

Obituary

Morris Wortman, MD, FACOG

December 18, 1950 – May 28, 2023

This issue features the final journal article of Dr. Morris Wortman, a frequent and contributor to Surgical Technology International. Dr. Wortman died tragically in a small plane crash in Lyndonville, New York on Sunday, May 28, 2023 after the wings fell off the plane. The evening before the crash, he and his wife Rebecca (Figure 1) spent their date night making the final revisions to the paper, a detailed review of the life of Dr. Harry Reich.

Dr. Wortman, known to everyone as “Moe”, was born on December 18, 1950 in Brooklyn, New York. He was the second son of two Holocaust survivors who met in a displaced persons camp in Munich. Both of his parents had lost a first spouse to the death camps. (Figure 2) Dr. Wortman founded the Rochester Area Holocaust Memorial Committee in 2007 and was a faculty member of “The Two-Thousand Years Road to the Holocaust” an interfaith adult education course taught at Temple B’rith Kodesh from 2007 to 2011. His mother, suffering from trauma following World War II, attempted to abort her pregnancy with him. This contributed to Dr. Wortman’s determination to provide safe abortion services. He was honored at a 1999 Annual NARAL Luncheon in Washington, D.C. for being an abortion provider in Rochester for many years. He was one of 3 abortion providers featured in a full-length documentary entitled On Hostile Ground featured on STARZ cable network in 2001. He could see the other side of this controversial topic and eventually befriended the abortion protestors outside his office.

Dr. Wortman earned a Bachelor of Science in Chemistry summa cum laude from Brooklyn College and went on to attend medical school at the University of Rochester. He settled in Rochester and completed his residency training in Obstetrics and Gynecology in 1980. He took the trouble of having his brother’s remains moved from New York City to the Rochester area to be close to him. After residency, Dr. Wortman became a Clinical Associate Professor of Obstetrics and Gynecology at the University of Rochester. He found the innovators and pioneer physicians early in his career and bravely pursued his own innovation. His expertise was minimally invasive hysteroscopic surgeries using a resectoscope and office-based surgery. He was recently on the Board of Directors for the Hysteroscopy Special Interest Group of the American Association of Gynecology Laparoscopists (AAGL). He sat on the Editorial Board for the Journal of Minimally Invasive Gynecology (JMIG) from 2007 till the time of his death. He had 65



Figure 1: Dr. Morris and Mrs. Rebecca Wortman at their son Israel’s Bar Mitzvah in September of 2021.

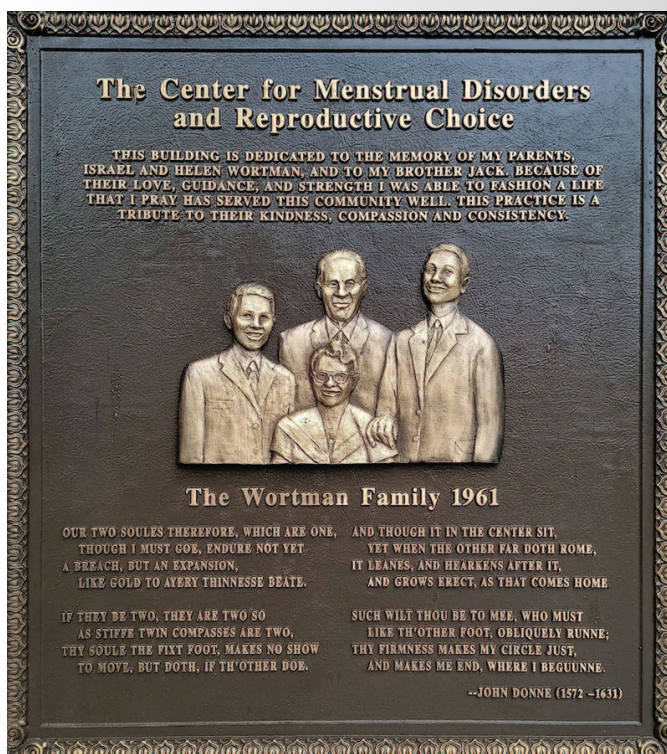


Figure 2: Plaque in Dr. Wortman’s Office honoring his family .

papers and articles accepted for publication in medical journals throughout his career and he lectured and presented extensively. His scientific papers read with warmth and humanity, and remarkable detail and original diagrams and drawings. He left a legacy for the next generation. His Center for Menstrual Disorders and Reproductive Choice achieved his goal of being an international Standard of Excellence. (Figure 3)

In his spare time, he studied aviation (Figure 4) and went on to hold three World Aviation Speed Records and three United States Aviation Speed Records, each of which earned him recognition at the Smithsonian Institute's National Air and Space Museum in Washington D.C.

Finally, Morris Wortman married Rebecca Privitera on April 19, 1998. Rebecca became the skilled manager of his medical practice, and the two worked side by side daily to create a successful and truly innovative practice. She had this to say after his death. "As you know, Moe didn't do anything small. He was, as so many say, "larger than life". He had a knack for making people comfortable enough to be their most authentic selves with him. Intelligence, kindness, humor, and intention impressed Moe. He could have cared less about status. He cherished his friends and always made room for new ones. I always admired him for that. He was an extrovert who had a lot of love and wisdom to give and gain to and from those around him. I shared him with the world and although there were times I wanted him home a little more often, I am grateful that we are all bonded by the indescribable experience of having Moe in our lives"

Tragically, Rebecca Privitera Wortman died on February 1, 2024 due to an aggressive cancer.

Dr. Julie Madejski is a gynecologist from Buffalo, New York who worked closely with both Morris and Rebecca Wortman from 2019 till each of their untimely deaths. The Wortmans shared their knowledge generously, helping her establish the Artemis Center for Menstrual Disorders in Buffalo.

Dr. Harry Reich writes:

I met Morris Wortman in the late 1980s as he was very interested in the new technology of endoscopic surgery, which was all I did. Thereafter, he would fly down to Kingston, PA, to watch me do a few laparoscopic hysterectomies and other advanced procedures, and like most people who came to watch my surgery, he stayed at our home. This was not unusual as Wilkes-Barre, PA, is a small community with few hotels. In fact, many doctors who wanted to learn laparoscopic hysterectomy stayed at our home over the next few years. I discovered that Morris had once been to Chattanooga to observe Dr. Liu and myself perform surgery. We became good friends. Once, he generously flew my mother to see a specialist in Rochester, NY.

I remember the time that we arm-wrestled. I considered myself to be one of the best, but I was quickly defeated by Morris. He then told me that he had won the gold medal at the Macabee games in Israel in the javelin event. He also competed in track and field events during the Penn Relays.

I believe that Moe Wortman was the best hysteroscopic surgeon that I knew and I referred him to Thomas Lazlo at Surgical Technology International for future work.

I lost touch with Morris soon thereafter, but he reappeared in my life in his last year, when he decided to write biographies of surgeons who had faced difficult times becoming recognized; I guess I fit that category!



Figure 3: Staff of The Center for Menstrual Disorders and Reproductive Choice staff in July of 2021



Figure 4: Dr. Moe Wortman and his plane. The sky is home to the dreamers of the earth ... Leonardo da Vinci