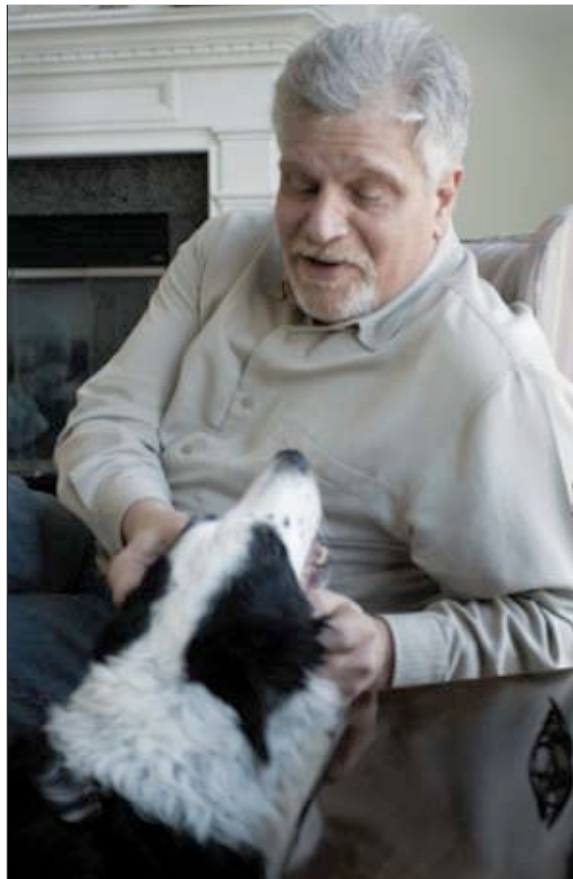


# “Nothing We Can’t Do”

Dr. Gary Horowitz brings a musical background to SIU OB/GYN

Written by Karen Carlson

Photography by James Hawker



“He loves his dogs,” says Karen Horowitz about her husband, Gary Horowitz, M.D., as two setters – grandmother and granddaughter, bound around the house, eagerly poking their master’s hand to throw a saliva-laden rubber ball.

He obliges them, and a gray cat dozes on the chair next to him as classical music streams from the stereo.

“If I have a tough day at work, I put the top down on the car, listen to music like this and take the long way home,” says Dr. Horowitz, associate professor of SIU Department of Obstetrics/Gynecology.

Parked in the driveway, the license plate on his red Toyota Celica convertible reads “Embryo,” a nod to his 20+ years helping infertile couples. The Horowitzs themselves had trouble conceiving initially, which sparked his interest in the specialty. “I know what it’s like being on the other side of the table,” he says. The couple has two adult children, Alexander and Rachel.

Fifteen percent of all couples will have at least one year of unexplained, undesired infertility, and about 30 percent seek advanced treatments, says Dr. Horowitz, who is chief of the SIU Division of

Reproductive Endocrinology. Reproductive endocrinology entails everything from babies born with ambiguous genitalia to little girls who start menstruating at the age of five to women in reproductive age seeking fertility to senior citizens with hormonal problems. Dr. Horowitz is the first reproductive endocrinologist at SIU in a decade. He estimates that 30 percent of his practice is patients with chronic pelvic pain.

The advances in the field since Dr. and Mrs. Horowitz longed for a baby are astounding. “The only limitations we have now are ethical,” he says. “There’s nothing we can’t do. I’ve taken eggs from one half of a lesbian couple, made embryos, and put them in another so they both can take part in it.

“If I wanted to clone somebody I could do it,” he continues with a wry smile. “But I’ve never known anybody who deserved it.”

Dr. Horowitz has extensive experience with in vitro fertilization (IVF). Of those couples who do IVF, he says, between 40-50 percent will be successful.

While the limitations may be few, he also doesn’t see much more that can be done in fertility.

Dr. Horowitz says that caring for patients has made the academic challenge of being a physician more meaningful.



“God’s a better doctor than I am. I don’t know how much better we’re ever going to get.”

A tool that is making patient care better is laparoscopy — especially micro-laparoscopy. “I’ll do anything with a laparoscope,” Dr. Horowitz says. “There are some advanced things you can do with a laparoscope because you’re not cutting patients open.”

A micro-laparoscope is just 1.5 millimeters in size — smaller than a needle that draws blood. A smaller incision means procedures can be done in the office, they can be used for young patients, and the recovery rate is days, not weeks.

“If you do laparoscopy when the patient is awake, you can ask them what hurts,” he says. “One patient had four laparoscopies, without finding out what was wrong. I used a micro-laparoscope, and it turned out to be hip joint. An orthopaedist took care of her pain.”

The combination of academic challenge, patient care and the ability to educate others makes working at a medical school a great fit for Dr.

Horowitz, an award-winning educator who most recently spent five years at Wright State University’s Boonshoft School of Medicine before joining SIU School of Medicine. “Medical students and residents can be like sponges — they are very intelligent people who absorb knowledge. It’s broadening for them and redeeming for us to see the light go on in somebody’s eyes. It’s important to perpetuate the next generation.”

He continues, “A lot of teaching is problem-based learning — but we gray hairs bring the big picture and pull everything together and make it interesting with real experiences.”

Dr. Horowitz has had experiences unlike most physicians, including receiving seven years of music training at the Julliard School of Music in New York, beginning when he was just 6 years old.

Music has been a family passion for Dr. Horowitz. His uncle, a jazz flutist who has played with Louis Armstrong and The Modern Jazz Quintet, helped him get into the prestigious

school. The future physician started playing the recorder, the saxophone and the clarinet before settling on the flute as his instrument of choice — in part because of its portability. “I lived in the Bronx, and on days I missed the bus I’d have to walk from the Bronx over the bridge through the center of Harlem into northern Manhattan to where Julliard used to be in Lincoln Center at 34th and 35th Street.”

He admits the flute is a surprising choice for a man of his robust build. “I’m a big guy, and I don’t seem like the type who would play such a petite and dainty thing.” But the beauty of the woodwind captivated him.

“The flute is the centerpiece of the orchestra,” he says. “The reeds themselves are the centerpieces. The violins are doing everything above, and the brass and the percussion are everything underneath. All of the major themes are always iterated by the flute. “It’s almost ethereal, too,” he continues, noting that the flute needs just a whisper breath to play. “I used to like to go out into the woods and just play for myself.”

While attending Julliard, he had the opportunity to play at Carnegie Hall when he was just 13 years old. Dr. Horowitz enjoyed being in the orchestra pit. “It’s the best seat in the house. When you’re in the pit and there’s something going on above you — like the opera — to hear the music crash over you and around you. . . . You can feel it in your seat. There’s nothing like standing in the pit — there’s no speaker system in the world that can match it.” Dr. Horowitz’s passion is for classical music, especially Mozart.

As he approached his teenage years, the future physician decided that a career in music wasn’t for him. “My uncle was always traveling. Music is a good life if you like being on the road, but it’s not family oriented. Plus, playing the flute is not a very macho thing, and it was a macho time — classical music was very passé, everybody was wearing their hair long, playing guitar.”

Instead, he pursued his love of academics. He had thought about becoming a physician as a child but got away from it when he was drafted. “The only thing I ever won was the draft,” jokes the retired Air Force Lieutenant Colonel. In the Air Force he met the love of his life — his wife, Karen — and with her, he found a love of medicine, too. “I was a nurse,

and he was hanging around the medical center waiting for me,” Mrs. Horowitz recalls. When she needed surgery, his interest in medicine peaked even more.

One day, the future physician turned to his wife and said, “I’m going to medical school.” She said, “You were a history major. Get a life.” But in a few years he graduated from the University of North Carolina School of Medicine.

Despite a later start in medicine (he was 30 years old when he went to medical school) Dr. Horowitz says it’s what God intended for him. “To me, it’s a very unique job,” he says. He gets up from his chair and stands inches away. “Americans are uncomfortable when you violate personal space. Being a physician is a job where not only do people allow you to violate their personal space, people allow you to let you do things to their bodies they wouldn’t let their dearest loved ones do. They’ll answer questions they haven’t even thought about themselves yet. That’s the honor of it for me.”

Medical school was arduous, he says, “like Sisyphus pushing the rock up the hill.” Mrs. Horowitz recalls when it all came together. “He was in med school, and he was at Camp Lejeune, N.C. He called me from his car, and he was so excited. I could hear it in his voice. I’d never heard it to that degree. The electricity ... it was just like he had realized he was alive.”

After working in New York, North Carolina, California and Ohio, Dr. and Mrs. Horowitz plan to retire here in Springfield. The couple hugs on the deck of their home on the edge of Springfield. They’ve just moved in and say that many boxes have yet to be unpacked, including the one with Dr. Horowitz’s flute. “I like the Midwest,” says the physician. “We’re people with simple desires. I asked her to grow old with me, and this is where we’ll do it.” ●●●