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'21 Jump Street' Writer Says He Was Defrauded by Unlicensed Lawyer



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Michael Bacall

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Michael Bacall is suing Jeffrey Shumway for taking hundreds of thousands of dollars for illegally performed legal services.

Michael Bacall has thrown a fraud lawsuit at his former attorney and alleges that Jeffrey Shumway is no longer legally entitled to practice law and that a fee agreement must be voided.

Bacall, whose screenplays include *21 Jump Street*, *Scott Pilgrim vs. the World* and *Project X*, is suing in Los Angeles Superior Court. According to the complaint filed on Monday, Shumway has acted as Bacall's attorney since 1989 when Bacall was a child actor. The plaintiff had small roles on *Small Wonder*; *Mr. Belvedere*; *Punky Brewster*; *Doogie Howser, M.D.*; and *The Wonder Years*.

In the decades since, Bacall has become a sought-after writer while Shumway has bounced around different agencies and law firms, most recently the Timaeus Group.

"In truth, while presenting himself to Bacall as a respectable and experienced attorney, Shumway was heading down a self-destructive path due to his addiction to alcohol," states the complaint. "As Bacall's career soared, Shumway's stalled. In time, Bacall essentially became Shumway's only profitable client — Bacall was almost single-handedly keeping Shumway afloat financially. Perhaps due to his professional frustration, Shumway's alcoholism progressed over time to the point where he could no longer hide it from Bacall."

The complaint goes on to allege that Shumway began to regularly call Bacall while intoxicated, and on one occasion, failed to show up at a meeting. But the lawsuit is really centered on how Shumway's bar status became "inactive" in June 2014 and the legal services and fee arrangement rendered thereafter.

Shumway, reached for comment, says he commenced an arbitration back in June. The first order of business in the latest lawsuit would appear to be a decision on whether this one remains in a public courtroom or should be arbitrated.

According to the complaint, Shumway "deceived" Bacall in January 2016 into entering into a written contract to formalize their attorney-client relationship. Bacall says he signed a fee agreement not knowing that Shumway and Timaeus were prohibited from practicing law.

"Indeed, Shumway illegally performed legal services under the 2016 Fee Agreement and pocketed over \$200,000 in fees," states the complaint.

The following year, the fee agreement is said to have expired. Shumway allegedly told Bacall that a new agreement would be needed. Bacall consented.

"Shumway continued to perform legal services for Bacall and [loan-out] RBC under the Fee Agreement, and collected over \$100,000 in fees," continues the complaint. "However, by May 2017, Bacall had finally had enough with his alcoholic attorney's erratic and abusive behavior. While advising RBC on a legal matter related to its office lease, Shumway ranted and raved at a member of Bacall's family for no logical reason. On May 26, 2017, Bacall sent notice to Shumway that he was terminating the Fee Agreement."

The next month, Shumway is said to have refused to acknowledge Bacall could terminate him and took the position that the Fee Agreement "actually wasn't an attorney-client agreement, but a mere 'services' agreement — despite Shumway's specific representations to the contrary."

Bacall, represented by attorney Bryan Freedman, is now claiming fraud in the execution of the agreements and seeking rescission of the contracts. He's also suing Shumway for malpractice, breach of fiduciary duty and unfair business practices.

Shumway is represented by Akin Gump attorney Jim Fitzgerald. A statement from Timaeus paints what happened as the firm initiating arbitration after Bacall "inexplicably stopped payments" under a "standard services agreement, which he freely and knowingly signed and renewed."

The statement continues, "In an effort to distract from his breach of that agreement and in derogation of its terms, Mr. Bacall has filed suit against Timaeus and Mr. Shumway recklessly asserting frivolous and scurrilous allegations. Over time, Mr. Bacall has, with guidance from Timaeus and Mr. Shumway, achieved a status in the entertainment industry as a skilled and gifted fiction writer. Mr. Bacall will learn over time that litigation is not fiction — it has to be supported by facts and the law, a standard his complaint fails to meet. Sadly, Mr. Bacall is about to learn a hard lesson: litigation is not therapy for dealing with personal, family and career challenges and, is no substitute for honoring binding agreements."



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