

NEW YORK NEWS U.S.

# EXCLUSIVE: Man sexually abused as teen in 1972 files suit against camp that employed counselor who abused him and others: 'Nobody stopped it'

By REUVEN BLAU and MICHAEL O'KEEFFE  
NEW YORK DAILY NEWS | SEP 01, 2016



Feedback



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When he was 13 years old, he was abused by a counselor who abused four other boys. (Michael Dabin/New York



He has held the secret of that summer for more than 40 years.

He was a 13-year-old in 1972, away at Camp Ramah in the foothills of the Taconic Mountains when, he says, a counselor lured him into the woods and forced him to perform oral sex.



The self-loathing smoldered inside, worsening each time a memory came flashing back.

Then earlier this year, the victim — a Westchester businessman and now a John Doe in legal papers — was fishing on the internet. What he found took his breath away.



His alleged abuser — Harvey Erlich — had gone on to sexually abuse four other boys.



Finally, he was forced to take a stand.

"This is what enrages me more than anything else," the father of three told the Daily News in an exclusive interview Wednesday. "The fact is this went on for years and nobody stopped it."

The businessman struck back Wednesday by filing a bombshell lawsuit in Manhattan Federal Court that claims camp officials knew Erlich, then an 18-year-old counselor at the Conservative Jewish camp in Wingdale, N.Y., was a sexual predator but failed to protect him and other children.



The businessman, now in his 50s said he has struggled with alcoholism, drug abuse, anger management and trust issues. Unable to cope with depression, he attempted suicide several times.



"I got f---ed over this," he said, showing scars on his forearms. "I was trying to punish myself for putting myself in this position and not doing anything about it."



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The lawsuit, which seeks at least \$20 million in damages, names the Jewish Theological Seminary. It also names the National Ramah Commission — the JTS subsidiary that operates Camp Ramah and other summer camps dedicated to teaching Jewish traditions.



"In 1972, Camp Ramah was an extremely dangerous place where a vicious, malicious and sadistic predator roamed free to pick off his innocent prey by relying upon the respect and reverence he commanded by virtue of his position of authority at the camp," the lawsuit says.



The seminary and commission did not immediately respond to a request seeking comment.

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camp director David Soloff and Kenneth Greene, the division head for campers in John Doe's age group, had been told that Erlich abused several boys just weeks before he assaulted John Doe.

Soloff, Greene and other officials failed to call police, notify parents or terminate the counselor, the lawsuit says.

The News was unable to reach Soloff and Greene for comment.

A coverup by camp officials and their failure to stop Erlich, the lawsuit says, allowed Erlich to sexually abuse four boys during the 1970s and 1980s in Toronto, where he worked as a dentist and served as a choir conductor.

One of those victims, an 11-year-old boy, was sexually assaulted in a Toronto synagogue, according to Canadian police.

Erlich was arrested on sex abuse charges in 2012 in Canada, which does not have a statute of limitations on sexual abuse cases.

**Feedback**



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Dr. Harvey Erlich was arrested on sexual abuse charges in Canada in 2012 and pleaded guilty in 2015. (Obtained by Daily News)



He pleaded guilty last year to three counts of gross indecency and was sentenced to 18 months' house arrest.

The strict statute of limitations in New York — which the Daily News has pressured officeholders to change — bars sex abuse survivors from pursuing criminal charges or civil damages after their 23rd birthday.

The businessman's attorney, Kevin Mulhearn, is trying a different approach to circumvent the restrictive law. Instead, he is arguing that camp officials violated Title IX, the 1972 federal law best known for enforcing equality for women in college sports.

Title IX also prohibits sexual abuse and harassment in educational programs that receive federal financial assistance.

The Second Court of Appeals recently ruled that the clock on the Title IX statute of limitations does not begin ticking until a plaintiff knows or should have known about the coverup, Mulhearn said.

The businessman told The News he did not know Erlich had abused other boys until he read accounts about his arrest and sentencing earlier this year.

He reported his abuse to Toronto police, but authorities told him there was nothing they could do because Erlich had assaulted him in New York, not Canada.

The businessman said it is time for JTS and the National Ramah Commission to take responsibility for their role in Erlich's sexual abuse.

"If they are not going to take responsibility, then f--- them," he said. "They get what they have coming to them."

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## Reuven Blau



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Reuven Blau has been a reporter in New York City for 13 years with a special focus on the city's jails, Brooklyn politics and the growing Jewish community. He grew up in Denver, Colorado and graduated from Brooklyn College.