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NYC slumlord wants to evict 94-year-old tenant before Christmas

BY GREG B. SMITH

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Maxwell Levy, 94, is being threatened with eviction by a notorious slumlord from his Upper West Side apartment on W. 80th St. where he has lived since 1955. (SUSAN WATTS/NEW YORK DAILY NEWS)

Just a few days before Christmas, 94-year-old Maxwell Levy faces possible eviction from the Upper West Side apartment where he's lived since the Eisenhower administration. Because he has experienced so many decades on this planet, he seems pretty calm about the whole thing.

"I go to a few senior centers in the neighborhood and I'm the oldest person there," he said. "Always!"

The landlord who filed an eviction notice with Levy's name on it is Pine Management, now under investigation by the state attorney general because of repeat accusations of it trying to force out rent-regulated tenants so it can then rent units at market rates.

In June, a superintendent of several Pine Management buildings — including Levy's — sued the firm, claiming it fired him when he refused to go into apartments to read mail and gather evidence to help get evictions.

On Tuesday, Attorney General Eric Schneiderman issued subpoenas to Pine Management as part of his ongoing probe, according to a source familiar with the matter.



Maxwell Levy's landlord has tried for years to evict him from his Upper West Side apartment. (SUSAN WATTS/NEW YORK DAILY NEWS)

Levy is one of Pine Management's rent-regulated tenants, and although he has paid his rent on time without fail and doesn't complain about the four floors he must climb to get to his six-room apartment, Pine Management wants him out.



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"They want to get my apartment because they can make a lot more money," said Levy, who pays \$1,650 a month for the pad. "Once I move out, they'll cut my apartment into two apartments, and then they'll get twice the amount of rent they get because I'm under rent control."

Levy, a small, wiry man with a trim mustache and a quiet laugh, adds as an afterthought: "I'm the oldest tenant in all four buildings in a row on this side of 80th St."

Born in 1922, Levy has lived in his W. 80th St. apartment since the 1950s, when the area that Lincoln Center occupies was a tenement neighborhood called San Juan Hill.

After serving in the Navy during World War II, Levy got a master's degree in physics and taught at NYU. At the time, teaching college did not involve receiving a livable wage, so he began a business fixing electronics.



He raised three daughters in the apartment, all of whom moved out and now live elsewhere. For years, management left Levy, who is widowed, alone.

In 2014, Pine Management's owners, Thomas Rohlman and his sons Daniel and Jason, accused Levy of being a hoarder and went to court to evict him.

The Rohlmans did not return calls seeking comment.

Levy admits he is, at times, reluctant to throw things out. After he closed his business repairing phone machines, he kept boxes of equipment in his halls.

But last year, the court appointed a guardian to oversee his affairs, and a court-ordered psychiatrist who visited found a cluttered apartment but no issues of competency. The psychiatrist noted that Levy "seems and looks younger than stated age" and quoted him saying, "I think positively all the time."

Levy's landlord, Pine Management, faces a state probe for allegedly threatening to evict rent-regulated tenants. (SUSAN WATTS/NEW YORK DAILY NEWS)



Maxwell Levy lives in a six-room apartment on the Upper West Side. (SUSAN WATTS/NEW YORK DAILY NEWS)

After a court observer found violations of the housing code in Levy's apartment, the court told the landlord to fix the place and stop bothering Levy.

For several months, the Rohlmans did just that. In August, a new eviction notice arrived — now claiming Levy still hadn't cleared out his boxes. That same month, he submitted to what the court calls a "heavy-duty cleaning" in which dozens of boxes went out the door.

"As far as I'm concerned, it's no longer impeding my activities," he said.

Levy's case is set to be heard Wednesday in Housing Court. He says he's not going because his guardian will handle it.

"I'm living on borrowed time," he adds.

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