# Victor G. Rosenblum 1925 - 2006

By **David Mendell, Tribune staff reporter**
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To many liberals who have fought to keep abortion permissible under the law, Victor G. Rosenblum was something of an enigma. He was an avowed liberal Democrat who skillfully directed court and legislative battles to try to end the legality of abortion.

"Victor had an abiding faith, from the gut, about the sanctity of human life and that it extended into the womb," said Robert Bennett, a legal colleague who opposed his friend in court on the issue. "We never really had a philosophical discussion about it. I simply respected his belief."

Mr. Rosenblum, 80, a distinguished Northwestern University law professor who was a leading strategist for the anti-abortion movement, died Monday night, March 13, in Evanston Hospital of congestive heart failure.

Though Mr. Rosenblum gained notoriety in recent decades for his anti-abortion work, he was much more than an activist lawyer over his long career as a legal scholar and Northwestern professor. He also was a respected and beloved teacher who wrote a handful of erudite law books.

With an engaging and uncritical manner, he could win the favor of whomever he came into contact, whether it was a legal foe, journalist or freshman law student.

"He was just genuine all the way down--that's who he was," said Ron Allen, a Northwestern law professor. "Everybody here was just crazy about him."

Born in New York, Mr. Rosenblum received undergraduate and law degrees from Columbia University and a doctoral law degree from the University of California, Berkeley. He began his career at Northwestern in 1958, interrupted only by a two-year stint as president of Reed College in Portland, Ore., starting in 1968. He continued teaching this quarter, overseeing an undergraduate seminar on due process and equal protection.

"He was the consummate teaching scholar who, by our count, never took a semester off from teaching, even on sabbatical years," said his son Jonathan.

Mr. Rosenblum's 1955 book, "Law as a Political Instrument," is still used and quoted today. U.S. Supreme Court Justice William Brennan cited the 1955 book in a civil rights case.

He also served the U.S. House of Representatives from 1957 to 1958 as associate counsel on a subcommittee reviewing government operations. He was a member of the executive committee of the Anti-Defamation League, Chicago-Midwest Region, from 1971 to 1995 and was its chairman from 1975 to 1976. And in 1987, he was president of the American Association of Law Schools.

But he is best known for his anti-abortion legal work.

As chairman of the Chicago-based Americans United for Life from 1989 to 1995, he was part of the movement that is perhaps least noticed, but arguably most effective. Instead of taking to the streets in protest or blocking abortion clinics, Mr. Rosenblum sought to chip away in court and in state legislatures at Roe vs. Wade, the 1973 Supreme Court decision that established a constitutional right to abortion.

Mr. Rosenblum was partially responsible for one of the few legal victories for anti-abortionists when he successfully argued the anti-abortion side of the Hyde Amendment before the U.S. Supreme Court. The 1981 amendment restricted the use of federal money for abortions.

"We all loved him and enjoyed his commitments even if it was a matter of controversy for other members of the family," said his son Peter. "He loved the spirit of engagement and the individual portion of that--his teaching, his friendships--were never affected by the politics of the abortion movement."

In a 1992 Tribune story, Mr. Rosenblum conceded that it was rare for a Jewish liberal to be fighting the anti-abortion cause.

Besides his two sons, survivors include his wife, Louise; three daughters, Susan Rabens, Ellen Rosenblum and Laura Peterson; three other sons, Keith, Warren and Joshua; and 17 grandchildren.

A service will be held at 11 a.m. Thursday in Beth Emet the Free Synagogue, 1224 W. Dempster St., Evanston.

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