

The Right Stuff

By Reg P. Wydeven
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Last week I wrote about my brush with celebrity after being confused with Joey MacIntyre, a member of the boy band the New Kids on the Block. The New Kids' biggest hit was 'You Got It (The Right Stuff)'. While the song was about the qualities of an ideal girlfriend, the title 'The Right Stuff' was actually borrowed from Tom Wolfe's novel about Chuck Yeager, the first pilot to break the sound barrier.

Wolfe's novel was adapted into a movie in 1983, which told the story of Yeager and other daring test pilots vying for the opportunity to become America's first Astronauts and beat the Russians in the race to put men into space.

Because Yeager never completed college, he was snubbed by NASA. Spurned, Yeager continued to test new jets, pushing the envelope of safety, until, in a climactic scene, he achieves the threshold of space himself. The flight is a near disaster, resulting in a horrendous crash. The burned but undefeated pilot, however, walking proudly away from the wreckage, is an unforgettable image of courage and is the epitome of Wolfe's phrase 'The Right Stuff'.

At age 83, Yeager once again must rely on his courage and resiliency as he prepares to battle his children in court over his pension.

Yeager filed suit last week against his children in federal court, accusing them of diverting hundreds of thousands of dollars from his pension fund. Since his first wife, Glennis, died in 1990, Yeager's finances have been controlled by his oldest daughter, Susan Yeager.

Yeager's current wife, 48-year-old Victoria D'Angelo, feared her husband was being precluded from making financial decisions, and accordingly, he filed suit. In addition to Susan, the lawsuit names Yeager's three remaining children, Michael Yeager, Don Yeager and Sharon Yeager Flick.

Unfortunately, this is not the first round in the Yeager family's personal Cold War. After Yeager and D'Angelo wed in 2003, Susan and two siblings sued D'Angelo, accusing her of alienating Yeager from his family to gain control of his estate.

In another family feud over finances, "actress" and former Playboy Playmate and exotic dancer Anna Nicole Smith won a victory in the U.S. Supreme Court in the war over her deceased husband's fortune. At age 26, Smith married 89-year-old oil tycoon J. Howard Marshall after meeting him at the strip club where she worked. She and his sons have been fighting in court over his \$1.6 billion estate since he died in 1995.

The Court made a narrow decision by holding that federal courts have the ability to adjudicate probate matters, which are typically reserved for state courts. The decision overturns a federal appellate court's dismissal of the case. The appellate court held that a U.S. bankruptcy court had no jurisdiction when it awarded Smith \$474 million, which later was reduced to about \$90 million.

The court did not address whether Smith should be awarded any portion of the estate, whether Marshall's estate planning documents that excluded Smith were tampered with, or whether she was kept from his bedside as he was dying.

The case will go back to the lower federal to divide Marshall's funds. Smith is hoping to get a bundle from the estate, as she is expecting a bundle of her own. She announced on her website last week that she is pregnant, and she's hoping to get a silver spoon as her first baby gift.