

I N M E M O R I A M

Robert Gifford Heiserman,

a respected immigration attorney whose clients around the world ranged from the wealthy and powerful to poverty-stricken Haitian immigrants, died Saturday, Jan. 13, 2018, in his apartment. He was 71.

Preliminary cause of death was listed as congestive heart failure caused by Post-Polio Syndrome, a degenerative process that occurs late in life to some poliovirus (CQ) victims. Heiserman contracted polio in 1951 when he was 5, just a few years before effective vaccines were developed and administered to a generation of school children, either through injections or orally with a sugar cube. The virus, which attacked the neurological system and was believed to be the cause of President Franklin Roosevelt's partial paralysis, was virtually eradicated within the next 20 years.

But the vaccine came too late for young Heiserman, who immediately began to suffer extensive nerve damage and lost the use of his right arm. Despite his condition, Heiserman remained an active child, playing in the waves and swimming while living in Miami Beach, FL. Eventually, he would excel at both long-distance running and alpine skiing, becoming a member of various ski patrols in Oregon.

Heiserman was born in El Paso, TX, but his father, a merchandise manager for large department stores, moved the family frequently, to Miami, FL; Milwaukee, WI; Rochester, NY; Los Altos, CA; and Beaverton, OR. He graduated from high school in California, then studied journalism at the University of Oregon. After graduation, he studied law at the University of Denver, was admitted to the Colorado Bar in April, 1972, #4792. He also was admitted to the federal bar in New Mexico, Washington, D.C., Alabama, and the U.S. Supreme Court in 1976.

"Bob went almost immediately into immigration law,"

said his sister, Peggy Gillenwater. "He also began doing classified work of some sort for the government. I imagine the two were related."

He spent the rest of his life as a resident of Colorado. He married in 1973 and had a daughter, Laura, in 1980. The marriage ended in divorce.



He joined the American Immigration Lawyers Association, founded its local chapter and served eight years as treasurer, then chairperson. He served on the national association's board of governors for six years and chaired the national Professional Ethics and Grievances Committee for nine years. In 1986, he received the association's Edith Lowenstein Memorial Award for excellence for advancing the practice of immigration law.

In 1984, the American Bar Association honored him for serving as coordinator for the Haitian pro bono project, securing legal representation for indigent Haitians attempting to enter the United States.

The Colorado Trial Lawyers Association honored him in 1995 for serving as its immigration editor. In 2007, the Denver Magazine named him one of Colorado's Super Lawyers. Heiserman worked frequently with the US military and in 2013 was accepted as a member of the Cowboy Chapter of the US Army's Special Forces Association. He was an adjunct professor at the DU School of Law, teaching ethics and professional responsibility.

A popular story-teller and sought-after dinner guest, Heiserman belonged to the Cactus Club and the University Club.

He is survived by his daughter, Laura, his sister Peggy, her husband Floyd "Skip" Gillenwater, a niece and a nephew.

He has willed his body to medical research. A memorial service is being planned in Denver in several months.