



# 'Fraud' in the family

## Dead man's son hits cuz as inheritance conniver

By ERIC LENKOWITZ

A Manhattan woman swindled her cousin out of his dead father's estate — by claiming he didn't exist, the son's lawyer is charging.

Marquilla Ferguson had promised to help her cousin claim control of his father's money but instead convinced the Queens Surrogate's Court she and a cohort were the "sole surviving heirs," according to court papers.

The Queens DA's office has launched a probe into the alleged antics, which included Ferguson writing letters to the court denying the existence of Ralph Howe's son, Richard.

"The office is reviewing the allegations," a spokesman for DA Richard Brown said.

Ferguson made off with \$200,000, said Susan Lask, Richard's lawyer.

The case began on Dec. 7, 2001, when Ralph Howe, 67, died without leaving a will.

His estate legally should have gone to his son, Richard, because his other son, Kennedy, is in prison, Lask said.

Richard Howe told The Post he asked Ferguson — who was taking care of Ralph in his final days — to file an affidavit saying he was the rightful heir.

"I couldn't get to New York to get to the court to file the papers to become administrator," Richard Howe said.

Howe charges that Ferguson instead filed an affidavit identifying Ralph Howe's only two sons as Kennedy Howe — who at the time was imprisoned for viciously attacking his father with a hammer — and Eric Douglas Howe, who was born out of wedlock.

Kennedy's attack on his father left the man with violent seizures, which were ultimately ruled the cause of his death.

Neither Kennedy nor Eric would be entitled to the estate under the law.

"I am the next of kin for the deceased, Ralph D. Howe," she hand-wrote in a letter dated Dec. 11, 2001 seeking access to examine Ralph Howe's home for documents and property, according to documents reviewed by The Post.

Richard Howe was never mentioned in the letter.

In a second hand-written letter, dated April 1, 2002, and addressed to the small-claims division, Fer-



**MARQUILLA FERGUSON**  
Awarded uncle's estate.

guson said Ralph Howe "had no other children other than Eric Douglas Howe, either natural or adopted," this time removing Kennedy from the picture.

Ferguson was initially allowed to recover property and cash with a value less than \$100, said the court's chief clerk, Annemarie Rice.

On April 26, 2002, Ferguson was able to dupe a title company into giving her the necessary papers allowing her to sell the home, which she did later that day.

Lask said when she confronted Ferguson about the money, she admitted she used the cash to pay off debts.

"I can't even believe she could file those affidavits and get away with it," said Richard Howe, who maintains his father only had two sons — he and Kennedy.

"This cousin cleaned my clients out of their house and home by falsifying documents before the Surrogate's Court," Lask said.

Ferguson also has control of Ralph Howe's bank accounts, credit cards, 1991 Dodge Daytona and other personal effects.

"My dad's personal possessions, I've lost those things," Richard Howe said. "I don't think I'll be able to get them back."

Ferguson maintains her innocence.

"I never spoke to Richard. He's lying," Ferguson said. "Where was Richard during his father's last two weeks, when he was sitting at home, decomposing?"

She said she expects the problem to be resolved tomorrow, when both parties argue their case before Surrogate's Court Judge Robert L. Nahman.



**TURNED INTO A GHOST:** Richard Howe claims he was ripped off for his inheritance after his father died.  
Michael McElroy