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Retired Cook County judge known for sensitivity in eviction cases dies

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During his 22 years of presiding over cases where landlords seek to evict tenants, retired Judge Sheldon C. Garber remained sensitive to the plight of tenants.

Garber, 74, who retired as a Cook County associate judge last month, died of an apparent heart attack at his Morton Grove home on Monday, said his daughter, Elise Garber.

Garber, who served as a judge for 27 years, spent most of his judicial career handling eviction cases in the Daley Center. For about a year, Garber acted as the 1st Municipal District's Forcible Entry and Detainer Section acting supervising judge. In 1997, the "acting" title got dropped and he remained that section's supervising judge until his retirement.

Attorney Sanford Kahn said he knew Garber for about 30 years and appeared before him regularly, usually representing landlords.

Kahn called Garber even-handed and compassionate.

Garber "had to be fair to landlords and fair to tenants," he said. "You almost never saw a tenant upset with an adverse ruling because he was so very fair and explained his rationale."

Lawrence Davis Wood, director of the Legal Assistance Foundation's housing practice group, said he represented low-income tenants before Garber for 22 years.

Low-income clients faced eviction from the only decent housing they could afford, he said.

Garber took those cases seriously and remained sensitive

to the possible loss of housing, he said.

"And if the law demanded that a subsidized housing resident be evicted, he would do that," he said. "But you could tell it really pained him on a personal level to evict people.

"He would follow the law, but he was always very sensitive to what was at stake."

For the last several years, Garber used a motorized chair due to complications related to diabetes, Elise Garber said.

Chief Cook County Circuit Judge Timothy C. Evans said in a statement, "Judge Garber never wavered in his dedication to his work and his devotion to doing justice, despite facing difficult physical limitations due to his many illnesses. He held the confidence and respect of the people, and his colleagues, throughout his long and honorable career on the bench."

Raised on the city's West Side, Garber earned a law degree from The John Marshall Law School in 1964.

He represented plaintiffs in personal-injury cases at Karlin, Karlin & Fleisher from 1964 to 1970. He worked as a solo practitioner from 1970 to 1985, continuing with personal-injury matters and representing buyers and sellers in real estate transactions.

His initial five years on the bench brought him to traffic and paternity courts. He moved to the Forcible Entry and Detainer Section in 1990.

First Municipal District Presiding Judge E. Kenneth Wright Jr. called Garber knowledgeable and easy to work with.

Cook County Associate Judge Leonard Murray said he appeared before Garber as an



Sheldon C. Garber

attorney and worked with him as a judge for the last five years. Garber possessed an even demeanor, he said.

Garber dealt with every issue that could come up in forcible entry and detainer cases, he said. Murray said he used Garber as a sounding board on various issues that arose in those cases.

"He was very fair and a very quick study on anything that I talked to him about," he said.

Elise Garber said her father should be remembered for his kindness.

"He was always just so gracious and made everyone feel important and good about themselves," she said.

Other survivors are Garber's sons, Joel, Adam and Loren; a brother, Herbert Garber; a sister, Sheila Nathan; two grandchildren; and a great-grandchild.

Funeral services are at noon, Thursday at Weinstein Funeral Home, 111 Skokie Blvd., Wilmette. Interment will occur at Westlawn Cemetery in Norridge.