

## **Landlord Sued for Sexual Harassment by Nick Sidoti, R.A.M.**

Q. Dear Nick, This is not really a question, it is just a warning that you may want to pass along to your readers. I rented to a family that had two young girls, age nine and four. The nine year-old girl used to warmly greet me when she saw me at my rental. It was almost like she looked forward to the little attention I gave her by recognizing her and spending a few minutes saying hello and talking to her. This might have been because of the lack of attention she got from her mother.

She also told the judge that her mother had told her that when this was all over they would have enough money to buy their own home.

Here is how my horror story begins. I decided to evict the tenants after warning them many times about the upkeep of my property and the damage they were causing to the property. When the tenants appeared in court, they were accompanied by the public defender. They used as their defense that I had made sexual advances towards the nine year-old girl when she was in the basement with me, watching me do some plumbing work, several months before I asked them to leave. They told the judge that the eviction was retaliatory because they had confronted me with this accusation. I was in total shock, as this was the first I had heard of this totally fabricated story.

During the eviction hearing, the public defender asked for the eviction to be thrown out of court, and for a restraining order forbidding me to go to my property, and forbidding me to have contact with any of the tenants there until the whole matter was cleared up. The judge granted all of these wishes.

After months, numerous court appearances, hearings, an investigation, a tremendous amount of stress and frayed nerves, large attorney fees and the expense of hiring a property manager, it finally came to court.

Fortunately, my kindness towards the nine year-old girl paid off. She admitted to the judge that she had only said what her mother had told her to say, and that it was not true. She also told the judge that her mother had told her that when this was all over they would have enough money to buy their own home. The case was thrown out of court, and I was found innocent on all charges. Needless to say, all I got out of it was an eviction. I was told that legal action against the family would not be worthwhile. The one thing that I am grateful for is that the media did not get hold of this case and ruin my name all over my community.

Nick, the reason I have told you this story is to help prevent others, including their current landlord from going through the agony I have just lived through. I ask that you keep my name anonymous (I have enough problems) when you print this.

...be cautious about being alone with current tenants, but you should also use caution when meeting with prospective tenants.

A. Dear Anonymous, I really appreciate you sharing your horror story with us. I think the AOA readers will think twice from now on, and not allow themselves to be in situations where they can be accused falsely.

I would like to remind my readers, not only to be cautious about being alone with current tenants, but you should also use caution when meeting with prospective tenants. There are many times in this business where we find ourselves alone in a vacant unit with a stranger. This could leave us open to robbery, physical attacks, or accusations of indiscretions on our part. Women showing vacant units by themselves are particularly vulnerable. Here are a few suggestions that you might want to think about.

If the unit is vacant, you might want to open the door and tell the person to go in and look. Stay by the door and answer their questions from this position of safety. You are safer if you never let the person get between you and the door.

Other things that might help are personal alarms, mace, or even car keys. You can even do something as simple as making a call on the phone and talking to the office while you are showing the rental, or just making a comment that someone is coming to meet you in a few minutes.

Some people might think that this is a little bit paranoid. What comes to my mind is the number of female real estate agents that have been attacked at open houses. They mostly work in teams these days. It is better

to be safe than sorry. Readers, if you have any other stories that may be instructive, please send them to me.  
Thanks, Nick

*Nick Sidoti, R.A.M. is a registered apartment manager, licensed real estate agent, investor, lecturer, author of several real estate courses and President of the Western NY Real Estate Investors. For information on his courses or to submit questions for Nick's column, please email [drcashflow@adelphia.net](mailto:drcashflow@adelphia.net) or visit [www.drcashflow.net](http://www.drcashflow.net).*