

Aileen Smith

25 February 2007

The Secretary of the Committee on Breastfeeding  
House of Representatives  
PO Box 6021  
Parliament House  
Canberra  
ACT 2600  
[committee.reps@aph.gov.au](mailto:committee.reps@aph.gov.au)

Dear Sir/Madam,

I am a mother of two children, both of whom I breastfed for ten months. Initially, when they were new born, six times a day for anywhere up to an hour. This eventually dropped to just three times per day, half-an-hour each feed. I imagine that if I do the math it would work out that I've probably spent a something like 5 months breastfeeding non-stop!

I may not be an authority in this particular field, i.e.: midwife, lactation consultant, nor doctor. But then again, I am an expert in this subject matter due to personal experience. And my children have thrived; not once did they suffer any illness while breastfed. I can state with absolute conviction that breast milk is an invaluable and precious resource.

When I had my second child, I felt like a jersey cow, initially – I produced so much milk – far too much for my little one. I was told later on, that after the second (and/or subsequent) child is born, the mammary glands become very efficient in lactating – after all no need for practice. And as a result of this enthusiastic over-production, I developed mastitis several times.

On one occasion, I ended up at Monash Medical Centre in Clayton. And during my stay there I struck up a conversation with a midwife in regards to breastfeeding and what to do with excess milk. I offered my services, only to be turned down by a very frustrated midwife. She informed me that there was no option for donating milk, due to health regulation; the milk needs to be pasteurised and screened for contaminants – *just* like cows milk. But, there just were no facilities available to the hospitals.

Yet, just down the hall from where we was having this conversation, there were babies screaming for milk; perhaps because their mothers were:

- Unable to attach properly,
- Unable to produce milk (eg: breast reduction),
- Unable to produce *enough* milk,
- Had delivered prematurely,
- Were recovering from surgery.

It was a real tragedy, I had at least 12 bottles of milk (240ml each) in my refrigerator, and I was forced to dispose of it all down the sink when I got home, all this liquid gold. It broke my heart to do so, especially when I think of any preemie baby that could have really benefited from having breast milk, as opposed to formula.

I was particularly surprised to discover that there wasn't a milk bank for Australian babies, as I was aware that there had been such facilities in the UK, US, Canada, even parts of Africa, for years now. And, I am constantly astounded at the general lack of understanding regarding the benefits of breast milk. There are many aspects within our society that, I feel, need to be re-evaluated or re-educated, in regards to the subject of breastfeeding.

If you break it down to the simplest level – that of biology – the mammal produces milk, that is the most suited for the growth requirements and health their offspring: a nutrient that is generally species specific. No formula produced can come close to being as beneficial for infants as breast milk.

Yet, here we are, in a first-world country in the western world that taboos breastfeeding mothers. Frowning on (and sometimes glaring at) women who choose to do what is the most natural thing to do with hungry infants; telling them that they can't/shouldn't do *that* in public; expecting them to feed their babies in rooms that are surplus toilets. If women *chose* to feed in public, if they feel *compelled* to do so, are comfortable in doing so, or need to do so, then they should be allowed to without being scrutinised or persecuted. After all, we are mammals and it is what defines us as such.

In all the recent media interest in breastfeeding, (see Kirstie Marshall and Kate Langbroek) and all the medical articles affirming the physiological and psychological benefits of breastfeeding, I have yet to come across any authoritative and definitive information that says that breastfeeding is a negative matter. Which begs the question – why does the government even *need* an Inquiry into the Benefits of Breastfeeding?!

I highly recommend that milk banks be established in every capital city for the benefit of all babies in need (and some jersey cows, too). No wrong can possibly come out of such a venture, only a healthy future.

Sincerely,

Aileen Smith