

■ NOCIRC OF MICHIGAN ■

INFORMANT

INFORMING MICHIGAN ON THE HARM OF CIRCUMCISION

VOLUME 1, NUMBER 3, SEPTEMBER, 1996

NOCIRC of Michigan Asks: "Whose Body, Whose Rights?"

Circumcision.

The Egyptians invented it.

The Jews and Moslems practice it.

Dr. John Harvey "Corn Flakes" Kellogg promoted it.

American doctors ask parents to do it.

American babies get it.

Finally, late in the 20th century, NOCIRC asks, "*Whose Body, Whose Rights?*"

A provocative new documentary, *Whose Body, Whose Rights?*, will make its Michigan debut Sunday, October 13th at the Troy Marriott Hotel, in Troy, Michigan.

Some ask, "How can a surgical procedure performed for 6,000 years be wrong?"

We ask, "How can a surgical procedure performed for 6,000 years be right?"

Some ask, "How can a surgery performed without question on the majority of males in the United States be wrong?"

We ask, "How can a surgery performed without question on the majority of males in the United States be right?"

Some say, "It's cleaner and easier to perform surgery."

We say, "It's cleaner and easier to bathe."

Some say, "It's healthier to do it."

We say, "It's healthier *not* to do it."

Some say, "After all, it's not just our religion, it's healthier."

We say, "After all, it's just your religion."

Some ask, "Why not respect the religious freedom of the parents?"

We ask, "Why not respect the religious freedom of the child?"

Some say, "The parents are always given a choice."

We say, "The baby is *never* given a choice!"

And again we ask, "*Whose Body, Whose Rights?*" For your son, your grandson, your nephew, for the ones you love, for the ones yet to be born, for mothers, for fathers, for men, for all, we ask this.

We ask you, "What are we doing to our precious little boys?"

For them, we ask, please be there.

Whose Body, Whose Rights? and It's a Boy! debut in Michigan on Sunday, October 13th, 2:30 pm at the Troy Marriott Hotel, I-75 at Big Beaver Road. Admission is \$8.00. For information, call (810) 642-5703.

DIRECTOR'S MESSAGE

NOCIRC of Michigan Makes News

The Midwest has the highest circumcision rate in the Western world, at *more than twice* the rate of the West coast. In Southeast Michigan alone, an estimated \$5.7 million dollars are spent per year on unnecessary circumcisions. NOCIRC of Michigan is lowering this unnecessary rate through the effective education of parents.

All of the local media have received press kits publicizing our showing of *Whose Body, Whose Rights?* and *It's A Boy!* Please help us make news and show your support by attending this important event on October 13th.

On behalf of all the children, thanks!

Norm Cohen, Director

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Mothers Against Circumcision

by Nora Plank-Champe

I'm working at the Ann Arbor Art Fair tomorrow," I finally announced to a group of friends.

This was my chance to talk about my involvement with NOCIRC. I hadn't yet professed my membership in NOCIRC to anyone.

"So where are you working?" one asked. "Well, it's a non-profit booth," I replied, putting out the bait. "What kind of non-profit booth?" one persisted. "I'm working for NOCIRC, it's a group that educates people about circumcision."

Even I was beginning to smile and giggle a little bit, nervously anticipating their responses. The Moms laughed. These are people I like, I reminded myself. And they're moms, just like me.

"Hey, that's interesting," said one, "I never knew there was a reason NOT to circumcise." I got to mention a few facts before the novelty of the moment subsided and The Moms dispersed to prepare the picnic lunch.

Helping staff the booth at the Ann Arbor Art Fair (July 24th-27th) was the opportunity to reach thousands of people! This was a huge event and I quickly realized how important it was that NOCIRC was there.

Most people, even educated people, are completely uninformed about circumcision. Many think this issue doesn't concern them, and falsehoods linger that circumcision is necessary to be "clean" and to "avoid infections".

At the booth, people approached for different reasons. A few individuals stopped by just out of curiosity. A few stopped because they agreed with our cause.

Many in the crowd were so embarrassed that they pointed us out to each other and giggled. I simply had not been prepared for this, especially in such a progressive community as Ann Arbor!

A co-volunteer, a nurse, described it as the "fifth grade laugh". We can't be

afraid or embarrassed, even though they are. Circumcision prevails because people are too embarrassed to talk about it.

Even if they did not come over and pick up literature, many fair goers saw that NOCIRC exists. The idea that routine circumcision is being challenged by some entered into their minds.

Several families stepped up proudly, stating their sons were intact and glad that such an organization existed. Two different South American families approached and signed our mailing list.

Knowing that our country is the only one that still routinely circumcises for non-religious reasons, I inquired about Brazil. No, they don't circumcise there, they told me. Their beautiful five-year-old blond boy was intact!

Several expectant women and birthing instructors picked up handfuls of literature. Yes, yes! Exactly the people to reach, I thought. I explained that there was no medical reason for circumcision and why the practice persists.

Shortly after, one man loudly snickered about "useless causes" and walked away. I felt angry at first. I felt strongly enough about this issue to spend time on it. I consider myself to be a "normal person" and a caring mother. I'm not that different from anyone else.

My frustration quickly subsided to pity. This man hasn't a clue as to what he experienced when he was born, I thought. I shrugged it off quickly, seeking a more positive opportunity in the huge mass of people passing in front of our stand.

Most men would walk by quickly, often pretending as if we were invisible. They found this to be a difficult, indeed impossible, subject to discuss.

A few senior citizens confidently stepped up and chuckled, "Well, it's too late for me!" We'd smile and reply, "Oh, no it's not," lifting up *The Joy of Uncircumcising* or reminding them, "But it's not too late for your grandchildren!"

"The baby boy is strapped on this board when he is about 12 hours old," I explained. "Circumcision is most often performed without anesthesia. The baby cries loudly but sometimes he is so distraught that he cannot make a sound. The baby even tends to 'shut down' for several days afterwards, finding it difficult to respond in any way, and sometimes unable to nurse," I explained.

I discovered that when presented with the facts, most people are interested. People usually are not "pro-circumcision"—they just don't have any facts to lead them to believe otherwise.

Americans are appalled at female circumcision taking place in other parts of the world and view it as barbaric. For some reason, though, it's alright to rob a baby boy of his foreskin in our "civilized" society, without his permission and against his will. Why?

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There is hope. With each pamphlet given out, many lives can be touched. What is said may be passed on to others. One family approached and requested specific hand-outs for a Jewish couple who were contemplating not having their son circumcised. Several nurses stopped—we had special information for them, too.

The Informant is the quarterly newsletter of **NOCIRC of Michigan**. It is a bridge builder to our supporters and members in Michigan. It represents our commitment to **NOCIRC** supporters to provide quarterly information on **NOCIRC** activism in this state and to activists everywhere. Articles, comments and questions are always welcome.

NOCIRC of Michigan

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Norm Cohen, Director

NOCIRC OF MICHIGAN

NOCIRC of Michigan is a consumer rights advocacy group helping parents understand that circumcision is harmful to their children.

We educate mothers, fathers and health care providers in Michigan about the harm of circumcision and about proper intact care. We protect consumers from false medical claims. We actively promote the benefits of normal genitalia.

We are a non-profit group consisting of health care professionals and dedicated lay people. We are committed to effective education, advocacy and activism to protect children from harm. We are part of a worldwide organization dedicated to ending all forms of male and female genital mutilation.

LOCAL NEWS

Volunteers Needed

Volunteers are needed to help staff the following NOCIRC of Michigan functions and special projects:

- 1.) information tables, 2.) newsletter articles, 3.) bulk mailings, 4.) public relations, 5.) doctor surveys, 6.) grant writing

Please call (810) 642-5703 to volunteer.

Restoration Support Group Now Forming

A monthly support group is forming for men seeking moral and technical support in foreskin restoration.

Interested men in southeastern Michigan, please call (810) 642-5703 for more information.

It's A Boy! Set for Detroit

As an added bonus, following our showing of *Whose Body, Whose Rights?*, the shocking British television documentary, *It's A Boy!*, will also be shown. In this disturbing and powerful film made by Jewish director Victor Schonfeld, the realities of the procedure and its possible aftereffects are revealed.

Mr. Schonfeld manages to convince a *mohel* to let him film a *bris* (Jewish circumcision). The story then unfolds for one eight-day old boy and his circumcision which, *while being filmed*, goes wrong.

Schonfeld says, "Any Jew or Moslem or African who would adhere to the tradition of male circumcision has the responsibility and the right to face the reality of the custom: its origins, its consequences, its risks. The time has come to break the pattern of silence and trivialization which has enabled the custom to continue through the generations unquestioned."

This film elicited an unprecedented response when it was broadcast last year in Britain to some 2.1 million viewers with overwhelmingly positive reviews.

Whose Body, Whose Rights? examines the ethics and the human-rights issues of infant male circumcision, October 13th, 2:30 pm in Troy, Michigan.

NOCIRC of Michigan Exhibit Dates

Volunteers are needed to help staff NOCIRC information tables at the exhibitions listed below. Come and enjoy sharing our message with others! Please call (810) 642-5703 to volunteer.

- ◆ **Saturday, September 14th:**
Inner Life Health and Self-Enhancement Expo
Ann Arbor Sports Coliseum,
Ann Arbor, MI
10:00 am to 6:00 pm
- ◆ **Saturday, October 5th:**
Birth and Parenting Expo
Washtenaw Community College,
Ann Arbor, MI
10:00 am to 4:00 pm
- ◆ **Saturday, October 5th:**
Michigan Stand for Children
State Capitol grounds,
Lansing, MI
- ◆ **Sunday, October 13th:**
Whose Body, Whose Rights? and
It's A Boy!
Troy Marriott Hotel,
I-75 and Big Beaver Road,
Troy, MI
2:30 to 6:30 pm

Mothers Against Circumcision

Norm Cohen explained to one couple, "Imagine having your tongue hanging outside of your mouth for one day. How would your tongue feel?" Dried out, insensitive and unable to taste anything, I thought to myself.

We displayed a man's leather shoe with the tip cut off. The shoe was obviously made useless. The relationship between the shoe protecting the toes and the fore-skin as a crucial part of a man's body was instantly evident.

Helping staff the booth also brought the opportunity to meet other NOCIRC members. During quieter times, we'd keep a careful eye on the crowd while sharing our experiences.

While planning a home birth about eleven years ago, I received a little blue pamphlet from my midwives. It was hand-drawn, typed and poorly copied. But someone had made the effort to get the message out that circumcision is not natural! Like most, I had assumed circumcision was something "everyone" did, it was just one more part of birth. The little blue pamphlet let a bit of doubt slip into my belief.

Our first two children were daughters, Libby was born in 1985 and Melanie in 1987. Our third child, Mark, arrived in 1990. By that time, I had watched Marilyn Milos, executive director of NOCIRC on the *Phil Donahue Show*

bringing the facts of circumcision to light. She was so dedicated and committed to this cause. I remember admiring her. I felt sheer horror when she described how an infant is circumcised.

I remember thinking, "Why haven't I heard about this before? Why isn't anyone doing anything about this?" I also remember realizing that my son would not be alone if we did not have him circumcised.

I hesitantly gave my husband some simple facts and he rather quickly agreed that if we had a son, he would remain intact. My mother had watched the same TV show and told me how it changed her views too. I requested the transcripts from that talk show, got on Marilyn Milos' national mailing list and eventually on NOCIRC of Michigan's list.

I've begun explaining to our son Mark about his body. I tell him how lucky he is to have his body whole. I tell him how special he is and that I would never allow harm to come to him. I tell him that this is the way little boys were meant to be and that is how most boys in the world are. I tell him that when he's older he might notice other boys' bodies are different (like Daddy's). I tell him about the surgery that they had when they were newborns. I never criticize other parents. I just explain that they weren't told the facts and how sad and unfair that is.

I tell my son that's why he will stay at Grandma and Grandpa's for the day while I will be at the Ann Arbor Art Fair. I will tell other Mommies and Daddies about circumcision so their little boys can be beautiful and intact, the way he is, the way they are born.

"Okay. But Mom, please don't talk about me," he begs, "and don't say my name. That's so embarrassing," he giggles. Oh no! Can it be? My six-year-old has the dreaded fifth grade laugh.

Nora Plank-Champe, 35, is an elementary school para-educator and an Avon Representative. She, her husband and three children reside in Milford, Michigan.

BAD IDEAS FROM THE HISTORY OF MEDICINE Real Quotes from Real Doctors

"Circumcision is an excellent thing to do; it helps to prevent hernia due to straining, and later it helps in preventing masturbation. The ordinary schoolboy is not taught to keep himself clean, and if he is taught, he thinks too much about the matter."

Dr. I. Solomons, M.D., *British Medical Journal*, June, 1920

TELL THE TRUTH ABOUT CIRCUMCISION

Become An Informant

A tax-deductible membership fee of \$25 or more makes you a NOCIRC of Michigan **Informant**. Help us to educate parents!
P.O. Box 333, Birmingham, MI 48012

NAME:

ADDRESS:

CITY:

STATE:

ZIP:

PHONE: