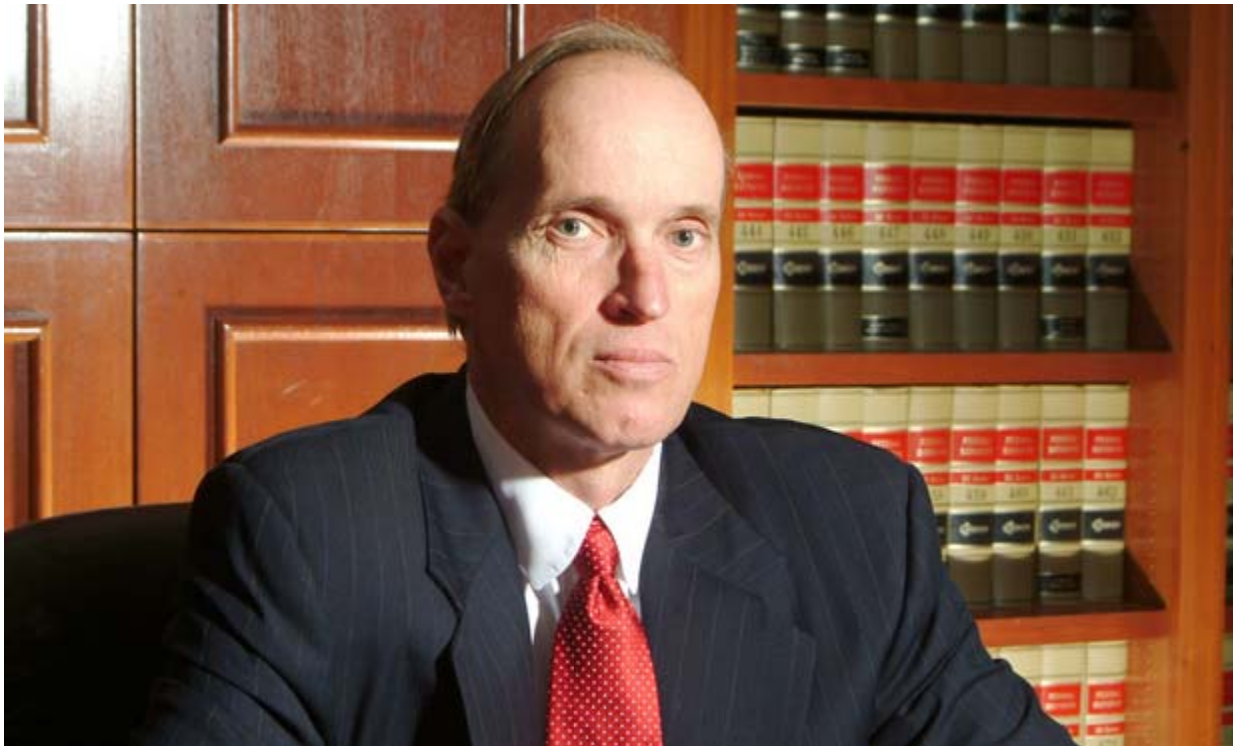


Miami Appellate Attorney Richard Strafer Dies at 66

Celia Ampel, Daily Business Review

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G. Richard Strafer. Aixa Montero

Miami criminal appellate lawyer G. Richard Strafer died Friday after contracting a mystery infection on a European cruise and letting his colleagues know before going into a coma in Britain. He was 66.

Strafer was known for his compelling appellate writing, including a 2012 petition that persuaded the U.S. Supreme Court to hear arguments in the *Kaley v. United States* on the constitutionality of pretrial asset freezes. The court later found them legal.

Strafer had his own firm for many years and last summer became of counsel at Black, Srebnick, Kornspan & Stumpf.

"He is one of the finest legal writers in this country," Black Srebnick senior partner Roy Black said while Strafer was hospitalized. "He has a brilliant and incisive mind and understands and resolves thorny legal problems better than anyone I know."

Strafer fell ill last month after contracting an infection on a Viking Cruises trip during a vacation with his husband, Jon Rick. Strafer was quarantined in his cabin, given antibiotics by the ship's doctor and taken to a hospital after the cruise ended.

At the hospital outside London, Strafer suffered cardiac arrest. That night, colleagues said his medical records show the hospital staff removed him from oxygen for nearly 10 minutes, and he lapsed into a vegetative state shortly afterward around June 22.

About a week later, he was flown to Baptist Hospital in Miami, where he was visited by his husband, 26-year-old daughter Jordan, friends, colleagues and his two dogs. Strafer trained the dogs as therapy pets so they could cheer up hospital patients, particularly children. In his final days, the dogs were allowed to climb onto his hospital bed and snuggle in his arms.

Under conditions of his living will, Strafer was removed from life support Monday. The source of the infection has not been determined.

His late wife, Greenberg Traurig shareholder Holly Skolnick, died of skin cancer four years ago. Strafer married Rick in 2015 after meeting him at a support group for those who lost loved ones to cancer.

Strafer was a graduate of Georgetown University Law Center, where he won the E. Barrett Prettyman Fellowship, awarded to two graduates each year who agreed to represent indigent clients. He and Skolnick left Washington for Miami in the early 1980s.

The pair quickly became close friends with two other Miami attorney power couples who moved from the capital: Jane and Norman Moscowitz and Jean and Joel Perwin.

"Richard was a wonderful person," Jane Moscowitz said. "In his work he was brilliant and imaginative and had a very definite and strong sense of ethics. But he didn't only work. He had many other interests. He was a great athlete, loved to hike and bike and to travel, loved to listen to jazz, was a great cook and importantly a very good father."

Jordan Strafer, an artist and graduate student in New York City, said she and her father were "deeply bonded" and she is immensely proud of him. He always encouraged her in her artistic pursuits and her education, she said.

"He showed me music, dancing, art, philosophy and literature," she said. "We would speak for hours about all of these. He taught me how to write. He taught me to say what I want to say — in as few words as possible."

Strafer was reserved, soft-spoken and gentle as are many attorneys who choose appellate writing over the gregarious life of a trial lawyer, Joel Perwin said.

"I'd have to sort of drag him out to lunch because he was at his desk eating a sandwich or something, intensely working on his appeals," Perwin said. "But I did, and others did, drag him into civilization over the years and spend time with him."

Uncredited Work

His notable achievements included getting Sonia "Sunny" Jacobs released from Florida's death row after her wrongful conviction for two murders. Strafer worked on that case pro bono for eight years with Skolnick and his then-law partner Jose Quinon, and it was later turned into a TV movie, "In the Blink of an Eye."

"My parents were pretty proud of it, and it was something that maybe solidified their connection to each other and is exemplary of why they both chose to be lawyers," Jordan Strafer said. "It's just such an amazing story."

Most of Richard Strafer's work was in the U.S. Court of Appeals for the Eleventh Circuit, where he won the reversals of several high-profile convictions and successfully argued the Southern District of Florida acted unconstitutionally by "super-sealing" court records.

Strafer did a lot of other work that doesn't bear his signature, often taking calls from attorneys who needed help with their writing — even if he didn't know them, Perwin said.

U.S. District Judge Robert Scola, who worked with Strafer before he was appointed to the bench, was one person who benefited from the help.

"I would look at Richard and say, 'Here's this seven-page motion I did. Can you just look at it and give me some thoughts?'" Scola said. "The next morning, he gave it back to me, and it was completely red all over like somebody bled all over it. But every suggestion he made was good."

When Scola and Strafer were in their 30s, they played basketball against University of Miami students, and Strafer got the nickname "Fade" for his top-notch fadeaway jump shot.

As his friends quit some of their more strenuous pursuits, Strafer only got more devoted, running and bicycling in world championship duathlons into his late 50s. He used his bicycle races to raise money for cancer charities, Black Srebnick managing partner Scott Kornspan said.

Even when he became "dangerously sick," Strafer was the same person, said his longtime friend and Black Srebnick partner Jackie Perczek, who texted him as soon as she heard he was ill.

"He wrote back simply, 'I am still alive to see Father's Day,'" Perczek said. "And I think that is the essence of this beautiful man — when times were so perilous and perhaps he feared his days were counted, when he wondered if these were his last moments, he was thankful that at least he had lived one more day to be a dad to his daughter Jordan. And that is the man, my friend Richard Strafer."