

AARON PODHURST:

A LEGENDARY PLAINTIFF'S ATTORNEY

On the night of December 29, 1972, Eastern Airlines Flight 401 crashed into the Everglades with 101 fatalities. The resulting investigation showed that the deadly crash was the result of the flight crew's failure to monitor cockpit instruments that showed the Lockheed L-1011 jet was gradually losing altitude.

Aaron Podhurst, then an up-and-coming Miami attorney, was appointed head of the plaintiffs' steering committee, as the judge handling the case felt there was no need to try the liability issues separately. "I became known as an aviation lawyer, and our firm has had that specialty ever since," says Podhurst, who is managing partner of Podhurst, Orseck, P.A. in Miami.

To represent clients effectively in aviation cases, Podhurst says it's important to understand how the industry works. "You need to know how air controllers operate, what procedures a pilot and maintenance crew follow and how airlines operate," he says. "When you cross examine an engineer, pilot or manufacturer, you have to recognize an opportunity to dig deeper into the issue."

Noting that the firm has been involved in more than 1,000 aviation-related cases since the 1970s, Podhurst adds, "Today,

we probably handle more aviation work than any other firm in the Southeastern U.S."

Through the decades, Podhurst has built a successful career as a plaintiff's attorney, handling complex aviation, automotive, healthcare, construction and other types of lawsuits. His recent cases involve representing physicians in litigation against health maintenance organizations (HMOs), and the firm serving on the plaintiffs' steering committee in litigation over Chinese drywall in Florida homes.

"In the 2000s, we have expanded our practice into complex commercial litigation," says Podhurst, noting that the 13-attorney firm represents clients and corporations throughout the United States, and in several foreign countries.

A NATURAL LOVE FOR THE LAW

Born in 1936 in New York City, Podhurst knew at an early age that he was headed for a career in law. "When I was in high school in upstate New York, I always liked debating and figuring out issues related to the law," he recalls. "I would hang



around the courthouse and talk to the district attorney and the other lawyers.” In the 1950s he headed off to the University of Michigan on a basketball scholarship, and played guard/forward while earning a bachelor’s degree in business in 1957. He then earned his J.D. degree at Columbia University, where he was a Harland Fiske Stone Scholar, and was admitted to the Florida and New York Bars in 1961.

Meanwhile, Podhurst began dating a girl from Miami Beach who was a freshman at Michigan when he was a senior. After law school, Aaron and Dorothy Podhurst were married and decided to move back to Florida. “We’ve been here ever since 1961,” says Podhurst. With three daughters and eight grandchildren, Podhurst spends much of his free time with family. He’s also a golfer and has a summer home in Colorado. “I love what I do, and I’ll keep on going as long as I’m healthy,” he says.

A SUCCESSFUL CAREER

After arriving in Miami and working for a year as clerk for an appellate judge, Podhurst joined the Perry Nichols firm to get his start as a litigator. In 1967 he left to form his own trial law firm with partner Bob Orseck, who passed away in 1978.

Podhurst recalls that when he was beginning his career, he enjoyed watching top national litigators like Edward Bennett Williams in action. “I had an opportunity to learn from the masters,” Podhurst says. “Now, I enjoy mentoring younger lawyers myself, helping to improve their skills. I tell them to work as hard as they can for their clients, giving them the best possible representation and making sure they get a fair trial.”

A long-time leader in the legal profession, Podhurst served as president of the Florida Justice Association (1977–1978). He’s also one of just 500 attorneys in the International Academy of Trial Lawyers and was president in 1990–91.

On a national level, Podhurst is a fellow of the American College of Trial Lawyers and a board member of the American Association for

Justice. He has chaired various aviation committees of the American Bar Association, American Association for Justice and The Florida Justice Association.

After more than four decades as a litigator, Podhurst says the U.S. system of justice is still working well. “I was taught to respect the courts, respect the judges and respect the other lawyers in a case,” he says. “To me, we’re the greatest country in the world because of our system of justice.”

Podhurst is also an active volunteer in the South Florida community. He serves on the University of Miami Board of Trustees, the board of the Community Partnership for the Homeless and is board chairman of the Miami Art Museum. He was president of the Greater Miami Jewish Federation, and received the Medallion of Honor from the National Conference for Community and Justice and the 1999 Jurisprudence Award from the Anti-Defamation League.

“Aaron is a role model and mentor, not just to me but to many lawyers in South Florida,” says Harley S. Tropin, a founding partner of Kozyak Tropin & Throckmorton, Miami. His enthusiasm and his genuine affection for people, along with his legal skills, make him a real leader in the legal profession and in the community.” ^{TT}



Aaron Podhurst with Pope John Paul II; Above with Israeli Prime Minister Yitzhak Rabin.