

PASTOR IN TRYST TROUBLE



Booze, cash, sex filled 14-year affair: mistress

Booze, cash, sex filled 14-year affair: mistress

By AL GUART

A charismatic Brooklyn preacher had a 14-year, booze-fueled extramarital affair with a sweet-voiced choir member — then attempted to toss her out on the street when the relationship ended, according to a palimony lawsuit filed by the jilted woman.

The Rev. Willie James Hall, 71, pastor of the Bethel Baptist Church in Crown Heights for the past 40 years, lived with choir member Velma Martin from 1985 to 1998, the lawsuit filed in Brooklyn Supreme Court stated.

During that time, Hall lavished expensive gifts on Martin, a sixth-grade public-school teacher, while hiding the fact he was still married, the suit alleges.

"I hope the Rev. Hall doesn't preach what he practices," said Martin's lawyer, Susan Chana Lask. "In any event, I believe my client deserves half of everything he has."

The affair began in January 1984, when Hall called Martin at her mother's home claiming to be sick, Martin claims.

"I took a cab to his home," Martin said. "When I got there, I discovered he wasn't sick at all. He was intoxicated. You could smell it."

Martin, 23 at the time, returned home and called Hall the next day to check on him.

"I went back over to see he if he was OK," she said. "I felt I could stop him from drinking."

Hall convinced Martin he was separated from his wife, Bernice, and later said they were divorced, Martin said. According to Martin, Hall began buying her fur coats, diamonds and fancy cars with the money he earned from the 4,000-member church.

"He was seducing me, buying me diamond rings for every finger, furs for every day of the week," Martin said. "One night I mentioned I wanted a car, and the next day I got [it]."

"Anything I said I wanted he

got it for me," Martin said.

In 1994, Hall arranged for Martin to have an abortion, she said.

All the while, Hall drank heavily, Martin said.

The relationship ended abruptly in May 1998, when Hall suffered a stroke. Martin says Hall's estranged wife turned up at the hospital and kept her at bay.

"For 14 years, I slept with this man every night," Martin said. "Where was his wife?"

Soon afterward, Martin found out her name was not on the deed to properties she had helped Hall purchase, and in one case she was left with a \$128,000 mortgage and more than \$28,000 in debts, Martin charged.

Next came eviction notices, the most recent last Oct. 18, which prompted Martin's lawsuit.

The lawsuit, which is yet to be set for trial, hinges on a technicality: New York does not recognize common-law marriages unless the couple visited states that do. Hall and Martin visited Alabama, Florida, Pennsylvania and other states that accept common-law unions, Martin says.

Hall, whose daughter, Andria, is a paid lecturer and former CNN anchorwoman, admitted the affair in a 1999 court affidavit — and revealed he had been married all along.

"[Martin] was not deceived by me into believing our relationship was any more than it was; namely an extramarital affair," Hall wrote in a January 1999 court affidavit. "My living arrangement with [Martin], portrayed in its best light is that of 'boyfriend/girlfriend,' and in its worst light 'an adulterous relationship.'"

Since the breakup, Hall has moved in with his wife, Bernice, in Plainfield, N.J.

"I knew that something was going on," Bernice Hall said, before referring questions to Hall, who did not return calls seeking comment.

21
New York Post, Monday, November 26, 2001
nypost.com