

2-10-2021

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Recommended Citation

Colleen P. Graffy *Honoring Professor James M. McGoldrick, Jr.*, 48 Pepp. L. Rev. xix (2021)

Available at: <https://digitalcommons.pepperdine.edu/plr/vol48/iss1/6>

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Honoring Professor James M. McGoldrick, Jr.

Colleen P. Graffy*

Way back in the 1980s, Pepperdine asked me to move from Germany, where I was serving as Director of Pepperdine's Heidelberg program, to London, where a certain law professor, James M. McGoldrick, Jr., had started Pepperdine's London Law Program. In 1985, Professor McGoldrick moved to England with his family to serve as the Visiting Faculty Member. And thus began a lifelong friendship. The McGoldricks took me in as a member of the family, and the children, Julie and JT, were immediately adopted and beloved by all of the law students. We would careen around London in my little Ford Fiesta, to the theatre and restaurants where Jim would treat all of us, including various hungry and broke law students.

Jim McGoldrick is the most generous person I have ever met. He was also brilliant, with a quick and cutting sense of humor. One time, a Pepperdine Administrator, who had made a universally unpopular decision at the time, happened to visit London. Jim was showing him the sights, when this individual looked the wrong way and stepped right in front of a London taxicab. Jim reached out and pulled him back to safety. Trembling, the Administrator turned and said, "Jim, you've saved my life." Without skipping a beat, Jim replied, "Yes. But don't tell anybody."

Jim could say things that the rest of us could only think of saying in our thought bubbles. At one student gathering, a student raised her hand and said, "Professor McGoldrick, I have a stupid question." Jim stopped her and in soothing tones assured her, "There are no stupid questions, only anecdotes for the faculty lounge."

Many are unaware of Jim's early days of preaching. I learned about this when my car finally failed for good and I decided to give it a proper sending off before it was destroyed at a junkyard. Jim immediately offered his services—he was quite sure that his pastoral range extended to automobiles. Eccentric Britain rose to the occasion as well, and complete with suits and

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hats we processed into the junkyard. Assembled were barristers and solicitors, Members of Parliament and the House of Lords, as Jim held forth with stacks of junked cars behind him. Never before had such fine and funny words been spoken about the virtues and significance of a little car about to be crushed.

Jim went on to even greater fame in Britain when he became the Commentator on SKY TV during the O.J. Simpson Trial. The *Los Angeles Times* reported that he and his nightly commentary had attracted a “cult-like following,” and people would stop him in the streets just to meet him. And of course, the students loved it.

Such was Jim’s leadership as Malibu Director of the London program that, pre-Internet, the day before applications for the London Program were due, students would line the halls outside of his office, many even spending the night, in order to ensure they had one of the coveted spots in the London Program. Thousands of students’ lives were changed forever due to the London Program that he founded.

Which brings us to Malibu, where I had the good fortune to have the office next door to Jim. His distinctive voice and uproarious laughter alerted all of us that the “other” faculty lounge was now open for business, and we would gather to hear stories and his many quotable quips, such as, “Anybody can teach if they’re prepared!” (His own teaching style was best described as free-flowing genius, law, and performance art.)

Year after year, 3Ls would vote to have Professor McGoldrick as their Senior Graduation Breakfast Speaker. They knew that they would be in for something unique: a combination of wit and wisdom as well as a humorously scathing assessment of all of the foibles that the students had endured during their three years in law school. For the administration, it might not have been as much fun; as one law dean at the time whispered before McGoldrick began, “Fasten your seatbelt!”

Jim has had an enormous influence not only on Pepperdine Caruso School of Law, as the longest serving Associate Dean and founder of the London Program, but also on the lives of law students through his personal involvement and teaching. The stories are legion of Jim’s generosity toward students—from overhearing that a student couldn’t afford the book for his class and buying it for them to inviting his entire class to a local restaurant and picking up the tab. Thanks to the extended Pepperdine community, the James M. McGoldrick, Jr. Memorial Scholarship was established, which will ensure that Jim will continue to impact the lives of future law students.

Jim's larger-than-life personality has left a pretty big hole in our own lives, which is why a group of us reached out to faculty, friends and alumni to raise funds to have Jim's office named after him. To the new 1Ls, I hope that when you walk by the office with his portrait and a plaque in his honor, you will stop one of us to ask for stories about this one-of-a-kind, the-mold-was-broken-after-creation, individual.

And for the rest of us, we will think of Jim and laugh at the things he would say—that we wish we could have said—and miss him even more.

[Vol. 48: xix, 2021]

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PEPPERDINE LAW REVIEW
