

In Memoriam

In Gratitude—Michael Maggio, 1947–2008

by Danielle Polen

It is with both sadness and gratitude that we bid farewell to our colleague, mentor, teacher, and friend, Michael Maggio. A long-time AILA member and the founder and chairman of Maggio & Kattar, P.C. in Washington, D.C., Michael died on February 10, 2008, at the age of 60, after a 10-month battle with non-Hodgkin's lymphoma.

A tribute to Michael on his firm's website notes that Michael's legal philosophy was grounded on the core principles of justice, the rule of law, and human rights—a sentiment with which friends and colleagues concur. "He was a brilliant legal mind who not only interpreted the law without peer, but he recognized also that justice could only be served by changing it. His life embodied that commitment to change," said José Pertierra.

During a legal career that spanned 30 years, Michael represented a wide spectrum of clients, including refugees and large corporations, housekeepers and foreign-born millionaires, artists, scholars, activists, and everything in between. His work on one of the most significant human rights cases in American jurisprudence, *Filartiga v. Peña-Irala*, established the precedent that paved the way for enforcing international human rights in U.S. courts.

Michael also tenaciously fought the deportation of Alexandre Konanykhine, a Russian banker and entrepreneur pursued by the KGB, during a case that spanned some 11 years. Court order in hand, Michael was on the tarmac at JFK International Airport as Konanykhine and his wife prepared to board the flight to Moscow, and the deportation was halted.

Yet despite the many high-profile cases in which he was involved, Michael never lost his passion for serving everyday immigrants and lending a voice to the disenfranchised. He never lost his willingness to teach, to mentor, and to make even the lowliest among us feel important. And, most of all, he continued to have a good time doing it all.

In bidding Michael farewell, it is only appropriate to end with words of gratitude for a job well done. As Martin Luther King, Jr. once said, "[E]verybody can be great, because everybody can serve. You don't have to have a college degree to serve You don't have to know Einstein's theory of relativity to serve You only need a heart full of grace, [and] a soul generated by love."

Michael was a servant among servants.

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