

Intact America

Children's Rights

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Campaign and Advocacy

Jan 14, 2021

I've been writing public articles about and against routine infant circumcision in America for several years now. I primarily tend to focus on my own experiences, questions, regrets, and trauma, along with the more basic physical reductions of having half of my penis suddenly degloved in infancy but I try to corroborate those personal reflections with plenty of supporting data and collaborative anecdotes from other folks with whom I've conversed about this issue.

After chatting recently with Intact America's executive director, Georganne Chapin, she emphasized that although these sorts of firsthand stories and interpersonal connections will always be essential to the intactivist cause and community, we also need to dramatically increase our emphasis on dismantling the medical for-profit corporate campaign that is at the heart of promoting this ongoing national tragedy against our children. Until we stop the harm where it starts in the disinformation machine and pressure-cooker solicitations that train doctors to view foreskins as malignant and overwhelm parents with the authoritative demand to purchase their removal from newborn children all we have left are personal stories of loss, like mine.

With this new orientation in mind, therefore, it didn't take me long to realize a curious coincidence. It is common knowledge (at least among intactivists, who seek out this kind of information) that the average adult foreskin measures approximately fifteen square inches when fully extended. This is precisely the same size as a standard 3.5-inch index card, which is why many intactivist groups often use index cards at rallies and conferences as simple, tangible handouts for educational outreach.

Ironically, however, there's another common, household item that can provide the same parallel measurements with a more loaded message: credit cards. If you line up two typical credit cards side-by-side, you'll end up with those same fifteen square inches, only this time the emphasis will be on cost as well as size. What is the physiological cost to a penis of being permanently skinned of its most protective part? What is the financial cost to exhausted and distracted parents of paying for this non-medically required violation of their offspring? What is the emotional cost of losing trust in your body, parents, partners, or medical experts because of an Adverse Childhood Experience (ACE)? What is the ethical cost of legally prohibiting female genital mutilation while allowing male genital mutilation to continue thriving as a billion-dollar industry?

Yes, you heard that right. As explained on IA's website, One million circumcisions are performed on boys every year in U.S. hospitals and medical offices. Circumcision today is a \$1 billion industry; the cost of repairing complications both short and long-term more than doubles that figure. When you dig deeper to discover that the average price-tag for an infant circumcision ranges from \$100-1,000, based on the provider and what the government or insurer (if applicable) will pay, suddenly this number doesn't seem shocking at all; in fact, it seems low. We all smiled at the unlikely fantasy nightmare of human batteries being harvested by hungry machines in 1999's blockbuster film *The Matrix*, but why are we ignoring the daily reality of hospitals harvesting major parts of infant penises to keep turning a profit?

Not only that, but routine infant circumcision works on much the same principles as the rest of our unequal economy: the average person loses [capitalists would say invests] for an intangible and unverifiable future, while the rich folks make immediate fiscal gains [profit]. Did my Penis Reduction Surgery as an infant prevent illness or impairment later in life? I'll never know. But someone definitely got paid for doing it, and that money, like my healthy stolen foreskin, is never coming back to me.

Nothing happens in fee-for-service medicine unless it ultimately puts money in doctors or hospitals or drug companies' coffers. If somebody's paying, someone else is collecting. So, the next time you pull out a credit card for a purchase, take a moment to remember: you're holding the physical equivalent of half of someone's foreskin, and the systemic enabler of its theft.

How much is integrity worth to you?

Kent Leatham

Interested in lending your voice? [Send us an email](#), giving us a brief summary of what you would like to write about, and we will get back to you.

Dec 23, 2020





I have four children, and two of them are boys. Paxton, who is older, is circumcised; his younger brother, Jaxon, is not. The story behind this is a painful one for me to tell, but it's also one of hope: Brothers don't have to match.

Before Paxton was born, I knew in my gut I didn't want to have him circumcised. But everyone around me said it was the right thing to do, including my husband. Finally, I agreed to go with him to talk with our pediatrician, who said it was better for boys to be circumcised. He waved off our concerns about pain, saying it would be just a snip.

But with the first diaper change all my fears were realized. It was no snip: It was an open wound. Paxton developed a painful ulcer, adhesions and other complications that lasted a long time. He cried with every diaper change. If I went anywhere near his genitals he would look at me in pure horror. I was sick and heartbroken. I didn't let anybody change him but me.

I sank into a deep depression. I felt completely alone, isolated from everyone, including my husband. There was a point when I told him I would rather walk in front of a bus right now. It was like a heavy coat. It hurt to breathe.

The darkness began to lift a little when I started connecting on Facebook with other moms going through the same thing. I joined a group of them at a protest in Washington, D.C., during Genital Integrity Awareness Week, and that's when I met Georganne Chapin from Intact America. Activism was empowering and it drove my healing. And learning just six months after Paxton was born that I was pregnant with his sister felt like a healing miracle.

When we found out I was pregnant with Jaxon two years later, there was no debate about circumcision. And we got no pushback from family. I think because for nearly three years I raged against it and told pretty much everybody I knew that circumcision was bullshit. By that time, we had left mainstream care, and Jaxon was born in a hospital with a midwife.

It was really freeing to be able to make a different choice. Jaxon is 2 now, and he has never cried during a single diaper change. But it has also been painful for me. I still deal with PTSD a bit, and changing his diaper literally transported my heart back to a place of pain.

It has taken four or five years to realize that something good came out of this journey: I have found my voice. I have grown into a person who can help other women who are struggling. I had always thought I was this strong person, yet I was brought to my knees. But then you say, No more. I can't allow this to consume my life and drag me to a dark place, and you find a voice and you turn it around.

That was the turning point of my life. That's when I became a totally different person. I am filling my own cup again, going to the gym and taking care of myself. I'm getting ready to rejoin protests when the pandemic restrictions lift. I've got an itch to get going again. I'm going to get back out there and hold some signs and make people uncomfortable.

Elise Wicklund

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Sep 24, 2020



I crossed the threshold of awareness that I had been circumcised when I was about 12. Running naked on the farm driveway was a second cousin, who was about 6. His penis was remarkably pointed and tubelike, yet somehow covered. I learned he and his brothers were not circumcised. I largely just left it at that until I was in graduate school at Northwestern University in Evanston, Ill., in 1971 when I came across the Gore Vidal novel, *Myra Breckinridge*.

When I got to chapter 22, I was convicted by words spread across a mere two pages. Myra started out, Just as I expected, seventy-two per cent of the male students are circumcised. At Clems party, I had been reminded of the promiscuous way in which American doctors circumcise males in childhood, a practice I highly disapproved of, agreeing with that publisher who is forever advertising in the New York Times Book Review, a work which proves that circumcision is necessary for only a very few men. For the rest, it constitutes in the advertisers phrase, a rape of the penis. Myra later states, Today only the poor Boston Irish, the Midwestern Poles and Appalachian Southerners can be counted upon to be complete.

There was that word complete. I was not complete. My penis had been raped. What would I have looked like whole? What would it have felt like? So began years of personal research, saving articles and assuring myself that should I have a son or grandson, they would remain whole.

Years later, while cleaning my parents vacant house, I found the Des Moines hospital-issued receipt for my mothers stay. The entire bill for her hospitalization in 1946 was \$83. Other charges: Twin baby boys \$10. My foreskin was zipped off for a mere \$5! What a rip-off!

So when our son was born in 1975, I made it clear again and again to hospital staff that our son was NOT to be circumcised. We had the same success when both of our children had sons. Our grandsons were spared. And a nephew and his wife took the same route with their two sons. Friends have credited me for the information they needed to keep new sons intact.

I had a 40-year daily newspaper career as a reporter, editor and columnist. In 1987, I interviewed a nurse from the group, Nurses for the Rights of the Child, based in Santa Fe, N.M. I wrote an article for my daily paper, but a senior editor spiked it (killed it from publication), claiming circumcision was a non-issue and such an article was inappropriate.

A few years later, when I was religion editor, I wrote a column that pointed out that Congress had outlawed female genital mutilation, and asked why the hypocrisy and a double standard? Why was it legal for males genitals to be cut, but illegal when done to females? I also wrote an editorial page column regarding Arizona health officials ending Medicare coverage for circumcisions, determining it was not essential medical care. The state became the seventh state in 2002 to do so.

With the arrival of social media, I wrote numerous commentaries and blog posts, and have fired off countless letters to hospitals and doctors. I have given formal talks. I own 40 books on circumcision and have many file drawers filled with materials. I wrote and published a novel in which circumcision is a key topic. In 1998, I joined a Phoenix-area NOCIRC/NORM group, whose men meet on alternate months to discuss circumcision issues and support each other in foreskin restoration. Both my twin and I have completed restoration, but we know we can never recover the specialized tissue long removed. For years, we have tabled at the annual Martin Luther King Jr. Civil Rights Day at a Phoenix park where we engage the public about circumcision issues. I have taken part in demonstrations and often carry a sign that says, Informed Parents Reject Circumcision.

I have come to know many of the giants in the intactivist movement through writings and attending the International Symposia on Genital Integrity and Childrens Rights those held in Seattle, Boulder and San Francisco. Intact America, co-sponsor of those gatherings, has given such new energy, resources and force to the cause, under the keen professional leadership of Georganne Chapin. At the 13th Symposium in Boulder in 2014, Marilyn Milos recognized me as one of about 35 pioneers of the Intactivist movement, and each of us got to address the conference briefly.

I have an Arizona personalized license plate (NOCIRCM) displayed on the child abuse prevention plate series carrying the words, It shouldnt hurt to be a child. My truck carries six provocative bumper stickers, including one that reads, Forced Circumcision is Sexual Assault. When I look in my rear-view mirror, I am heartened by the fingers pointed to those messages. Drivers and passengers behind me then launch into conversations and often take cellphone pictures. It hopefully plants seeds in their minds that forced circumcision is wrong.

Lawn Griffiths

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Aug 12, 2020

There are such strong opinions on newborn circumcision. If the topic ever came up, which it did more often than one would think, there was usually negativity about intact boys. I didn't have reason to worry about such things until I realized that I would someday have to make a decision on whether or not to circumcise.



Growing up, my grandmother had told me the story of my dad's circumcision. She was 16 years old when she had him, and he was born tongue-tied. She scheduled an appointment to have the web of his tongue snipped. My grandmother was asked to sit in the lobby while they did the snip. When she got home, she noticed that there was blood in his diaper. She immediately took him back to the doctor and asked why he would be bleeding. The doctor explained that he had gone ahead and performed the circumcision to get it out of the way. The bleeding wouldn't stop and my dad nearly died. My grandmother almost lost her baby due to a negligent doctor performing a procedure that wasn't approved by her. Being young, she didn't put up a fight, but she told me she never took my dad to that doctor again. Obviously, this story had a huge impact on my view of circumcision.

I found out I was having a boy in January of 2005. He was due to come in July, so we had some time to prepare for our bundle of joy. Right away, I had expressed to my husband that I wasn't quite sure what I was going to do. Thankfully, he didn't argue. He just told me it was up to me. I decided I didn't know enough about the procedure and why it was done. I got pamphlets and searched for answers on the internet. To make the research legit, I needed to explore all sides. I looked up websites that are for and websites that are against. Some examples I found of reasons why a person should do newborn circumcision are: it's cleaner, to be like dad, to prevent penile cancer, to protect future partners from cervical cancer, to prevent UTIs, and so on. I made sure to deeply research each claim I found. It has been determined that an intact person is not the cause of cervical cancer. It has also been proven that the foreskin is there to protect against UTIs as long as it is not prematurely retracted. As for any other claim, I concluded they are all absurd! To think we will cut a body part off to be cleaner or look like a parent is unthinkable. In the end, I chose to leave my baby intact.

When I was about seven months along, some family came to help me prepare his nursery. During the decorating, they were telling me stories about when they were expecting, labor and delivery, bringing home newborns, etc. One family member told me that she had decided to get her baby cut because she wanted to protect his future wife from cervical cancer. I've heard her tell the story how her dad held the crying baby for hours disgusted that she could do such a thing. It was at this time that she asked what I was going to do. When she found out that I wasn't planning on getting the procedure done on my baby, she made it her duty to try to change my mind, bombarding me with questions about why I thought it was a good idea. I explained to her that I had done my research and found that there is no medical reason to have this done. I think this may have offended her a little bit because she thought she did a good thing by doing this to her son. She immediately went downstairs, and asked my husband what he thought of the whole thing. Surely he would want the baby circumcised! When he told her he wished it had never been done to him, she couldn't believe it. I felt bad for her because she truly thought she was doing the right thing, but I really feel sorry for the moms that are still doing this today. So many people just agree to it without ever getting all the details. I've advised every expecting mom in my life to at least do the research.

Even though I had been met with a huge amount of opposition to my choice, I stuck with my decision. I kept my baby with me in the hospital and reiterated many times that the procedure was NOT to be done. I had a fear that I would get the third degree, but shockingly enough, not one health official tried to persuade me. In fact, the pediatrician told me it was for the better. It was for the better.

Marci Eggers

Interested in lending your voice? [Send us an email](#), giving us a brief summary of what you would like to write about, and we will get back to you.

Jul 16, 2020

When my first child was on the way, we met with the doctor for the usual checkups to make sure the pregnancy was going smoothly. In all those months, we never thought about circumcising the baby if it turned out to be a boy. At all. It never came up in our meetings with the doctor. She never asked if we were going to do it. Because it's something I'd never consider, and I didn't know it was a nearly-default procedure in this country, I didn't give it much thought.

The day came to go to the hospital. It was about one in the morning. We were very nervous. I scrambled to get my phone ready to record the moment. The mother was in a lot of pain, and emotions were running high. My son was born around 4 a.m. After the doctor handed him over to the nurse to clean him, she turned to leave. On the way out of the room, she said, You're going to circumcise, right? She didn't ask me, she told me.

Without even thinking, I said yes. I really didn't even hear her. She was so nonchalant, and I was so tired and full of emotion. But about two or three seconds later, I suddenly realized what she had asked and I said, No! Circumcise? No! She turned around and said, What? I held up my fingers like I was cutting the air with scissors. No cutting! I wanted to make sure she knew. No, we're not cutting, no!

She said, Oh, OK. Her manner was that it was no big deal and everybody does it, but she didn't try to talk me into it. I repeated myself another two times just to be clear. No, we're not going to do it.



And they did not cut my son. But how many families who barely speak English might have had a different experience from ours? They go through the entire pregnancy and the checkups and the topic of circumcision never comes up once. Then right after the birth, when everyone is exhausted and overcome with emotion, they ask you if the baby will be circumcised, in a way that presumes the answer is yes. It would be very easy not to understand what is being asked in that moment especially if you come from a culture where routine medical circumcision is unheard of.

You trust the doctor. You trust that her advice is sound. The moment the baby is born is no time to discuss circumcision for the first time. Perhaps the timing is no coincidence.

Until my son was born, and until I heard about Intact America, I didn't realize how common circumcision is in this country. I grew up in South America, and circumcisions there are usually for religious reasons. When Georganne Chapin told me how widespread it is here, I couldn't believe it.

Now I talk about it with basically everybody I know who is expecting a baby. I tell them to be careful because you don't have to do it. And make sure you tell the doctor that you're NOT going to do it multiple times, if you have to.

Not everyone understands the urgency. So I like to use the analogy of fingernails: Why do we cut our fingernails? Because they grow and accumulate dirt. So why, I ask, don't you pull them out? That way you don't have to cut them anymore? It's the same thing with a foreskin. If it gets dirty, wash it. Why would you remove a part of your body that is fine and is there for a reason?

I recently joined Intact America as a program manager after a number of years on Wall Street and then as a New York State Senate staffer. I took the Intact America job because I believe in what Intact America stands for, and what Intact America does. These are challenging times for any nonprofit to get the message out and raise support, but we need more people to be aware of what is happening to baby boys and the men they will grow up to be.

American culture blindly accepts circumcision as just another facet of a boy's birth. We're used to it, and most people don't even think about it. I'm working to change that so that when the time comes, without any doubt, parents can protect their child's right to remain intact.

Sergio Serratto
Tarrytown, New York

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Jun 10, 2020



A number of years ago, I remember delivering a baby boy, and the first thing the father asked me was, When can he be circumcised? The father seemed panicked. I'd never seen anything like it before. He truly seemed in an uproar that something was terribly wrong with his baby.

I told him that he would need to talk with the pediatrician.

In retrospect, I think I might have been more effective as a physician if I had replied, You have a beautiful baby who only wants to love you and his mom. He is perfect.

January 15, 2020 was a defining moment for me. I started a new Locums tenens (temporary) obstetrics job that day. While seated at the nurses station on Labor and Delivery, my body jarred at the sound of a most horrible screaming a screech followed by the coughing sound of spittle and saliva choking a baby followed by more screaming. It was deafening. I looked at the nurse seated across from me and asked her, What are they doing in there? A treatment room was right around the corner.

The nurse replied, They are circumcising him.

I looked down at the ground and said, This is just horrible. It is so unnecessary.

More screaming and choking followed by crescendos of screeching and coughing came from around the corner. I felt sick.

The Nurse replied, You are right.

Shortly after that day, I began to hear a baby scream uncontrollably at night in my dreams. A horrible screaming and howling. Sometimes I hear myself say No. and at that point my legs jerk together and my arms also move and I wake up. Sometimes I wonder if the screaming that I hear is from the baby who was assaulted on January 15, or is that me who I hear crying? Sometimes I have the sensation that I see bright lights, and my arms and legs suddenly cannot move. There is muffled talk, I am screaming and I have this sensation of terrific pain and more crying, but I cant get away.

When I left this last assignment in Nevada, I remember visiting a new couple during postpartum rounds. They had their first baby the day prior. It was a truly enjoyable time as I didnt have a clinic and could just sit and visit with the parents. They had a beautiful baby girl. I remember the father holding his daughter and seeing her move her hand up towards his face. The baby girl was making happy cooing sounds. The mother was looking from her bed at her daughter. Everything seemed right and beautiful. It really is an incredible sight to see, and on days like this I feel very lucky to be an obstetrician. At the same time, I thought to myself, Why do people focus so much on circumcision when all their baby boys or girls want is to love their parents? Their babys hands just want to touch their mother or father and give the parents love and be loved.

It all makes me very sad.

James F. Verrees, M.D., FACOG
Las Vegas, Nevada

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