

INTERNATIONAL

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Memories of the case of Elian Gonzalez

An American lawyer helped him return to Cuba



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Among the thousands of cases that Mr. Jeffery Leving has worked, he remembers with particular interest the Elián González case, who in 1999 gained notoriety when, after leaving his native Cuba with his mother illegally headed to the United States, a fight between relatives erupted in Miami who wanted the child to remain in Florida and others who wanted his return to Cuba after his mother drowned in the crossing.

"His great uncle, Manuel Gonzalez, contacted me to help him (return the child back to Cuba)," recalls Leving, who is a native of Chicago, Illinois, but has Cuban family ties. While maternal relatives of the child claimed political asylum for him, the father's family struggled to return him to Cuba.

"This case was very special because it shed light at an international level on the importance of the father (in the lives of their children)," Leving said.

The fight for custody of Elian ended on April 22, 2000, when agents of the Immigration and Naturalization took by assault the house where the child was living with maternal relatives. The child was reunited with his father and returned to Cuba, where he currently lives.

"Many criticized me (for defending the interests of the father of the child), but not others. I received a letter from President Jimmy Carter saying he supported my decision (legal)," Leving said.

According to Leving, although similar cases to that of Elian Gonzalez have been solved in less time, the media pressure surrounding this case was the reason its outcome took longer.

Translated from Spanish to English from El Nueva Dia.