



To my deepest joy, thirteen years of volunteer work as a breastfeeding counselor in the Dutch LLL-equivalent VBN (Vereniging Borstvoeding Natuurlijk) culminated in the IBLCE-exam last summer.

My studies for IBCLC took up one and a half years. During that period, my mom died (in 2006) and that disturbed my equilibrium. My father had died in 2004, my only sister at the age of 32 in 1999, and my mom's passing away left me behind as the only one still alive from a family that had been split up many years before

due to my parents' divorce. It affected all of us and somehow became an important part of my motivation to protect and support breastfeeding mothers and babies, so they can enjoy nursing their children like I did with our four daughters at breast.

The lack of concentration caused by the mourning made me decide to postpone the international exam from 2007 to 2008 and I immensely enjoyed the twelve months extra time I allowed myself to study and get carried away by all the fascinating material that touches our scope of practice.

Friday 16<sup>th</sup> January, I celebrated the official opening of my private practice and I told my guests how, during a training weekend for improving listening skills in 1999, the sunflower struck me as a symbol. A child needs its parents to safeguard optimal physical and psychological development, to flourish and lead a bright, fruitful life, but no parent can earn that 'title' without a child. Not only during the early postpartum period does co-regulation between mother and child play an important role. Conscious interdependency is something that is beneficial for every relationship throughout a lifespan, albeit not always through breastfeeding. Later in life, open communication will largely depend on self esteem and internal working models. How did they form in the early years? Did states become traits in a positive way, or did the adult person experience burdening hormonal conditions in infancy, that are hard to shake off once habits are established...? Prevention is always preferable to cure. Good health and secure attachment are the most valuable assets in everyone's life and I am very happy that the 2008 version of the IBLCE Scope of Practice, next to the more technical lactation competencies, puts emphasis on the cultural and psychosocial aspects of working as an IBCLC. I wholeheartedly intend to keep this an essential part of my work in the years to come, in consultations as well as workshops and policymaking. Therefore, this text is on my website on the page for health care providers:

"When a mother is expecting, she and her loved ones look forward to welcoming the baby for months. During the pregnancy as well as afterwards life takes on a completely different aspect for the family and much has to be arranged. Especially when a first child is born, many things are new and questions may arise. A number of health professionals shows up in that period. It is important for parents that from all those people, they get coherent information and assistance, that is not confusing due to differences, but enlightening due to consistency. Therefore, great responsibility rests upon the shoulders of workers in mother- and childcare to put baby, mother, parents and family in the center of their professional guidance. Up-to-date knowledge, a positively stimulating attitude, well developed conversational and counseling skills and an open learning attitude greatly contribute to that."

I very much look forward to keeping in touch with my colleagues at home and abroad, to which goal Lactnet will remain one of the incredibly valuable, well recommended resources.

Warmly,

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