

# Woman Sues Dad, Alleges Sex Abuse

By Jonathan Dienst

STAFF WRITER

A 27-year-old Garden City Park woman is suing her father for \$17 million because she says he sodomized her for three years when she was a child.

Sheryl Burpee said her father, Donald Burpee Sr. of Garden City Park, sexually abused her repeatedly between 1972 and 1975 — from the time she was 8 until she was 11. And Burpee and her therapist, Ilene Brecher, said Donald Burpee acknowledged committing the abuse in joint therapy sessions at the end of last year.

"He forced himself sexually on me," Burpee said in an interview yesterday. "I had no memory of this until recently after years of therapy. And then he admitted it."

In a letter to Sheryl Burpee's attorney, Brecher wrote, "During these sessions, Mr. Burpee acknowledged that he sexually abused his daughter, Sheryl, during her childhood."

Court papers filed by the father's lawyer say the "defendant vehemently denies the allegations."

Brecher, Sheryl Burpee and her attorney, Eliot F. Bloom, said the father's admissions occurred during meetings at Brecher's office on Oct. 15, Nov. 15 and Dec. 10, 1990.

Repeated attempts yesterday to reach Donald Burpee Sr. by telephone proved unsuccessful. His attorney, Lawrence C. Re of Great Neck declined to comment.

Sheryl Burpee, a gymnastics coach, said she began therapy in 1986 because she lacked self-esteem and was having difficulty in her relationships with men. After the counseling began, she began to have memory flashes about a man molesting her. Slowly, her father emerged as the man who had molested her, she said. She asked her father to join her in sessions with both their therapists.

The state's statute of limitations for felonies is five years, said Laurence Leff, spokesman for the Nassau district attorney's office. Sheryl Burpee filed the civil lawsuit on April 23. But in court papers, lawyers for the father contend the statute of limitations for civil proceedings has expired as well. But



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Sheryl Burpee

Bloom argued that even though the acts occurred beyond the legal limit, the lawsuit is valid because the daughter realized her father's behavior only during the past year. State Supreme Court Judge George A. Murphy is considering the case and whether the statute of limitations apply to the point at which the abuse allegedly occurred or when she said she first remembered the attacks.

Bloom said his client is seeking \$10 million in punitive damages, \$2 million in compensatory damages and \$5 million in incidental damages.

Sheryl Burpee, who has two siblings, said her father was the only one in her family who knew of the abuse.

Her mother, who has divorced Donald Burpee and asked not to be identified, said, "I feel devastated by what has happened to my daughter."

Sheryl Burpee said, "I'm not ashamed. I'm not going to protect him because it's his shame. Society doesn't want to hear this. It's so appalling that a father does this to his daughter. But it's a serious problem and it happens in many more homes than we know about."