DOCUMENTS OF THE GENERAL FACULTY

REPORT OF THE MEMORIAL RESOLUTION COMMITTEE FOR
LEONARD GILLMAN

The special committee of the General Faculty to prepare a memorial resolution for Leonard Gillman, professor emeritus, mathematics, has filed with the secretary of the General Faculty the following report.

Sue Alexander Greninger, Secretary
The General Faculty

IN MEMORIAM
LEONARD GILLMAN

Leonard Gillman was born on January 8, 1917, in Cleveland, Ohio. In addition to his family interests, he was a devotee of music, of mathematics, and of the English language, especially word play and excellent expository prose.

Family
Len met his wife-to-be, Reba Marcus, at the Walden School, a small “experimental” private school in New York City, when they were both less than thirteen years old. They were married for over seventy years and had two children, Michal and Jonathan. Reba shared Len’s passion for music and performed professionally as a soprano.

Music
Len was a Fellow of the Juilliard School of Music from 1933 to 1938, when he received his diploma. He was a pianist of considerable mastery, and throughout his life, he practiced his art and gave public performances. These included a performance of Brahms’s Piano Concerto #2 with the All-University Orchestra of The University of Rochester, a number of concerts with fellow mathematicians (violoncellist Louis Rowen and flutist William Browder) at meetings of mathematical societies, and various appearances in productions of the Gilbert and Sullivan Society of Austin. He maintained close contact with the music faculty at each of the universities with which he was associated, and occasions at his house frequently had substantial participation by both music and mathematics faculty. He played chamber music in his home with both amateur and professional musicians.

Mathematics
Early history and university appointments: Len received his B.S. in mathematics from Columbia in 1941. He did research in Naval Operations during the subsequent years while continuing his studies, receiving his M.A. in 1945 and his doctorate in 1953. His numerous strong research papers earned him support from the Carnegie Foundation, the Guggenheim Foundation, and the National Science Foundation, and he spent two years at the Institute for Advanced Study in Princeton. He went to Purdue University in 1952 as an instructor and rose to assistant professor in 1953 and associate professor in 1956. In 1960, he moved to Rochester, becoming simultaneously a professor and chairman of the mathematics department. His energy, mathematical taste, and extensive contacts in the mathematical world resulted in a dramatic improvement in the quality of the department. In 1969, he moved to The University of Texas at Austin, where he served as chairman of mathematics for four years. He made a number of excellent hires during this period, including R.H. Bing, a famous topologist and doctoral student of R.L. Moore. The hiring of Bing paved the way for the recruitment of additional excellent faculty. But, Len laid his mark on the department in other ways as well: faculty hired by Len chaired the department for thirty-two years after he stepped down as chairman. During this period the department grew to be ranked as the fourth best among mathematics departments at public universities, topped only by Berkeley, UCLA, and Michigan.

Publications: Len had a number of well-received and influential papers in the general area of topology. But perhaps his best-remembered works are books. With Meyer Jerison, he wrote Rings of Continuous Functions, which was published in 1960 and is still in print in 2009. This book has helped to train generations of
topologists and is a favorite reference work in its subject. Then, in 1973, he published a calculus textbook with
Robert McDowell that set a new standard for exposition of the subject although it was not widely adopted.

Work in the service of mathematics: Len had service roles in many mathematical organizations. His service to
the Mathematics Association of America (MAA) was truly exemplary. He was elected treasurer in 1973 and
served in this role for thirteen years. In 1987, he was elected president of the MAA, serving for the usual two-
year period. He was instrumental in establishing the Dolciani Mathematical Center as the home of the MAA. He
was a strong supporter of an enhanced role for women in mathematics, as illustrated by his appointments to the
MAA Executive Committee. Overall, he was a tireless advocate for and supporter of this influential association
of enthusiasts for mathematics and mathematics education. In 1999, he was presented with the Yueh-Gin Gung
and Dr. Charles Y. Hu Award for Distinguished Service to Mathematics.

**Word play and excellent expository prose**

Under the heading of word play: Len loved to tell about the evening when he and Reba and another couple were
sitting over cocktails, and the husband of the other couple turned to Reba and warmly said “You are one of the
fondest people…” As he paused in confusion, Reba confidently chimed in, saying I AM OF. Len also liked the
word game in which someone gives an answer and you try to figure out what the question was. It’s never what
you expect. Here is an example he liked: “The answer is Ford, Chevrolet, and Plymouth.” The question was:
“Name two automobiles and a rock.” And when the feminist movement began in earnest, Len remarked
“Changes are underway, as sure as my name is Leonard Gillperson.”

Under the heading of excellent expository prose: (a) Len once submitted an article containing a sentence that
began with “But.” The editor changed this to “However.” But Len did not let the matter rest. He replied with a
document of some fifteen pages, citing instances of the “But” usage by famous authors and various other
sources, along with lengthy and forceful arguments in its defense. The editor could not withstand this onslaught
and backed down. (b) Len deplored the use of the phrase “as far as” without the accompanying “is concerned.”
He would cringe at a sentence like “As far as asparagus, I’m not too enthusiastic.” Once when he was on
the track in the football stadium, he asked a colleague: “Do you think I can run as far as the bleachers, meaning as
far as the bleachers are concerned?” (c) It troubled him that the plural noun “criteria” had come to be used in the
singular sense, when actually the singular is “criterion.” Although his mental powers were allegedly fading in
his later years, he was heard to correct this error on his ninety-first birthday.

Len is survived by his wife Reba, by their children Michal and Jonathan, by three grandchildren, and by two
great-granddaughters.

This memorial resolution was prepared by a special committee consisting of Professors John Dollard (chair),
Klaus Bichteler, and James Vick.

Distributed to the dean of the College of Natural Sciences, the executive vice president and provost, and the
president on November 23, 2009. Copies are available on request from the Office of the General Faculty, WMB
2.102, F9500. This resolution is posted under “Memorials” at: [http://www.utexas.edu/faculty/council/](http://www.utexas.edu/faculty/council/).