



Woman Accused of Scamming Boyfriend With Alzheimer's out of Millions

Woman's Home Searched, But No Charges Filed Yet

By KIM CAROLLO, ABC News Medical Unit

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The family of a retired Washington state optometrist with [Alzheimer's disease](#) says a woman he met on an Internet dating site bilked him out of more than \$2 million.

Federal authorities searched the woman's home in Coupeville, Washington last month and are investigating whether she [defrauded](#) 80-year-old Norman Butler.

So far, no charges have been filed.

"More than 90 percent of his investments are gone," said Butler's son Doug. "He has a little bit of cash, a few IRAs and some savings and that's it."

The woman's name is being withheld for now because she has not been charged with a crime.

In mid-December, a Washington judge ordered the woman to repay \$2.26 million, after Doug Butler filed a petition to recover the money because his father is a "vulnerable adult," but her attorney is appealing that judgment.

The woman's attorney, Tim Leary of Seattle, has not yet returned calls.

"I believe it [the appeal] has to do with when he [Norman Butler] was [diagnosed with Alzheimer's](#)," said Doug Butler. "He was officially diagnosed in August of 2009." Norman Butler and the woman began dating in 2005, and a private investigator found he started giving her money shortly after the relationship started.

At first, Butler's family members were pleased about his new girlfriend.

"Dad told us he met this lady and we thought that was a great thing," Doug Butler said.

He said the woman didn't talk to his family very often, but they had no reason to be suspicious until late 2009 when Doug, who's an accountant, noticed his

father started writing bad checks.

"We have records that show she got all this money," said Rose Winquist, a private investigator working with the Butler family. "We found out she transferred some of the money to family members in other states, but we're still trying to figure out where the rest of the assets are."

Winquist said when she confronted the woman, she said at first that she only got a little bit of money from Butler but gave it back. She later said she gambled the money away.

Winquist's investigation also revealed that the woman was convicted of second degree murder in August and served 8 years of a 15-year sentence and was previously charged with theft. The woman was also married at the time she started dating Butler.

Cases Common and Can Be Difficult to Resolve

"It happens so frequently because people with Alzheimer's are such a target and are vulnerable," said Hyman Darling, an elder law attorney at Bacon Wilson P.C. in Springfield, Mass.

"It's difficult to get hard evidence on it, but certainly if you put together all the anecdotes, one would have to



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believe it happens with a fair amount of frequency," said Marshall Kapp, director of the Center for Innovative Collaboration in Medicine and Law at Florida State University in Tallahassee.

Kapp added that people with [Alzheimer's disease](#), in their mentally compromised state, are unable to realize they are being victimized by unscrupulous scammers.

"Even if the person does have the mental wherewithal to figure it out, older people are very reluctant to report this," he said. "They feel embarrassed and afraid if they show themselves to be vulnerable and unable to take care of their affairs, they will have whatever freedoms they have taken away from them."

Norman Butler, according to his son, still has no idea the woman he was dating had been taking advantage of him.

"He was interviewed by law enforcement, he sat down with our attorney and Rose [Winqvist] and they've talked with him, we had him served [to force him to testify in court], he sat in court and doesn't remember any of that," said his son, Doug.

Every state has laws in place to protect people against fraud, but legal experts say enforcing them can be difficult, especially if resources are scarce. They may also be difficult to prove, especially if a person isn't viewed as "vulnerable" in the eyes of the law.

Family Hopes Others Will Learn Lessons

Doug Butler concedes that he didn't check up on the woman carefully enough. He said he ran her name through web sites that offer thorough [background checks](#), which came back clean.

It was only when Winqvist got involved that he learned the truth. The private investigator advises people to "follow their gut."

"You have to go through public court records, and go through civil indices, too. Search for the person and see what comes up," she said. "By looking at who these people are can turn things up that will provide the family with the ammunition you might need to either go to the courts or just run these people off."

Attorneys strongly recommend that families discuss financial matters with their elderly relatives, as difficult as those conversations may be.

"Families have to approach it in terms of, 'Let's work collaboratively, let's help each other,'" said Kapp. "It's important for the family to preemptively help plan ahead while the person has the capacity to make his

or her own decisions and manage their own affairs."

The money allegedly bilked from Norman Butler, according to Winqvist, was going to be used to help provide care so he could live in his own house. Now that the money's gone, he may have to go into a state-funded care facility.

Despite what happened, Norman Butler still loves his girlfriend, said his son.

"He still e-mails her on a regular basis," said Butler's son, Doug. "He tells her he loves her and misses her."



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