

The following story appeared in the Winter 1998 issue of the *Silha Bulletin*:

Prof. Gillmor's Last Class Is "Bittersweet"

As Professor Donald Gillmor conducted his last class after 45 years of teaching, he admittedly had mixed feelings about ending his academic career at the University of Minnesota's School of Journalism and Mass Communication.

On Dec. 4, Gillmor's two-hour First Amendment theory lecture to 25 graduates and undergraduate students in his "Contemporary Problems in Freedom of Speech and Press" course marked the final time this internationally respected media law scholar would stand in front of a class as a college professor.

While lecturing from with his yellowed note cards, which showed signs of constant updating over the years, Gillmor couldn't miss the crowd of staff and faculty gathering outside the classroom door. On behalf of thousands of grateful students and fellow scholars, they had gathered to honor the award-winning Silha Professor of Media Ethics and Law - even if he would be "embarrassed" by the party.

"I'm always embarrassed in situations like that," Gillmor, who will be 72 in April, admitted later. "And as I analyze myself, in answering the question why I don't like farewells, I think it's because I grew up as a fairly shy person, and I don't like to make friends and colleagues feel obligated to attend something like that. That's as difficult for me [to handle] as the last day of class was."

Yet there was also "a certain amount of relief" involved with that final lecture. The constantly changing area of media law can be "challenging," even for the co-author (with Jerome Barron and Todd Simon) of the field's classic textbook, *Mass Communication Law: Cases and Comment*, just published in its sixth edition.

"I do think I feel a certain amount of relief since I'm at the age where normal wear and tear begins to show," he said. "And it gets more challenging to keep up in a field that is as fluid as the media law and ethics area - it never, never stands still."

His writing and lectures might be completed, but that doesn't mean Gillmor's scholarly mind will rest. In retirement he intends to cultivate his interests in art, music and architecture under the tutelage of his two younger brothers, a musicologist and an architect, both active Canadian university professors. He also intends to travel with Sophie, his wife of 46 years, seeking out art museums, cathedrals and concerts. While home in the Twin Cities, he will spend "a lot more time" with his two young grandsons.

"I have never had time to do these things before because I have been very much wrapped up in my work," Gillmor explained. "I have been very

single minded about my teaching and my research, and so it's a bitter-sweet feeling to be sure. But there's something to be said for it. It's not as if I'm being denied a future. I have a future to explore."

A native of Fort Francis, Ontario, Gillmor began his journalism career in 1950, at the *Winnipeg Free Press*, after earning his bachelor's degree at the University of Manitoba. Prior to that, he joined the Royal Canadian Air Force at age 17, but wound up with the army infantry due to heavy Canadian losses in Europe. Gillmor's mother was a registered nurse and his father was "a mechanical genius of sorts," credited with several inventions.

Lured by an offer of double his reporter salary, Gillmor left his native Canada in 1953 for a teaching job at the University of North Dakota in 1953, where he eventually became a full professor and started the All-University Honors Program. Receiving both his master's and doctoral degrees at the University of Minnesota, he joined the faculty in 1965. During his distinguished tenure, he also helped established the Silha Center for the Study of Media Ethics and Law, thanks to his fellow Canadian and best friend, Jerry Kline, then SIMC director, and benefactors Otto and Helen Silha.

Gillmor credited his original interest in media law to former Minnesota professor J. Edward Gerald, to whom he dedicated his first book, *Free Press and Fair Trial*, based on his doctoral dissertation. Since then, Gillmor has authored or co-authored a library shelf worth of books, articles, essays, reviews and legal briefs, and has lectured nationally and internationally.

When asked what accomplishments he was most proud of, Gillmor mentioned his four teaching awards - one from the University of North Dakota; the first Horace T. Morse Distinguished Teaching Professor, awarded by the Minnesota Alumni Association; and two from the Minnesota Press Club - along with his first published book, and the respected textbook he co-authored with Jerome Barron.

"There's only one thing in the world more exciting than your first book, and that's your first child," he remarked. "That is something I cherish. After that, you tend to take the publication of books for granted...So I am very, very satisfied. I couldn't ask for anything more."

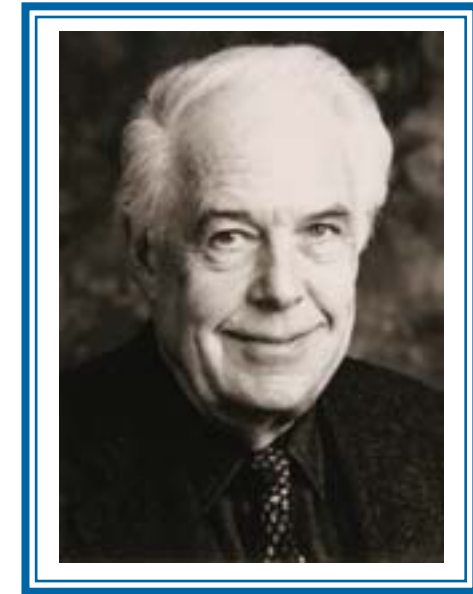
How does the veteran professor feel when former students thank him for the wisdom and knowledge he passed along?

"Oh, I feel grateful," he answered humbly. "I just feel very, very grateful."

And judging from that loyal group gathered for that "last class" party - many, many feel the same way.

JACK BRESLIN

SJMC Graduate Student and *Bulletin* Editor (1998)



A tribute to
Donald M. Gillmor
from the pages of the *Silha Bulletin*



SCHOOL OF JOURNALISM
& MASS COMMUNICATION
COLLEGE OF LIBERAL ARTS
UNIVERSITY OF MINNESOTA



SILHA CENTER
FOR THE STUDY OF MEDIA ETHICS & LAW
SCHOOL OF JOURNALISM
& MASS COMMUNICATION

The following story appeared in the Spring 1998 issue of the *Silha Bulletin*:

Gillmor “Roasted” at Conference Banquet

A warning to aspiring young journalists who later become distinguished mass communication law scholars: A feature newspaper story that you write at age 23 could come back to haunt you 47 years later.

That’s what retiring University of Minnesota Professor Donald M. Gillmor found out during a memory-filled, black-tie banquet “roast” in his honor during the National Media Ethics and Law Conference, on Saturday, April 19, in Minneapolis. About 150 family, friends, attorneys, colleagues, journalists, alumni, and former students gathered to honor the award-winning Silha Professor of Media and Ethics and Law, who is retiring in June after 45 years of teaching, primarily at the University’s School of Journalism and Mass Communication.

A native of Fort Frances, Ontario, Dr. Gillmor began his journalism career in 1950, at the *Winnipeg Free Press*, after earning his bachelor’s degree at the University of Manitoba. He later completed his masters and doctoral degrees at Minnesota, before joining the faculty in 1965, after teaching at the University of North Dakota. His book, *Mass Communication Law: Cases and Comment*, which he co-authored with Jerome Barron and Todd Simon, recently published in sixth edition, is considered the field’s classic textbook.

But instead of something from his bookshelf full of scholarly work, a surprised Prof. Gillmor saw his feature story from the October 18, 1951, edition of the *Winnipeg Free Press* appear on an overhead screen. The banquet’s roastmaster, William A. Babcock, director of the Silha Center for the Study of Media Ethics and Law, began the evening’s fun by inviting Gillmor’s students to edit their former professor’s copy. There were redundancies, clichés, even a bad lead paragraph, Dr. Babcock joked, wielding his red pen over the copy.

“But I was only 23 then!” Prof. Gillmor cried out, rising in mock protest to the lighthearted destruction of his early journalistic prose. The scholar later admitted that the best part of the story about a Ukrainian Canadian’s dream about Coronation Day was the “terrific” photograph that didn’t get printed.

Also displayed near the front of the room was a blow-up poster of a 1973 *Esquire* parody of the *National Enquirer*, which named Prof. Gillmor as one of the nation’s sexiest college professors.

More than 20 speakers accepted Prof. Babcock’s invitation to honor Dr. Gillmor with touching, sometimes emotional remembrances of his dedicated teaching, remarkable scholarship, and devoted friendship.

Prof. Gillmor’s final master’s degree student, Russian native Irina Dmitrieva, shared how Prof. Gillmor would often mix touching personal stories with his scholarly lessons. She and her husband, SMJC graduate student Gregory Borchard, met last fall in a Gillmor class.

“He would tell stories about how he and [his wife] Sophie met,” Ms. Dmitrieva said. “On his desk there was this beautiful photograph of her. Behind this wise and clever man there has been this wise and clever woman all these years.”

Unable to attend the banquet, Dr. Gillmor’s youngest brother, Alan, a professor of music at Carleton University, sent a touching letter read by Stuart Adam, a Carleton vice-president. In remembering his brother in “this warm and bittersweet moment,” the younger Gillmor praised his brother’s constant encouragement, even though he admitted “losing many arguments over the years.”

“You were there for me, refreshing my spirit by word and deed and giving me the permission to excel,” the letter stated. “In this warm and bittersweet moment, you are surrounded by people whose lives you have touched.”

Among the many stories shared was one from Herb Terry, Prof. Gillmor’s one-time student and later co-author with Jerome Barron and Todd Simon. As a graduate student, Prof. Terry once “boldly corrected” Dr. Gillmor after a lecture that John Marshall was not the first chief justice of the United States.

A few years later, when Prof. Barron was arguing the case of *Miami Herald Publishing v. Tornillo* before the Supreme Court, he could not even get a chamber seat ticket for his wife to attend the oral arguments. The enterprising Dr. Terry wrote to fellow Minnesotan Chief Justice Warren Burger and obtained two tickets. The former student was “so proud” to take Prof. Gillmor to the court, especially since the ticket envelope was marked “Herbert Terry and guest.”

Witchita State University Professor Vernon Keel stated he “would have paid for a copy of the *Winnipeg Free Press*” as a Gillmor student at the University of North Dakota, then a graduate student at Minnesota, nearly four decades ago.

Fellow School of Journalism and Mass Communication (SJMC) faculty member Daniel Wackman thanked Prof. Gillmor for welcoming him and his wife, Kathy, into the community some 27 years ago.

“Kathy and I are in a sense Don’s kids,” remarked Wackman, who was once “his boss” as SJMC’s director. “Don and Sophie took us in and made us a part of the community.”

Always having his door open for students, fellow faculty and media professionals, Dr. Gillmor was “amazing” in his passion and dedication. And as a student in Prof. Gillmor’s final class wrote, “The only thing to do with Don Gillmor would be to clone him,” Wackman said.

Steven Rosenstone, dean of the College of Liberal Arts, agreed that “the idea of cloning seems like a good idea,” since Prof. Gillmor is “one of the few giants” among the college’s 500 professors. In announcing the beginning of a national search for a new Silha Professor, Dean Rosenstone also praised Prof. Gillmor’s recent leadership in the SJMC’s crusade for state funding for new media technology.

“The sense of camaraderie in the Journalism School created by Don over the past eight months made a new chapter possible in the life of the Journalism School,” Rosenstone stated.

Joining other media scholars present, Prof. Barron, Dr. Gillmor’s longtime co-author, extolled his colleague’s stature in First Amendment scholarship. They first met when Dr. Gillmor sat in on Prof. Barron’s class at the University of North Dakota in 1969. When West Publishing asked Prof. Gillmor to write a textbook on mass communication law, he insisted that Prof. Barron

be his co-author. At the banquet, attorney James Goodale admitted that he “stole” the book’s table of contents for the “principal basis” for law seminars at the Practising Law Institute.

“His views on the First Amendment differ from mine at times,” Prof. Barron noted. “He believes these problems are resolved by relying on the ethical standards of working journalists. I didn’t always agree, but I respected him as a scholar. He’s contributed to the education of students, journalists, and my own.”

“It’s amazing that two people with such diverse views on the press would get along. That shows his tolerance and mine too. It gives our work a tension but a good one. Even though I think he sometimes lives in error, I believe in his passion. He’s a great scholar, a great colleague and a great friend - a pleasure to celebrate.”

Otto Silha, principal benefactor of the Silha Center with his wife, Helen, recalled first meeting Prof. Gillmor and being impressed with “his optimistic idea” for establishing such a center for the study of media ethics and law.

“Almost everyone I meet here today is either a student, a disciple or a mentoree of Don Gillmor,” Mr. Silha said. “He told me at breakfast this morning that he was going to keep his gradebooks because he wants to remember the names.”

In his humorous roast, Stanford University Professor Ted Glasser, former Silha Center associate director, used an impressive slide collection of Gillmor memos, clippings, and photographs to reflect on his remarkable career. Prof. Glasser also recounted Dr. Gillmor’s unusual “fetish” for trapping squirrels on his property, then setting them free elsewhere.

As a final token of appreciation, the Gillmors were presented with several gifts, including a framed map of their beloved Rainy Lake in Northern Minnesota.

In thanking those gathered and those who could not attend for their many wishes, Prof. Gillmor first made “just a few corrections” about some of the stories told, then particularly expressed his gratitude to his wife, his family, his co-authors, students, and others.

“This is probably the last time I’ll see my friends, my students, my family, all in one place. That’s a sad thought, but it makes a wonderful occasion. I just want to say how much I owe to all of you...”

“I just want to say how much Sophie and I appreciate you being here tonight. This is a very memorable evening for me. We love you all. We thank you so very much.

“And Bill [Babcock], this was your idea. I damned you for it, but I love you for it.”

JACK BRESLIN

SJMC Graduate Student and *Bulletin* Editor (1998)

Dr. Jack Breslin is now a member of the mass communication faculty at Iona College in New Rochelle, New York, where he teaches media ethics and law.