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Manhattan mom, kids remain homeless more than three years into eviction fight

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December 11, 2021 2:36pm Updated



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A homeless Manhattan widow is waging war against her billionaire landlord.

Deborah Privitello, mom of three, has been forced out of her rent-stabilized duplex apartment for nearly four years amid a decades-long court battle with Francis Greenburger — known as the “Co-op King of New York” — who she claims turned her “beautiful life” into a “sick nightmare” when he snapped up her Midtown East building.

Privitello and her husband, Michael, had already been in the \$1,400-a-month, ground-floor pad for nine years when Greenburger's Time Equities Inc. bought the five-story building, 342 East 50th St., and the adjoining five-story 344 East 50th St. for \$2.5 million in September 2001.

The family lived in the largest unit in the buildings: a three-bedroom, 1.5 bath with a working fireplace, washer and dryer, air conditioner, full basement and French doors to the backyard — a place with a current market value around \$9,000 a month.

“We'd slow dance in the living room,” Privitello said. “It was just special.”

Things quickly headed south.

Within weeks of its purchase, Time Equities allegedly tried to convert the family's backyard and vestibule into common spaces, cut off utilities like the washer and took over the basement, the widow claims. Within months, the basement began to flood. By 2005, the



Deborah Privitello has been forced out of her rent-stabilized duplex apartment for nearly four years.

Helayne Seidman

“We had a beautiful life there, before these people came into it,” said Privitello, who is in her early 60s and is retired from the entertainment industry.

As Time Equities converted the rest of the units to condos, the Privitellos became the lone holdouts, refusing to leave or take a buyout, with Michael Privitello fighting in court to preserve the home as the disrepair worsened.

Michael Privitello, 56, died of a sudden brain tumor in 2006, his wife said. Years later, the family believes the toxic mold that had invaded their home with the repeated floods contributed to Michael’s glioblastoma, a “rare form of cancer that scientific articles now show to have a link to exposure ... [to] toxic mold,” they claim in court papers.

“I was married 25 years, he was never sick in his life,” said the widow.



Deborah Privitello and her husband, Michael, had already been in their apartment for nine years when Greenburger's Time Equities Inc. their building.

Handout from Deborah Privitello

Michael Privitello's death did nothing to stave off Time Equities, claims Deborah, who alleges the company sent a process server to hit her with more court papers while they sat shiva.

Repeated floods, leaks, rodents and ceiling collapses created dangerous mold that Time Equities failed to fix, according to court papers.

There have been "multiple collapsing ceilings" in the 100-year-old building, and dozens of violations doled out by the Buildings Department, court papers show.

In April 2018, the city slapped a partial vacate order on Privitello's apartment — forcing her and her children out. Later that year, the state Division of Housing and Community Renewal found the home uninhabitable, and reduced the family's rent to \$1 a month, a decision it reaffirmed Nov. 10.



Time Equities failed to fix repeated floods, leaks, rodents and ceiling collapses that allegedly lead to the mold.

Handout from Deborah Privitello

Since then, Privitello has drained her life savings as she and her kids have bounced from hotel to hotel.

“I have a rent-stabilized apartment that’s legally mine, that [my kids] have succession rights to, that’s worth over \$3 million. We are having to live in hotels and this guy hasn’t paid a nickel,” she fumed.

mold remediation and inspections, court records show.

Instead of paying, Time Equities appealed. A state appeals court overturned the judgment last year, leaving a desperate Privitello to use her life savings instead.

“My children’s lives have been turned upside down. It has been a sick nightmare,” she said.

The son of a Queens literary agent, Greenburger’s rags-to-riches story started with him quitting school to take over his father’s business before moving into real estate and building a portfolio of units which became co-ops. He’s reportedly worth \$4 billion.

The landlord repeatedly contends in court proceedings that Privitello has denied them access to make repairs, a claim her lawyer shot down in a recent legal filing which called the safety of the entire building into question.



A state appeals court’s decision forced Deborah Privitello to dip into her savings.

Helayne Seidman

claiming a lack of access,” wrote attorney Joel Dichter.

Time Equities told The Post that Privitello “goes to the apartment and refuses to let anyone in” every time repairs are planned, a claim the widow quickly shot down.

“I haven’t set foot in the apartment in 3 1/2 years,” Privitello said, adding, “Why would I not want somebody to come in and make repairs?”

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