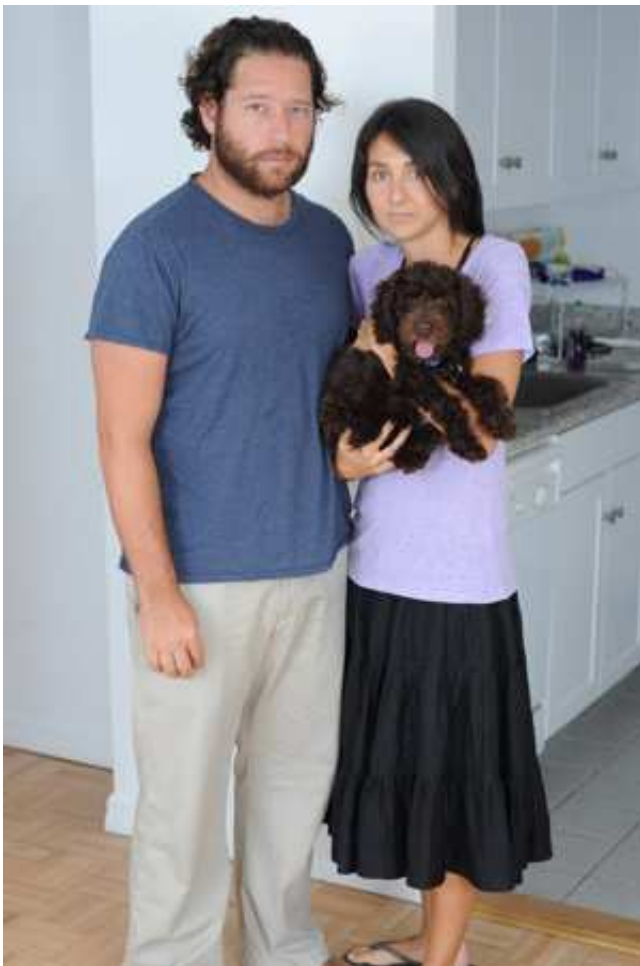


METRO

East Village couple returns home from legal victory over landlord to find dog killed in mysterious arson

By [Doug Auer](#)

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HITTING HOME: Indignant couple Adam Berk and Karen Kushkin have a new apartment and dog following the grief of a nasty legal feud at their old East Village home plus a break-in and arson that killed their beloved Labradoodle, Foster.

Photo: Christopher Sadowski

(
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An East Village couple returned home from legal victory over their landlord to a horror show — their place was torched in a mysterious arson that killed their beloved Labradoodle, *The Post* has learned.

Internet entrepreneur Adam Berk and his lawyer girlfriend Karen Kushkin, scored a \$2,850 default judgment against their landlord, Steven Croman, of Croman Realty, and went out to celebrate in Chinatown.

They returned to their East Seventh Street ground-floor apartment, near First Avenue, around 11:30 p.m. on Jan. 5 to find an intruder had burglarized their pad and set fire to a closet to cover his tracks.

Kushkin's adorable pooch, Foster, was found lifeless on the bed and had to be resuscitated by firefighters. He died eight days later at Fifth Avenue Veterinary Specialists from smoke inhalation and severe burns to his body.

"He was a fighter, and we thought he was coming home," Kushkin, 31, said last week.

The couple had been locked in a bitter battle since November with Croman Realty to padlock two doors that, they say, allowed easy access to their back yard.

Had the metal sidewalk hatch in front of the building and a side entry door been properly secured, the couple is certain, the callous crook never would have gotten in and their pet pup would still be alive.

Detectives, with the help of fire marshals, arrested career criminal Jorge Molina on Feb. 15 after he made an illegal transaction with a credit card stolen from the apartment, sources said.

Molina, 22, pleaded guilty on June 23 to criminal possession of stolen property, but investigators could not link him to the burglary or arson because any evidence he may have left behind was turned to ash.

He was released from custody on July 14 and is scheduled to be sentenced on Sept. 1.

Molina has more than 20 prior arrests, dating back to 2003.

"I blame the criminal the least; I blame Croman most of all," he said.

Croman could not be reached for comment, and property manager Yessenia Camilo said Berk and Kushkin were to blame for allegedly leaving a window ajar the night of the break-in.

The couple is mulling filing a civil lawsuit against Croman Realty and has since dropped its small-claims case.