

“THE BEST OF AFSA”: AN APPRECIATION

RICHARD CURTIS SCISSORS

1935 – 2007

BY SUSAN MAITRA

Richard Curtis Scissors, 71, a retired Foreign Service officer, former AFSA Governing Board member and tireless advocate for equitable employment practices for Foreign Service officers, Foreign Service National employees and their families, died at his home in Chevy Chase, Md., on Sept. 1. With his passing, AFSA and the Foreign Service lost a great friend and advocate. Recognizing this, the Governing Board has named AFSA's new legal defense fund in his honor.

Mr. Scissors was born on Oct. 23, 1935, in St. Louis, Mo., the only child of Jack and Irma Scissors. His father had emigrated from the Ukraine at age 10, one of nine children in a Jewish family. Irma was the eldest of six children in a Catholic family. Both had had to drop out of school after eighth grade in order to help support their families during tough times. They wanted their son to have all the opportunities offered by a good public school education and access to the many cultural opportunities available in the St. Louis area.

After graduation from Clayton High School — where he was a good student who came to love film and music, especially classical, show tunes, jazz and anything by Stevie Wonder — Scissors headed off to Harvard, where he majored in government, graduating in 1957. At Harvard, he thrived on exposure to the finest minds of the times. He managed the squash courts to earn spending money and despised the rainy, dreary Cambridge weather, but he made lifelong friendships and never stopped marveling at the

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chances he had been given. This past June, he went back for his 50th reunion and relished wandering the campus, staying in a dorm and reminiscing with old friends.

Following enlistment in the U.S. Army for a two-year stint, his dream of being accepted into the Foreign Service came true in 1960, and he spent the next 36 years as an FSO. He married and became the father of two sons, Derek and Curtis. He traveled extensively, serving in Stuttgart as a vice consul, and in Lahore, Karachi and Cape Town as an economic officer. Later overseas postings took him to Bucharest and back to Cape Town where, as consul general in the late 1980s, he reported on the collapse of apartheid. Assignments at home included various economic policy positions, director of maritime affairs and land transport and, finally, political adviser to the commandant of the Coast Guard.

Scissors was a dedicated diplomat who, as his wife, Patricia Scissors, notes, “was involved in Foreign Service matters until the end.” Following retirement in 1996, he put his FS background, and in particular his experience in the area of human resources, to work advancing AFSA's goals. As the association's labor management specialist, he was active on behalf of office management specialists and was instrumental in the revamping of the Language Incentive Pay Program, among many other accomplishments.

“Dick deeply cared about the Foreign Service, the rights and responsibilities of its members and ensuring that they received fair treatment,” recalls Tex Harris, a former AFSA president and current secretary. “Getting justice for all was his passion,” Harris adds. “He helped so many members with his smarts, experience and abiding dedication to fairness. He represents the best of AFSA.”

AFSA General Counsel Sharon Papp elaborates: “Dick

***“Getting justice for
all was his passion.”***

— ***E.A. “Tex” Harris***

went out of his way to help people with a range of issues such as assignments, low rankings and medical clearances. He was very knowledgeable and kind, and truly dedicated to trying to make the Foreign Service better for its employees.”

Scissors retired from this position in 1999 and, the next year, was elected to the AFSA Governing Board, where he served as a retiree representative for two years (2001-2002). “I can say without reservation that no FSO I know had a greater respect and appreciation for the work of AFSA in defending and supporting the Foreign Service than he did,” says AFSA Retiree Vice President Bill Farrand, recalling his friend and colleague of 35 years.

At a memorial service at DACOR-Bacon House on Oct. 7, family members, friends and colleagues celebrated Scissors’ life. They praised his extraordinary kindness and generosity,



Dick Scissors at his desk.

as well as his sharp and analytical mind, keen memory and enviable ability to write clearly and cogently. As his wife recalled, he also had a great sense of humor and one of the biggest laughs imaginable. Many of them came at the dining room table after a

wonderful meal and good wine with family and friends, she added.

Besides his immediate family, Scissors loved and often mentored the young people to whom he was closest: his nieces and nephews, and the Mullen clan of New Hampshire. One of them offered this tribute at the memorial service: “What I will always remember about Uncle Dick is his intelligence, his kindness, his generosity, sense of humor and legendary laugh! Most important for me was his remarkable ability to listen. He always took such a keen interest in my life, my goals and my interests. This is something he did for each of us, and I will never forget it.”

Scissors was formerly married to Rochelle Edelman Scissors. He leaves his wife, Patricia, of Chevy Chase, Md.; two sons, Derek of Bethesda, Md., and Curtis of Jonesborough, Tenn.; and two grandchildren, Rachel and Naomi of Bethesda. ■

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