

# FRAUD

A PUBLICATION OF THE ASSOCIATION OF CERTIFIED FINANCIAL EXAMINERS

# MAGAZINE®

HE SOUGHT AND BROUGHT OUT  
**THE BEST IN  
EVERYONE**

Gilbert Geis, Ph.D., CFE  
(1925 – 2012)

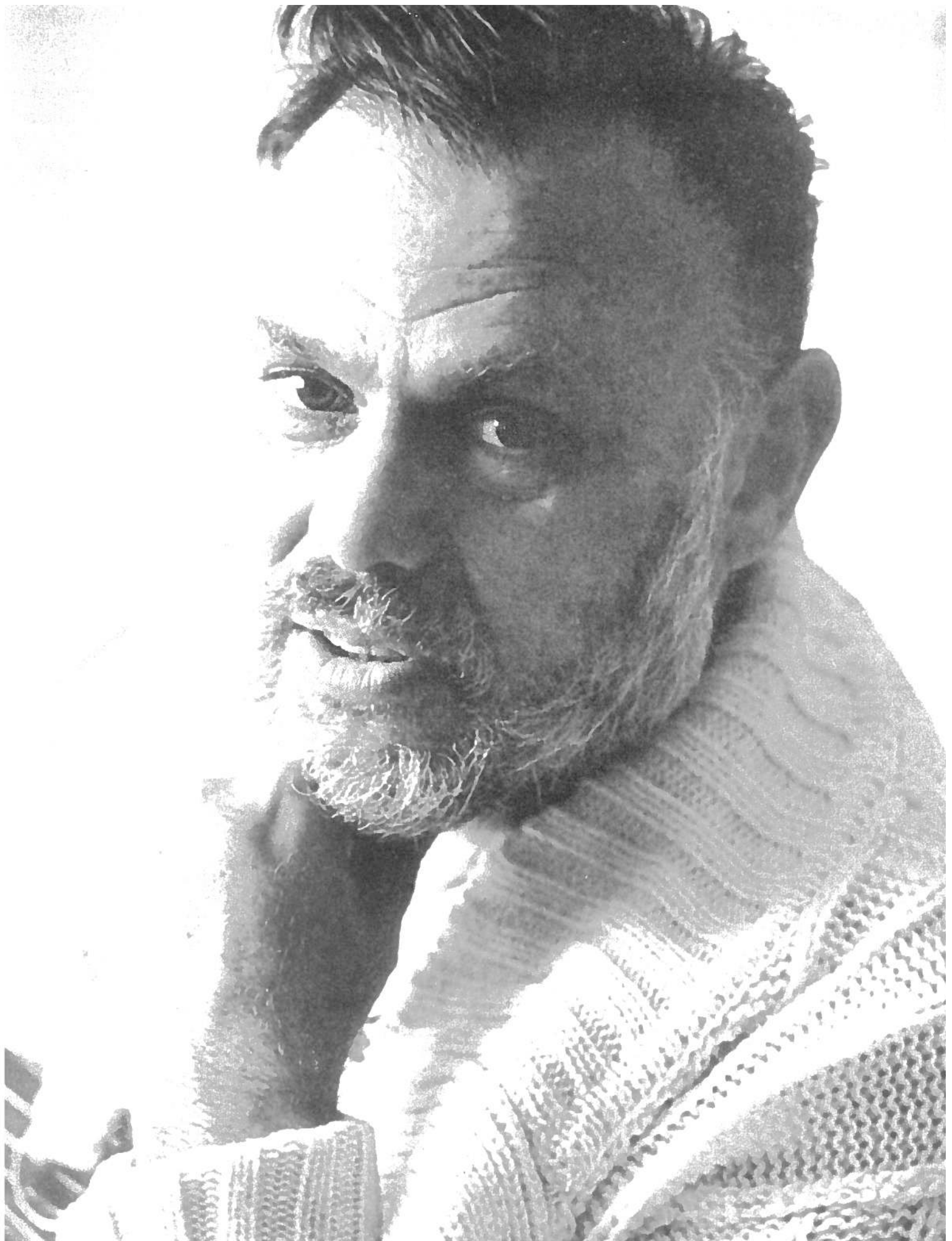
## IN THIS ISSUE

Unaccountable  
auditors PG. 28

Geis, Sutherland and  
white-collar crime PG. 36

Affinity is only  
skin deep PG. 42

In the company  
of criminals PG. 50





# HE SOUGHT AND BROUGHT OUT THE BEST IN EVERYONE

Gilbert Geis, Ph.D., CFE  
(1925 – 2012)

Gil Geis was generous. He was also a giant in criminology research and education with more than 500 articles and book chapters and 28 books to his name. But after Gilbert Geis, Ph.D., CFE, died Nov. 10, 2012, at the age of 87, most who knew him said he was, above all, a kind and giving colleague and friend.

"Gil was an extremely intelligent and accomplished gentleman," says Jeanette LeVie, CFE, the ACFE's vice president – administration. "Someone with his background could easily

Gil Geis, a former ACFE president and one of its pillars, was a seminal white-collar crime researcher, author and teacher. But he'll be remembered best for his generosity of spirit.

*By Dick Carozza, CFE*

intimidate you. But Gil was the warmest person I've ever met. He was genuinely interested in you and never wanted to talk about himself. I will miss his big smile and friendly manner."

Francis T. Cullen, Ph.D., Distinguished Research Professor of Criminal Justice at the University of Cincinnati, said Dr. Geis wasn't enthralled with his fame. "Regardless of a person's status in the field — whether a well-known scholar or a little-known student — Gil would always take the time to stop, talk and take a genuine interest," Cullen says. "In the very early days of my career, he had no reason whatsoever to befriend me; but he did. He read and commented on my work, and he sent me his articles to read. Thereafter, when our paths crossed, he would give me a warm handshake

and ask about my family. I was fortunate to have had the chance to publish two papers with him.

"I was recently reminded of his generosity when he invited Cheryl Jonson, then one of my graduate students, to coauthor an essay celebrating Donald Cressey's contributions," Cullen says. "Nervous at first, Cheryl was heartened by Gil's support and amazed at his capacity to take a competent draft and transform it into a compelling account. I assured Cheryl that this was an experience not unique to her!"

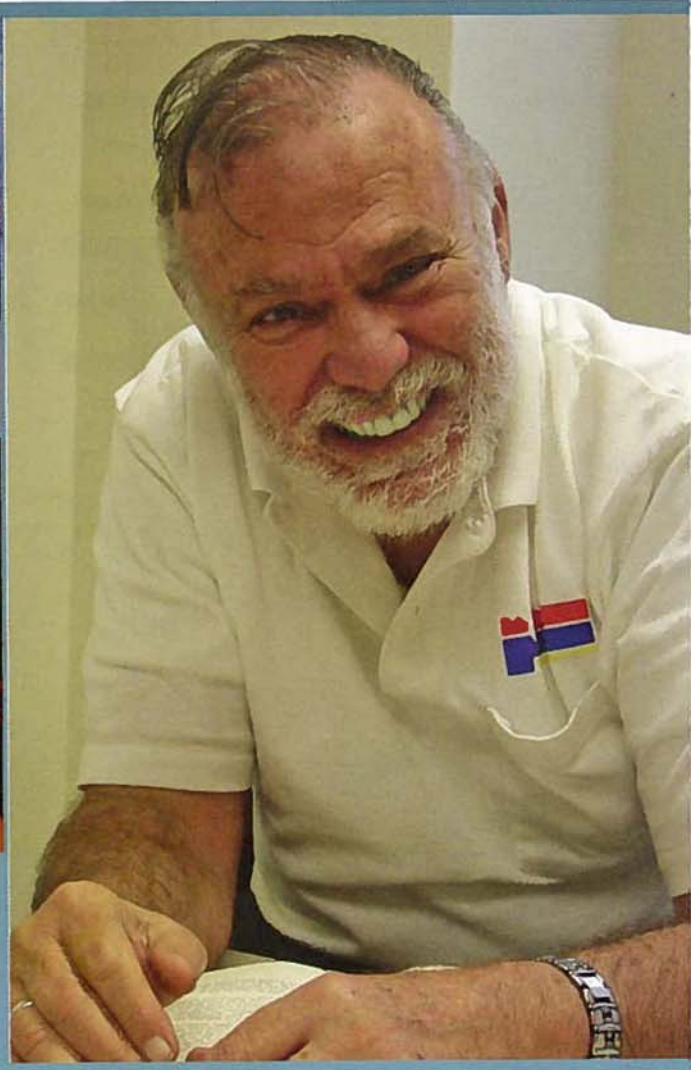
John Gill, J.D., CFE, vice president – education of the ACFE, remembers how Dr. Geis was able to put everyone at ease by confounding expectations. "When I started at the ACFE in 1995, Gil Geis was the president and a member of the Board of Regents," Gill says. "I did not know of his reputation until I started studying more about fraud prevention and criminology. Virtually every academic article I saw on behaviors of white-collar criminals was either written by Dr. Geis or quoted him extensively.

"I wasn't sure what to expect when I met him in person. In my mind, I had the image of a gray beard, a tweed jacket and a pipe. Boy, was I surprised. He did have the gray beard, but that was as far as the stereotype went," Gill says. "He was very informal, almost to the point of being irreverent. He had a wicked sense of humor and loved to crack jokes during meetings.

"During one of the breaks, I introduced myself. When he found out I was a lawyer, he immediately began telling me about a new book he was working on about 'crimes of the century.' I have always been a 'true crime' buff, and we had a great discussion about the infamous kidnapping of Charles Lindbergh's infant son — one of the cases to be featured in his book. I was amazed at his recall of facts and how quick witted he was. ... Gil



Top left: Dr. Geis with Rudy Giuliani. Bottom left: Dr. Geis shooting hoops at an Annual Fraud Conference networking event. Right: Dr. Geis circa 1990s.



was a good friend. ... He was fun to be with, and everyone that knew him loved him," Gill says.

Michael L. Benson, Ph.D., professor in the University of Cincinnati School of Criminal Justice, also remembers Dr. Geis' warmth and generosity. "When I was a new Ph.D. from Illinois and just getting started in the field, I sent Gil a copy of a paper I was working on and asked him for comments because the paper drew a lot from his work," Benson said.

"Even though he didn't know me at all, he sent the paper back to me practically by return mail all marked up in red ink with both editorial and substantive suggestions. He also sent a very encouraging letter. I took his advice and the paper

... was eventually published. ... A couple of years later when I finally met him in person ... he not only remembered me and the paper, but he made me feel like it was the best thing he had ever read (which clearly it was not by a long shot). I've never forgotten his kindness, and I've heard similar stories from many other people. He really was a good and most exceptional man."

### A Brooklyn boy

Dr. Geis' beginnings were more humble than exceptional. Born Jan. 10, 1925, in New York City, he was raised in Brooklyn by his mother and grandmother. Mary Dodge, Ph.D., director of the Criminal Justice Programs in the School of Public



Affairs at the University of Colorado – Denver and a former student of Dr. Geis, remembers that he once said he partially credits his interest in criminology to his grandmother's fervor for dime crime magazines. Dodge says Dr. Geis' grandmother, a Polish immigrant, supported the family during the Depression by manufacturing bootleg liquor that was marketed through the infamous Dutch Shultz gang.

As a teenager Dr. Geis worked as an usher on Broadway and collected tickets at N.Y. Yankees' and Giants' baseball games before becoming a radioman in the Navy during World War II. He attended college under the GI Bill, earning a bachelor's degree at Colgate University in New York (where he ran track). From 1946 to 1948 he worked as a reporter for the Times in Hartford, Conn., and then the Daily Home News in New Brunswick, N.J.

He received his master's at Brigham Young University and a doctorate at the University of Wisconsin-Madison. Dr. Geis was a faculty member at the University of Oklahoma and California State University, Los Angeles, before joining the University of California - Irvine faculty in 1971, where he played a significant role in establishing the School of Social Ecology and the Department of Criminology, Law and Society. He retired in 1987 and remained extraordinarily active as a scholar and a mentor up to his final days. (Read more about Dr. Geis' history in "Geis, Sutherland and white-collar crime" on page 36.)

### Simpatico with Dr. Wells

Dr. Joseph T. Wells, CFE, CPA, founder and Chairman of the ACFE, met Dr. Geis at a 1986 retirement party for Dr. Donald R. Cressey, another renowned criminologist and a father of the ACFE. (See "Gil Geis: Simply no one like him" on page 40.) Dr. Wells later shared with Dr. Geis his vision of forming an association that would create well-rounded fraud fighters by teaching them skills in accounting and auditing, law, investigations, and fraud prevention and deterrence. Dr. Geis

wholeheartedly agreed that the theoretical and the practical needed to be married, and he would lend his expertise.

Steve Albrecht, Ph.D., CFE, the first president of the ACFE, and one of the de-

“

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— John Gill, J.D., CFE,  
vice president – education of the ACFE

velopers of the Certified Fraud Examiner concept, said Dr. Geis loved the ACFE. “He told me many times that the ACFE is exactly what is needed — an organization to bring together people with different backgrounds to fight the growing problem of fraud,” Albrecht said. “He told me that whatever he could do to help the ACFE succeed, he would do it.”

Dr. Geis later wrote the entire criminology section of the ACFE's *Fraud Examiners Manual* in less than six months and worked on subsequent editions. He also spoke at conferences. “I attended the first class the ACFE presented in Austin, Texas, in 1989 for those of us who were new fraud examiners at the time, where I was privileged to sit at the feet of the masters who wrote this original fraud material, including Dr. Geis,” says Regent Emeritus Joseph R. Dervaes, CFE, ACFE Fellow. “To this day I can still remember watching and listening to him as he made his presentation on criminology from the podium during that class. It was absolutely amazing.” Dervaes wasn't the only one

enamored with Dr. Geis' teaching fervor. No one who stepped into his classrooms ever snoozed.

### Perpetual teacher

Dr. Geis was totally committed to education. During an interview last year with Valerie Jenness, Ph.D., dean of the School of Social Ecology at the University of California - Irvine, Dr. Geis said, “What I see education as almost uniquely doing is trying to convey a sense of excitement about knowledge, about knowing things, about learning things.

“The facts change in three years anyway. But I want them to think that it's exciting, it's interesting, it's fun. All that I can convey to them is that I find learning worthwhile,” he said. (See the full interview at <http://tinyurl.com/boehq2n>.)

However, his teaching couldn't be contained in the classroom. “Ultimately, like so many of his other students, I wanted Gil to feel proud of me,” says Robert F. Meier, Ph.D., professor of criminology and criminal justice at the University of Nebraska at Omaha. “He was my most important teacher. Did I ever have a class from him? No. My learning was more experiential. He was my intellectual father. I felt I just didn't want to disappoint him,” Meier says.

“Gil became my intellectual focal point. Some of my interactions with Gil were informal and unrelated to academic matters. In those moments he didn't talk like he was teaching, but his talk was always instructional to me,” Meier says. “He taught me about being an academic and living a life of the mind. And, he taught me the substance of criminology and the method of thinking and writing about that substance. Upon reflection, he was always teaching me things. It was his nature, and he did it without conscious plan. But, he did it all the time.”

Dr. Geis was a perpetual teacher partially because he was a voracious reader. “I read endlessly and very eclectically,” he told Jenness. “The New York Times publishes the best 100 non-fiction books



of the year, and I read every one of them because I want to force myself to read stuff that I otherwise wouldn't go near. It sometimes takes several years to read one year of recommended books, and then I just start all over again on a newer list."

### Strong shoulders of a premier researcher

"Gil Geis is best known for being, in essence, the second father of white-collar crime," says Cullen. "[Edwin] Sutherland, who invented the concept of white-collar crime, is seen as the original dad of the field. But after Sutherland died somewhat prematurely in 1950, few scholars remained to carry on his tradition. To a large extent, Gil Geis performed this role, almost single-handedly keeping alive the study of upper-world criminality until the topic resurfaced in the mid-1980s," says Cullen, who was also past president

“

Gil was an inspiring communicator in both the spoken and written word. He enlivened the thought and the consciences of all who encountered him. Criminology as a discipline is permanently transformed because Gil Geis graced this planet. ...Gil's contribution and his character will never be forgotten and will live on in the field and the people he helped build.

”

— John Braithwaite, Ph.D., distinguished professor at The Australian National University (ANU), founder of RegNet (the Regulatory Institutions Network) at ANU and the first recipient of the ACFE's Donald R. Cressey Memorial Award in 1989



1 Dr. Geis, Nancy Bradford, CFE, CIA, CPA, and Frank Howatt, CFE, visit after a Board of Regents meeting.

2 Dr. Geis greets Joseph Dervaes, CFE, CIA, and Dennis Dycus, CFE, CGFM, onstage at an ACFE Annual Fraud Conference.

3 Dr. Geis speaks during a Board of Regents meeting while John Gill, J.D., CFE, listens intently.

4 Dr. Geis presents the ACFE's first Report to the Nations on Occupational Fraud and Abuse, The Wells Report.

of the American Society of Criminology (as was Dr. Geis).

"Gil's work on white-collar crime that sprung to prominence in a criminology that was taking little interest in white-collar crime was his research on the heavy electrical equipment conspiracy of 1961," says John Braithwaite, Ph.D., distinguished professor at The Australian National University (ANU), founder of RegNet (the Regulatory Institutions Network) at ANU and the first recipient of the ACFE's Donald R. Cressey Memorial Award in 1989. "This saw for the first time vice presidents of really major corporations like General Electric and Westinghouse sentenced to imprisonment for a corporate crime. (See "The only reason we are here is because of Gil Geis" on page 26.)

"Thanks to the work of Gil Geis, when Watergate came, there was a foundation of scholarly excellence in white-collar crime research. After Watergate, criminological interest in white-collar crime surged," Braithwaite says. "And some great graduate students migrated to work with Gil at the University of California - Irvine, and hordes of undergraduates enrolled in his inspiring white-collar crime course, which I had the honor of teaching under Gil's mentorship as a Fulbright post-doctoral fellow in 1979-80.

"Gil was an inspiring communicator in both the spoken and written word. He enlivened the thought and the consciences of all who encountered him. Criminology as a discipline is permanently transformed because Gil Geis graced this planet," Braithwaite says. "It no longer neglects fraud as one of its central topics. Gil was also lucky that he met Joseph Wells [founder and Chairman of the ACFE]. This allowed him, like Don Cressey before him, to consolidate his accomplishment within the walls of academe into an accomplishment that was rolled out into the world of practical fraud control. Gil's contribution and his character will never be forgotten and will live on in the field and the people he helped build."



## Bringing out the best in everyone

Richard Wright, Ph.D., curators' professor of criminology at the University of Missouri-St. Louis, recalls the passage that Dr. Geis would read from "I Never Promised You a Rose Garden," by Hannah Green, at the conclusion of Dr. Geis' famous white-collar class at the University of California – Irvine.

"The passage describes why two mental hospital attendants, Hobbs and McPherson, evoked such different responses from their charges," Wright says. "I still can see Gil in my mind's eye, standing on the stage in front of a packed lecture hall, reading these lines, with Pandy, his white Scottie, sitting at his feet:

Hobbs was a little brutal sometimes, but it was more than that. He was frightened of the craziness he saw

around him because it was an extension of something inside himself. He wanted people to be crazier and more bizarre than they really were so that he could see the line which separated him, his inclinations and random thoughts, and his half-wishes, from the full-bloomed, exploded madness of the patients. McPherson, on the other hand, was a strong man, even a happy one. He wanted the patients to be like him, and the closer they got to being like him the better he felt. He kept calling to the similarity between them, never demanding, but subtly, secretly calling, and when a scrap of it came forth, he welcomed it. The patients had merely continued to give each man what he really wanted. There was no injustice done. ...

"That passage stands as a fitting tribute to Gil who, for all his extraordinary

accomplishments, never lost sight of the fact that we share a common humanity that should be cherished and nurtured," Wright says. "He was the real-life equivalent of McPherson. He sought and brought out the best in everyone he met. That's how he lived his life." ■ FM

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*Thanks to Henry N. Pontell, Ph.D., for assistance with this article.*

*Unfortunately, we weren't able to include all the testimonials from Dr. Geis' colleagues. Please visit [Fraud-Magazine.com](http://Fraud-Magazine.com) for all the comments we received about this remarkable man. — ed.*



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