Perhaps it’s not surprising—this quest for knowledge about our roots. In La Leche, as in our families, the only way to preserve history is to pass it on.

Many LLL Alums know about the stories, the struggles, and the Leaders connected with the early Groups in their own communities or Areas. Yet all-too-often, unless we are active Leaders, there is a disconnect between our knowledge of the past and the focus of today’s Leaders—as it should be—on the present and future.

This issue celebrates La Leche League’s “pioneers.” We hope it will also serve as a catalyst for long-term and retired Leaders to begin sharing their own memories of LLL’s history.

A special site on the Alumnae web pages is being developed to collect these early reminiscings online. Watch for it in the new millennium!

A quest for the past ignites passion for the future

At the 1999 LLLI Conference’s Alumnae Tea, the Alumnae Association wanted to honor LLL’s “second tier founders”—those women, inspired by the seven Founders, who got La Leche League started locally throughout the world. The problem was that these individuals had not been identified by the organization.

Some Areas clearly knew who their founder was. Others had undertaken searches as part of a 20th, 25th, or 30th Area-level anniversary. But nowhere was there a list of local founders.

When the Alumnae Conference Committee met to select projects, I picked this one because it sounded pretty straightforward, uncomplicated, and quick—send out a hundred or so letters, collate the responses. Little did we know.

We decided to work through the individual Areas and Affiliates, writing to each current ACL or Affiliate Director to enlist her help in the search. We felt it was important that each Area have the final word on its founder. This proved to be a wiser choice than we realized at the start, because for some Areas, identification was far from simple.

In the fall of 1998, we sent out search letters, letting each ACL know what we were looking for and why. It was truly exciting—and remained so throughout this project—when the responses started coming in from all over the world. Areas who had an easily identified founder(s) seemed very pleased to have her (them) honored by the Alumnae. Areas who needed to do a search said they were grateful for the opportunity to seek out this information.

Not surprisingly, a number of challenges arose. There were geographic/administrative issues when Areas had combined or split over the years. And of course as more Leaders learned about the search, we got the inevitable conflicting information. On the other hand, the Area history that frequently accompanied these letters was absolutely fascinating.

As the Conference drew near, we sent invitations to the confirmed Area/Affiliate founders. We also asked each to share a few memories of the beginnings of LLL in her Area. These responses were awesome! Stories of language problems, cultural barriers, very small and struggling Groups, Groups that started out with 50-plus people at the first meeting, Leaders who traveled many miles to lead meetings—you name it. The constant force throughout (not surprising in LLL, but heartwarming nonetheless) was the deep desire of each of these women to help other mothers breastfeed. Many wrote about their pride in LLL and the lifelong impact their leadership had on their lives not only as a mother but as a woman.

Where are we now with this project? We consider it a work-in-progress. Some Areas were only able to make a “best guess;” others made even less progress. And some have not yet responded. We hope that the recognition of these local founders may spark the memories of other Leaders, who will get in touch with the Alumnae Association or their current ACL and add their recollections to LLL’s history.

—Ivy Steele, Illinois USA
Superlatives abound for the LLLI Alumnae Founders’ Tea

Grand. Wonderful. Magnificent. Elegant. A highlight of the Conference! These were the superlatives shared on conference evaluation forms. Clearly, the Alumnae Tea—from the dainty but abundant tea sandwiches, assorted cheeses, cookies, and scones to the delightful updates from the seven Founders—was a memorable occasion.

A note from Alice Barbiere, EUS Division Director, seems to sum up the feelings of many. She writes:

“A Proper Tea is much nicer than a Very Nearly Tea, which is one you forget about afterwards.”

—Pooh’s Little Instruction Book

“One of the best memories which keeps coming back to me from the Conference was the elegant tea.

“After the Conference I wandered into a book shop in Downtown Disney, where I found Pooh’s Little Instruction Book and the enclosed quote, which so aptly describes my sentiments.

“I have not forgotten the Alumnae Tea and am so hopeful that this event is repeated next time. I’ve already started planning my outfit for the occasion!”

Area “Pioneers” who were honored at the LLLI Alumnae Tea: Back row, l-r—Johanna Horton, OK, USA; Graziana deBotto, Chile; Bernadette Stuebler, Paraguay; Lynn Moen, WA, USA; Margi Hall Gerharz, MA, USA; Mary Jeanne Hickey, MA, USA; Jan Riordan, KS, USA; Prisilla Stothers, Dominican Republic; Jini Fairley, France. Front row, l-r—Betty Ann Countryman, IN, USA; Yanet Olivares deSaiz, Dominican Republic; Pam Oselka, Alumnae Association Coordinator; Nora d’Oliveira deMottini, Uruguay; Nancy Stanton, FL, USA; Judy Canahuati, Honduras. Not pictured but also in attendance: Nancy Sabeen, Costa Rica and Connie Little deGoorri, Spain.

LLLI Founders: Edwina Froehlich, Betty Wagner Spandikow, Viola Lennon, Marian Tompson, Mary Ann Kerwin, Mary White, Mary Ann Cahill
Kudos to the Leaders who began LLL Groups in communities around the world

Listed below are the Leaders who have been identified as the individuals credited for beginning LLL in their areas. If your Area or Affiliate is not listed, a local “founder” has not yet been identified or confirmed. If you have information that would assist in the LLLI Alumnae Organization’s search, please contact Pam Oselka, LLLI Alumnae Coordinator (see page 8).

Arizona/New Mexico USA - Nancy Thayer, Phylliss Turner
Arkansas USA - Jane Wolfe
Australia - Waltraut Kovacic
Bolivia/Ecuador - Ann Johnson
Brazil/Argentina - Skip Rapp
California (Northern) USA - Dolly Lundberg
California (Southern) USA - Abigail Calvin, Mary Dugan, Jody Nathanson
Canada (Alberta) - Lois McLatchie
Canada (B.C./Yukon) - Carol Anderson (Spiers)
Canada (Manitoba) - Nancy Gajdosik
Canada (New Brunswick) - Pauline LeBlanc
Canada (Newfoundland) - Elena Rosen (Hannah), Marilla Nakayama*
Canada (Nova Scotia) - Karen Pearce
Canada (Ontario) - Ann Dawson, Margaret Bennet-Alder
Canada (Prince Edward Island) - Lynn MacDonald
Canada (Quebec) - Barbara Pitre, Mrs. Victor Foyle*
Canada (Saskatchewan) - Sheila Kippley, Dona O’Brien
Chile - Graziana B. de Bozzo
Colombia - Caroline Villa
Colorado USA - Mary Ann Kerwin, Leslie Hawkins, Anne Theobald, Rhonda Hartmann
Connecticut USA - Betty Hayward
Costa Rica - Nancy Sabean
Delaware USA - Julie Booser
Deutschland - Edda Langmann*
Dominican Republic - Yanet Oliva de Saiz, Pricilla Stothers
El Salvador - Mimi Bohemier, Linda Bustamante*
Florida USA - Nancy Stanton
France - Jini Fairley, Karima Khatib
Georgia USA - Terry Weaver
Germany (English-speaking) - Nancy Kuhn*
Great Britain - Nancy Turnbull
Greece - Sandi Toomey
Guatemala - Mimi Wilson*
Honduras - Judy Canahuati
Indiana USA - Betty Ann Countryman
Israel - Jane Abramowitz
Kansas USA - Jan Riordan
Kentucky USA - Patricia McGinty, Mary Pringle
Maine USA - Joan Sprague*
Maryland/Washington D.C. USA - Lois Noonan, Jeannie Ney
Massachusetts USA - Margaret Gerharz (Hall), Mary Jeanne Hickey, Rosemary Peterson
Mexico - Mari Carmen Mariscal
Minnesota USA - Gail Mraz, Monica O’Kane
Montana USA - Janice Miller
The Netherlands - Marijke Wisse
New Jersey USA - Judy Sobel
New Zealand - Kathleen Peace, Shirley Walker, Yvonne Foreman
North Carolina USA - Wilma Asrael
Ohio USA - Martha Pugacz
Oklahoma USA - Johanna Horton
Paraguay - Bernadette Staehler
Portugal - Fatima Vilanca Branco
Puerto Rico - Frances Gonzalez
Rhode Island USA - Elsie Rudgers, Pat Petersen, Cynthia Leonhardt
South Africa - Vera Garrett
South Carolina USA - Carol Gore
Spain - Pilar Pons, Connie Little de Goiri
Switzerland - Christina Hurst-Prager
Texas USA - Kathy Lyons
Uruguay - Nora d’Oliveira de Mottini
Vermont USA - Judy Bigelow*
Virginia USA - Mardi Dean
Washington USA - Lynn Moen
Zambia - Mary Rea

*We would appreciate any information that would help us locate these individuals.
Messages, memories & reflections from LLL’s pioneers

When the Area and Affiliate “founders” were contacted by the LLLI Alumnae Association, they were invited to share their early memories of LLL. Some excerpts:

Leslie Hawkinson (Colorado): Friends! My first LLL meetings became a circle of friends who talk, endure, laugh and cry together as we share in our growing adult children and grandchildren. My closest friends are from those early days of LLL.

Betty Ann Countryman (Indiana): Encouraged by my obstetrician, I had been having breastfeeding “classes” in my home for a year or so. When I found out about the League and invited a couple of the Founders to visit me, it seemed to make sense to contact all my class “alumnae” to see if they were interested. I invited them to my home and they came en masse! It was a gratifying first meeting because from it—on the spot—four future Leaders emerged. Shortly we had Groups north, south, east, and west in Indianapolis.

Bernadette Staebler (Paraguay): LLL Paraguay was founded on September 6, 1983 during the first group meeting in my home. Seven mothers, several children and three pediatricians attended the meeting.

Margaret Hall Gerharz (Massachusetts): I don’t remember the exact date or place of the first LLL Group meeting in the Springfield MA area, but I do remember those wonderful women who have been soul mates throughout the years—especially Doris Preston, Jan Kozub, Marieke Burt, and Sally Comeau. LLL has had a profound influence on my mothering and grandmothering and on my life as a woman. Thank you!

Nancy Stanton (Florida): Armed with my copy of The WOmanLY ART of BREASTFEEDING and three successfully breastfed children, I was confident a notice in the paper would bring dozens of expectant and new moms seeking information and support. Our first meeting was held in my living room July 28, 1964 with 12 participants. We grew quickly in Florida, and I was thrilled to bring a large delegation to the 1966 Conference in Indianapolis. We flew from O’Hare Airport on the same flight as the Founding Mothers. I knew then that behind words in a book were real people whose advice I could truly count on—and I have for many, many years.

Jan Riordan (Kansas): The breastfeeding rate was 18 percent when we first started meeting in the early 1960s so we felt like kindred sisters—a feeling we still have after four decades!

Jane Abramowitz (Israel): My first meeting was held after I was in Israel a short time, barely spoke Hebrew, and was sure no one would turn up! Over 20 mothers were there, and the group just kept growing as did my self-confidence and my competency in Hebrew. Being a Leader did a lot more for me than I ever did for others!

Pat Petersen (Rhode Island): I was trained in Denver and moved to Rhode Island in 1966 when my husband came to graduate school at Brown. When I became pregnant with my second child, I started a Group in Providence—about 30-35 people at the first meeting—and never looked back!

Mary Jeanne Hickey (Massachusetts): The earliest Groups were in western Massachusetts. In 1964, independently and nearly simultaneously, Groups sprang up in the greater Boston area.

Julie Boozer (Delaware): In the sixties, even though there was an active Nursing Mothers Organization in northern Delaware, there was little or no support for families of breastfed babies in the middle or southern parts of the state. As an experienced Leader with a special interest in older nurslings, I’d planned to retire when Bob and I moved to Delaware in 1970. At the urging of a local pediatrician, Dr. Walter Omans, I “came out” of retirement and began holding LLL series meetings in our living room. As with a healthy plant in a very fertile field, LLL grew by leaps and bounds, with new Leaders being prepared and Groups splitting to better meet the needs of families hungry for the fellowship and support of League-style parenting. Delaware was now on the growing list of states offering LLL support to families of breastfed babies.

Mardi Dean (Virginia): When LLL of Virginia separated from Maryland and Washington DC, it was an exciting time. This meant we had “come of age.” We were overflowing with generous volunteers, and we felt empowered to make a difference in our own communities and in our state.
Jini Fairley (France): “April in Paris” 1975 was the time and place of the very first LLL meeting I ever led. It was also the first meeting of La Leche League in Paris, France. I remember it well. The afternoon sun was shining, my apartment was ready, my two children, Kevin, just turned 3, and Jessica, 2 months, were keeping me busy so I wouldn’t get too nervous; and Karima Khatib was there as my co-Leader. The mothers and babies came, and I was so amazed that we had nine countries represented, with the common bond of breastfeeding transcending the language barriers. (The meeting was held in English.) Karima had traveled over an hour each way by train and metro, with several children, to support me. We did this for each other. We had one Group, LLL of Paris, in two locations, and each of us went to the other’s meeting monthly. Eventually that one Group became two separate Groups, and within a year there were bilingual Leaders and French Leaders holding meetings in French beyond Paris and its suburbs.

Cynthia Leonhardt (Rhode Island): I recall the joy of finding this group of women who shared so many common ideals of good mothering. We learned so much and had such a good time as well.

Nancy Sabean (Costa Rica): We met in the home of a Costa Rican psychologist who had recently given birth to her third baby. A group of eight moms and babies came. We had a great meeting. For the first time, I found out what a La Leche League meeting was really like. (I had become a Leader by correspondence, without having been “grown” in a Group.) We continued to meet with attendance between 3-18 moms and babies. It has been great.

Nora d'Oliveira de Mottini (Uruguay): At the first Group meeting I was very happy when one mother said: “I’m so grateful that now we have someone to call if we need help... mothers were so lonely... I feel glad having somewhere to go and someone with whom to talk when I need to.”

The mothers and babies came... we had nine countries represented, with the common bond of breastfeeding transcending the language barriers
—Jini Fairley

Sheila Kippley (Saskatchewan-Canada): I was a shy, young mother when I learned our family was moving to Regina. My LLL Leader insisted I had to become a Leader, because there was no LLL there. And thus LLL began in Saskatchewan.

Dona O'Brien (Saskatchewan-Canada): I was invited to a meeting at Sheila Kippley’s in 1968 where I saw Judy Burlock for the first time in 8 years. Judy and I became Leaders in 1970. I retired in 1990 and left League in the capable hands of four daughters and one daughter-in-law—all Leaders!!!

Priscilla Stothers (Dominican Republic): I am a nurse and have three children whom I breastfed. Eleven years ago I began to teach in a local prenatal center. I contacted LLLI for breastfeeding materials and became a “Breastfeeding Resource Center.” With encouragement from Judy Canahauati and MaryAnne Stone-Jimenez, I went ahead and completed the process, long distance, to become the first LLL Leader living in the Dominican Republic.

Connie Little (Spain): LLL had a slow beginning in Spain (1987). It took me years to get a Group going. Twelve years later, we have 20 Leaders and 20 Leader Applicants.

Carol Anderson, formerly Spiers (British Columbia/Yukon-Canada): I nursed my first child in 1966 with THE WMANLY ART in hand and encouraged my friends informally until 1968 or 1969 when I started to lead formally and widely. I’m still surrounded by nursing babies. Sometimes there are even LLL meetings in my garden when the weather beckons.

Pauline LeBlanc (New Brunswick-Canada): All through my life as Leader, I have hoped that the mothers who came to my meetings would feel something of the welcome, the relief and the joy I found when I attended my first meetings—to find women who shared many of my feelings and thoughts and above all, seemed to believe that I was doing ‘OK’ as a mother. It’s gratifying and humbling to be acknowledged as a pioneer and I think the Leaders involved will be touched. I’d suggest that most of us have received more than we gave and have used all that to enrich our lives in all kinds of significant ways.
The values espoused by the League and that special sisterhood of woman to woman, mother to baby, family to family fostered for all of us a richness of life that continues in LLL circles to this very day

—Nancy Gajdosik

Judy Canahuati (Honduras): I didn’t realize what a profound change we would be catalyzing as we exchanged experiences about breastfeeding our babies. My life was transformed as have been the lives of countless children touched by La Leche League and its philosophy in Honduras, as in many other countries.

Karen Pearce (Nova Scotia-Canada): In starting the first Group in Nova Scotia, it was a case of being in the right place at the right time. The first meeting I led was the first I had attended, and there were 41 mothers and 9 babies present. The second meeting we had 58 mothers and 20 babies—most of the babies in car beds—remember them? We were meeting in a private home, so after that I held two meetings a month—one in each city—Dartmouth, and across the harbour in Halifax—until a second Leader was accredited. There were many wonderful women helping. It was a fun and busy time, and neither the medical profession nor the media knew what to make of us. In a very few years we had 13 Leaders come out of the Dartmouth Group; 13 others came here for Applicant previews, and many others began in this Group and moved elsewhere. The organization experienced fast growth, and it was an exhilarating time.

Nancy Gajdosik (Manitoba-Canada): I look back on those days of having a “tiger by the tail” and the energy to match. Those were times when we were unstoppable, forging ahead into foreign, often hostile territory, yet not allowing ourselves to be deterred… and thank goodness we did! Thirty years has clouded my memory of details of the first LLL meeting here in Winnipeg, but I do retain many impressions of that time. Women were so ready in 1970 for the ways and means to counter the taking-over (and all-too-casual replacement) of natural mothering that had insidiously crept into family life over the years, primarily by a health care society dominated by male physicians. That upstart organization called La Leche League brazenly challenged the status quo and refused to go away, quietly or otherwise.

I look back on the groundswell of interest those first meetings generated. Our initial meetings had upwards of 30 mothers and almost as many babies. One group quickly became two, then three as we realized the walls simply couldn’t be pushed out any further. Our second and third Leaders were certified within a year of our first meeting.

My being a nurse and a clinical nursing instructor in labor and delivery at our largest hospital was both a blessing and a curse, but it permitted a recognition that enabled the League and the “fanatical” women in it to be taken seriously and with a somewhat cautious, yet growing respect.

We never thought ourselves radical or fanatical, but we certainly were a threat to the establishment and as such had to tolerate the slings and arrows of suspicion and criticism. As the word and the wisdom of the “womanly art” spread, we who were there from the beginning lowered our soap boxes and began to function more as a team with the medical and the lay population in our community.

The greatest proof of how sound was the message and example set by the League was in our beautiful, healthy, happy babies, and the growing number of women putting mothering over any other aspect of being successful, satisfied people. There was absolutely nothing new or different from the beginnings of humankind being advocated through the League, but under the care, conviction and wisdom of the League and because we were no longer alone, like voices in a wilderness, we were rising to challenges and realizing potential in ourselves as women and mothers that we could not have otherwise.

The values espoused by the League and that special sisterhood of woman to woman, mother to baby, family to family fostered for all of us a richness of life that continues in LLL circles to this very day… and must continue if this fractured world of ours is to survive. I am humbly proud, I am honored, to have helped spread the message and example of the League.
The LLLI bookshelf: for the kids & grandkids in your life

A growing collection of books and other items for young children on topics dealing with pregnancy, birth, babies, breastfeeding, siblings and families can be ordered directly from LLLI.

We Like to Nurse, by Chia Martin, illustrated by Shukyo Lin Rainey presents breastfeeding as a natural part of life for many different kinds of animals—and humans, too. Charming pictures and short, simple sentences make this book ideal for toddlers. Softcover, 32 pages. No 370 · $9.95

A Ride on Mother’s Back, by Emery and Durga Bernhard depicts parents in different cultures carrying their infants and young children as they perform their daily tasks. Richly colored illustrations warmly capture the people, plants, and animals of each locale. Hardcover, 34 pages. No 354 · $15.00

The Cuddlers, by Stacy Towle-Morgan, illustrated by Marvin Jarboe captures the warmth and love a family experiences when children are drawn to the security of their parents’ bed. Softcover, 32 pages. No 265a · $9.95

Maggie's Weaning, by Mary Joan Deutschbein is a delightful, child's eye view of the nursing experience. Maggie reflects on the time she spent at her mother's breast, and offers her thoughts on the joys and the challenges of slowly leaving breastfeeding behind. Softcover, 24 pages. No 284 · $6.95

See How You Grow, by Dr. Patricia Pearse, illustrated by Edwina Riddell is a “lift the flap” book that answers many of the questions children ask about where babies come from and what is going on inside mommie when she is pregnant. Hardcover, 30 pages. No 3282 · $13.95

The Best Gifts, by Marsha Forchuk Skrypuch, illustrated by Halina Below teaches Sara that the best gifts you can receive are not gifts that can be bought, but gifts that must be felt by the heart. Sara is pictured breastfed by her mother and later breastfeeding her own son. Softcover, 32 pages. No 3094 · $6.95

Michele, the Nursing Toddler, by Jane Pinczuk, illustrated by Barbara Murray talks about growing up in a family that loves to the fullest. Michele blooms from an infant to a toddler, developing confidence and pride along the way. Hardcover, 32 pages. No 253 · $14.95

Happy Birth Day! by Robie Harris, illustrated by Michael Emberly tells a child about how he was born and shows the loving interaction of both mother and father with the newborn. Hardcover, 28 pages. No 315 · $16.95

A Baby Just Like Me, by Susan Winter [No 3282 · $13.95] • On Mother’s Lap, by Ann Herbert Scott, illustrated by Glo Coosalon [No 398 · $6.95] • Will There Be A Lap for Me? by Dorothy Corey, illustrated by Nancy Poydar [No 3053 · $4.95] each gently address the coming of a new baby sister or brother and will reassure young children that there is always a special place for them even when the new baby arrives.

Mariana: the Breastfeeding Doll

Mariana is a wonderful gift for children who until now had no option but to play with bottlefeeding dolls. She is handmade of soft cotton material by a woman's group in Brazil. No 4642 · $22.00

Motherlight is a recording of fun songs highlighting the spirited relationship between a mother and child. No 606a Audio cassette, $11.95

Daddies Sing Good Night is a collection of lullabies performed by men who are both fathers and musicians. No 659 Audio cassette, $9.95 No 659 CD Compact disc, $14.95

Check the LLLI catalogue for more detailed descriptions and titles. Order by phone, 847-519-9585 between 8 AM - 5 PM Central Time M - F; or online, <www.lalecheleague.org> Shipping charges apply; Mastercard and VISA accepted.

Join the Alumnae!

YES, I want to keep in touch and support LLLI. My Alumnae membership category is checked below. Enclosed is:

☐ $6 for CONTINUUM (I am currently an LLL Leader or member)
☐ $19 for an LLLI Alumnae Membership (includes CONTINUUM)
☐ $36 for CONTINUUM and an LLLI Individual Membership
☐ $50 for a 3-year LLLI Alumnae Membership (includes CONTINUUM)
☐ $75 for a 5-year LLLI Alumnae Membership (includes CONTINUUM)

Name: __________________________
Address: _________________________
State/Province: __________________
Zip/Postal Code: __________________
Country: _______________________
Current LLL status: ______________

Send to: LLLI International, P.O. Box 4079 Schaumburg IL 60168-4079 USA
Inaccuracies found in co-sleeping study

La Leche League International and co-sleeping expert Dr. James McKenna, Professor of Anthropology at the University of Notre Dame, questioned the accuracy of a recent study published in the Archives of Pediatric and Adolescent Medicine which refers to co-sleeping as an unsafe practice for families.

The study, recently cited in both national and local news, prompted a number of calls to LLLI. Although technically not a breastfeeding issue, co-sleeping does relate to breastfeeding because it is an option that many mothers choose, with certain safeguards, to best meet their babies’ nighttime needs.

While the study clearly was negative, what was surprising, said PR assistant director Mary Lofton, was the number of articles that were much more positive than expected.

LLLIs full press release on the topic can be found on the web: http://www.lalecheleague.org

LLLII & Alumnae updates

❖ Congratulations to the winners—over 40!—of this summer’s LLLI Alumnae Association Donation Drawing. Dihann Geier from Virginia won the grand prize. She will receive a pastel portrait of her children by Nancy Jo Davis. Founder Viola Lennon won the lovely mother and child statue.

❖ Katy Thorn is the new Alumnae Area Representative for Iowa. She can be reached at: 4408 Lake Shore Dr., Okoboji, IA 51355, 712-332-9078 or 712-330-1014.

❖ Please note: LLLI is part of the 1999 Combined Federal Campaign! Remember #1153.