On Campus

New Fellowship for Oral History

By
Marcus Tonti
|
Spring 2010



Sybil Shainwald in her Midtown Manhattan law offices. (Jenica Miller)

Attorney Sybil Shainwald ’72GSAS is a pioneer of women’s health law. In the 1970s, she represented plaintiffs in *Bichler v. Lilly*, the first case in which drug manufacturers were held liable for the health problems of children whose mothers took the anti-miscarriage drug diethylstilbestrol, or DES. She has also represented thousands of women in developing countries hurt by unsafe birth-control devices

distributed by Western companies in the 1960s and 1970s.

Now Shainwald is endowing a $100,000 fund to provide fellowships for master's degree candidates in Columbia's oral history program. Shainwald chose to support the program, she says, for its focus on preserving the voices of common people and members of traditionally marginalized groups. She also hopes that her gift will bring attention to the plight of men and women today who still suffer from health problems caused by their mothers' taking DES.

Shainwald has named the new fellowship fund for Judge Jack B. Weinstein '49LAW, a senior federal judge for New York's eastern district who handled many of her cases over the years and, in her view, was instrumental in bringing justice to her clients. (Weinstein also taught at Columbia Law School from the 1950s to the 1990s.)

Shainwald developed an appreciation for oral history, she says, while studying consumer movements for her master's degree at Columbia under the famed historian Richard Hofstadter.

"Oral history is vital," says Shainwald, who in 2009 received the dean's award for distinguished achievement from the Graduate School of Arts and Sciences. "I hope that the oral history department can preserve powerful stories of human tragedy, as well as the voices of people who understood the tragedy and sought to provide justice."

Read more from ***Marcus Tonti***

Guide to school abbreviations

All categories >
Read more from ***Marcus Tonti***