

Family fight over 'genius' boy

Child whose mom set up claim of amazing 298 IQ at center of family fight

By Julie Poppen

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He was called a boy genius with an IQ off the charts.

Now the youngster smothered with global media attention for his stunning intellectual feats - later proved to be manufactured by his mother - is at the center of a dispute between her and her parents.

Jane and George Chapman, of suburban Rochester, N.Y., say they haven't seen or heard from Justin Chapman, their 14-year-old grandson, for two years despite a 2005 court order allowing visits with him.

Justin was profiled in the *Rocky Mountain News* in February 2002 for his amazing yet questionable intellectual accomplishments.

A Denver psychologist and gifted child expert concluded the boy, 6 years old at the time he was tested, had the world's highest IQ. Later, Elizabeth Chapman acknowledged she and her son studied an IQ test booklet before the exam.

Elizabeth Chapman and her parents have had a strained relationship for years.

The Chapmans said Justin, now a ninth-grader, visited them five times from 2003 to 2006 and seemed to enjoy himself. Then communication stopped. Jane Chapman said her grandson is believed to be living with Elizabeth in Colorado Springs. But a private investigator the Chapmans hired cannot find them.

"She's cut off contact completely," George Chapman said. "She will not put him on the phone to talk to us."

Expert cited 'greatest genius'

Elizabeth Chapman moved to Colorado with her son from New York in 2001 to take advantage of programs and experts in the field of gifted education and counseling, including psychologist Linda Silverman, who runs the Gifted Development Center in Denver.

Silverman tested Justin's IQ and recorded the 298 score on the Stanford-Binet Intelligence Scale. Most IQ scores top out at 160. Silverman called Justin the "greatest genius to ever grace the Earth."

Silverman did not return a recent call for comment.

Justin became a celebrity. He was the youngest person ever to enroll in a for-credit course at the University of Rochester. That attracted more than 100 interview requests. He traveled the country and spoke at gifted education conferences.

Then in November 2001, Justin was hospitalized for an apparent suicide attempt. A Broomfield County judge removed the boy from his mother's care and she was accused of neglect.

Justin spent 22 months with three different foster parents between late 2001 and early 2004, his grandparents said.

In a March 2002 interview, his mother admitted copying the SAT score report of a neighbor's son and attributing the perfect math and verbal scores to Justin, then 6. She also said she had checked out a copy of an old version of the IQ test from the library and studied it with her son before Silverman tested him.

The neglect case filed in Broomfield against Elizabeth Chapman, 36, was officially closed in 2006. She was granted full custody of her son after completing counseling and parenting classes mandated by the court, her parents said.

The Chapmans tried twice - and failed - to get permanent custody of Justin, they said. Justin's grandparents say they have spent "six figures" on attorney fees, mandatory evaluations associated with court proceedings and about 17 trips to Colorado.

"We spent every dollar we had going back and forth," said George Chapman, 56, who has worked for Rochester Gas and Electric for 37 years. "I probably would be retired now if it wasn't for that."

After receiving an e-mail message requesting an interview, Elizabeth Chapman called using a restricted phone number. In a brief conversation, she said, "Everything is going well." She said there is gag order in the case, and that she wanted to maintain confidentiality.

Kin exchange accusations

An El Paso County judge granted a permanent restraining order against Jane and George Chapman in December 2005, at their daughter's request, records show.

She had accused her parents of stalking her - a charge the grandparents rebut. In a 2001 interview with the *Rocky*, she said her parents employed a "totalitarian" approach to parenting. Her parents accuse her of "controlling" her son.

The restraining order does not impact a visitation decree calling for two visits in Colorado and two in New York per year, documents show.

In response to a motion filed by Jane and George Chapman, El Paso County District Court Judge J. Patrick Kelly issued a contempt of court citation against their daughter because of her alleged failure to comply with the visitation. A hearing is now set for November.

Court officials said they could not discuss the case because it involves a juvenile.

Jane Chapman said she and her husband are worried about their grandson.

"The bottom line is our daughter needs help and we want that kid," she said. "He's being abused by not seeing his family. He's got 80 relatives here. Everyone's heartbroken about this situation."

John Thirkell, chief deputy county attorney in El Paso County, said as long as the child's welfare is not at risk, there's not much courts can do to enforce visitation.

"I understand that's hard on people - but it's sort of like two neighbors having a dispute," Thirkell said.

Grandparents recall visits

Jane Chapman fondly recalls the last visit with her grandson two years ago. Every time the couple would see Justin, it was as if no time had passed, she said.

Justin seemed happy enough, she said, but he would never discuss his life in Colorado - other than saying he mowed lawns to make extra money. He wouldn't talk about school, friends or what he did for fun.

Instead, Justin and his grandparents would go to the park, fly kites, go out for ice cream, visit the Rochester Museum and Science Center - where Justin especially enjoyed the hands-on exhibits, she said.

George Chapman also recalled a trip to a beach at Lake Ontario.

"Even though it was really crisp that day, he didn't want to hurry and he spent a lot of time finding shells and talking of times past," George Chapman recalled. "We visited some of our relatives, including his great-grandparents."

Then the time would come to leave.

"It was horrible having to put him back on the plane," Jane Chapman said. "He always said, 'I don't want to go back.' "

Still, he knew he had to go and he loved his mother. "That's still his mom. And he's a great kid. I could see him wanting to take care of his mom."

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