

Sunday, February 10, 2008

Michael Maggio leaves the planet.

Photo from website of U.S. District Court (W.D. Mi.).
Today, Michael Maggio passed away. The world is all the poorer for it. In 1987 during my second year of law school, I was obsessing over how to overlap my goal of doing good with my law degree while not being relegated too long by my earnings to living in a group house and eating only rice and beans for dinner; of course, many honorable pursuits do not enable living much more luxuriously than with rice and beans. One evening in my immigration law class that year, I walked highly-skilled and optimistic immigration attorney Michael Maggio (my immigration clinical and law class professor Paul Grussendorf also has been very inspirational), talking to us about determining when immigration matters are ripe for federal court action; his client Margaret Randall, who eventually tried regaining her United States citizenship after having previously renounced it (in 1989, the U.S. Board of Immigration Appeals ruled she never had lost her U.S. citizenship); and circumstances where maids in developing countries have maids. Instead of cursing the darkness in government and the legal system, Michael fought and fought for immigrants' rights in the courthouses, and in the so-called immigration courts that are actually part of the executive branch. My ears pricked up during law school when I learned that Michael had served as the personal court representative for the late Orlando Letelier (who served as an ambassador and defense minister to the Salvador Allende regime), having joined the survivors of Ronni Moffitt in suing the government of Chile for the bombing death of both people. (See Michael's comments here about the 1986 burning murder of young photographer Rodrigo Rojas, apparently by Chilean military members during the Pinochet regime.) Michael's law firm grew and grew, to include substantial business immigration work on top of immigration representation for individuals. Michael's remained a reliable voice in navigating the complex and overgrown area of immigration law analysis. My law partner Jay Marks, being an immigration law practitioner, knows numerous lawyers at Michael's law firm, and gave me the sad news of his passing today. On a website set up to share good wishes during Michael's illness, today I posted the following before knowing he had already passed: "Michael- You have been an inspiration to me ever since I first met you over twenty years ago, when you guest-lectured at my immigration law class taught by Paul Grussendorf. Instead of cursing the darkness, I saw you lighting a blowtorch towards eliminating it. Your name was already big by the time I met you, yet you still would speak with me as if I was one of your equals. Thanks, Michael. Jon Katz." ADDENDUM: Here is Michael's obituary, including information on his memorial services and coverage of his rise from humble beginnings in a one-room office.

Posted by Jon Katz in Jon's news & views at 11:00