

## The Kindest Justice

**Paul Hoffman**, Schonbrun, DeSimone, Seplow, Harris & Hoffman

Has appeared in or assisted with more than 20 cases, argued 4: *U.S. v. Alvarez-Machain*, *Sandin v. Connor*, *Sosa v. Alvarez-Machain*, *Muehler v. Mena*

The key to a Supreme Court argument is “preparation, preparation, preparation,”



**Hoffman with his wife, Maggie.**

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says Paul Hoffman, who has appeared in front of the court in some capacity more than 20 times—many of the cases dealing with the complex issues of international and constitutional law.

But no matter how many times you appear before the justices, Hoffman says, your first time will always stick out from the rest.

“The first time what you are really worried about is making a horrific mistake and the earth just opening up underneath you and swallowing you into lava or something,” Hoffman says. His own first experience was made more terrifying because he was arguing against Ken Starr.

“I was more relaxed by the second argument,” he says. “You get more a sense for the dynamic of the court and realize the justices are asking questions as much for themselves as they are for you. And you get a sense of the importance of moral advocacy at that level, and it actually gets more enjoyable.”

Some of the justices seem to add to the amiable atmosphere of the court more than others.

“Justice [John Paul] Stevens is always so kind to the advocates,” Hoffman says. “If all the judges were like him, it would be a pretty pleasant experience.”

Chief Justice Rehnquist, on the other hand, referred to one of the arguing attorneys in a case before his as the “singularly most unprepared lawyer” that had ever appeared before the court.

“After I saw that, I really expected lightning bolts to come down on me,” Hoffman says.

Fortunately Hoffman did not suffer the same fate as the berated barrister. He admits that it gets easier and says there is no better experience for any attorney.

“There is nothing I have done in law better than arguing up there,” he says. ❖