



Gungor's Story

From "The Story of My Body," an event co-Sponsored by *Glamour* magazine and the International Women's Health Coalition (IWHC)

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I always wore long underwear, even when I was small. I would go to sleep at night wearing pajama trousers under my nightshirt. This is how it is in Turkey. My parents told me, "Be careful when you sit down, Gungor! Never to turn my back to the boys, Gungor! Do not bend over when you are working, Gungor!" Because my bottom would stick out.

I didn't know anything about my body when I got married.

I was fourteen years old on my wedding day. I had just had my first period six months before and suddenly I was getting married to a 26-year-old man. I was a child, but when I entered my husband's house, he would expect a fully-grown woman. I was terrified.

Right before my wedding, I pulled a neighbor's cousin aside. I asked her, "What is sex? I'm getting married. I don't know anything about these things. When it first happens, what should I do?" She told me, "You will learn, you will learn." All I had before I got married was that five-minute talk.

And then it was my wedding day. I was bewildered and excited. All the presents! All the colors! All the clothes! My whole family around me. At moments the day was so exciting I forgot my nervousness about what was to come that night. But then the sun went down and my new husband and I walked back to our new home. Eleven elders from the community followed at our heels. This is tradition. They wait for the bloody sheet to make sure the girl is a virgin. Trust me, I was.

I knew something was expected of me. I just didn't know what. And with 11 people waiting right outside the door... Truthfully, I don't think my husband was much more knowledgeable than I was and that's not a bad thing. Many men get their information from magazines and from school. But many others go to prostitutes for their first sexual experience. It's a tradition. The older boys take the younger ones. So maybe it was a good thing my husband didn't know much. I wish we could have learned it together... in private... without an audience of 11. It was so embarrassing to be naked. He was embarrassed, too. I never saw his manhood. It was over quickly enough that I can't even tell you what I thought of his body.

The elders saw the blood on the sheet and left. And then we started our marriage.

Years later, I learned to enjoy myself, to feel more comfortable in bed. And I knew that I never wanted my own children to have those same fears about their bodies. I have taught my children to discover their bodies and to ask what the woman wants, not just what the man wants. A woman should know that she can say no, even to her husband. And a man should know that he has to respect that. Everybody should marry knowing what "marriage" is. It should be taught in school. They give religious lessons. They should give pre-marital lessons.

I am comfortable talking about these things.

But my friends? They want the television turned off when the subject of sex comes up. They don't want to discuss these issues. This makes me so angry. Sexuality itself is created by nature. It can't exist without women. Life starts with her! Why should we keep the subject closed? Why should sex be shameful? Is this not how life begins?

Gungor has participated extensively in human rights training programs at the Turkish organization Women for Women's Human Rights-New Ways. IWHC has supported WWHR-New Ways since 1998.