

Chicago Daily Law Bulletin®

Volume 160, No. 120

Marshall Susler: One man's legacy

On April 30, our legal community — and the world — lost a remarkably talented lawyer, civic and religious leader and wonderful human being.

His name was Marshall Susler, and he was from Decatur. I had the good fortune of meeting him when I was a young lawyer in 1997 and had gotten to know him very well over the past 17 years.

Marshall was a brilliant man who was well-versed in just about everything under the sun. He was a very well-respected trial lawyer with an impressive track record of cases over a 50-year career.

He had a terrifically sharp wit, contagious laugh and a million-dollar smile. He was the quintessential family man and had an extensive network of friends, acquaintances and colleagues. He inspired others to be their best and to see the good in others, and he spent countless hours helping those who were unable to help themselves and who were unfairly displaced by society.

He touched many hundreds of lives during his nearly 84 years of life. Until the very end, Marshall always put the well-being of others before his own.

Marshall was not just a good friend — he was my father-in-law.

Marshall was hospitalized at the end of April with pneumonia, and he died five days later. I was blessed to have the opportunity to say goodbye to him right before he passed away.

As I reflect on his life, what immediately comes to mind is the amazing legacy he leaves behind. During the week of his illness, passing and funeral, I learned so much about the

indelible imprint he left on the world and those around him.

As I sat with my husband and sisters-in-law to plan Marshall's memorial service and to write his obituary, I thought about how our memories of loved ones are all that we have left when they pass on. When we die, memories of us will be all that are left to console those who are grieving. It is our responsibility to leave behind a world which is a better place than when we entered it.

I cannot think of a better way to impart his essence than to share the words that were written by those who knew him best. Thank you, Marshall, for teaching us all about the importance of making a positive difference and leaving a meaningful legacy.

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Marshall Susler, longtime lawyer and civic leader, an upstanding man known for living his principles, died on April 30.

He and Wylmarose Miller Susler, his wife of 23 years until her premature death from breast cancer in 1981, were parents to Jan Susler, Julie Susler Blum, Jody Susler Schneeberg and David G. Susler. In 1983, he married Eileen Ruski, becoming father to her children, Maureen Ruski, Kelly Gonzalez and Rob Ruski.

After 30 years of marriage, Eileen says she loved him even more than she did the day they married. They have seven grandchildren: Aaron and Daniel Blum; Jason Gonzalez; Devon and Malone Ruski Moretti; and Simone and Stella Rose Schneeberg.

Marshall was born in 1930 to Sewell and Marion (Appelbaum) Susler, working-class people who struggled to ensure that he and

PARADIGM SHIFT



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his sisters, Sharna Blumenfeld and Beverly Susler Parkhurst, valued education. Marshall was accepted to Millikin University on academic scholarship, graduated summa cum laude and attended the University of Chicago Law School.

After serving in the Army in military intelligence, he returned to Decatur to practice law, representing civil and corporate clients and many in the Decatur community whose cases other attorneys would not take.

As an attorney, he exercised commitment to civil and human rights for all people. Marshall helped found the Legal Aid Society in Decatur, presided over the Human Relations Commission and belonged to the Macon County Coalition against the Death Penalty (with Eileen). He was equally committed to

the community of attorneys, serving for many years on the review board of the Illinois Supreme Court's Attorney Registration & Disciplinary Commission and being awarded the Decatur Bar Association Pro Bono Award and the Illinois State Bar Association title of senior counselor.

His sense of civic responsibility also extended beyond the law. As part of the Jewish community in Decatur, he was active in many ways, including as a long-serving member of the board of Temple B'nai Abraham and a term serving as its president. Having experienced anti-Semitism, he worked in interfaith organizations to help dispel some of the hatred caused by lack of education about or exposure to other faiths.

He was well-read and intelligent, always backing up his opinions and arguments with evidence. His children believed he was a walking encyclopedia, who always knew the right answer to everything. But his favorite answer was, "Look it up! What are you going to do when I'm not around?"

He was an avid contract bridge player, loved listening to Broadway musicals, had a voracious appetite for books and film, was adept at crossword puzzles and enjoyed his cookies and ice cream.

Surviving many health challenges in the last third of his life, he became the oldest person to receive a kidney transplant at Springfield Memorial Hospital. Healthy in mind to the end, his body betrayed him, though he never complained.

In lieu of flowers, the family asks for donations for kidney transplant work through kidney.org.