

## Family Alleges Forgery In Latest Twist Of NYC Deed Dispute

By **Emma Whitford**

Law360 (October 12, 2022, 7:11 PM EDT) -- The 2015 transfer of a Brooklyn, New York, brownstone away from an elderly woman was the result of a forged deed and should therefore be voided, according to new claims in a lengthy and closely watched property ownership battle.



Signage outside 964 Park Place in February, during an eviction defense action. A new complaint marks the latest effort by Ida Robinson's family to recover ownership of the Brooklyn property. (Emma Whitford/Law360)

In a complaint filed Tuesday in Brooklyn Supreme Court, 98-year-old Ida Robinson is seeking to recover ownership of 964 Park Place in Crown Heights. The move comes after her daughter, Helen Robinson, received **special guardian status** in May in the hopes of unwinding the transfer that made her family tenants at the property.

"Defendants ... falsely made and prepared the forged deed with the evil design of defrauding plaintiff out of her title to, value in, and ownership interest in the subject premises," according to the complaint.

Ida Robinson's prior court-appointed guardian **withdrew** its own such effort without explanation earlier this year after bank statements and emails **emerged** supporting a claim that her family knowingly participated in, and profited from, the property's sale — an agreement that came with a buy-back option.

But the new filing claims the family believed certain payments to be proceeds from a purported mortgage refinancing, in addition to other misrepresentations.

The suit also accuses several actors of stealing the property under the guise of a refinancing opportunity, later bringing frivolous lawsuits to make the deed and subsequent property transfers seem legitimate.

Though the ownership fight spans years and courts, it **burst into the public eye** in February when groups including the Crown Heights Tenants Union and Brooklyn Eviction Defense organized a stoop watch for Ida Robinson's daughter Helen

Robinson and granddaughter Sherease Torain, blocking what they deemed an unlawful eviction.

According to Tuesday's complaint, defendant Hezi Torati met with Ida Robinson, Helen Robinson and Ida's grandson Ali Torain on June 18, 2015, after presenting himself as a lender. The plaintiff thought she was agreeing to a mortgage refinance that would generate \$330,000 in cash, but Torati and co-defendant Yariv Katz, pretending to be her attorney, allegedly got her to sign other documents under false pretenses.

Some combination of Torati, Katz and co-defendants Mordche Fuchs and 964 Park Place LLC — described in the complaint as Torati's alter ego — then allegedly "photocopied, photo-shopped or otherwise made a facsimile" of Ida Robinson's signature in order to convey the property that September.

"The illegal and unlawful conveyance of the subject premises ... was effected not only through the forged deed — which bears the stamp, but not the signature, of defendant Fuchs as a notary public — but also by the unlawful recording of the forged deed," the complaint stated.

"The forged deed then became the basis for additional transfers of the subject premises to other cohorts or partners or grantees of defendants Hezi Torati and 964 Park Place LLC, and for the unlawful recording of such transfers," the complaint continued.

The true deed is the one from 1968 in which Ida Robinson and her late husband, Ephraim Robinson, became co-owners of 964 Park Place, according to the suit. A copy of the deed filed with the suit shows the couple assumed ownership from an entity called 327 McDonough Street Corp., of which Ephraim Robinson was president.

Additional defendants include Menachem Gurevich, the current owner of 964 Park Place, his alleged alter ego Gantz LLC, and The Federal Savings Bank, which allegedly issued Gurevitch a \$625,000 mortgage against the property in February 2016.

The suit also names nonparties Robert Wright and Jean Paul, a self-described financial adviser and mortgage broker respectively, who allegedly facilitated an introduction between Ida Robinson's grandson and Torati.

Another nonparty, former attorney Andre Soleil, allegedly collaborated with Torati even as he represented Ida Robinson in multiple lawsuits without her knowledge.

"In short, Soleil was brought in by said defendants to do their bidding to further the frauds against plaintiff," according to the complaint.

In separate litigation brought against Ida Robinson, counsel for her prior guardian, Adam Birnbaum, **said** Soleil had been disbarred in 2019 and efforts to contact him had been fruitless.

As part of an April filing in that litigation, 964 Park Place LLC claimed Ida Robinson's grandson was actively involved in the sale of 964 Park Place, which resulted in payments north of \$800,000, including hundreds of thousands that went toward the family's mortgage and affiliated businesses.

Tuesday's complaint describes a mortgage payment of \$451,700.61 submitted by Gurevitch in September 2015, alleging it was made without Ida Robinson's knowledge or consent.

"Plaintiff had never met defendant Gurevitch nor sought refinancing or payment of her then outstanding mortgage loan ... from defendant Gurevitch," the complaint stated.

The suit also describes a payment of \$9,500 to Ali Torain and a \$126,000 payment to the family business account in June 2015, allegedly presented as partial payments from the purported mortgage refinancing. A third payment of \$197,476 was made to the family business account — a health-and-wellness enterprise — that September.

"On information and belief, Torain was cajoled into accepting and retaining the \$197,476 amount by Andre Soleil, who stated falsely to Torain that if he ... did not accept the payment, defendant Katz would likely lose his license to practice law," the complaint stated.

In addition to forgery, Tuesday's complaint alleges unjust enrichment in the form of Ida Robinson's lost equity in 964 Park Place.

The elder Robinson is seeking a declaration that the September 2015 deed is void, along with any instruments deriving from it, and that Gurevitch's ownership claim to 964 Park Place is the result of fraud.

The defendants could not be reached for comment Wednesday.

Attorneys who have represented Gurevitch and 964 Park Place LLC in related litigation did not reply to comment requests Wednesday.

"We want the court to recognize that this is our family home and has been our family home for well over 60 years," Helen Robinson said in a statement Wednesday to Law360. "We're getting super legal support, and we're very grateful."

Gurevitch has an active eviction case against members of the Robinson family, but it has been **paused** since the spring

when a housing court judge found that a rental assistance application by Sherease Torain was pending. At the time, Gurevitch claimed the family owed more than \$466,000 in unpaid rent.

Ida Robinson is represented by Philip T. Simpson of Leech Tishman Robinson Brog PLCC and Yolande I. Nicholson.

Counsel information for the defendants was not immediately available.

The case is *Ida Robinson v. 964 Park Place LLC et al.*, case number 529438/2022, in the Supreme Court of the State of New York, County of Kings.

--Additional reporting by Grace Dixon. Editing by Janice Carter Brown.

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