

white-hot rhetoric that paints someone like George Tiller as a murderer rather than a healer. Anti-abortion extremists have even promoted the assassinations of abortion providers as “justifiable homicides.” So these “lone nuts,” heeding the call to violence, are as good as licensed to kill.

Tiller also faced a concerted attack through the courts, including two grand juries convened to investigate him as a result of a citizen petition drive organized by Operation Rescue and other anti-abortion groups (neither jury found any basis for indictment). And in 2004, then-Kansas Attorney General Phill Kline, a right-wing anti-abortion Republican, subpoenaed Tiller’s patient records, supposedly to determine if he hadn’t reported statutory rapes of pregnant girls under 16. Kline got some of the records and filed 30 criminal charges, but a state court judge quickly dismissed them.

Kline was voted out of office in 2006, but the new attorney general, Democrat Paul Morrison, surprisingly charged Tiller with 19 misdemeanors. Morrison downplayed the charge that Tiller failed to get a legally proper second opinion on some abortions as just “technical,” but if Tiller were to have been convicted, he could have served 19 years in prison. After nearly two years of legal proceedings, the jurors in the case delivered a resounding “not guilty” verdict in just 25 minutes.

“It was Kansas jurors, men and women, who were brave enough to deliver Kansas justice,” says Dan Monnat, Tiller’s attorney in Wichita. “Everything else was nonsense Kansas politics.”

The legal battles were exhaustive and expensive for Tiller, although he “held up like a soldier,” says Monnat. Nonetheless, his friends worried about him. “The last time I talked to him,” says Susan Hill, “I said, ‘Why are you still doing this, George? You certainly don’t need to. Why don’t you just retire, enjoy life?’”

“He said, ‘I can’t, I can’t leave these women. There’s no one else for them.’”

“When I found out about the murder,” says Miriam Kleiman, “I just kept hugging and kissing my boys and telling them I loved them.” Her 8-year-old asked, “Mommy, why do you keep crying?”

“And I said, ‘There was a man who helped us about Junior’”—the family’s name for the son whose life was unsustainable. “Someone killed that man, and I’m sad.” Later, her son saw a headline and a photo of Tiller in the newspaper and asked, “Mommy, was that your friend?”

“At whatever level,” says Kleiman, emotion welling up again, “my son *got* it.”

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* You can read the rest of this story in the Summer 2009 issue of *Ms.* Pick up a copy on newsstands, or have it sent to your door by joining the Ms. Community.

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A Man Who Trusted Women

Dr. George Tiller leaves a legacy of courage, tenacity and an abiding dedication to women's rights

By Michele Kort



In her 28th week of a very wanted pregnancy in 2000, Miriam Kleiman, a government employee in Washington, D.C., and her husband, Jason, learned that their male fetus had a severe brain malformation. He would probably die shortly after birth.

The couple immediately went for second, third and fourth opinions. The news stayed the same.

"This is not a fair life for a baby," they decided. "Even with every medical intervention, the baby's going to die. It's not if, but when. If there's no hope of improvement, why *do* that to a baby?" When she and Jason made their choice clear to the perinatologist they consulted, the doctor left the room and came back with a scrap of paper. There were just four words on it: Dr. Tiller, Wichita, Kansas.

From the moment they called the office of Dr. George Tiller, they were greeted with compassion. "I've never met any medical professionals who were that attentive, that caring, that warm. They *got* it," she says.

Tiller was actually on a rare vacation the week Kleiman and her family spent in Wichita, but his presence was unmistakable. "The clinic *was* Dr. Tiller and these wonderful people he brought on board," Kleiman says.

A year to the day after she terminated her pregnancy, Kleiman gave birth to a healthy baby boy, and subsequently had a second. She finally met Tiller when she came to Wichita in 2006 to speak at a conference on choice.

"To be able to publicly thank him"—she chokes up at the memory—"was just so meaningful to me. Dr. Tiller"—who was murdered in the lobby of his church on May 31st, allegedly by an anti-abortion extremist—"was such a good man."

At age 67, financially comfortable, Tiller didn't have to continue working in his long-embattled profession, says Susan Hill, who operates a number of abortion clinics and often referred late-abortion patients to Wichita.

Over the past decades, abortion providers live with increasing risk: One in five clinics annually are the targets of repeated violence. Since the early 1990s, nine doctors and clinic workers have been murdered in attacks by anti-abortion extremists, and 30 others wounded, including law enforcement officers responding to the incidents.

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