

# *In Memoriam*

## Richard Frederic Gibbs

### 1931–2001

Dr. Richard Gibbs, an anesthesiologist and lawyer and a driving force in broadening the mission of this society about 30 years ago, died Tuesday, July 17, 2001, in Waltham, Massachusetts. He was 70.

A pioneer in the study of law and medicine together, Dr. Gibbs had a longtime interest in creating a reliable standard of medical care. His own was high: A doctor should treat every patient as if the person were a member of his own family. That was roughly why he had become a doctor himself.

“I was born knowing how to comfort people,” he once said.

Raised in Chelsea, Massachusetts, Dr. Gibbs graduated from Brandeis University in 1953, the school’s second graduating class. After college, he earned a master’s degree in marine biology from the University of Massachusetts, but when funding in that field dried up he decided to become a physician.

He earned a medical degree from New York Medical College in 1959. Early in his medical studies he wanted to be a surgeon, but when he found out he was allergic to the soap that surgeons must use, he decided to become an anesthesiologist.

After his internship and residency, Dr. Gibbs joined the staff of what is now Brigham and Women’s Hospital in Boston, eventually becoming senior anesthesiologist there, until his retirement in 1991. At the hospital he was known for bringing bagels to the operating room every Sunday. Dr. Gibbs was also affiliated with Harvard Medical School.

While medicine was his first profession, Dr. Gibbs also had a passion for the law. He earned a law degree in 1970 from Suffolk University Law School.

Shortly afterward, in 1971, Dr. Gibbs became vice president of this society, which was then known as the American Society of Law & Medicine. During the late 1960s, the society had substantially enlarged its focus, moving from an educational forum for forensic physicians to an organization that promotes education not only in medicine but also in the legal issues that affect it.

Dr. Gibbs played an important role in the new direction of what is now the American Society of Law, Medicine & Ethics, serving as vice president from 1971 to 1978, as a member of the Council from 1979 to 1981, and as a member of the Board of Directors from 1981 to 1982.

In addition to his work for the society, Dr. Gibbs also served as president of the American College of Legal Medicine and as a member of its board of governors, as well as a trustee of the college’s educational foundation. In addition, he was a trustee of the American Board of Legal Medicine from 1980 to 1987.

He was editor-in-chief of a journal called *Legal Perspectives on Anesthesia*. He was also an editorial board member of the *Journal of Legal Medicine*, the *American Journal of Law & Medicine* and *Anesthesiology News*, among others.

A former law professor of Dr. Gibbs's, David J. Sargent, now president of Suffolk University, said Dr. Gibbs "was one of the very few of his era to achieve great distinction as both a physician and lawyer."

Dr. Gibbs's passion for the two disciplines originated with a malpractice court case that he observed, which stemmed from a mistake in administering anesthesiology in a hospital. The trial interested him enough that he sought time off from work to attend it, and Boston lawyer Barry Reed consulted him for his subsequent novel *The Verdict*. (The book was made into a movie in 1982, starring Paul Newman.)

Dr. Gibbs himself was an author and popular lecturer. Friends recall his encyclopedic knowledge and quick wit. He loved movies, gardening, cooking, the Boston Celtics and especially the New England Patriots.

At the time of his death, Dr. Gibbs was living in Wellesley, Massachusetts. He died at Deaconess-Waltham Hospital, after outlasting his wheelchair's 10-year lifespan.

Dr. Gibbs is survived by his wife, Carol (Brickman) Gibbs; his daughters, Robin A. Gibbs and Michele Gibbs-Luna; his daughter Michele's husband, Jay Robert Luna; and his stepdaughter, Lindsey Rosen. He also leaves a brother, Bert Gibbs, of Marblehead, Massachusetts, and Bert's wife, Norma.

Services under the direction of Levine Chapel in Brookline were held at Temple Beth Elohim in Wellesley on Thursday, July 19, 2001.

Memorial contributions may be made to the American Heart Association, 20 Speen Street, Framingham, Massachusetts 01701; or to the charity of the donor's choice.