



**Mary White** says that her first attempt at breastfeeding was just like that of most mothers in the 1940s—disastrous! There were strict feeding schedules, bottles of cows' milk formula to be given after each nursing, and absolutely no encouragement. When her second baby was born, her doctor husband, Greg, was home from the army, and she had the support that a nursing mother needs. Only the first three babies were born in the hospital; the others were born at home. Mary's devotion to the special kind of mothering that is so much a part of breastfeeding has always been a guiding influence in La Leche League.

Mary White is the eldest of eight children (six still living). She was born on April 3, 1923, to Edward M. Kerwin and Marie LeTourneux Kerwin. Mary says, "My dad lived to be 90 and my mom to be 95, so I hope to do as well myself!" She was born in Oak Park, Illinois, and grew up in Elmhurst, where she moved when she was five. When she was twelve, the family moved back to Oak Park, where she lived until she married.

Mary attended the Convent of the Sacred Heart, a boarding school in Lake Forest, and later graduated from Rosary College in River Forest. Mary comments, "I liked history, English literature, drama and speech (my major), French, and mathematics." She and Greg met at a college dance and married on February 5, 1944. Mary adds, "The wedding took place a week after I graduated from college. It was during the war and we attended classes through the summer to be able to graduate early."

In 1956 when LLL was founded, Mary and Greg had six children. They were living in Franklin Park, where Greg was in family practice. Greg was very receptive to more natural ways of caring for mothers and babies, in part because his own mother had struggled with the common child rearing practices of her day. When he was in medical school, Greg studied under Dr. Herbert Ratner, and was impressed by Herb's philosophy of living according to "Mother Nature." Greg and Herbert were close friends throughout their lives, and were a big influence on the philosophy of La Leche League.

In July of 1956 the Whites and the Tompsons found themselves at a Christian Family Movement picnic in Wilder Park in Elmhurst, Illinois. While other young mothers at the picnic were struggling with bottles and trying to heat formula, Mary and Marian had no worries about milk for their little ones. Their healthy, happy babies were ample proof of the wonder of natural supply and demand. They asked themselves what it would take to share what they had learned with other interested mothers. They were thinking in terms of Franklin Park and its vicinity, nothing more. They decided to move ahead with their idea.



And so it was: seven women and an idea, the beginning of a dream to bring gentleness to giving birth and joy to the womanly art of breastfeeding. The basic purpose of the LLL meetings was to provide support and encouragement for the new mother, coupled with solid research and reliable information about breastfeeding. None of the seven women imagined that their dream would travel around the world and affect the lives of countless mothers and babies.

Mary comments, “Starting La Leche League was something we were all ready and willing to take on. We had all discovered just how much joy there was in mothering our little ones and what fun it was being with them and learning all about them.” For Mary, being absorbed in mothering her children and in La Leche League, it was hard to know where one began and the other left off because, as she adds, “The two were intimately bound up with each other.” About the other Founders, Mary says, “My fellow founding mothers are some of the very finest women I could ever hope to meet, and I love them all dearly.”

When LLL started, Mary had the responsibility of keeping track of the medical information. She also wrote articles, helped with the newsletter, and edited the inserts from local areas. She was on the LLLI Board of Directors for many years. On the subject of obstacles the Founders had to overcome in 1956, Mary says, “We always said, back in those days, that the three main obstacles to successful breastfeeding were doctors, hospitals, and social pressures. I think the desire to breastfeed was always there along with the conviction that ‘breast is best.’ We were not promoting a product that people had to be convinced about. But very few young mothers knew anything about the ‘how to.’ Women had forgotten the wisdom of previous generations.” By the time LLL came along, new mothers did not have the support of family or friends, let alone doctors, nurses, and hospitals. Mothers who tried to breastfeed on their own in the early 1950s were almost destined to fail.

Mary still keeps busy, mostly with her family. She is the secretary on the board of the condominium where she lives, and she is editor of their newsletter. Mary adds, “This is lots of fun. I am also on a couple of committees, but they don’t take up much time.” Mary and Greg had 11 children—their oldest daughter, Peggy, died of cancer in 1968 at the age of 18. Greg passed away in 2003. Mary has 58 grandchildren and 26 great-grandchildren (with four more on the way). She adds, “I know them all and thoroughly enjoy every single one.”

Although Mary no longer accepts invitations to speak at LLL Area Conferences, she actively participates in get-togethers with the other Founders. She comments, “I always look forward to the big International Conferences. I have happy memories, too, of visiting LLL in other countries. I think my favorite memory was a visit to LLL of Ireland some years ago. I remember walking into a room full of moms and babies and telling them that I felt right at home because all the little ones looked just like my own family!”



**Edwina Hearn Froehlich** was definitely a woman ahead of her time. She was born in the Bronx, New York, in 1915, the youngest of three daughters of Edwin and Anna Bent Hearn. Edwina says, "My mom did not want to take a chance that they would not have a son to name Edwin, so they added an 'a' and called me Edwina. I have always been very fond of my name." Edwina's father died when she was four years old. Her mother returned to work when Edwina reached school age, but fortunately, with creativity and discipline, she combined the continued care of Edwina and her sisters with the responsibilities of her job.

The activities Edwina loved most during her school years were drama classes, choral groups, and competing with other schools as a member of the debating team. She was also a good organizer and good at writing as well. Those two skills have proved enormously useful during her years in La Leche League. Edwina attended Mundelein College for two years and then took a job as a secretary in downtown Chicago. Even though she enjoyed her work and was good at it, Edwina always planned and expected to be a wife and mother some day.

Edwina and John met the year they both turned 33 and six months later they were married. She was 36 years old when she gave birth to her first child. Since most women in the 1940s and 1950s had their babies well before the age of 30, it was not surprising that Edwina was given dire warnings about the perils of having a first baby at such an "advanced" age. Moreover she was told that the breasts of a woman over 30 could never produce milk. Fortunately her "aged" mammary glands produced plenty of milk for each of her three sons.

Even before Edwina was married, she had given thought to where and how her babies would be born. Edwina and her two sisters had been born at home, and Edwina's mother had fond memories of her experience. In 1950, when Edwina and John were expecting their first baby, there was nobody they knew who would even consider doing such a thing. However, Gregory White, MD, was their physician and was known for doing things naturally. Edwina had read *Childbirth without Fear* by Grantly Dick-Read, who advocated birthing as naturally as possible, including having babies at home. On her next visit to Dr. White, Edwina asked him what her chances were of having a home birth. His reply was, "Very good." And so in November 1950 Edwina gave birth to Paul at home. His two brothers were also born at home, David in 1952 and Peter in 1957.

When La Leche League began in 1956 it was not surprising that Edwina was one of the seven Founders. She had solid information about natural birthing and breastfeeding. Each of the seven Founders had a vital role to play in the formation and development of La Leche League. They had young children but they



knew how to get things done. Edwina, whose role was that of secretary, communicated with mothers and health care professionals worldwide.

Edwina comments, "I spent many hours with mothers on the phone and many more hours responding to their letters. The seven of us were a good team. It was a blessing for me to be part of the La Leche staff. The friendships I developed with the other Founders and what I learned from them have been wonderful parts of my life."

What soon followed in the field of breastfeeding has been labeled "a quiet revolution." In fact, no one was more surprised by the growth of La Leche League than the seven Founders. Women wanted to know how to breastfeed their babies but the majority of physicians couldn't help them. Their expertise was formula feeding. So the need for LLL was there. Mothers who came to LLL succeeded in breastfeeding because, as the Founders knew, breastfeeding (almost always) is a mothering issue, not a medical one. Word quickly traveled around the world that La Leche League International was providing breastfeeding information and that there were breastfeeding mothers available to help others.

Mothers who had successfully breastfed were eager to help other mothers, so they became La Leche League Leaders and started support groups in their neighborhoods. Because of the work of the Founders, LLL Leaders, LLL Professional Advisors, and other supporters, more babies today are being breastfed. La Leche League International has changed the breastfeeding practices around the world. It has even had a measure of influence on the medical profession. LLLI is one of the few lay organizations that is accredited by the ACCME to provide continuing education credits to health professionals.

Through the years Edwina has enjoyed giving many talks on breastfeeding. She says the most rewarding response is when mothers or fathers thank her for starting La Leche League and tell her how its information has changed their way of parenting to what they consider a more loving and caring approach. They say they feel more confidence in their parenting because they better understand the needs of the baby and how best to fill those needs.

Edwina's husband, John, passed away in 1997. They had enjoyed 49 years of marriage. At age 91 Edwina is still active in the organization as secretary of the Founders' Advisory Council. She also still attends the biennial La Leche League International Conferences.

In her personal life Edwina regularly attends Tai Chi classes. She is a gourmet cook and the proud grandmother of nine grandchildren, all of whom live just a few minutes' drive from her home. Edwina comments, "My three sons outdid themselves in choosing their wives." She says her three daughters-in-law are outstanding young women, devoted wives, and nurturing mothers. The role Edwina cherishes most is that of being a grandmother.



**Mary Ann Cahill** was born to John William (Bill) Phalen and Olivia Spoerlein on June 10, 1927. She was raised to believe in the power of service, giving and connecting with others—strong elements for her future interest in reaching out to support mothers and babies. Mary Ann comments, “My favorite subjects in school were history and English. In history I had an excellent teacher who brought life to historical movers and shakers!” She graduated from high school in Chicago and went on to attend college. However, she soon met Chuck, a friend of her brother’s, and she and Chuck Cahill married in 1948 and settled in Franklin Park, Illinois. They began their family that grew to nine children.

Mary Ann shares her early philosophy of “people building” (parenting), “We were idealists and dreamers, as are all parents of young children to some extent. For Chuck and me it was a wonderfully exciting time. Chuck and I and other young parents found each other through the Christian Family Movement. A good number of young couples in the community were going through the same joys and frustrations. A sense of camaraderie developed that helped us to cope as parents.”

It was during 1956 that the sharing of breastfeeding information began and became formalized. Mary Ann says, “When the seven of us started the nursing mothers group named La Leche League, we were not thinking of founding a worldwide organization. Our families were a great help. Grandparents, brothers, and sisters lived nearby. Chuck was starting his own accounting business. Chuck and I were well aware of the power of having the love of family and friends to support us. When the idea came up of helping mothers learn to breastfeed their babies, there could be no hesitation. It was all part of the wonderful adventure of which we saw ourselves being part.”

When asked about challenges she and the other Founders faced when they started La Leche League, Mary Ann commented, “The main challenge was women’s attitude toward breastfeeding. Women would ask us, ‘Why would you want to do that [breast-feed]?’” When the Founders would talk to women about breastfeeding, one of the replies they got was, “I will try, but I know I won’t succeed!” Mary Ann added that there was a strong negative societal environment related to breastfeeding. She ended with the words “We trusted our instincts and followed our hearts, and very soon we knew we were right!”

For the seven, these were exhilarating times. Their phone lines buzzed with calls. The pace was brisk because decisions needed to be made quickly. Mothers were in a quandary, on the one hand feeling an obligation to follow the doctor’s orders, while at



the same time being impressed by the healthy, happy, totally breastfed babies that were everywhere at La Leche League meetings. Giving birth, breastfeeding, mothering became known as La Leche League's philosophy. The perspective of the Founders on this and how the philosophy was to be passed on to others would dominate their thinking for years to come.

Mary Ann's talent for connecting people is apparent in her statements, "My first love was always with the group, meeting with other mothers, sharing the wonders of babies and breastfeeding." The introductory series of the Christian Family Movement began with the question, "Who is my neighbor?" It provided the nudge for the members to reach out and discover how small, seemingly inconsequential actions aimed at helping one's neighbor can make a difference, even against strong odds. Taking a small step, doing what is doable, rather than spending limited time and energy on theorizing about a grand plan was Mary Ann's philosophy and one of the tactics that helped build the organization. In the 1950s, in matters of infant feeding and child care, small steps were all that could be taken.

From the onset of La Leche League, Mary Ann worked tirelessly filling different positions and responding to the needs of the organization. She answered letters; was Editor of LLL News; was the Director of the Leader Applicant Department; worked together with Viola Lennon in the Funding Development Department, and was Acting Executive Director for nine months in 1994. After this position and until her retirement, she continued working in the Funding Development Department. Mary Ann left the LLLI office staff in 1995 and now works part time as the Stewardship Coordinator for The Church of the Holy Apostles. "But I still don't have enough time to do all that I'd like to do," she says. Working with the other Founders on the Founders' Advisory Council remains a favorite activity for her.

Chuck passed away in 1978 and Mary Ann found comfort in her family. There are nine children in the Cahill family —Bob, Elizabeth, Tim, Teresa, Mary, Joe, Margaret, Charlene ("Charlie"), and Frannie, with room always at the table for Janet, a foster daughter who spent several of her grade-school years with her "Cahill family." Mary Ann lived in Franklin Park, then Libertyville, and now lives in McHenry, Illinois. Mary Ann spends as much time as she can with her seventeen grandchildren. "When we're all together, we have a grand time," Mary Ann says. "The hopes and dreams, the prayers and hard work of 'people building' are well worth the effort. I can't imagine a more satisfying life."

Mary Ann was one of a group of seven women who shared a simple idea to bring gentleness to giving birth and joy to the womanly art of breastfeeding. None of the seven women imagined that their dream would travel around the world, stem the tide toward artificial infant feeding, change how people thought about child care and, in so doing, reverse a societal trend. At the time, they saw their lives as already busy and fulfilling and not too unlike those of other young wives and mothers.



**Betty Wagner Spandikow** was born to John and Valiree Redmond in 1923. Her parents had no inkling that their baby girl would one day be the Executive Director of an international organization recognized as the leading authority on breastfeeding, and what is more, that it would reverse a major societal trend and change baby-feeding practices around the world.

Raised in the Chicago area, Betty was the only girl in the family of four children. She excelled in mathematics and after high school graduation she worked at Continental Bank.

After she married, she was employed at Montgomery Wards in the accounting department while her husband was away at war.

Betty married Robert Wagner in 1942 and in 1943 gave birth to Gail, the first of seven children. Unlike many women of her time, Betty received practical information and support for breastfeeding from her own mother. In 1946, Betty and Bob moved into their new home in Franklin Park, Illinois, where they raised their family. Betty lived in that house for the next forty-five years.

In 1956 Betty and Bob were expecting their fifth child. Gail was 13, Robin was 11, Wayne was 5, and Mary 2. Betty was a busy full-time mother and also enjoyed working with the other young mothers in the Altar and Rosary Society at St. Gertrude's Church. Betty became friends with Mary Ann Cahill, who went to the same church and had similar opinions about child care and family life. When Betty was invited to be a part of the group that was being organized to help breastfeeding mothers, she was eager to join. And so La Leche League was born.

From 1956 until 1963, the grassroots organization of La Leche League International flourished around the seven families' kitchen tables. Between family activities, the seven Founders met regularly to handle business and pool their ideas on interesting and unusual breastfeeding questions. Betty was the Treasurer and took over the business aspects of the fledgling organization.

With all seven homes filled to bursting with correspondence, books, and files, it finally became evident in March of 1963 that an official office was necessary. Now, in addition to the title of Treasurer, Betty became Business Manager and eventually Executive Director, a title she held for 19 years until she retired.

During these years, with the organization facing explosive growth, Betty continued to manage the business end of La Leche League as well as the planning. Some of the many innovations launched during this time were: a Publications Department



that published periodicals, books, educational materials; a quarterly review of scientific information published for health care professionals; an International Conference, a Seminar on Breastfeeding for Physicians, a Peer Counselor Program, a Center for Breastfeeding Information, an 800-line, as well as a Capital Campaign to purchase an International Headquarters building in Schaumburg, Illinois.

Betty initiated flex hours and a family-friendly workplace in the '60s long before they became the popular perks they are today. The business hours at the La Leche League International office were from 7:00 AM to 3:00 PM so that the employed mothers could be back at home with their children after school. Every year, the office closed for a week over the Christmas holiday to enable families to spend this time together. Additionally, Betty's ideas about work teams and home offices were also far ahead of their time. It was the sum of these innovations that played a role in enabling the organization, made up mainly of mothers, to grow and be effective in a highly structured business world.

Betty preferred to hire women who were mothers, saying that, "Mothers know how to manage their time, how to manage their money, and how to work hard!" Betty proved to be an extremely effective recruiter and she had the ability to retain the experienced talent, enabling the organization to grow and expand. In addition to the paid staff, which eventually grew to over fifty employees, Betty managed a volunteer staff of nearly 12,500 La Leche League Leaders all over the world.

Betty retired as Executive Director of La Leche League at age 70. Her husband Robert had died in 1975. When she retired, she took up square dancing, where she met her second husband, Paul Spandikow, a widower. They were married in 1993. Paul and his wife raised seven children as did Betty and Bob, so the two families have a lot in common, including a large number of grandchildren and great-grandchildren.

Today, Betty and Paul live in Springville, Tennessee, but they also have a condo in Glendale Heights, Illinois where they visit regularly to stay connected to family and friends. At age 83, Betty continues to serve on the Founders' Advisory Council.



**Viola Brennan Lennon** was born in 1923 to Viola O'Grady and James

Brennan in Chicago. She attended St. Ignatius Grammar School and St. Scholastica High School. St. Scholastica was administered by the Benedictine Sisters, whose mission is devotion to a communal life of prayer, work, and hospitality with a focus on “empowering women, particularly the young, the poor, and those most in need, through education and the sharing of the Benedictine culture and spirituality.” Viola comments, “While in school, my preferred subjects were history and literature. I have always loved to read and still do.” She went on to graduate from Mundelein College with a degree in Economics. While in college, Viola joined the Young Christian Workers (YCW) and adopted their philosophy of “doing things naturally.” Already Viola had the upbringing and desire to help and support others through natural ways. In 1951, Viola married attorney William (Bill) Lennon, whom she had met while at her job at YCW. She says, “Bill worked in an office down the hall from YCW—this is how we met!” Together they had 10 children, including twin girls.

In 1956, Edwina Froehlich, Viola's friend from college, invited her to a meeting at the home of Mary White. She went to the meeting with no idea that the events of that evening would change her already busy life as well as the lives of the other six women in attendance. She was by no means aware that this simple neighborhood gathering would blossom into a worldwide organization, La Leche League International, later to be called “the quiet revolution.” Viola credits her mother with having the strongest influence on her philosophy of breastfeeding and mothering. She says, “My mother portrayed breastfeeding as an enjoyable experience that brings you close to your baby.”

Viola and her six friends were on the right track. In addition to seeing results from helping friends and other women with their breastfeeding concerns, the overwhelming success of sponsoring an evening with Dr. Grantly Dick-Read in 1957 provided further validation that women wanted to do things naturally and demonstrated the fact that women were looking for help with breastfeeding. Dr. Dick-Read, a strong proponent of natural childbirth and breastfeeding, provided a quote that would be used by LLL for many years, “The newborn has but three demands: warmth in the arms of its mother, food from her breast, and security in the knowledge of her presence—breastfeeding satisfies all three.” The desire of these seven Founders to help other women and their babies learn about the art of breastfeeding eventually spread around the world reversing the trend toward artificial infant feeding.

How did Viola, as a busy mother with a rapidly growing family, find time to work with the other



Founders on the increasingly larger responsibilities of this blossoming organization? A guiding principle of “family first” became the unspoken rule for all the Founders, even as their roles within the organization began consuming more of their time. It was a work philosophy that each of them never questioned when put into practice.

In 1972, Viola took on the important role of Chairman of the LLLI Board of Directors, a position she held for five years. During this time, she helped guide the LLLI Board in the formalization of the policies and procedures for running this growing organization, as well as defining the organizational philosophy and principles. Unfortunately, in 1984, the financial picture was taking a downturn and the future of LLLI was at stake. Viola spearheaded the search for an answer that was found in the advice of John Howard, president of the Rockford Institute. He advised the Board to appeal for help directly from its Leaders and Groups, thus launching the Second Founding. Viola later became the Director of the LLLI Funding Development Department, a position she held for many years. On departing from that position she dedicated her time and effort to the expansion of the Alumnae Association and became a strong proponent of this entity.

If one talks to Viola today, she will reiterate, “I feel that breastfeeding gives the mother a vision of what a human person is. Personally, it led me to self-discovery and to a greater appreciation of the full humanity of the babies who were entrusted to me. Each woman needs to trust her own instincts, her own feelings, and her own sense of what will work for her with each baby.” LLLI has always been about more than the techniques involved with breastfeeding management. LLLI is also about how to be the best and most effective mother and parent. In fact, when Edwina invited Viola to that first meeting, Viola accepted because of her curiosity about the term “mothering.” It was a new concept at the time.

Viola and the other Founders have tirelessly worked for 50 years to hasten the day when every mother can be assured of getting whatever help she may need to succeed in the womanly art of breastfeeding. Viola comments, “Women in the 1950s had forgotten the wisdom of previous generations in relation to breastfeeding. Mothers who tried to breastfeed on their own were almost destined to fail.” She laughs when she adds, “The neighbors sent their children to watch me breastfeed!” Together, the Founders have set into motion a network of mother-to-mother support. The description of LLLI as an educational organization doesn’t begin to describe the scope of its outreach and work throughout the world.

Today Viola lives in Park Ridge, Illinois, very close to all of her adult children and their families. She takes pride in having 18 grandchildren. Viola continues to volunteer with LLLI as a member of the Founders’ Advisory Council and she is active in the LLLI Alumnae Association.



**Mary Ann Kerwin** was born at home in 1931 to Florence and Thomas Collins in Oconomowoc, Wisconsin. She and her family lived in Wisconsin and Ohio before settling in the Chicago area in 1940. She graduated from Barat College, Lake Forest, Illinois, in 1953 with a BA in English literature and a minor in Education. She did some teaching and later worked as a travel agent and was invited to become an assistant manager in a travel agency in Chicago. She was eager to travel to Europe and appreciated the travel agent discounts that were available.

She married Thomas J. (Tom) Kerwin in December 1954. Their first child was born in November 1955. Eight more children followed in the next 15 years. Their third son, Joe, died of SIDS in 1959.

Mary Ann's experience with breastfeeding her first son was not smooth and easy. She relied heavily on the support, encouragement, and practical help she received from her doctor, Greg White, and his wife, Mary. (Mary White is Mary Ann's sister-in-law.) A year later, Mary asked Mary Ann if she would like to help start a group to help mothers breastfeed. Because of the tremendous help with breastfeeding she herself had received, Mary Ann says, "I felt eager to help other mothers less fortunate than myself. Also I enjoyed the thought of discussions with other breastfeeding mothers from whom I could learn and exchange information and ideas." She responded with an enthusiastic "yes." Six other mothers were part of the group, which soon became the leadership core of La Leche League.

Mary Ann explains, "In 1956, breastfeeding in the United States was a lost or dying art. I believe that never before in the history of the world had a resource as valuable as human milk been so widely discarded. Most US mothers, about 80 percent, were using infant formula. Only about 20 percent of US mothers breastfed their babies. Subsequently, mothers in other countries, including mothers in underdeveloped countries, jumped on the formula bandwagon and abandoned breastfeeding."

Shortly after the first La Leche League meeting, the newly formed breastfeeding group grew to the point where they had to split into two groups. As word spread about the organization they started receiving letters from breastfeeding mothers all over the United States and soon from other countries as well. The letters were divided among the seven Founders, who wrote personal replies.

La Leche League grew to include hundreds and then thousands of breastfeeding mother volunteers who reached out to offer breastfeeding information and support to mothers. From a small suburb of Chicago, the organization spread to every US state, Canada,



and eventually 67 countries worldwide. A successful publications business became part of the organization, with the Founders co-authoring *THE WOMANLY ART OF BREASTFEEDING* in 1958. Now in its seventh edition, it remains one of the most widely recognized and respected breastfeeding books ever published.

Mary Ann moved to Colorado on January 1, 1960, six months pregnant with her third child. Within a month, the first La Leche League meeting in Colorado was held, and Mary Ann spent time answering an increasing number of letters from mothers all over the western United States. “I recall sitting at a table writing letters for hours while my two toddlers played at my feet. I was amazed at how eagerly I wrote those letters even though in the past I had often procrastinated about replying to letters.”

She continued to provide an active role in the leadership of LLL, serving as an active member of the Board of Directors for 45 years, including three years as Chairman of the Board, from 1980 to 1983. Today Mary Ann serves on the Founders’ Advisory Council and the LLLI Legal Advisory Council and is legal advisor for an alumnae scholarship committee.

Mary Ann’s experiences with the founding of La Leche League and her drive to understand clear and fair ways for organizations to function and protect the rights of families led to a new interest—becoming a lawyer. In 1986, Mary Ann earned a JD from the University of Denver College of Law and practiced family law and general litigation until her recent retirement. She regularly served as expert witness in court cases involving breastfeeding issues. As an active member of the Colorado Breastfeeding Task Force, she spearheaded the passage of breastfeeding legislation in Colorado in 2004 and continues to work on legislation to promote breastfeeding in Colorado.

Mary Ann recently was awarded an honorable mention for the 2006 Unique Woman of Colorado Award presented by The Women’s Foundation of Colorado and Lockheed Martin. Mary Ann is listed in *Who’s Who in American Law*, *Who’s Who in America*, *Who’s Who in American Women*, *Who’s Who in the West*, and *Who’s Who in the World*. She received the Distinguished Service Alumni Award from Barat College in 1999.

She enjoys an active lifestyle, with biking, reading, and swimming among her favorite activities. She has nineteen grandchildren.



**Marian Leonard Tompson** was born in 1929 to Marie Bernardini and Charles Leonard in Chicago, Illinois. Since then, the woman who was one of the Founders and the first and only President of La Leche League International has never stopped asking for more and better information. Perhaps it was this driving need that led her as a young mother to change doctors for the first three pregnancies until she found the breastfeeding information she was seeking and the help she needed.

Marian attended Catholic schools until her senior year, when the family moved to the suburbs, where she graduated from Leyden High School in Franklin Park, Illinois. While studying ballet, she worked as a receptionist at an architectural firm and then in the accounting department in another company before her marriage to Clement “Tom” Tompson in 1949. Marian loves reading, absorbs new information, remembers a multiplicity of facts, is a keen learner, and enjoys learning things on a diversity of topics from all kinds of sources. As a young mother, Marian demonstrated her love for learning by reading whenever possible. All the Tompson children received library cards as soon as they were old enough. Biographies and autobiographies are favorite topics for Marian with good mystery stories added for relaxation.

The young couple had four daughters under age six by 1956. Having read Grantly Dick Read's book *Childbirth without Fear*, Marian was able to persuade her obstetrician to let her have a natural birth without drugs; however she was unhappy with the way birth was handled in the hospital. She was therefore delighted with her fourth pregnancy to learn about Doctor Gregory White, who attended births at home. Her fourth daughter was born at home (as were the rest of the children). With the help of Dr. White and his wife Mary, Marian was able to nurse this daughter until she weaned herself at 13 months. The Whites and the Tompsons belonged to the Christian Family Movement at their church, and it was at a church picnic in 1956 that the seed for what would become La Leche League was planted.

At this picnic, when conversing about feeding their babies, Marian and Mary realized that many of their friends were formula feeding their babies as a second choice. They had faced many of the problems encountered by Mary and Marian, and it became clear that if only these mothers had had support and practical information, they would have breastfed their babies. Marian felt strongly that it was unfair that women who wanted to do the best for their babies couldn't get the help they needed. She approached Mary with the idea that they do something to help these women with breastfeeding, not knowing at the beginning what form this would take. They invited five other women to come to share their breastfeeding experiences with women in the community who were interested in breastfeeding, and La Leche League was



born. During the first 24 years, Marian served as President, acting as its official ambassador. Along with the other Founders, she helped to guide the organization from a grassroots neighborhood group to an international organization.

Marian started the LLL NEWS publication in 1958 as a way of reaching out to women who were isolated and didn't have any support or didn't have an LLL Group in their area. LLL NEWS gave them access to the stories of other mothers as well as up-to-date information and practical recommendations. The former LLL NEWS is now a glossy magazine called NEW BEGINNINGS. Marian also started the Breastfeeding Seminar for Physicians to make sure that the doctors were also educated and able to better help their patients with breastfeeding. These seminars have been accredited for continuing education credits and have been held annually for 34 years, since 1973.

In her role as President, Marian successfully responded to and dealt with various challenges to breastfeeding, such as early introduction of other foods and liquids, environmental contamination of human milk, lack of support of the mother in the workplace, medicated childbirth, and lack of support of long term breastfeeding. Her keen love of learning led her to seek out the very best and most accurate scientific information to meet any challenge that interfered with a mother's ability to breastfeed her baby.

Today Marian is an active member of the Founders' Advisory Council and is a member of the International Advisory Council for the World Alliance for Breastfeeding Action (WABA). She also serves on the boards of a number of other organizations. In 2001 she founded AnotherLook, a not for profit organization dedicated to learning the truth about HIV/AIDS and breastfeeding. Although her husband and partner, Tom, died in a tragic accident in 1981, she has her 7 children and their spouses, 16 grandchildren, and 4 great-grandchildren as well as her LLL family and other friends to fill the hole in her heart. She continues to be an inspiring and motivating speaker, traveling the world while enjoying and making time for the special family events which nourish and feed her spirit.