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The Most Vulnerable Among Us

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By Mary Ann Miller

His name is Steve Croman and he is a predator landlord. His prey are the most vulnerable among us: the elderly, the sick of any age, and those that speak little or no English.

The name may sound familiar and you may have even seen his picture in various tabloids and online publications. On May 9, 2016, New York State Attorney General Eric Schneiderman arrested Steve Croman, but not for what he did to Helene Rajewsky, Raymond Miskell, James Panitz, and so many others. He arrested Croman for committing the cardinal sin: defrauding the banks!

Croman was arrested on 20 counts—two counts for harassing tenants and 18 counts pertaining to mortgage fraud, and other financial matters. In a more perfect world, the counts would have been reversed. However, in this capitalist society, the more egregious



BATTLING A PREDATORY LANDLORD:

Helene Rajewsky (above), a 91-year-old resident of the West Village, is one of the many victims of Steve Croman's tenant harrassment. Photo by Peter Chaffee.

crimes seem to do with money.

Helene Rajewsky is a 91-year-old woman living on Prince Street in Little Italy. She resides in a rent controlled apartment, which is ordinarily an affordable and safe place to live. However, in Helene's case, with this landlord, it is a death sentence.

We don't exaggerate. Helene was forcibly taken on several occasions by the police to hospitals for "observation" and released within hours. Croman's property managers, Janet Donovan and Jackie Slater, were responsible for calling the police, no doubt attempting to earn the bonus that Croman gives his workers for evicting tenants like Helene. On November 27, 2012, Helene was violently removed, put on a gurney, handcuffed, and carried down the stairs roughly, placed into an ambulance, and hauled off to New York Cornell Weill Hospital. Her keys, money, coat, and decent shoes were left behind.

A neighbor awaiting Helene's return was assured by the property managers that she would return home by ambulette, but that did not happen. With the little bit of change she had in her pocket, Helene managed to reach the 2nd Avenue bus. She took it downtown, to the closest stop to home, several long blocks away. She was forced to walk in the sleet and rain to Prince Street where the neighbor waited with her keys. As the neighbor accompanied Helene to her apartment, the neighbor realized she was soaking wet and asked her how this happened, Helene said that she had to walk many long blocks from Houston and Chrystie to get home.

Being a diabetic, the soaking wet slippers rubbed against her frail and aged skin, causing an open sore. Over the next few days, the sore festered and became gangrenous. Helene had to return to a hospital and have part of her foot amputated. She spent several weeks in the hospital and rehab, and then returned home to continued harassment by Steve Croman and his people.

Helene survived that night only to be taken to court several times subsequently. Croman has Helene in court again as this article is being written. The burning question is: Why did the police forcibly remove someone like Helene on a call from Steve Croman's property managers?

But Croman's tactics are not limited to courts. He also has a secret weapon, one Anthony Falconite—a former cop, who now serves him. I personally encountered Falconite and witnessed his tactics. Leaving my apartment one morning around 8:30am, I heard very loud pounding coming from the floor below. I saw a short, burly man pounding on the door of my lovely Chinese neighbors, the Dag family. He

was shouting, "I'm from the landlord. I must get in to look at the plumbing." He turned to me and said "They won't let me in," expecting sympathy. I said, "I wouldn't let you in either, pounding like that." I told my neighbors to never open the door to this man. After suggesting that he leave, Falconite stormed off, cursing me all the way down the stairs. I fully expected early the next morning, and for many mornings thereafter, to hear that dreaded pounding on my own door.

There are many others—vulnerable ones too numerous to mention in this article. Even after Croman's arrest and the Cease & Desist Order on Anthony Falconite from the Attorney General, both Croman and Falconite continue to conduct business as usual.

If Croman wins, his revenge will be swift and thorough against those who brought him to this point; we will surely lose our apartments, if not our lives. Those who fought him, in the streets, in their homes and in the courts will certainly be the most vulnerable among us.

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