came true for WITTY! But as I recall, you had to designate only one person as your BFF, to the exclusion of others. And being human, female and young, in those days, we were fickle. Our BFF would change from school year to school year. Flash forward 20 years to a more mature and broadened worldview and a strong steeping in La Leche League's mothering/parenting philosophy and the WITTY is born–except this group of seven women won't realize that for another ten years and we won't name it for another twenty.

Beginning around 1981, seven LLL Leaders in Tucson, Arizona, experienced the evolution of a deep, lasting friendship. We began to know each other better during the following ten years. We were seven Leaders coming together at LLL Series Meetings, Evaluation Meetings, Chapter Meetings, local Area Conferences, and International Conferences. Our ages span almost a decade.

It is LLL that brought us together weekly and monthly over the years. Then one day several of us articulated that parenting our teens could be challenging. Although LLL meetings and conferences have served us well with our babies, children, and families, we felt the need for another kind of LLL gathering. We called ourselves the *Teen Group* and we gathered monthly to help each other to learn how best to honor, respect, and parent those hormonally imbalanced, emotionally challenged, coming-of-age persons inhabiting our households. We embraced LLL's parenting philosophy and asked ourselves, "What Would La Leche League Do?" (WWLLLD) to guide our discussions which ranged from teens' weekly allowances to nipple piercings, with multiple doses of the more serious stuff, too. What we are beginning to realize, though, is that each of these women was becoming more and more important to us on a personal level.

"WITTY" We may not have it all together but together we have it all.
Back row: Judie Ellison, Brigitte Stuetze, Sue Perno, Pam Bridgmon.
Front row: Joan Meyer, Carolyn Vemulapalli, Pat Orzech.

Flash forward another ten years and we are coming into the time period when all the children are finally viable and we have a little more time for ourselves. We stopped holding *Teen Group* meetings. We began to meet monthly, calling the times "Enrichment" meetings to discuss articles, books or audiotapes. One year, each one of us read all of *Oprah's Book Club* selections. However, the conversation at these meetings always became much more intimate as we began with a "check in" about what is going on in our lives, our families' lives, and even our work lives. Many of us had returned to school or work after being stay-at-home mothers. The interpersonal and organizational skills we learned in LLL really *are* marketable! Gradually, we realize that we didn't need an "enrichment" excuse to meet. We ***wanted*** to be together, often and regularly. We made time for each other. Alan Loy McGinnis wrote, "There can be no intimacy without conversation. To know and love a friend over the years you must have regular talks." We started going away together on three-day "retreats" where we had extended periods of uninterrupted time together, walking and talking. One of the "rules" at the retreats is "no watches."

We called ourselves "WITTY," which means **W**omen **I**n **T**ouch **T**hrough the **Y**ears. We continued to extrapolate LLL philosophy into our conversations and life situations. It's become second nature now and we never have to actively ask, "WWLLLD?" We just talk through whatever is going on in our lives: our young adult children's missteps, a divorce, caring for aging parents, moving, moving away, planning a wedding, welcoming a grandchild, a separation, a serious health threat, and losing a loved one. This is "***hands on***" friendship–the sort that the great Christian apologist, C.S. Lewis, described when he wrote, "Friendship is something that raises us almost above humanity…It is the sort of love one can imagine between angels." We are comforted to know that, no matter what or when, we can call on one another for anything. It is not so much our friends' help that helps us, as the confident knowledge that they will help us.

While each of us has many friends–church friends, work friends, neighborhood friends, hobby friends, childhood friends and new friends–it is our LLL friends that we return to, again and again, like a comfortable pair of shoes, with increasing love, care and concern for each other's well-being. It's immensely comforting to be in the presence of someone with whom you feel there is an understanding, even across distance or when thoughts are unexpressed. Our friendship is not diminished by distance or time. Although one of us moved across country ten years ago, the friendship has only grown stronger. We learned to be patient with each other and to allow for each other's faults. We have learned, in fact, to embrace those faults, because of our love for each other.

To the members of WITTY–Carolyn Vemulapalli, Joan Meyer, Judie Ellison, Brigitte Stuetze, Pat Orzech, and Sue Perno: one of the highest compliments I can receive is that I am your friend. I love each of you profoundly, and I can never thank La Leche League enough for bringing us together.

Pam Bridgmon
Tucson, Arizona USA

The LLL Alumnae Association—Stay Connected and Get Involved!

Exciting changes and new plans are underway for the LLL Alumnae Association after an April meeting of the Alumnae Council. Since the LLL Alumnae Association first began in the late 1980s, a constant has been its mission to be the vehicle through which La Leche Leaders and members continue a lifelong affiliation with LLL and with one another. We know that connecting in various ways is core to all that we do; our focus is to reach out in new ways to increase Alumnae member involvement and to bring members together.

There are many organizational changes occurring at LLLI, and much time and attention has been focused on these. Many Leaders, both new and experienced, may feel confused about these changes. Some Alumnae members may be watching to see what happens, others may be actively involved in helping to facilitate these changes in their Areas.

Amidst all of this, the Alumnae Council is clear in our role now and in the future, and we are committed to connections, support, adventures, and fun. In order to accomplish this, the Alumnae Council, with the help of other Alumnae members, has these goals and plans:

- Also at the April meeting, Susan Geil, Treasurer, submitted the 2008-2009 Financial Statement that is on p. 9 of this issue. The 2009-2010 budget was reviewed, amended and approved.
- Increase membership by 200 this year, encouraging all current members to "invite a friend" to join.
- Pilot some regional gatherings, (such as in a state or national park or at a local art gallery), which would include brainstorming roundtable discussions on future plans and member involvement, combined with a flexible, affordable getaway experience.
- Identify and utilize the skills and experience of members to work on manageable tasks to benefit the Alumnae Association.
- Update the Alumnae website http://alumnae.llli.org – promote its use; keep it current.
- Fill the two vacant positions on the Alumnae Council (Coordinator and Resource Development) and create detailed job descriptions for all Council members.
- Continue to work on strategic planning, incorporation, and the organizational structure needed to obtain the association's 501 (c) 3.
- Plan a more extensive trip in 2011 to a location (perhaps a city or national/state park) in the Western part of the US.

Since the LLL Alumnae Association became independent from LLLI in 2007, LLL Leaders now pay their Alumnae membership directly to the LLL Alumnae Association. We are working diligently to inform Alumnae members that their membership is expiring and are seeing progress. Since LLLI Conferences were a time of wonderful connections for Alumnae members and there is currently no plan for an LLLI Conference, we hope to recreate some of those connections in other ways. With all the skills, experience, and enthusiasm of so many, we believe the future of the Alumnae Association is bright. Indeed, we hope that you not only will find your place, but also will choose ways that you wish to connect and help the Alumnae to grow and flourish. Please share any ideas you have with any of the Alumnae Council members.

Pam Oselka
LLL Alumnae Council
Public Relations/Outreach

News from Janet Jendron

In February 2009, Janet Jendron resigned from the LLL Alumnae Council to accept her election as President of the Board for Attachment Parenting International. She wrote the Council: "In accepting the position, I knew that it would mean resigning from the Alumnae Association Council. I do that, with a bit of regret but mostly with anticipation of giving my energy to a cause that stirs my passion. We won't lose touch! I love you all and have learned so much from working with you–practically, emotionally and spiritually. I hope to take that experience and our relationships into a new beginning." At this time, Janet is gaining experience in her new position. The next issue of *Continuum* will feature more about Janet.

Ordering Online? Here's a Link to Help LLLI!

Alumnae member, Alice Ziring of Mercer Island, Washington, shares: I did some exploring on the LLLI website and found a link to Amazon.com. This link goes directly to the Amazon pages from the LLLI website: http://store.llli.org/main/creative and gives a percentage to LLLI! Since I order [books] from Amazon frequently, I'm glad to know about this!

LLL Breastfeeding Helpline-US

To donate funds directly to the HELPLINE (1-877-452-5324), please mail donations to: LLL Breastfeeding Helpline, c/o Pamela Dunne, 7295 Highland Estates Place, Falls Church, VA 22043. If you have questions, contact Pamela at: pameladunne@msn.com

Marilyn Thompson: Creative, Poetic, Fun-Loving Communicator and Listener

For the past three years, Marilyn led the Alumnae with her vision and goal-setting talents. Her positive spirit radiated to all who worked with her. Her approach was to look for new ways to do things better. When she became Coordinator, she stated, "Alumnae members and potential members are women with wisdom and experience. We are valued for our life experiences." I felt that I became one of many who were showered with her wisdom that cascaded into our lives along with memories of times spent with her. My hope is that these photos and memories from Alum Council members will show how much we gained from knowing Marilyn during the times she freely volunteered her time and talents with LLL.

Karri Rickard & Marilyn Thompson, Lake Michigan Alum Dinner Cruise, July 2007

"A heartfelt thanks to you for sailing the LLL Alumnae Association through the choppy waters of transition from an LLLI-supported entity to the beginnings of an independently functioning organization. While it was a journey that wasn't on the horizon at your start as Coordinator, your commitment and calm during the past three years helped facilitate a smooth move. As we set our sights towards the future, I am grateful for the role you played and richer for having had the pleasure to work with you. Best wishes to you."
Sue Christensen

"I loved working with Marilyn! She combined a calm approach to challenges, with an incredible ability to focus on critical issues. She brought her beautiful self and beautiful spirit to every endeavor. Her support was positive and pure. Her sense of humor enhanced every situation and everything we ever did together!"
Janet Jendron

"I appreciated the time I was able to spend with Marilyn on the Alumnae Council. She is a woman who knows how to work and knows how to play. I especially enjoyed the work we did together at the LLLI Conference in Chicago in 2007. Marilyn helped us all to be able to relax and have fun in the midst of the work that we were busy with at the Conference. I will miss her presence as Alumnae Coordinator."
Susan Geil

Elaine Shaner "Mom" & daughter, Marilyn, 2006 San Antonio Trip

"Marilyn brought so much wisdom and encouragement to the Alumnae Council. Whenever there was a difficult conversation, she always knew how to put things into perspective and choose words carefully. For me, being around Marilyn was another example of the La Leche League continuum. I had found another mentor for treating people with respect. And, she always knew how to add fun. Poetry, songs, words of inspiration, and stories of her mother and life on the farm added so much enrichment to our meetings. I will miss working with her, and I look forward to her company in the future at Alumnae gatherings."
Sue Steilen

"Thank you, Marilyn, for the many gifts you gave to the Alumnae Association when on the trips to Savannah, San Antonio and Philadelphia and as you coordinated the activities of the Alumnae Association. Your sense of humor, balance, peace, and community blessed every one of us. Thank you for sharing your sisters Rebecca, Linda and Pat and your mother Elaine when they attended trips with us. I personally have enjoyed the time I've spent with each of you. Bless you. And thank you."
Nancy Franklin

Fran, Susan Geil, Janet Jendron, Sue Christensen, Pam Oselka, Marilyn, Sue Steilen Alum Council Meeting, March 2008

Marilyn possessed the perfect mix of graciousness, enthusiasm, consideration, and attention to the needs of everyone in her presence. These qualities, and many more, gave the Alumnae Association the leadership and direction needed during her term as Coordinator. Who can forget her smile, her willingness to make every meeting and gathering a time where fun was had by all? She provided such a calm presence, no matter what the storm. Thanks, Marilyn–we love you and appreciate all that you did!
Pam Oselka

One word I would use to describe Marilyn Thompson is gracious. I know Marilyn best from the Alum Council meetings and, of course, the 2007 LLLI Conference. She is a lady who keeps her "cool" under pressure. Thanks for being a part of my life as well as LLL Alumnae! Last but not least, she is a knitter extraordinaire of baby socks/booties.
Wendy Masters

Fran Dereszynski
Huntington Beach, California USA

Alumnae Association Finance Report

April 2008 - March 2009 ~ Submitted by Susan Geil, Alumnae Treasurer

Ordinary Income/Expense

Income		
Contributions		872.00
Fundraisers		
eBay		93.05
Breastfeeding Helpline		120.00
Leader Pins		443.74
Fundraisers/Other		280.51
Total Fundraisers		937.30
Interest		234.48
Memberships		6,285.00
Total Income		8,328.78
Expense		
Bank charge		9.65
Continuum		1,588.98
Council meeting		531.00
Credit card and PayPal fees		239.62
Fundraising costs		27.00
Postage		101.61
Project support - Helpline-U.S.		3,000.00
Trip advertising		230.00
Total Expense		5,727.86
Net Ordinary Income		2,600.92
NET INCOME		2,600.92

Search for New Alumnae Coordinator Still in Progress

The Alumnae Coordinator search was initiated in the fall 2008 issue of *Continuum.* The search is still in progress. Recommendations are still being sought. You may recommend someone or volunteer yourself.

Coordinator Job Description
The LLL Alumnae Association seeks an energetic volunteer Coordinator who can devote about 10 hours per week on Alumnae work. The LLL Alums are in an exciting new phase–financially independent from LLLI, reshaping our structure, and setting a course for a sound and vibrant future.

Coordinator qualities: good organizational skills; ability to delegate and work comfortably with other volunteers; positive outlook and good sense of humor (the Alumnae believe in fun as well as hard work!); broad network of Active and Retired Leaders; appreciation of teamwork and collaboration; email access is a must.

Coordinator responsibilities: work in collaboration with current Alumnae Council members and in alignment with the Association's financial independence; recruit, oversee and communicate with Alumnae Council members who will focus on increasing membership and more active involvement at the local level; assure that LLL Alumnae Association goals and budget are met; that written materials and external communications offer a positive reflection of the organization; that questions and concerns from Alumnae members/retired Leaders are responded to in a timely and respectful manner; communicate and coordinate Alumnae involvement with other LLL entities and Areas, when applicable; and plan one to two Alumnae Council or special Alumnae team meetings per year, budget permitting.

Interested candidates or those wishing to recommend a candidate should contact Pam Oselka by July 15, 2009: poselka1945@att.net or call Pam at (269) 469-2706 (Eastern Time zone). Please provide the following information with your response: Name, address, city, ZIP, state, phone/fax, email, Alumnae involvement or experience, past LLL experience, present LLL position and/or Leader status. Also include any questions you may have about the position. Thank you for taking time to consider recommending someone.

It Gets Better and Better!

I just received the Sept-Dec 2008 *Continuum*. I have to tell you it gets better with each issue! All the tributes and first-hand stories of Edwina were absolutely wonderful. No wonder LLL has grown and emitted so much love and confidence to help mothers breastfeed. It was very inspiring and touching. My article on breast cancer turned out very well. Of course, I'm biased! Thanks for including the picture of my husband Bill and me–a nice touch! I'm hoping it will inspire any women who are reluctant to get their annual mammograms. If one person decides to have a mammogram after reading of my experience, it will be my reward! Now, I've wondered how often breast cancer is found in women who have breastfeed. The annual breast cancer rate in USA is 1 out of 7 by the age of 70, so when I look around a room of my contemporaries and count off grade-school-style–1, 2, 3, 4, 5, 6, 7–it hits me about the prevalence of breast cancer. Wow!

Continuum is such a welcome service to us old-timers. As a young mom I stopped everything (well, almost everything) to read *LLLI News*, and now I do the same with *Continuum*. Your efforts are helping us oldies keep in touch with LLLI ideals and strengthening our memories of those wonderful LLL meetings and friendships.

June Campbell
Kelleys Island, Ohio USA

Lynne Stone lives in Staten Island, New York. She has been an Active LLL Leader for 40 years, has six children and 15 grandchildren. Lynne does presentations at in-service education programs for medical nursing personnel and prospective parents. She is actively involved with the Public Awareness Campaign for the Prevention of Shaken Baby Syndrome and attends bi-annual Shaken Baby Syndrome Conferences.

Eight Words That Changed My Life

On the evening of October 30, 1995, I was in my Brooklyn, NY childbirth preparation center. As always, I was very happy to be teaching. But nothing prepared me for what happened next– the phone rang and it was 9:30 pm. Then I heard my son David's frantic voice with eight words that would change my life forever: "Mom, what's the difference between 'coma' and 'unconscious'?" I quickly finished the class and went to a local police station. There I learned that my daughter-in-law, Pam, had violently shaken Amber, my seven-month old granddaughter. Soon I was headed toward the Verrazano Bridge, back to Staten Island, NY. My mind was racing and reeling as I drove to the hospital.

I remembered that Amber's mother was beautiful, but troubled. She could be quiet or argumentative; she also was bipolar and had ADHD (Attention Deficit Hyperactive Disorder). The video of Amber's natural birth, and then being breastfed, with David looking on lovingly, was in sharp contrast to four days later when my son went to the police, child welfare and the Brooklyn Family Court to express fear that Amber would be hurt by Pam. This was a fear that "arose from one incident after another," after Amber's birth until that fourth day of life when a flung bottle almost hit Amber's head. In the court, beauty took precedence over behavior. The judge said, "A mother won't hurt her baby." My son, now separated from his wife, was given limited visitation. I was given none.

At last, I was at the door of the Pediatric Intensive Care Unit. My heart sank when I saw a tiny bundle in a big crib with wires, tubes, and machines surrounding her, as well as hearing beeping and alarm sounds. For the next week-and-a-half Amber remained in a coma. I sang, talked, played music and gently massaged her unresponsive body. She was not expected to live. When Amber eventually awakened, it would be the first of many times she would be called a "survivor." Her eyes were now crossed, her tongue protruded from a lax mouth, and there were no sounds other than labored breathing.

One day, as I held a mirror, going back and forth from her face to mine, I said repeatedly, "grandma/Amber." A doctor came in and said, "Stop, you're wasting your time." I was determined to do some type of infant stimulation. Again, he said, "Stop you're wasting your time!" "Why?" "She's blind!" That was how I found out that Amber had lost her sight forever because she had been shaken.

Lynne and Amber 2007
Empire State Building in the background

The next year was a pure nightmare of health, legal and other crises. In fact, my son was interviewed for hours at a well-known newspaper. They decided not to run the story because "no one would believe it!" Amber had a second stroke, another hospitalization, went through medical, court, and other blunders, then three brain surgeries and a shunt. She was paralyzed on her left side, had eating difficulties and seizures, despite medications, and other health problems.

At that time I had been a Registered Nurse for many years, a Childbirth Educator (because of an LLL lecture!) and an International Board Certified Lactation Consultant since 1985. The twenty-seven years as a Leader and my attendance at so many conferences all made an immense difference in my understanding, patience and ability to care for Amber. We exercised, massaged, cuddled and slept with Amber. Many of the (eleven) doctors commented, "She seems like a breastfed baby!" Progress was slow, but consistent. We used many alternative therapies, including acupuncture, acupressure, and the wonderful Medek Method of physical therapy, as well as the traditional occupational and physical therapy, feeding, etc. At the age of fourteen months, Amber sat up for the first time post-injury. At four years old, she took her first step. At the age of seven she began to speak.

I tried to remain cordial to Amber's mother despite constant threats, harassment and worse. Until recently, unless a baby or child died from Shaken Baby Syndrome, the punishment was anger management classes. So we had very little peace. Our family, not the perpetrator, became the victims along with little Amber. Amber's mother married three times in three years, had three babies within three years, married her third husband six weeks before she gave birth to her second husband's second child and died from an overdose at age 27. Amber has two younger half sisters who live nearby with foster parents who became paid parents. Their father does not want them to know about Amber, at least for now.

In November 2006, Amber had an MRI, because of the insistence of several doctors I spoke to when I attended a Shaken Baby Syndrome conference. They were worried because of a comment I had made. The results were totally unexpected: Amber was diagnosed with Neurofibromatosis Type 2 that has nothing to do with Shaken Baby Syndrome. In her case it is due to a genetic mutation soon after conception. MRI's for brain, spinal cord and peripheral nerve tumors must be done throughout her lifetime. Amber had an acoustic neuroma (hearing nerve tumor) that apparently had been growing for years. There was little time to wait. I felt myself physically and emotionally deteriorating. "Blind, then deaf?" There was a five-and-a-half hour surgery by two top Manhattan specialists, complications, and a seven-week tension-filled time. Then we found out that Amber was a rare case–hearing on the operative side was retained. *(continued on p. 11)*

Eight Words That Changed My Life *(continued from p. 10)*

Worldwide prayers, I believe, made the difference. The future? Unknown because even if a tumor is removed, it can grow back! Amber is still not toilet-trained. She is a little fourteen-year-old, who is extremely well developed. She is microcephalic (if the brain does not grow, neither does the head). She is funny and verbal, but has mood swings and periods of erratic behavior. Each day is a challenge and special. I try to remember the expression, "We are never given more than we can bear." I am grateful for the support of my son, family members, friends, after-school help and Medicaid.

During July 2007, at the unforgettable 50th Anniversary La Leche League International Conference, I reflected on my forty plus years with this wonderful organization: the influence on my six natural births (the last three at home); long-term breastfeeding experiences, as well as mothering and professional skills; my education and experience with LLL; the friendships, support, my family attending so many conferences; then the loss of my beloved husband; the strength I was given to raise, then marry off the children; and now fifteen grandchildren whose parents respect healthy birthing and breastfeeding. Again, all influenced by my years with La Leche League.

To understand Shaken Baby Syndrome: A baby's head is heavy; neck muscles are weak. Shaking a baby, with or without impact, causes the brain to bounce against the skull or a whiplash. Babies die, or if they survive, can be left with mild to critical lifelong injuries. The traumatic brain injury can mean blindness, deafness, retardation, meltdowns and other medical, intellectual and emotional issues.

Working as an LLL Leader, I learned the importance of encouraging and educating others about breastfeeding. Now I am doing the same with "A Public Awareness Campaign for the Prevention of Shaken Baby Syndrome." Many readers will understand when I say that my strength and abilities are not the same as years ago, but my responsibilities are greater. My wish is for good health, happiness, and peace for all of us!

Lynne Stone
Staten Island, New York USA

Alumnae Council

Coordinator: Search in progress

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Resource Development
Position Open

From the Mailbag

May is a time for rebirth and renewal in my part of the country. Out of the cool temperatures of winter's cocoon, flowering shrubs, roses and colorful tulips are blooming. I felt the urge to "spring clean" clutter in closets and piles throughout the house. Papers and magazines went to the recycling bin. Other items are in a donation box. It was uplifting to my eyes and spirit—no more disorder to look at or shuffle through. I unloaded heaviness hovering in my mind to get things done around the house. I hope these months bring time for you to uplift your thinking and let go of what is not useful to your spirit.

Loss doesn't have to be recent to be painful. I trust that Jeanette Busch's article provides members with a sense of understanding of friends or family who are widows or may be widowed in the future.

Thank you to readers who shared ways they get together with families—all great ideas for a future issue. More input is welcome. Are you a caregiver to a loved one? Through experience, local or distant caregivers understand the power of meaningful communication with peers and family. How about writing an article for *Continuum?* It can be cathartic and help others. Reflect on what can be an emotional rollercoaster, what worked, what didn't, how you shifted and transformed your role as spouse, sibling or daughter to support the loved one. Send articles to me.

Many thanks to Barbara Parker, Pam Oselka, and Susan Switzer who brought Alumnae presence, photos and copies of *Continuum* to their respective North Carolina, Indiana, and Georgia Area Conferences this spring. Charlotte Walkowski from Texas writes about the last issue: "I loved the Philly picture and recognizing faces I know."

Send articles and photos to me by September 1, 2009 at: dereszyn@gte.net or by ground mail. Articles selected for publication may be edited for length, clarity, and adherence to LLL journalistic guidelines

P.S. Remember to send a recommendation (p. 9) for Alumnae Coordinator by July 15.

Fran

(published May 15, 2009)

LLL Alumnae Association Newsletter
c/o La Leche League of So. California, Inc.
Fran Dereszynski, Bulk Mail Permit Holder
5502 Maryport Drive
Huntington Beach, CA 92649

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Yes, I want to keep in touch and support the LLL Alumnae Association. **Dues are $20/year. You may renew for more than one year at a time. Send checks to:**

Susan Geil, LLL Alumnae Treasurer
4868 N. Hermitage Ave., Chicago, IL 60640
Questions? Contact Susan at: <srgeil@yahoo.com>

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