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A Nursing Home Murder and a Family's Arbitration Fight

By MICHAEL CORKERY
and JESSICA SILVER-GREENBERG

Elizabeth Barrow celebrated her 100th birthday at a backyard gathering with her son and three grandchildren in the coastal Massachusetts town where she raised her family and cooked lunches in a school cafeteria.

A month later, in September 2009, Mrs. Barrow was found dead at a local nursing home, strangled and suffocated, with a plastic shopping bag over her head. The killer, the police said, was her 97-year-old roommate.

Workers at the nursing home,

herself or others."

After a police inquiry, the roommate — despite her age and dementia — was charged with murder. The authorities did not focus on the nursing home, though. Brandon Woods claims that, except for some minor arguments, the two women got along nicely. When the roommate was deemed unfit to stand trial and committed to a state hospital, the sensational case that shocked this corner of New England essentially disappeared.

More than six years after the killing, Mrs. Barrow's only son, Scott, is still trying to hold the

month. "She should not have been living in that room with my mother."

Mr. Barrow was barred from taking Brandon Woods to court in 2010 because his mother's contract with the nursing home contained a clause that forced any dispute, even one over wrongful death, into private arbitration.

He has been trying ever since to get back to court, and next month he will finally get that chance. A Massachusetts state court is scheduled to hear Mr. Barrow's case against the home, which has evolved into much more than a lawsuit about one woman's death.

