

## FLOYD ABRAMS

By Ronnie Abrams

**“TELL ME ABOUT YOUR CASES!”** This was always my desperate, last-ditch plea. My final chance at getting my dad to let me stay up past my bedtime. And it worked every time.

Over the course of his distinguished career, my father, Floyd Abrams, has worked on more than his fair share of groundbreaking cases. But as I think about why he is deserving of the New York Law Journal’s Lifetime Achievement Award, I think not just about the ways he has contributed to the law, but the ways he has contributed to the profession. Although he is a well-respected writer, scholar and professor, at heart he is just a lawyer and darn proud of it. Well before I knew what the Pentagon Papers were, I knew that. His passion for the practice is, I am certain, why I was that kid who always wanted to be a lawyer too.

When I was around my dad, lawyers always seemed to be the good guys. They did pro bono work that took them from Cambodia to South Africa, Mississippi to Washington, D.C. They moved, led and roused countless others to care about our Constitution. They could describe thorny legal issues in the simplest of terms and argue their cases with eloquence and vigor. I wasn’t always old enough to fully appreciate what I was witnessing when I was with him—including when I fell asleep at the U.S. Supreme Court at age nine (during his opponent’s argument) or disrupted his Yale Law School class with popping candy at age 10—but I knew enough to keep tagging along.

Over the years, people have occasionally asked me whether it was difficult to follow in the footsteps of a legal giant. To the contrary, I just felt lucky to have been by his side. And anyway, how could it be hard to follow your own biggest fan? When I was a young lawyer on trial, my dad was often cheering me on from the gallery, leaving many a judge to wonder whether there was some important First Amendment issue hidden in an otherwise routine criminal case.

More importantly, he—forever unassuming and humble—would never even think of himself as the icon he has become. He once wrote that “the difference between [his] life and those of such giants of the bar is that unlike almost all of them, [he has] lost cases as well as won them and made errors as well as hit home runs.”

His greatest contribution to the profession? Maybe just helping to give lawyers a good name. People don’t always agree with his positions, but no one can question his intellect, decency or commitment to the principles he believes in. To me, he has always been an inspiration—not just as a lawyer, but as a parent, a person and an American.

Do you know what my daughter said when she snuck into my bed at an ungodly hour last Sunday morning? “Tell me about your cases!”



RONNIE ABRAMS  
is a judge of  
the U.S. District Court  
for the Southern District  
of New York.



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**FLOYD ABRAMS**

**Cahill Gordon & Reindel**

**J.D., Yale Law School, 1960**

Joined Cahill in 1963 after serving as a law clerk for a U.S. District Court judge in Delaware; became a Cahill partner in 1970

- Frequently appears before the U.S. Supreme Court in cases raising First Amendment issues, interpretation of ERISA, nature of broadcast regulation, impact of copyright law and continuing viability of *Miranda*.
- Published "Speaking Freely: Trials of the First Amendment" in 2005.
- Argued for The New York Times and Judith Miller in the CIA leak grand jury investigation.

- Led a successful challenge to a New York City Board of Health regulation requiring retailers to display graphic images on hazards of tobacco use.
- Prevailed before the Supreme Court on behalf of Senator Mitch McConnell as amicus curiae defending the rights of corporations and unions to speak publicly about politics and elections in 'Citizens United'.
- Represented Nina Totenberg and National Public Radio in the 1992 "leak" probe conducted by the U.S. Senate arising from the confirmation hearing of Justice Clarence Thomas.
- Taught for 15 years as visiting professor of First Amendment Law at the Columbia Graduate School of Journalism.