

# TOOTH AND NAIL

The Making of a Female Fight Doctor



LINDA D. DAHL

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*Linda Dahl*

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**Tooth and Nail: The Making of a Female Fight Doctor** Linda Dahl

“Well-written, compelling, and revealing.”—Ronald Epstein, M.D., author of *Attending*

**A fearless and exhilarating memoir of a surgeon who became one of the first female ringside boxing doctors in New York City, for fans of Judy Melinek, Pauline Chen and Atul Gawande**

Fresh out of medical school, Linda Dahl began her surgical residency in the Bronx as a total fish out of water. Growing up in a Middle Eastern family in the American Midwest, she was a born outsider, and in her new community in New York, she felt even more isolated. Even at work she struggled to fit in: among her fellow specialists, she was one of the only women.

One night, at her husband’s urging, Dahl watched a boxing match between Shane Mosley and Oscar De La Hoya. Seeing Mosley survive against the odds gave Dahl hope that she, too, could find her footing. As her fandom grew, boxing became a way to connect with her patients and community. Later, when she was in practice on the Upper East Side, Dahl received a phone call from the New York State Athletic Commission. They were looking for a fight doctor. Dahl accepted.

*Tooth and Nail* chronicles the years Dahl spent as an ear, nose and throat surgeon by day and a ringside physician by night. Intrepid, adrenaline-fueled and loaded with behind-the-scenes takes on famous boxers, including Mike Tyson, Vladimir Klitschko and Miguel Cotto, Dahl’s story offers a modern examination of sexism, dislocation, the theater of boxing and a road map for how to excel in two very different male-dominated worlds.

## Tooth and Nail: The Making of a Female Fight Doctor Details

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## From Reader Review **Tooth and Nail: The Making of a Female Fight Doctor** for online ebook

### **Katie B says**

3.5 stars

Going into this I was a bit uneasy because while I like reading memoirs, I'm not a big fan of boxing. Thankfully, while her work as a fight doctor for boxing matches is part of the story, you really do not have to know anything about the sport to enjoy the book.

Dr. Dahl grew up in North Dakota, the daughter of parents from Syria and Chechnya. Even after completing her residency and living in New York, she still felt like an outsider. Her ex-husband loved watching boxing matches during their marriage and she grew to appreciate the sport. She decides to apply as a fight doctor with the New York State Athletic Commission. An ear, nose, and throat surgeon by day at a private practice, at night she is the only female doctor ringside. She works to find her voice in two very male-dominated worlds.

I'm glad I took a chance on this one because this was an enjoyable read. Dr. Dahl shared lots of interesting medical stories from her career as a doctor, both in and out of the ring. The case involving the drunk old man who refused to leave his chair for a year, was crazy and if it hasn't been a plot line on *Grey's Anatomy*, it should be. There's a good touch of humor used throughout the book and I think it is pretty easy to relate to feeling like an outsider most of the time. I enjoyed reading how Dr. Dahl was able to find that inner voice to help develop some confidence. I think if you love reading memoirs or a fan of women going out and succeeding in male-dominated fields, this is your book!

I won a free copy of this book in a giveaway but was under no obligation to post a review. All views expressed are my honest opinion.

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### **Dean says**

It's an easy read, fast paced, interesting throughout. Gives a view of the boxing world one never sees unless one is personally involved. Even for people not interested in boxing, it's still entertaining - a good read.

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### **Bruce Reynolds says**

Young female physician in New York, beat down by professional politics in her residency, finds a niche for her skills, and an acute awareness of the egos and skills of professional boxers. She becomes a ringside doctor in the web of the New York Boxing Commission. As strange as that story may be, she still feels herself in a second-rate status among her peers until she adds a new persona which really shuts down all opposition to her nighttime career at ringside. The added persona for the mild-mannered dermatologist is the surprise buried in this autobiography. Moves quickly, and hides few details of her actual life (her child is excluded) but does expose the danger that boxing brings to its participants.

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### **Kayla Tornello says**

I enjoyed reading about how becoming a fight doctor helped the author find her true calling in life. The book was a mix of the boxing world and Dr. Dahl's personal meanderings through life as a medical student and doctor. I was really disappointed that there were no pictures, but I was reading an uncorrected proof, so maybe there will be pictures in the final version.

I received this book as a Goodreads giveaway. Yay!

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### **Janet says**

I received a DIGITAL Advance Reader Copy of this book from #NetGalley in exchange for an honest review. From the publisher ---

A fearless and exhilarating memoir chronicling the coming-of-age of a surgeon in New York City and her experiences as one of the only female ringside boxing doctors for the New York State Athletic Commission, for fans of Judy Melinek, Pauline Chen and Atul Gawande

Fresh out of medical school, Linda D. Dahl was nervous to begin her surgical residency in the Bronx. Compounding the long hours and an overwhelming workload, Dahl felt like a perpetual fish out of water. Growing up in a Middle Eastern family in the American Midwest, she was a born outsider, and in her new community in New York, she felt even more isolated. Even at work, she struggled to fit in: among her fellow specialists, she was one of the only women.

One night, at her husband's urging, Dahl watched a boxing match between Shane Mosley and Oscar De La Hoya. Watching Mosley survive against the odds gave Dahl hope that she, too, could find her footing. As her fandom grew, boxing became a way to connect with her patients and community. Later, when she was in practice on the Upper East Side, Dahl received a phone call from the New York State Athletic Commission. They were looking for a fight doctor. Dahl accepted.

Tooth and Nail chronicles the three and a half years Dahl spent as an ear, nose and throat surgeon by day and a ringside physician by night. Intrepid, adrenaline-fueled and loaded with behind-the-scenes takes on famous boxers, including Mike Tyson, Wladimir Klitschko, and Miguell Cotto, Dahl's story offers a modern examination of sexism, dislocation, the theater of boxing and a roadmap for how to excel in two very different male-dominated worlds.

This is a brutal book about a brutal sport --- I didn't like it all that much. I can get her point and understand her point of view but not the most enjoyable book for me. You might like it though...give it a chance.

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### **Guna says**

An autobiography of a transplanted Middle Eastern woman who becomes a doctor in the Upper East Side of New York, and her stint as the only female ringside fight doctor in the state. She doesn't gloss over her weaknesses, and so we see how she pushed through sexist and other obstacles to become a successful physician.

One of the best autobiographies I've read in a long time.

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## **Kerstin Wolf says**

Most memoirs have a difficult time keeping my attention, but this one didn't. I was hooked from the get go! There are a few bits that I found a touch confusing, but it was great overall. It was the perfect book that I was craving.

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## **Grace Sutherlin says**

Initially, I want to be forthright and say that I won an early release copy of this memoir via a Goodreads giveaway and I would like to thank HarperCollins/Hanover Square Press for sponsoring that giveaway. As a memoir/narrative nonfiction writer, I am always on the hunt for a memoir written by a relatively unknown person who is not a major celebrity as I have always found those writers to be some of the more authentic authors in the memoir genre. This book, *Tooth And Nail: The Making of a Female Fight Doctor* particularly resonated with me.

Initially, we have a young woman who has parents from a Middle Eastern culture who decide to reside in the Midwest in a part of the country that is anything but urban. Linda D. Dahl grows up being mocked because she is considered different and an outsider. Low and behold, this young woman grows up and decides to make medicine her career, specifically becoming an ear, nose, and throat specialist. We see her coping with a hospital residency located in the Bronx. She copes with senior residents who generally appear to make like difficult for medical students and residents. The author is introduced to boxing via her first husband who appears to have more of a relationship with it than with his wife or a career of his own. The author finally adjusts to residing and working in the Bronx and it toughens her as a person who is now street-smart and no longer afraid of standing her ground when necessary.

Ms. Dahl then moves to the Upper East Side of Manhattan which is a high income, expensive area. She joins a private ENT practice with several other male specialists. One patient she sees asks her about possibly working as a female fight doctor on the side to earn extra money. Suddenly, she finds herself being hired without even so much as an interview as a ringside doctor at various boxing matches. She never even gets a handbook or any formal instructions on what her job entails and basically, learns what to do via on the job experience. She encounters men who dismiss her because she is female, men who harass her repeatedly, men who belittle her or cannot believe she is an actual ringside doctor, and men who repeatedly hit on her and try to force themselves on her.

When Ms. Dahl meets another patient via the private office where she practices as an ear, nose, and throat specialist, she suddenly discovers a way to deal with the incorrigible behavior displayed by men when she serves as a ringside fight doctor. And it is great to witness her not take any kind of dismissal because she is female and also dish out some reprisals of her own to the men who have repeatedly belittled her, treated her disrespectfully, and harassed her on a near constant basis.

Later the author realizes she really likes treating the boxers more than her Upper East Side New York clients at the private office. Occasionally, a boxer she has worked with at a fight will locate her at the private practice and request that she treat them as the boxer received less than adequate care from a fight doctor who is not as meticulous as Dr. Dahl. She even attends a boxing convention and meets some famous boxers

which is truly enlightening. Just when she thinks she has finally found her niche, she learns that the three private practice doctors who hired her are closing the practice in ten weeks and are joining the faculty of a local hospital. None bothered to inform her of what was transpiring ahead of time or advocate on her behalf. At this point, she must make a decision about what to do with her career: join another private practice, interview with a hospital for a position, or possibly open her own practice.

Dr. Dahl's ultimate choice for her future is defined by the fact that she has always taken the more challenging road when it comes to her life choices. And she sees that many successful boxers face the pain in the ring in order to move through that pain and get to a point where they can define their lives in the way they choose. And throughout this book we see that Dr. Dahl is very much a fighter and leader in her own way. Excellent read.

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### **Stephanie says**

Meh.

Very cool life. Sounds like she was successful. Hopefully she got a lot out of writing this book, but as far as i was concerned, i didn't need her to dwell on how powerless she felt her whole life. But okay.

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### **Belle says**

Linda Dahl may be a doctor and surgeon, something I will never become, but she definitely managed to be relatable. There was a lot about her struggles to be a part of the community, and about fitting in. I know that I have white privilege, and perhaps have not struggled in the same way she has, but everyone has a part of them that doesn't fit in, and this book addresses that in a very honest way. Throughout the memoir, Linda also managed to be funny and witty, eliciting loud laughter from me (even in settings where it was inappropriate, such as my work desk). While her writing wasn't very lyrical or literary, it was down to earth and refreshing.

Another thing that I absolutely loved about *Tooth and Nail* was the built in medical lessons. While sometimes they were written in a condescending, braggy tone ("look at all this information I can rattle off the top of my head"), Dahl is a specialist and her knowledge about her specialty leaked through the pages. For someone who is a huge medical nerd like me, it was a real enjoyment.

However, despite Dahl's constant talk about feeling left out/ not fitting in, some things she wrote made me feel that she wasn't aware of how much privilege she also has. One of the things that bugged me the most was her writing out speech impediments/ local accents. Stutters were written with a "s-s-stutter" and local accents were plentiful, "mon". It felt like she saw the people she wrote about in such a way as simply a demographic, rather than real people.

*Tooth and Nail* also includes some famous boxers including Tyson and Klitschko. One thing I noticed when reading her accounts of her meetings with famous people is the way she made them into some sort of antagonist. Perhaps that really was her feeling upon meeting them, but for the most part, I got the sense that it was just bashing without any real substance to back up her experiences.

The part that made me the most upset with the memoir is Dahl's journey with her own sexuality. Dahl went

on and on and on about it. I get it. Many careers (particularly male dominated ones) are rife with sexism and harassment. I totally agree with her feelings on the way that men would treat her. However her solution (and yes, spoiler alert here)? Absolutely not something that I would want my future daughter using. Everyone has their own experience and does things their own way, but to dress up as a dominatrix-like doctor, to lower your neckline, just to give yourself legitimacy, does not sit right with me. Once again, I totally understand that for Dahl, this was how she made herself feel powerful, but I don't think that women should feel that sexualizing themselves is the solution to legitimacy and success.

In other words, this book got a three star review from me, because despite being a wonderful memoir, there were a couple issues I just couldn't get over. I would recommend this book to boxing fans, or fans of medical memoirs, but aside from that this is definitely a one-time read for me.

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### **Kayo says**

While I'm not much of a sports fan, this book was told thru the perspective of a doctor. Very interesting. I won this book from Goodreads first reads giveaway. While I got the book for free, it had no bearing on the rating i gave it. Thank you for the opportunity to read it.

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### **Sue Jackson says**

Tooth and Nail is about a female working in the male world of professional fighters. What started with her watching a match on TV ended up with her sitting in the corner of the ring as a fight doctor. I was completely unaware of this world and learned a lot about what medical exams are needed before and after the fight. It was nice to feel her enthusiasm and explanations about what happens in the ring. She explained it clearly and it is because of that passion and the fact that I learned a lot that I enjoyed reading this book.

Although I realize that Linda Dahl was the lone female in the world of male fight doctors, I never felt that she was secure in her role. It seemed like she had a constant struggle wanting to fit in as a physician in a medical office and in the ring. She describes many of those insecurities include how she chose to dress or the need to keep her life private. I wish this book would have included more personal stories about the fighters (without name dropping) and her interactions with them. It would have better taken us on her journey as a female fight doctor.

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### **Suzi says**

I didn't expect to enjoy this book so much. I am totally uninterested in boxing. But this is so much more. It is a memoir of Dr. Dahl's struggles as an outsider....never able to fit in. Fascinating.

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### **Jen Juenke says**

Well... this book is a whirlwind of information. I liked the narrative, but I would have liked more insight into her childhood instead of just the glancing blows that the author gave it. Also, why did her marriage break up?

Did she ever date a boxer? I know that they asked her out but did she date them?  
I enjoyed the book but was left wanting MORE!  
A great book about being a lady boxing doctor, yet left much to be desired.

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## **Lance says**

Linda Dahl, an ear, nose and throat physician practicing on New York's Upper East Side, was not happy with how her life was going. She couldn't connect with her patients, she had gone through a divorce and felt intimidated around me. So, looking for some other outlet, she applied with the New York State boxing commission to be a fight doctor. Her stories of being one of the few females in a male-dominated sport are told in this memoir.

While her marriage didn't last, it did have one significant event that changed her life. She watched a match between Shane Mosely and Oscar de La Hoya at the urging of her then-husband, who was a huge boxing fan. Dahl then saw how boxing became a way to connect with others after being inspired by Mosely's courage and survival instincts in the match. Having felt out of place throughout her medical career, she decided to take a chance by applying to become a fight doctor.

The mood of book changes frequently, as Dahl expresses not only her highs for her times in the ring and her encounters with famous boxers, but also her lows and frequent times of self-doubt. Her stories about her encounters with Mike Tyson and Vladimir Klitschko were the best, and her job performance in the ring was always considered top notch by fighters, trainers and commissioners alike. Moments in the ring and in the presence were the best parts of the book.

However, that isn't the case as Dahl's self-doubts about her ability, her communication skills, especially around me, and even her sexuality cast a pall on the book that at times made it feel like too much of a self-pity party. While these parts of her personality were needed to tell her complete story, it felt like this was too much of her life.

One way she overcame this was by channeling her "inner Dom" after talking with a female patient at the New York practice. I won't deny, I was thinking that this might lead the book down a very different path, but it did not do so. Instead, what that lead to was Dahl wearing more revealing clothing to fights at which she worked. That was interesting and did have the desired results for her – she became more assertive, especially around men.

Overall, this is a very interesting memoir that boxing fans will enjoy. It is more than just a book on the sport, though, as readers who are inspired by women who overcome odds to be successful in male-dominant professions will also want to read this book.

Rating was 3 1/2 stars, rounded to four for Goodreads

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