

Children of Man Killed in Murder-Suicide Sue Woman's Psychiatrist



Victoria Howden killed her husband and herself a month after the suicide of her former lover.

By LESLIE BERGER
TIMES STAFF WRITER

The tangled murder-suicide case of a British stripper and her husband has prompted the slain man's children to file a civil suit against a psychiatrist whose handgun was used in the Sherman Oaks couple's deaths.

The suit filed Friday in Van Nuys Superior Court also seeks unspecified damages against Eli Lilly and Co., the maker of the controversial antidepressant Prozac, claiming that Victoria Howden's use of the drug contributed to her June 10 murder of the children's father, Charles House, and her suicide minutes later.

Prozac has been linked to violent behavior in about 75 civil suits nationwide, although Lilly has blamed negative publicity about the medication to an anti-psychi-

atry campaign by the Church of Scientology.

Detectives searching Howden's apartment after her death found vials of Prozac and Valium prescribed by Dr. Charles Charuvastra, a Downey psychiatrist described in police reports as Howden's former lover.

A defendant in the suit filed Friday, Charuvastra told police that Howden broke into his home and stole the handgun she used to kill herself and her husband.

Charuvastra, whose relationship with Howden is also the subject of a California Medical Board investigation, could not be reached for comment Friday.

The suit claims Prozac contributed to Howden's "increasingly agitated state" in the months before her death and that Charuvastra was negligent in failing to report the theft of his gun, especially since

he knew Howden was emotionally unstable and using prescription drugs.

Her suicide came about a month after a California Highway Patrol officer, Ronald Webb, shot himself by the side of the San Diego Freeway in Van Nuys, apparently because Howden had rejected a marriage proposal, police have said.

A day after Webb's body was found, Ventura County sheriff's deputies arrested Howden at the officer's ex-wife's home, where Howden was brandishing a gun and threatening suicide.

The county is also named as a defendant in Friday's suit because she was taken to a mental health facility for observation, but released.

Other defendants in the suit, filed on behalf of Jason and Jennifer House, whose parents are divorced and who live with their mother in La Crescenta, are How-

den's estate and a prominent Los Angeles plastic surgeon, Dr. Stephen E. Genender.

Genender acknowledged Friday that Howden had been a patient but said he had no idea why he was named in the lawsuit.

He denied having any personal relationship with Howden and said it had been years since he might have prescribed any medication.

House, a Kentucky native who was training to become a police officer, married Howden in January as a favor so she could obtain a green card.

He regretted the marriage and had planned to divorce when he graduated from the police academy, relatives said.

Attorney Gary N. Stern said he filed the suit on behalf of House's minor children because they had been denied their father through combined negligence by the defendants.