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## Immigration Lawyer Michael A. Maggio, 60

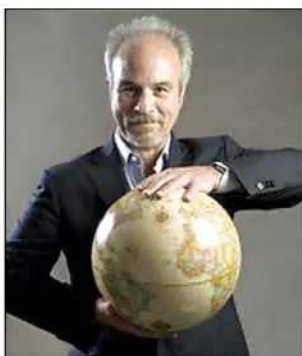
By [Patricia Sullivan](#)

Washington Post Staff Writer

Tuesday, February 12, 2008; Page B07

Michael A. Maggio, 60, a well-known immigration lawyer in Washington whose Dupont Circle law firm has one of the area's biggest immigration practices, died Feb. 10 of non-Hodgkin's lymphoma at his Washington home.

Mr. Maggio represented everyone from Guatemalan housekeepers to a Russian "whiz-kid" millionaire



Over a 30-year career, Michael A. Maggio represented housekeepers, refugees and even a Russian millionaire being pursued by the KGB. (Courtesy Of Maggio & Kattar)

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pursued by the KGB and threatened with deportation. He advised the father of Elián González in his successful effort to return the Cuban boy to his homeland. His work on a landmark human rights case, *Filartiga v. Pena*, in 1980 established the legal precedent for U.S. courts to punish noncitizens for acts committed outside the boundaries of the United States. Most recently, he represented Bolivian scholar Waskar Ari, a Georgetown University graduate barred from reentering the United States to teach at the University of Nebraska.

Named Washington's best immigration lawyer in 2002, based on Washingtonian magazine's interviews with lawyers, judges and clients, Mr. Maggio was known over his 30-year career for championing the rights of the

underclass. He also represented large corporations, nonprofit organizations and universities.

"He was incredibly dedicated to his clients, he had a very strong commitment to justice, he hated intolerance, and he could disagree with you without ever seeming personal, disagreeable or abrasive," said a colleague, Andres Benach.

Mr. Maggio didn't hold his tongue, however; in 1996, he publicly compared the Washington regional office of the Immigration and Naturalization Service to "Dante's rings of hell." Two years later, he said: "The bureaucracy is unresponsive, the building is Third Worldly, the computer equipment is a decade old. It's a disgrace to have this office serving the nation's capital."

When a young Russian millionaire banker, Alexandre P. Konarykhine, found himself in the gunshots of organized crime, he fled to New York, then Washington. INS agents arrested him and his wife at their Watergate apartment on a visa violation. The Russians claimed

Konanykhine embezzled \$8 million in bank funds, and they threatened that unless the INS turned him over, the United States could not occupy its new embassy in Moscow. Konanykhine was granted asylum in 1999 but was rearrested in 2004 and came within minutes of being put on a plane and deported to Russia. Benach said Konanykhine finally got asylum again this summer.

"Alexandre's suitcase was sent [back] to Russia; that's how close he came to deportation," Benach said. Mr. Maggio "showed a relentless determination to fight deportation ... where the situation couldn't be any more bleak. [The case] represents his dogged determination to save someone's life."

Mr. Maggio was born in Philadelphia and attended Georgetown University. He graduated from Temple University, where he led many politically charged protests both on and off campus. He had spent part of the 1960s living in Berkeley, Calif., and graduated from the District's Antioch School of Law in 1978.

A fluent Spanish speaker, he was active in the opposition to U.S. intervention in Chile, El Salvador and Guatemala in the late 1970s and early 1980s and represented refugees from those countries who sought asylum. He also represented Iranians opposed to U.S. policies and Nicaraguans opposed to U.S. intervention in their country.

He was honored by the American-Arab Anti-Discrimination Committee, the American Immigration Lawyers Association and the National Immigration Project of the National Lawyers Guild. He received awards from the Tahirih Justice Center, which focuses on gender-based violence, and the National Coalition to Protect Political Freedom.

A nephew, Peter "Jamie" Maggio, said the importance of his uncle's work came home to him one day as they rode to court together in a cab. "The driver refused payment as he excitedly told Michael that he was the reason that the driver and his family were able to live and work in America as citizens," the nephew said.

Survivors include his wife of 26 years, Candace Kattar of Washington; his mother, Dr. Lena Maggio of Philadelphia; and a brother.

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