

# Brooklyn, NY – Activist Sister Wins Bitter ‘Yerusha’ Battle over Older Brother

October 2, 2010 11:12 pm

By admin



Brooklyn, NY – It's been the ultimate sibling rivalry – a bitter eight-year battle between a brother and sister over the ownership of their late rabbi father's \$1 million-plus home in Manhattan Beach, Brooklyn, where they were raised.

And now, much like the biblical fight between David and Goliath, this donnybrook has been won by the undisputed underdog, with Amy Neustein, an author and women's rights activist, scoring a judicial knockout over her wealthy landlord brother, Joshua.

Brooklyn Surrogate Judge Diana Johnson granted Amy full ownership of the disputed home and in a subsequent Sept. 15 legal decision, she has awarded her an additional \$534,000 in lost rental income and penalties while socking her brother with an estimated \$200,000 more in back interest.

"This is a victory for Orthodox Jewish women who refuse to be enslaved and subjugated by patriarchal traditions," insisted Amy Neustein, 53.

"My brother thought that because he was the oldest son and first born I would just simply go away, but I didn't."

"We've been up against every type of legal obstruction that you could have faced, but our persistence appears to have paid off and I think we're finally seeing justice," added her attorney, Michael Leshner.

The siblings grew up in 235 Dover St., a now dilapidated white Cape Cod stucco, on a quiet well-kept street just a block from the ocean, the children of Rabbi Abraham Neustein, a renowned scholar, educator and lawyer.

A former yeshiva high school principal and estate law professor, the elder Neustein served as chief rabbi for what was once the largest congregation in Brooklyn, the Jewish Center of Brighton Beach.

He passed away at age 89 on June 23, 2002 – and although neither sibling lived with him when he died, they began bickering about who owned the home where they both once lived.

Amy claimed that after her father's funeral, Josh, 66, kicked her out of the house, changed the locks and told her the house was his – not hers, according to court records.

"During the shiva," she told The Post, recalling the Jewish ceremony for the dead, "he changed the locks and said, 'The house is mine!'"

Joshua Neustein could not be reached for comment and his attorney, Israel Goldberg, did not return phone calls.

She claims her brother's hostility towards her was fueled by her campaign against pedophilia within the Orthodox Jewish clergy – a position that she says has roiled the insular religious community in which they were both raised and left her brother feeling unnerved.

Her brother has been a formidable adversary, she adds, because he is a self-made real estate mogul, the owner of scores of apartment buildings in Upper Manhattan and The Bronx, who is worth an estimated at \$30 to \$40 million.

Cited as a slumlord in several media reports, he has tallied more than 1,800 HPD violations on 11 residential buildings, according to a "New York City Worst Landlord" web site for New York City Public Advocate Bill de Blasio.

The first legal salvo between the siblings came when Joshua submitted a June 6, 2002 deed he claimed had transferred half of the home's ownership to him and another sister, Frima Burger, 54, according to court papers.

His sister, Amy, challenged that deed as fraudulent and an affidavit from Richard T. Picciochi, a noted handwriting and document examiner, asserted that it was a likely forgery.

Judge Johnson ruled that the forgery allegation was moot, as the deed Joshua submitted was not recorded by the court clerk until July 12 – 19 days after the elder Neustein had died.

New York real estate law requires deed changes to be recorded before the prior property owner dies – so Joshua's claim was not valid, the judge concluded.

The deed Amy relied upon – one dated May 9, 2001 – was binding and her brother's actions in booting her were therefore illegal, the judge ruled.

Judge Johnson cited how Amy had paid the liability insurance, fire insurance, water and sewage bills and property taxes, but was denied an estimated \$3,000-a-month in rental income for 89 month – and with a portion of that sum subject to triple damages, she awarded her \$534,000.

The judge also assessed an additional nine percent annual interest, worth an estimated \$200,000 more, according to Amy's lawyer.

Joshua Neustein has 30 days to file an appeal, although it is unclear if he plans to do so.