



Kurt W. Melchior

October 30, 1924 - November 5, 2022

Kurt Melchior, a prominent San Francisco attorney for six decades, passed away peacefully in his home after celebrating his 98th birthday surrounded by his family.

Kurt was born in Essen, Germany, to Anna and Rudolph Melchior. The Jewish family escaped the Nazis in October 1938, seeking refuge in the United States where they settled in Chicago. Kurt attended Hyde Park High School and City College, working to make ends meet by driving a taxi and running an elevator in a downtown hotel. One day a professor suggested he transfer to the University of Chicago, even if it required him “to beg, borrow or steal”. His studies were interrupted to serve in the United States Army, which then funded his education via the G.I. Bill. He received his undergraduate degree, as well as a master's degree, from the University of Chicago and earned his LL.B. at Yale Law School. Kurt studied the law voraciously and enjoyed spirited debate. He remained in touch with his classmates, personally and professionally and attended reunions often.

Kurt's first job as an attorney was with the Department of Justice in Washington DC where he met his wife, Suzanne Ellen Sabin, over lunch at a Chinese restaurant. He had studied Mandarin at UC Berkeley in the Army, remained fascinated by China, and longed to return to the San Francisco Bay Area. In 1959, Suzanne and Kurt were married in San Francisco with a reception at the Mark Hopkins Hotel.

Kurt was one of California's pre-eminent trial lawyers, with more than 60 years of experience in litigation. During the course of his long and storied career, he served as counsel of record in more than 70 published cases. He tried two class actions to successful verdicts. He also served as a testifying expert in dozens of cases on both attorney ethics and insurance coverage practices. He was inducted into the California Bar Association's Trial Lawyer Hall of Fame in 2004 and received a lifetime achievement award, which was presented in recognition of his stature in the legal profession and his contributions to the community. He actively practiced into his 97th year, and only retired in March of 2022.

He worked for 26 years at Severson (formerly known as Severson, Werson, Berke and Melchior). In 1989, at age 65, he left Severson to lead the San Francisco litigation practice for the Nossaman law firm. He served as General Counsel for Nossaman for 23 years. Those who worked most closely with him often described his generous spirit, his ability to listen (especially to the most junior of lawyers), and his gift of animated and humorous story-telling. Many of those anecdotes appear in his book ***Off the Record: Sidebars from a Trial Lawyer's Life***, from Courthouse Steps Publishing, in 2010.

“Kurt had an unparalleled passion for the practice, a sterling reputation in the legal community, an encyclopedic knowledge of so many areas of law, and the strongest commitment to public service of any lawyer many of us have ever known. We were very fortunate that Kurt chose to join Nossaman. May his memory be a blessing.” said George Joseph, managing partner of Nossaman.

Evidence of his civic leadership is the 40 years he served as President of the San Francisco Law Library. He led the transformation of the country's oldest county Law Library from a 19th century resource to a 21st century institution, digitizing critical resources, while protecting the superb Rare Books Collection. Kurt was instrumental in diversifying the Board by appointing as trustees women, small-firm attorneys and people of color, and in 1991, appointed the Law Library's first woman law librarian.

Additionally, he served as vice president of the State Bar of California; Member of the Board of Governors; Deputy Editor for the American College of Legal Medicine's online publication, *Legal Medicine Perspectives*; Senior Delegate to the State Bar of California to the House of Delegates for the American Bar Association; and as a member of the Standing Committee on Specialization for the American Bar Association. In his longstanding commitment to community involvement he has served, among others, as President of the San Francisco French-American Bilingual School, the Oakes Children's Center, the San Francisco Association for Mental Health (formerly San Francisco Suicide Prevention), and on numerous other boards and committees.

Kurt is survived by his wife Sue, his brother Frank, his children Karen Anne Melchior and Katherine Melchior Ray, and four grandchildren, Sabin Ray, Hunter Ray, Audrey Fisher and George Fisher, a sister-in-law and many nieces and nephews. A memorial for Kurt will take place at Nossaman on December 2, 2022. Donations in honor of Kurt may be sent to the San Francisco Law Library: sflawlibrary@sfgov.org T(415) 554-1772.