

Human Rights Advocate Margaret 'Maggi' Popkin

Margaret L. "Maggi" Popkin, 54, whose lifelong work for human rights took her from the heart of the civil war in El Salvador to the halls of Congress, died May 18 at Washington Hospital Center of complications following heart surgery. She was a resident of Silver Spring.

Ms. Popkin was well-known in the world of human rights advocacy. She had been executive director of the Due Process of Law Foundation since 1999 and focused on strengthening legal systems in Latin America. She also worked with several truth-and-reconciliation commissions in Central America.

She was a frequent participant in human rights conferences and was the author of "Peace Without Justice: Obstacles to Building the Rule of Law in El Salvador" (2000).

The insights in that book came out of the eight years she spent as deputy director of the nascent Human Rights Institute at the University of Central America in San Salvador. She arrived in 1985, in the middle of El Salvador's civil war. Despite the widespread violence, which included the November 1989 slayings of six Jesuits from the school, including her boss, the Rev. Segundo Montes, she developed a deep love for the country.

Ms. Popkin returned to the United States in 1993 and worked as a

consultant to the United Nations and the Lawyers Committee for Human Rights (now known as Human Rights First). She was a fellow at the Orville H. Schell Jr. Center for International Human Rights at Yale University in 1994 and at the Washington Office on Latin America in 1995.

In Washington, she worked for the Robert F. Kennedy Memorial Foundation as program director for Latin America and Africa from 1995 to 1999, when she joined the Due Process of Law Foundation.

Ms. Popkin was born in Iowa City. She graduated from the University of California at San Diego and received a master's degree in women's studies from Goddard College in Plainfield, Vt., in 1975 and a law degree from Boalt Hall School of Law at the University of California at Berkeley in 1979.

She spent several years at New Hampshire Legal Assistance in Berlin, N.H., before moving to the National Center for Immigrants' Rights in Los Angeles, where she became interested in issues affecting Central American immigrants.

Survivors include her mother, Juliet Greenstone Popkin of Pacific Palisades, Calif.; a son, Joel Damian Popkin of Silver Spring; a brother, Jeremy D. Popkin of Lexington, Ky.; and a sister, Susan Popkin of Vienna.