



The Kid Stayed in the Pictures

Following his dad's lead, Steve Rotfeld built a thriving TV production company

By David Tanklefsky -- *Broadcasting & Cable*, 2/22/2010
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Ask Steve Rotfeld, and he'll tell you that his dad was always a "pretty big character." Berl Rotfeld created the cult sports-documentary series *Greatest Sports Legends* (where he hobnobbed with the likes of Jim Brown, Reggie Jackson and Mickey Mantle), was profiled in *Sports Illustrated*, and was known for wearing a cowboy hat and a long, flowing coat. "He looked like a Western gunslinger," Steve says.

So, it wasn't going to be easy when, in 1986, Steve stepped out from his father's long shadow to work on his own. After graduating from law school, he had spent five years working alongside his dad on *Legends*, but left to start Steve Rotfeld Productions out of his Pennsylvania home.

"I set up shop on the second floor of my house," Rotfeld explains. "It was just me, a desk, a typewriter and absolutely nothing to do." But Rotfeld, who had won an Emmy for writing *The Legend of Jackie Robinson*, was not idle for long. He partnered with 44 Blue Productions to produce a series of sports-blooper clip shows with sportscaster and baseball funnyman Bob Uecker called *Bob Uecker's Wacky World of Sports*. Rotfeld took the shows to syndication, and "that got SRP on the map," he says.

Rotfeld then produced 65 episodes of ESPN's *Lighter Side of Sports*, which is when things began to take off. Perhaps the best indication: He and his team were forced to move out of his house after a neighbor complained. "We had grown from one car [in the driveway] to four or five," he jokes.

Steve Rotfeld Productions, which celebrates its 25th anniversary this year, is now a well-respected independent production company. It has branched out from sports to children's and family-friendly programming such as *Wild*

About Animals and *Awesome Adventures*, which currently air on Fox owned-and-operated stations.

Rotfeld began developing kids programming in the mid-'90s, when stations received a mandate to carry three hours of educational shows a week. "The only business that was left to a niche player was this weekend morning [slot] for children's FCC-friendly programming," he says. Thus, *Wild About Animals*, hosted by Mariette Hartley, was born. Sixteen years later the show endures, with Animal Planet recently picking it up for a three-year run.

In 2008, Steve Rotfeld Productions established the independent satellite The WorkShop, headed by onetime SRP producer Tom Farrell. The WorkShop has developed Golf Channel programming such as *The Haney Project*, *Golf in America* and the upcoming *Donald J. Trump's Fabulous World of Golf*. The Haney Project, in which golf-swing coach Hank Haney tries to improve a celebrity's golf game, will debut its second season, featuring Ray Romano, on March 1.

Syndicators are quick to praise the quality and output of Rotfeld's team. Art Moore, VP of programming at WABC New York, has had a working relationship with Rotfeld since the late '80s. "In this business, you have a lot of usedcar salesmen and so you don't always get what [producers] tell you you're going to get," Moore says. "When [Rotfeld] says he's going to deliver something, that's what he delivers."

It's a notion passed through the Rotfeld generations, for whom television production is still a family business. Rotfeld's wife, Fern, is SRP's director of syndication. Their son, Robby, is producing new episodes of *Wild About Animals*. And their daughter, Carly, recently graduated from college. Berl Rotfeld passed away in 2005.

Away from the cameras, Rotfeld is an avid tennis player and golfer (he is better at the former than the latter), and began playing the guitar 10 years ago after watching Eric Clapton's legendary performance on *MTV Unplugged*.

Rotfeld maintains a strong hands-on approach to all of SRP's content. During the snowstorm that pounded much of the East Coast on Feb. 10 (a day in which one could be excused for taking it easy), Rotfeld was working from home like the old days. His typewriter has been replaced by a laptop, but his work ethic remains steadfast.

"The day that I stop enjoying this is the day that I'm not going to be in this business anymore," he says. "I just love the process."

STEVE ROTFELD

Title

President, Steve Rotfeld Productions; CEO, The WorkShop

Education

B.A., University of Hartford, 1977;

J.D., Brooklyn Law School, 1980

Employment

Greatest Sports Legends, writer/producer, 1980-1985; Steve Rotfeld Productions, president, 1986-present; The WorkShop, CEO, 2008-present

Personal

b. Nov. 10, 1955; married to Fern; son Robby, daughter Carly