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Probers want the truth from Ruth

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SHE WAS one of Far Rockaway High School's perkier and brainiest blonds — and she only had eyes for a slightly awkward swimmer named Bernie Madoff.

Today, Ruth Madoff's high school sweetheart will stand in a federal courtroom and admit he's one of the biggest frauds in Wall Street history.

Hanging over the proceedings is one question: What did she know, and when did she know it?

Their close union — she was a director of one of his companies and kept an office near his in the Lipstick Building — suggests Ruth Madoff was more than just a 67-year-old happy housewife and innocent helpmate.

Investigators seeking to unravel the 70-year-old Bernie Madoff's \$65 billion Ponzi scheme

have zeroed in on a pair of his wife's curiously timed wire transfers in the final days of his crime wave.

On Nov. 25, 2007, as her husband scoured the planet in a desperate hunt for cash to keep his fraud alive, Ruth Madoff withdrew \$5.5 million from Cohmad Securities, a Massachusetts-based brokerage firm he partly owned.

Then on Dec. 10 — the day he confessed his thefts to his sons and 24 hours before his arrest — she took an additional \$10 million from her account, filings show.

"The timing of her \$15.5 million in withdrawals — as he was becoming aware of his problems, and then on the day before his arrest — is very suspect," Massachusetts Secretary of State William Galvin told the Daily News.

Galvin, the top securities regulator in the state, calls Cohmad a

feeder fund in Bernie Madoff's empire. Representatives for Cohmad didn't return calls.

Galvin ridiculed Bernie Madoff's claim of having executed the complex, decades-long global banditry alone.

"There are only two questions that exist right now: Where's the money? And was there anybody else involved?"

Ruth Madoff has not been accused of wrongdoing. Still, she has fueled outrage by trying to claim a \$69 million personal fortune unconnected to her husband's booty, which will be subject to court-ordered forfeitures.

Among the treasures she's angling to keep are their \$7 million penthouse apartment off Park Ave., which is listed in her name; \$45 million in municipal bonds, and \$17 million in cash.

Ruth Madoff's claim that the assets are "unrelated" to the alleged fraud makes Alexandra Penney's blood boil.

"She's even more of a repulsive sociopath than Bernie," the Madoff victim and best-selling author wrote in a profanity-laced

blog on the Daily Beast.

Lawyer Jerry Reisman, who represents 14 victims who are out \$150 million, said: "This is stolen money, the fruits of the crime — and it must be returned. Why should she continue to live a life of luxury while the victims are penniless?"

Luxury is an understatement: Ruth Madoff enjoyed a Montauk oceanfront retreat, a Palm Beach spread surrounded by bougainvillea, yachts in Florida and the French Riviera, access to two corporate jets and a regular table at the Palm in East Hampton.

Arrogance is part of her story, and it was often on display at Primola, a pricey Italian restaurant on Second Ave. where the Madoffs dined at least once a week at a quiet table in the back.

Waiters said she treated "the help" with a frosty contempt, and even Giuliano Zuliani, Primola's courtly owner, felt her coldness.

"I've known them for 30 years, but in all that time, I don't think she ever spoke one single word to me," he said.

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Ruth Madoff's high school photo.