

An Interview With Gila, Breastfeeding Mother of Twelve Children!

By Anna Durdant-Hollamby of The Mother Magazine, United Kingdom

1) Tell me about your family Gila

Our family has been blessed with 12 children. I gave birth naturally to all of them (including twins), and a few of my babies were born at home with midwives.

2) When did you become aware of the benefits of breastfeeding?

I always knew breastfeeding was the healthiest way to feed a baby. I never even thought of feeding them any other way. My opinion has always been: cows' milk is for calves and women's milk is for babies.

Once I started, I also became aware of the bond between the baby and me. That feeling of closeness and bonding with the baby is so special, something that lasts for a lifetime. I knew I was not only feeding my babies the healthiest milk possible, but I was also ensuring that they would grow up emotionally healthy and fulfilled.

3) How was breastfeeding for you?

I loved every minute of it. My kids were avid breast feeders. They nursed day and night. My firstborn son used to get up at least five times a night to nurse. I did not believe in putting babies on a strict schedule of feeding. I generally fed on demand and I used nursing to reassure my babies if they were in need of comfort. I nursed all my children for a minimum of fifteen months and a maximum of eighteen.

4) How did you manage feeding time with the twins?

Nursing twins was a challenge. They literally nursed all day. But the blessing was that they rarely nursed at the same time. Although I did feed them simultaneously on occasion, I found it easier to nurse one and concentrate on that baby and then do the second one separately. It was almost non stop nursing, but I did not mind. Thank God they were easy babies! I nursed one, put her to sleep, nursed the second one and so it went like that, with very short breaks in between.

5) Practically, how did you manage your life and time?

I learned to juggle my time. I realised that I could not have the cleanest house in the world, but I felt the children came first. The cleaning could wait - the babies couldn't. Nobody could give the babies the gift of my milk so I felt that was my priority. I never thought about any "cons" of being unconditionally committed. I certainly didn't feel any lack in my personal life. In fact, I never felt anymore fulfilled than when I was pregnant and nursing my kids.

6) What was the reaction of friends and family to such committed, unconditional parenting and breastfeeding?

Family members or friends used to tell me my milk was not rich enough, the babies were hungry all the time and that I should give food, bottles etcetera etcetera. I used to ignore them although it was not always easy. My babies seemed hungry often and I had to nurse constantly. But as long as they were gaining weight properly and they were happy, I figured everything was okay. When my twins were born, they had to remain in the hospital for a few days. I gave strict instructions that they should not be bottle fed but the nurses did not listen to me and behind my back they gave a bottle to at least one of them. As a result that baby became constipated and unwell, and I knew it was from the formula. As soon as I took her home I gave her only my milk and the baby did fine.

7) What long term physical and emotional impact do you think breastfeeding has had on you and your family?

I have no doubt that breastfeeding has had fantastic health benefits for all of us. I don't really know why scientifically but in my experience it makes a difference to the mother and child's emotional and physical well-being. I also believe that it helps the child's immune system fight off imbalances such as allergies.

I can see a difference between babies who are breastfed and babies who are just bottle fed. I cannot say that a child who is bottle fed wouldn't turn out secure or emotionally balanced because I am sure it is not only breastfeeding that contributes to a child's wellbeing. I believe constantly being close to the mother is very, very important for the child's mental and physical development which will lead to a happier, healthier more self confident individual. And nursing is the best way to establish that constant closeness.

8) Thank you very much Gila and for a final question, have you any advice that you'd like to share or anything else you'd like to say to finish?

There is one thing that I would like to mention. My family and I have lived all over the world. In each country that we lived, I ran groups for nursing women and gave advice about breastfeeding. But despite all my efforts, or even despite all the efforts of well known lactation instructors and theories, I came to realise that there is a small percentage of women who struggle to produce milk. So for that reason for the past several years my family and I have drawn on nature to develop a remedy to help these mothers increase their milk supply by working with herbs.

As for advice, look on every child as a blessing. Try to find the positive in every experience. Accept that yes your life does change when you become a parent and that you will make sacrifices but you'll never do a more important or fulfilling job.

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