

Billionaire Slumlord

By Deborah Privitello

Another Fourth of July is upon us, and I write this in remembrance of my late beloved husband Michael Privitello on what would have been our wedding anniversary.

My children and I have been rendered homeless since April 2018 from our three-bedroom duplex on E. 50th Street. We have lived here since the 90s. Our billionaire landlord Francis Greenberger/Time Equities, dubbed the “Condo Co-op King” since the 80’s, has constructively evicted us.

We are the last remaining rent-stabilized tenants. Our apartment is the most valuable, worth well over three million dollars (more than he paid for the two buildings together).

His empire, headquartered at 55 Fifth Avenue, owns over 36 million square feet of real estate, and nets over four billion in revenues across 5500 residential apartments. Greenberger’s credo, “it’s the hold in real estate,” fueled his purchase of our building to convert to condos. He made sure to maintain his hold by managing the buildings.

The cruelty toward us for the past 20 years has been so painful and scary. And for the last three years homeless, forced to live in hotels and 16 months of that in the pandemic. We have everything we owned destroyed, including irreplaceable possessions of my beloved husband.

Just four days after September 11, 2001, Greenberger managed to close on the building while the world wept and the country was at a standstill. He even sent us a letter of eviction in 2005 for flying the American flag. This flag flew even prior to his purchase.

Since his ownership, we have been subjected to harassment, and our apartment has been left to rot and fall into disrepair. There have been numerous structural emergencies with collapses of ceilings and caving in of floors—one in April 2018 and another just two months ago in April 2021. The NYC Department of Buildings issued a second emergency vacate order for our apartment, emanating from the leaks coming from the main waste line in the building. Greenberger was again cited for failure to maintain the warrant of habit-

ability and for structural violations for the basement and the joists that support the foundation to the building.

Deadly toxic mold was detected again and Greenberger denied that it ever existed, with stachybotrys growing. My beloved husband died from a brain tumor directly correlated to the mycotoxins found in the mold in our home. These dire conditions have been covered up for years—leaks, repeated flooding, compromised structures due to rotting pipes, holes in the foundation, and a cracked roof that has been leaking and has never been properly weather-proofed since their ownership.

In 2018, over 92 violations were issued and our pleas for help ignored. The landlord continued to force us out using every illegal landlord tactic to evict us, including taking away our grandfathered amenities that were part of our tenancy long before his ownership—the washing machine, fireplace, and fuse box room.

Greenberger uses the courts, agencies and politicians at his disposal to get away with harming us by using any means necessary. In court he falsified papers and framed us, shifting and twisting the blame that somehow we were responsible for these hazardous conditions. He even utilized Governor Cuomo, who started the tenant protection unit and who has done nothing except get reduced office space rent and large campaign contributions all these years from Mr. Greenberger.

The collapse in 2018 made headline news in NYC. The super was caught tearing down the vacate order put there by the Department of Buildings. Instead of immediately providing us with housing, he had his PR firm take the story off the air and did nothing to help us.

While refusing to remediate, Greenberger took out another baseless lawsuit against us to force us to accept an unsolicited buy-out offer. Their lawyer and property manager falsely obtained a default judgement with a restraining order against us! They hid from the court their own deadly toxic mold report for almost one year. A year later we were finally granted a dismissal of their false proceedings and awarded dam-

ages. Greenberger immediately appealed the judge’s ruling and continued to keep us homeless.

On June 17, 2020 on a Zoom conference, his attorney did not even show up for his own appeal. It was like Greenberger had it in the bag. One month later the appellants took away the judgment! After three years still homeless, Greenberger continues to fight us ruthlessly and illegally in court with no repercussions whatsoever.

As the founder of his Center for Social and Criminal Justice, he has never done anything for us resembling justice.

In the context of bad landlords Greenberger gives Steve Croman, a run for his money!

Twenty years of suffering, my husband dead, we remain homeless, they continue litigation against us, emotionally, physically and financially broken, our apartment decimated and our lives destroyed.



SINCE FRANCIS GREENBERGER/TIME EQUITIES' OWNERSHIP, Deborah Privitello's apartment pre-Greenberger (top) has been left to rot and fall into disrepair (bottom). Photos courtesy of Deborah Privitello.

Joan's Shanghai

By Joan Klyhn

Joan's Shanghai is a memoir of a childhood in Shanghai in the '30's and '40s of the 20th century. I am primarily writing it for myself, extending it to my friends, and now to the many people who have shown themselves fascinated with this period in the past.

The Slave

Xiao Mei entered my life in 1940 when I was six years old and Shanghai was occupied by the Japanese. World War Two meant less to me than the invasion of my life by this young girl, barely twice my age.

“So, are you planning to write about that slave of yours?” asked Phyllis. I was visiting her in the late '80s at her home in Guelph, a Canadian town. I distinctly remember sitting down suddenly. “I forgot all about her,” I mumbled. I had buried that time deep in my memory, but at that moment, my mind flashed back to my childhood. “Well she spent at least three or four years with you,” Phyllis continued relentlessly, “how

could you forget that poor girl?” Vivid images came back to me as she talked. I see myself, up a tree, demanding my breakfast. I see her expressionless face as she awkwardly climbs up the tree and hands me the tray. That image, which I suppressed for years, cuts across my vision like it just happened; the day, the sun, the tree, being alone, hating my life, hating my parents for forcing on me this ugly, dull, sad, pockmarked girl. All I can think to do is punish her for being alive. Just as I took the puppy I vehemently didn't want and threw it down the stairs and ran into my room and screamed and screamed and screamed.

“Well, you needed a friend,” my exasperated mother said, “and Xiao Mei's parents

were glad to let us take her.” I wanted a dog, too. I had cut out photos of some big dogs to show my parents, but I was given a handbag size pup, who yapped non stop. “It's the perfect size dog for you. You won't have to take it for walks; you can run around the garden with it.” My mother, again, settling the issue without any chance of rebuttal. “You are not capable of managing a big dog.” Eventually I got fond of Blondie, who survived her fall, but she was never the dog I wanted. Xiao Mei was definitely not the friend I wanted.

At that age I began to shut myself in my room to have tantrums. Neither my father or my mother ever presented themselves at these events. In that big house with its solid

continued on page 29