

Mother who staged phony kidnapping and later found with daughter at Disney World gets eight years in prison for stealing more than \$1million

By [DAILY MAIL REPORTER](#)

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The suburban mom arrested at Disney World after calling in a hoax kidnapping of her daughter nearly three years ago was sentenced to 100 months in jail after she was convicted of stealing more than \$1million from her boss and a relative.

Bonnie Sweeten triggered a nationwide search in 2009 after calling 911 to say she and her nine-year-old daughter had been carjacked and abducted near Philadelphia by two black men.

But it wasn't long before she was found and arrested at the Florida theme park.

Prosecutors said the trick was part of a much larger fraud.

The prosecutor's office said in a statement: 'As part of her scheme to defraud, Sweeten concocted an elaborate hoax that she and her daughter had been kidnapped in order to deceive family members and law enforcement as to her whereabouts'.

The 40-year-old Pennsylvania paralegal was previously sentenced to up to 12 months in Bucks County jail after admitting to the kidnapping ruse before the FBI took custody of her amid the massive federal fraud probe.

Authorities said she had swindled her boss and an elderly relative.

Sweeten pleaded guilty last week to diverting settlement payments and opening loans in her employer's name.

At her sentencing today, U.S. District Judge William H. Yohn Jr told Sweeten: 'You've done great wrong and you have to pay the price'.

The Philadelphia Inquirer reported that Judge Yohn called her a 'master con woman' and suggested she was behind some 2,000 fraudulent acts in a five-year period.

She and her second husband, a landscaper, were spending \$4,000 a month on their \$400,000 mortgage and an additional \$8,000 a month through debit purchases, an FBI agent testified at her trial.

A co-worker couldn't figure out how she had gone from a 'mobile home community' to a life replete with 'clothes, shoes, jewelry, purses,' not to mention a \$30,000 dump truck purchased for her husband and thousands of dollars spent on infertility treatments.



Jailed: Bonnie Sweeten, left, pleaded guilty to theft and other fraud charges and was sentenced to eight years in jail



'Con woman': Sweeten triggered a nationwide search in 2009 after calling 911 to say she and her nine-year-old daughter, right had been carjacked and abducted near Philadelphia by two black men

'They ate out constantly, breakfast, lunch, dinner because she didn't cook. Every room in [her] house had the big flat screen TV, brand new furniture ... vacations ... a cruise,' the suspicious co-worker told authorities, according to the government's sentencing memo.

Sweeten devised elaborate means to steal \$640,000 from the one-lawyer firm and \$283,000 from the retirement accounts of her first husband's elderly grandfather, prosecutors said.

She also took out \$150,000 in personal loans in her boss' name.

'I'm not going to say I was minding the store. ... I wasn't,' boss Debbie Carlitz testified Thursday.



Excuse: Sweeten claimed she was distracted in recent years by her daughter's health problems and a failing marriage. She also acknowledged a prior addiction to Ritalin, a drug often used to treat attention deficit hyperactivity disorder

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Sweeten frequently deposited Carlitz's paychecks into her own bank account. Carlitz said she never noticed because her then-husband was making big money selling custom mattresses, so she had plenty of other money in her account.

But the family of Sweeten's first husband noticed their missing money.

Her former mother-in-law was close with Sweeten and kept giving her more time to pay it back.

'She didn't want to see Bonnie go to jail because she didn't want to hurt the grandchildren,' said the woman's brother, Michael Biondino, of California. The person defrauded was their father, Victor, a retired steelworker.

When the ultimatum finally came, Sweeten said she had gotten help from her parents. She sent out a check for \$280,000 – and then called in the hoax and fled before it bounced.

Victor Biondino, now 94 and suffering from dementia, doesn't know that he was swindled, the son said. The money represented his life savings.

The family recouped some of the money through a lawsuit against Vanguard but doesn't expect to recover the final \$83,000 or the \$40,000 in legal fees, he said.

Sweeten went to lengthy measures to pull off the various frauds, posing as Carlitz to obtain the mortgage-equity loan and as her co-worker to board the flight to Florida, authorities said.

She stole some of the firm money from client accounts, authorities said.

Public defender James McHugh had previously called his client 'very remorseful'.

Her father, William Siner of Milton, Delaware, also testified last week, saying that his daughter realises that she made a big mistake.



Suspicious: The family enjoyed a lavish lifestyle before mom and daughter fled to Disney World, arousing a co-worker's suspicions
