

# INCEST CASE MAY BE LANDMARK

By ANDREA PEYSER

A Long Island woman who claims she repressed memories of sex with her father for 15 years could help pave the way for incest victims in New York to sue those they claim ruined their lives.

The case of Sheryl Burpee caught the attention of a Long Island judge, who has joined a chorus of incest survivors who want stiffer laws against abusive parents.

In an unusual ruling, Nassau Supreme Court Judge George Murphy last month urged state lawmakers to extend the statute of limitations in cases of incest — which now is even shorter than for simple assault.

The judge nearly apologized, explaining he had no choice but to dismiss Sheryl's case:

"Child sexual abuse ... has reached epidemic proportions in the United States," Murphy wrote.

"Perhaps it is time for the Legislature to address this important issue, as other states have done."

Soon to be appealed, the case of Sheryl Burpee against her father, some court observers believe, could help change the way New York deals with incest.

Claims such as Sheryl's — that she blocked out memories of incest for 15 years — are becoming increasingly common in courts around the nation.

"It is extremely common to have memories or parts of memories repressed," said



**SHERYL BURPEE**  
As a 9-year-old.

Susan Mufson, a certified social worker in Manhattan.

"A child's way to survive the trauma — the technical word is dissociation — [is to] cut off part of themselves."

Attempts to reach Sheryl's father, Donald Burpee Sr., at his home in Garden City, L.I., were unsuccessful. His lawyer, Lawrence Re of Great Neck, did not return calls

## L.I. woman's appeal could change law

from The Post.

The question remains why Sheryl, at 27, would want to dredge up the past. She has a new teaching job and has finally settled into a relationship with a caring man.

"My keeping quiet made me have all the symptoms I had," Sheryl said resolutely.

Those symptoms, she said, were bouts of depression and low self-esteem that made her life seem like an endless, downward spiral.

She talks in a firm, matter-of-fact tone — in chilling contrast to the horrific story she has to tell.

It started with a flashback, Sheryl said. She was in bed in her Manhattan apartment, she said, when the long-forgotten image of a man on top of her burned into her brain.

In the vision, Sheryl saw herself as a little girl. The man sexually abusing her, she believed, was her father.

"I started shaking and crying," she remembered.

Summoning all her courage, Sheryl confronted her father — the good-time guy who took her drinking when she was just a teen-ager. This time, there was no booze to soften the edges of

their encounter.

"I can't believe I ever did it," Sheryl heard her father, Donald Burpee Sr., say in the office of her therapist.

"Do you remember?" she prodded.

"I guess I do," he allegedly responded.

Sheryl's account is backed up by her therapist, Ilene Brecher.

"Mr. Burpee acknowledged that he sexually abused his daughter, Sheryl, during her childhood," Brecher wrote in a letter contained in court papers.

Her father later changed his story, Sheryl said.

"He told me I was crazy," said Sheryl, her voice cracking for the first time.

"He said I had no right to do this to him, and he wanted nothing from me."

Sheryl cried day and night for four days. Then, she decided, she was through playing the victim.

Last spring, Sheryl Burpee filed a \$17 million lawsuit against her father, now 63, in Nassau County Supreme Court, demanding he pay for her therapy — and at least start to repay her for the trauma he allegedly inflicted on her life.



**FAMILY SECRET:** Sheryl Burpee, pictured with her father, Donald, in a family photo, claims he has admitted abusing her 15 years ago.