

Ain't Nothin' Like the Real Thing

By Reg P. Wydeven
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My junior year of high school, I went on a school trip to New York City. My buddies and I were on a walking tour of Broadway when a group of middle school-aged girls ran up to me and screamed, "Oh my gosh, it's Joey MacIntyre!" Horrified, I yelled, "I'm not Joey MacIntyre!"

My friends laughed hysterically because Joey MacIntyre was a member of New Kids on the Block, the hottest music group in 1990 and a favorite of pre-pubescent girls. Apparently, I resembled the boy bander, which was not exactly the macho image most 17-year-olds hoped to portray.

We discovered that New Kids on the Block were in New York for a concert that night after a second group of girls stopped me. I quickly shooed them away, too. Finally, when the third group of groupies asked for a picture and an autograph, I obliged. I smiled for a few snapshots and signed several autographs, "Hang Tough! Love, Joey MacIntyre," using the title of one of the band's hits.

While I probably wouldn't have gotten into trouble for impersonating a New Kid, as America's obsession with celebrities continues to grow, impersonators are becoming more and more of a problem.

Celebrity appearances at nightclubs can instantly turn a dive into the newest hot spot. Hoping to become the next hot spot, owners will gladly let the booze flow for free for celebrities and their entourages. Knowing this, celebrity look-alikes also show up, hoping to fool owners and patrons into getting VIP treatment.

Like my 15 seconds of fame, bamboozling clubs out of a few free drinks doesn't cause any real harm and doesn't rise to an illegal level. It is illegal, however, when a celebrity doppelganger uses their famous resemblance for advertising or commercial purposes without permission.

For example, if a look-alike is used in a TV commercial and it's not clear the actor is a fake, the celebrity can sue for using his or her likeness without consent. Similarly, if I had charged a fee for my Joey MacIntyre autographs, the real Joey could certainly take me to court for profiting from his celebrity status.

Look-alikes could also be found guilty of fraud if they obtained a benefit or derived value from someone else under false pretenses. In New Jersey, a woman was arrested for posing as CaCee Cobb, Jessica Simpson's former assistant, after several designers sent her \$12,000 worth of free jewelry, clothing and handbags she told them Simpson was interested in promoting.

Finally, in some states, like California and New York, where celebrities abound, engaging in sexual relations with another while pretending to be a celebrity could constitute assault. This act is criminal because the other person may have consented to the relations under false pretenses.

Some individuals, though, have made a career out of looking like celebrities. According to the 2000 census, 1 out of 4 Americans is an Elvis impersonator. Profiting from impersonating is legal so long as everyone involved knows the impersonator is a fake.

So if you are ever mistaken for a star, bask in the glow and enjoy the attention. However, don't ever try to pass yourself off as the real thing. Hopefully, there won't be an Old Kids on the Block Reunion Tour that stops in Kimberly so I have to fight off the paparazzi.