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SCHEFRIN, ARAM

PASSAGES

Aram Schefrin, lawyer, dies at 68

He was also a musician, authored four books and was writing an opera

By TOM MOONEY
JOURNAL STAFF WRITER

Many Rhode Islanders know the name — Schefrin — as in Lovett, Schefrin & Harnett, the Providence law firm with the ubiquitous advertisements.

But when Aram Schefrin died from cancer earlier this month at 68, it was the passing of a Renaissance man whose passions and achievements stretched beyond his narrow public persona as a personal injury lawyer.

A lover of history and music, Schefrin had authored four books, was in the process of writing an opera, played international polo and had a successful career as a rock/jazz musician prior to his death in Wellington, Fla., say his friends and relatives.

"He was probably the most well-read person I ever knew," said Michael Zager, his lifelong friend with whom Schefrin started playing music when they were boys in Passaic, N.J.

"Aram was actually, if you didn't know him, a quiet guy unless you got him involved in conversation ... I would not have wanted to go against him in a courtroom. He was so damn smart."

While Schefrin attended Columbia University and then Harvard Law School, he and Zager also pursued their musical interests. "We wanted to write [music] for the theater," said Zager, "so we decided to form a band to make contacts."

They also approached composer Stephen Sondheim — who became an Academy and Grammy Award-winning songwriter of stage and film — who mentored the young men for three years.

Their band, 10 Wheel Drive, formed in 1968 and for a time had Genya Ravan as its lead singer. It recorded four albums, and the duo wrote several hit songs. The band's success took them to Carnegie Hall in 1971 where they performed, along with the American Symphony Orchestra, a rock opera based on the Battle of the Little Big Horn.

Among Schefrin's books was "Glorious," a biography of Gen. George Custer; "Marwan," the autobiography of a 9/11 terrorist, and "Consider the Elephant," the life and death of John Wilkes Booth as told by his brother.

Later in the 1970s, Schefrin returned to the law practice for financial security, says Zager. He joined the Lovett law firm in 1978.

He and his wife, Pamela, lived in Barrington, where Schefrin spent much time restoring a three-story Civil War-era home, says his cousin Joshua Shapiro, of New York City.

"He tore it apart, and put it back together again," said Shapiro. "He loved that house."

Schefrin was unusual in the sense that he had both a successful artistic career and a professional career, said Shapiro. "Very few people have both."

The firm's office manager Susan Trabucco said Schefrin "was such a smart man and so multifaceted. He got bored so easily. He was constantly getting into different things. ... And one thing about Aram was he never had a bad word to say about anybody. ... He was very thoughtful and very sensitive. We'll miss him here."

Though Schefrin and his wife moved several years ago to Florida, he remained an active member of the firm, said Trabucco, returning to Rhode Island for trials and depositions.

He died Nov. 4 and was buried at the Star of David Cemetery in West Palm Beach, Fla.

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