

PLEASE DON'T
CUT
THE
BABY!

a nurse's memoir

MARILYN FAYRE MILOS

with Judy Kirkwood

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This memoir is based on the author's memories along with her decades of experiences as the mother of the anti-circumcision movement. She has devoted most of her life to this cause and has conducted extensive research into the topic. This book also contains portions of emails and communications from different people, whose lives have been touched in some way by the practice of male genital cutting. Several names have been changed for the sake of privacy.

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This book is dedicated to:

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every baby and child, each of whom deserves and
needs our love, respect, and protection;

~

parents who know it is their responsibility to protect
and defend their baby's rights, and to those parents
who are willing to learn;

~

and healthcare professionals who honor the normal body,
support children's rights, and tell parents the
truth about circumcision.

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FOREWORD

By Dean Edell, MD
Mendocino County, California

T rue pioneers are an unusual lot. They decide to give their lives to a cause and follow through. Many of us dream about changing our world in some way but few ever get even close. Marilyn Milos is one of those unique people who pulled it off.

The devotion and passion she brought to her life's work made it quite an experience to be around her. A furious tornado of energy swirled about her at all times. And, as the fastest talking human on earth, she never ran out of words. Marilyn's commitment to her cause was a force to be reckoned with.

What was the subject of this ferocity? A small piece of human tissue at the tip of a baby's penis—the foreskin—or more accurately, the lack of it after routine circumcision.

It's a wonder to me that it took so long for circumcision to rise in the public conversation about healthcare and human rights. There was a palpable void. Perhaps a subject that dealt with the human penis was bound to be verboten in polite conversation, as well as on the federally regulated airwaves. Maybe it took a female to push the truth about circumcision onto the national stage because men themselves were not at

all well informed about this routine travesty that affected them not only as infants but their entire lives.

In 1983, when I first got involved in Marilyn's crusade to inform the public, as well as healthcare professionals, about how circumcision is not medically necessary, most men barely knew what circumcision was—even though most American men were circumcised. Until they were confronted by an uncircumcised penis in a locker room or in any foreign country other than Israel or Islamic nations, they might as well have arrived on the planet stripped of their foreskin. Simply put, in the conservative Reagan years during which Marilyn created NOCIRC, National Organization of Circumcision Information Research Centers, most Americans did not know what an intact penis looked like.

I met Marilyn when she and her colleague, Sheila Curran, came to the KGO studio because I'd invited them to show me their video on circumcision, *Informed Consent*. Marilyn then helped in putting together a two-part mini-documentary that aired for two nights on the medical segment during the evening news. I saw Marilyn again in the hospital just after my fourth son was born. Marilyn was educating mothers on the obstetrical ward about circumcision and telling them the American Academy of Pediatrics did not recommend it. That didn't sit well with hospital brass, and Marilyn was fired shortly afterwards—a fortunate event because that gave Marilyn the time and incentive to launch her protest movement.

While Marilyn's inspiration for educating the country on circumcision was the emotionally searing experience of witnessing a screaming baby tied down and forced to have a surgical removal of critical penile tissue, I came at it with a scientific public health and journalistic interest. My radio and television careers were taking off and Marilyn regaled

me with a barrage of information that just clicked in my brain. Here was something no one was talking about in the national media. It was a no-brainer for me, and a story made for media—sex, religion, human rights, genitals, and babies. It had legs, as media pros would put it. We did lots of stories on radio and television and print media together.

A quick perusal of the medical literature on the subject revealed a gaping intellectual hole. Back in the nineteenth century, John Harvey Kellogg, in his copious cornucopia of health advice, advocated circumcision to prevent masturbation and sexual impropriety. So strong was his belief that he circumcised himself at age 37! The primary excuse in the later twentieth century for nonreligious circumcision was that we would prevent future medical problems of the penis by surgically removing part of it from a newborn infant. Using the same logic, shouldn't we be removing infantile breast tissue from female infants to prevent breast cancer? Maybe while we're there, grab other trouble-makers like a gallbladder or an ovary? The prevention of disease was an outmoded myth, and the foreskin turned out to have important functions instead of being useless excess tissue.

In short, there was no logical or medical reason to routinely circumcise all baby boys born in the U.S. Other countries had mostly abandoned this practice long ago. As parents started informing themselves, they easily saw the ruse and made appropriate decisions. Marilyn was indefatigable in her efforts to bring this to the public's attention. As Marilyn pushed and her organization NOCIRC grew, she brought her message to an ever-widening audience around the world. Marilyn organized annual international symposia, produced a variety of publications, and coordinated street protests at medical conventions and the offices of major medical organizations. She put this issue on the map.

The subject had so many different angles that more stories began to appear in print and electronic media. Mainstream medical organizations like the American Academy of Pediatrics started weighing in and more publicity was generated. Even though they sometimes were too wishy-washy on the subject, I trusted that as more people were aware of the controversy, they would make the right decisions. We managed to stir up a hornet's nest among diverse groups, from angry rabbis and pediatricians to adult women who had never seen a foreskin in person.

When female circumcision started making headlines, the hypocrisy of male circumcision was exposed. The pro-circumcision community pushed back with blind defensiveness. There was the thorny question of religious freedom and the right to perform blood rituals. American pediatricians and obstetricians initially were unconvinced until many looked at the research, saw no evidence to justify this gross violation of a baby's body, and joined the movement. Objective research papers on sexual function and feelings are far and few between. Marilyn designed and implemented a scientific controlled study published in the *British Journal of Urology* that proved the circumcised penis was much less sensitive than the intact penis. Men who were circumcised as adults came forward and reported their experiences. The momentum was building and circumcision rates in the U.S. started to fall. But not far enough.

Marilyn has said many times that she won't quit until the practice completely disappears from the American medical landscape. I believe her. Yet, in her eighth decade, it may be time for her to sit down for a minute and catch her breath while others carry the banners and spread the word.

Marilyn's personal story, which you will read here, reveals furious devotion and an unwillingness to give up against overwhelming odds.

For those who believe that one person cannot change the world, you are wrong. Yes, of course, Marilyn had cohorts and helpers along the way without whom her success would have been muted. But educating America about circumcision started with one nurse who was outraged by one extremely common medical procedure others thought was routine and appropriate. I might have been one of those “others” if not for meeting Marilyn.

I was born Jewish and participated in the ritual of circumcision with my first three sons. After meeting Marilyn, it was impossible to acquiesce to routine circumcision for my fourth son. He is pushing 40 now and intact, and so is his son. Thanks, Marilyn.

PREFACE

When I decided to write a book about the history of NOCIRC and the movement to stop routine infant circumcision, for which I have been both blamed and credited, I showed an early draft to several friends. They each asked why I hadn't included myself in the book. I explained that this book isn't about me: it is about the babies. They insisted that, if not for me, we wouldn't be having this discussion, and the book would be more interesting if I included myself.

To be honest, I have often wondered why no one else was ever as moved as I was to end nontherapeutic circumcision of infants and children. I became an advocate for parents to make an informed decision about circumcision from the moment I first witnessed a tiny infant's reaction to this misguided ritual. Having incorporated material about the things in my life that shaped me, I now understand how my earlier years were preparation for my work.

As I stepped onto this path, I worried about how I would fund myself and the advocacy I was intending, hoping, and wanting to do. At every roadblock, fork in the road, incident of road rage—and there were many attempts to derail me on this path—I found encouragement from different sources. Someone sent me the following quote attributed to Mother Teresa:

*God is Love in action, and
He can move you any time*

to serve a need.

If He shows you a need

to be served, He will provide the resources.

So you can trust totally—And, don't you organize too much.

Goethe reportedly said the same thing a little differently:

The moment one definitely commits oneself, then providence moves too. All sorts of things occur to help one that would never otherwise have occurred. A whole stream of events issues from the decision, raising in one's favor all manner of unforeseen incidents and meetings and material assistance which no man could have dreamed would have come his way. Whatever you can do or dream, you can begin it. Boldness has genius, power, and magic in it. Begin it now!

Thankfully, these quotes have proved true for me.

I began working on this book in 2018, but the isolation of the 2020 pandemic finally gave me the opportunity to settle into the work it takes to write a book—something for which, along with book editors, I have a new respect. Now in my eighties and knowing that the women in my family died during this decade of their lives, I have a sense of urgency to complete this project as part of my life's mission.

This book offers both a beginning and an end, as I pass the torch to others to carry on informing the world about the issues that surround the very important decision of whether to circumcise a child. To be clear, unless there is a legitimate medical reason for circumcision, I believe—based on everything I have learned in more than four decades of study and exchange of information with both experts in relevant fields and feedback from countless humans who have experienced circumcision—that it is our responsibility to end the routine mutilation of those who do not yet have a voice to say “No!”