

Kin planning how they will spend money

Paternal relatives battling over Hughes' estate

HOUSTON — Charles Ireland, a 68-year-old retired barber from St. Louis, cites physical evidence to support his claim to some of Howard Hughes' vast estate. He bears a strong resemblance to the late tycoon.

Ireland has heard so many people say it that, at the start Monday of yet another probate court hearing on who will inherit Hughes' millions, he was confident enough to talk about the money.

"If I inherit that money, I'd do several things: probably buy a new home, a new car, things like that," said Ireland, who never met Hughes.

Ireland, who says Hughes' grandmother was his great aunt, was one of 100-plus relatives of Hughes' father who came to Houston to fight for the paternal half of the \$163 million to \$1.2 billion Hughes left when he died in 1976.

Including the many who did not come, lawyers count 500-plus paternal claimants trying to overturn the claims of five closer paternal relatives — three daughters of Hughes' first cousin and two step first cousins — to inherit.

Judge Pat Gregory already has ruled Hughes a Texan who left no will, living parents, wives, children, brothers or sisters. Gregory has awarded the maternal half of the estate to 14 relatives of Hughes' mother.

On Monday, lawyers started the two- or three-day process of picking a six-member jury to help decide which relatives of Hughes' father inherit, the five close relatives or the crowd of more distant paternal claimants.

Many of the distant relatives who came were middle class working folk on vacation, although teacher Robert C. Hughes of Wilsonville, Ala.,

had to hire a substitute for the duration. Some drove several hundred miles. Some flew.

Housewife Evelyn Askins Trautwein, her brother Tom Askins, a sheriff's deputy, and sister Colleen Askins Delgman, a nursing home supervisor, drove from St. Louis, stopping en route to visit Elvis Presley's mansion in Memphis.

Many were staying in hotels near the courthouse. Some bought food at grocery stores to eat in their rooms to reduce spending at restaurants.

One of the few distant relatives who claimed they had met Hughes was Dorothy Bacon Wilson, 63, of St. Louis, retired beautician, chef and amateur genealogist who has made eight trips to Houston for Hughes estate hearings.

Wilson said she met Hughes "sometime in the mid-1920s" when she was about 11 and he was about 19. She remembers little about the meet-

ing at a cousin's house: "He was shy, very nice looking, thin, with dark hair."

But he was rich even then, and the memory of the visit, his subsequent legendary exploits and Wilson's definite family tree tracings — "We are definitely the blood heirs" — fueled the dreams of her cousin, Lucille Hopes.

Hopes, 51, of Orwell, Ohio, a school bus driver whose husband drives a truck, said she was "saving or borrowing" to make her second trip to Houston. Just being a potential Hughes heir has changed her life.

"You have big day dreams," she said. "I think we all have big day dreams. Our favorite words are 'if' and 'when.' It's like being in a soap opera." They all have plans for the money.

"I made one promise and that was all — to give 10 percent to the church right off the bat. After that I don't know," said John Askins, his wife, Mable joked: "I'll give you another percent to go to the Pussycat Club."

"Put a new roof on the house — that comes — and new gutters," Hopes said. "I'm going to have a good yard sale, sell everything in the house, and start over."

But she was practical: "I haven't ordered a Cadillac yet."

Gregory and the lawyers say, no matter the outcome of the current paternal hearing proceeding, it may be years before any money actually is disbursed, and inheritance taxes take 77 percent of it.

Quirks in the News

Jumping for joy

United Press International SOUTH EASTON, Mass. — A veteran skydiver says he will try to shatter a world record by making 264 parachute jumps in 24 hours — then give all the proceeds to cerebral palsy research.

Bruce McLaughlin, 35, plans to begin a nonstop 24-hour series of 2,000-foot parachute jumps at 2 p.m. Sept. 15 at the Taunton Municipal Airport. He said he picked the date because weather forecasters have predicted a full moon.

"I'll either break this record or they'll carry me off the field," he said.

McLaughlin has already raised most of the \$6,000 he said is needed to defray expenses. Everything collected above the \$6,000 will be given to the United Cerebral Palsy Fund of Southeastern Massachusetts in Brockton.

The current record for most jumps in 24 hours is 233, set two years ago in England. McLaughlin hopes to surpass the record by 31 jumps.

All in the family

United Press International WINFIELD, Kan. — George Jenkins' step-granddaughters say when they asked him to pay rent for the house he lived in, he lowered the boom — with a bulldozer.

Jenkins, 61, a carpenter, was bound over for arraignment and trial Monday after witnesses at a preliminary hearing testified he leveled two houses owned by his step-granddaughters with a bulldozer in a rent dispute.

Jenkins' wife died four years ago and willed two houses in Geuda Springs, Kan., to her granddaughters, Susan Reed Johnson of Wichita and Teresa Byers of Arkansas City. Jenkins lived in one of the houses, while Jim Johndrow and his wife rented the house next door.

Jenkins had completely remodeled both houses and got angry when he was told he would have to pay rent, authorities say.

They charge he removed his belongings from his house, then allegedly destroyed both houses, valued at about \$35,000 a piece. The Johndrows also lost \$15,000 worth of personal property.

Jenkins did not testify Monday and was unavailable for comment.

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