



LOCAL OBITUARIES

His cases inspired Hollywood movies. Attorney Albert Krieger has died at 96 in Miami

BY JAY WEAVER

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Miami defense attorney Albert Krieger HANDOUT

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Albert J. Krieger defended New York crime family boss Teflon Don John Gotti, Miami Vice cocaine smuggler Willie Falcon, and the Lakota Sioux tribe that occupied Wounded Knee during the American Indian Movement.

His cases not only made national headlines but also inspired Hollywood movies.

Krieger, who died at the age of 96 on Thursday in Miami after a storied legal career that spanned the country, was always passionate about the rule of law and a defendant's rights, no matter one's status in life.

"It is the defense lawyer who says to the all powerful government that it must prove that the charge was properly brought," Krieger once said. "It is the defense lawyer who gives to all those within our borders, whether they realize it or not, freedom's comfort."

Despite his tough-looking exterior and single-minded zeal, Krieger's family members recalled him as a "marshmallow" inside, a man who adored his wife, Irene, and their five children, and always seemed to have the right thing to say while they were growing up in New York and Miami.

"As good as he was as a lawyer, he was a better dad," said Luise Krieger-Martin, a Miami-Dade County Court judge. "He was the kind of father who challenged and inspired his kids. He was never better than when one of us had a crisis of some kind, and he could always reframe the problem. He made us look at it in a different way, and made us feel safe and protected."

Krieger was born and raised in New York and went to New York University on a football scholarship. That's where he met his college sweetheart, Irene Stoller. After suffering a career-ending injury as a freshman, he turned his full attention to academics. He served in the Army during World War II and upon his return, he married Irene. Krieger then attended NYU Law School, and the couple started raising a family on Long Island in the 1950s.

As Krieger pursued his legal career in Manhattan, he found himself working long hours in the city and commuting to and from the suburbs — a trend that would continue as his practice expanded to Miami and other parts of the country in the 1970s. Eventually, Krieger opened a second office in Miami and moved his family to a home in Coral Gables. Krieger, an avid boater and fisherman, fell in love with the tropical weather and Biscayne Bay.

"He had this perpetual guilt that he traveled so much for his work, but we would say to him

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Krieger was not only in demand as a criminal defense attorney at major trials in Miami, New York and California, but he was also active in legal organizations and lecturing at law schools. He was a founder of the National Criminal Defense College and one of the original members of the National Association of Criminal Defense Lawyers, serving as its president in 1979-1980. NACDL, with thousands of members today, honored him with its Lifetime Achievement Award, one of numerous legal awards in his career.

Longtime colleague, Miami lawyer Neal Sonnett, said Krieger was a defense attorney for “all the right reasons,” pointing out that he was not only praised for his trial skills but for his ethics and temperament. “Everybody respected him, the defense attorneys, prosecutors and judges,” Sonnett said.

Sonnett said that for all of his high-profile work representing mobsters, drug traffickers and even attorneys who got into trouble with the law, Krieger was most proud of defending members of the Lakota Sioux tribe during the American Indian Movement protests nearly 50 years ago. Members were charged with illegally occupying Wounded Knee — the site of the infamous 1890 massacre of 300 Sioux by the U.S. Seventh Cavalry — in a deadly standoff with federal agents in 1973. Krieger, along with other members of the NACDL, did the legal work for free and won acquittals for their Native American clients.

“He saw the injustice when he went there, and he was able to contribute to righting the wrong,” Sonnett said. “He saw that as a calling for criminal defense lawyers to do pro bono work.”

Krieger also had an impact shaping the careers of law students and young lawyers in Miami and across the country. One of them, Brian Tannebaum, posted a remembrance of Krieger on his Facebook page: “I met Albert when I was in law school. He would go from idol, to mentor, to friend, to co-counsel in a period of 26 years. When I met him he was ‘the guy who represented John Gotti.’ When he died, he was one of the pillars of my career.”

Even the New York federal prosecutor who battled Krieger in the courtroom during the Gotti trial that ended with the mobster’s conviction in 1992 praised his adversary. In a 2008 letter, John Gleeson, who by then was a federal judge in Brooklyn, wrote Krieger to congratulate him on winning a Legal Legends award after reading about his honor in the NACDL’s magazine, *The Champion*.

Gleeson wrote: “Though I hope my career turns out to be as long as yours, I already know when

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Dade Judge Luise Krieger-Martin (David J. Martin) and Jared T. Krieger (Deidre Saunders); along with nine grandchildren, five great grandchildren and dozens of nieces and nephews.

Krieger will be buried at Beth David Mount Nebo Cemetery in Miami and a memorial service will be held when it is safe to do so because of the ongoing coronavirus pandemic. In lieu of flowers, donations can be made in his memory to the NACDL Foundation for Criminal Justice at www.NACDL.org.



Miami defense attorney Albert Krieger is pictured lecturing at The John Marshall Law School. HANDOUT

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