***Perkins v. Commissioner*, 1 T.C. 691 (1943)**

In Texas, a gift of a life insurance policy purchased with community funds is considered a gift of only one-half of the policy's value for gift tax purposes.

Summary

Joe J. Perkins, a Texas resident, gifted a life insurance policy to his wife, Lois. The policy was purchased with community funds. The Commissioner argued the entire value of the policy should be included in taxable gifts. Perkins argued only half the value should be included due to Texas community property law. The Tax Court held that because the premiums were paid with community funds, only one-half of the policy's value constituted a taxable gift. The court also held that the gift was of a future interest, thus not eligible for the gift tax exclusion under Section 504(b) of the Revenue Act of 1932.

Facts

Joe and Lois Perkins were married and resided in Texas. Joe obtained a life insurance policy in 1924, naming his estate as the beneficiary but later designating Lois as the beneficiary, reserving the right to change beneficiaries. All premiums before March 8, 1939, were paid from community funds. After that date, Lois paid premiums from dividends she received from gifted stock. On March 8, 1939, Joe executed an instrument irrevocably designating Lois as the beneficiary and waiving all rights to the policy.

Procedural History

The Commissioner determined a gift tax deficiency. Perkins petitioned the Tax Court, contesting the deficiency determination. The key issue was whether the gift constituted the entire value of the policy or only one-half due to Texas community property laws.

Issue(s)

1. Whether the gift of a life insurance policy, purchased with community funds in Texas, constitutes a gift of the entire value of the policy or only one-half for gift tax purposes.

2. Whether the gift of the life insurance policy qualifies for the gift tax exclusion under Section 504(b) of the Revenue Act of 1932.

Holding

1. No, because under Texas community property law, assets acquired during marriage with community funds are owned equally by both spouses.

2. No, because the gift conveyed a future interest as Lois did not have immediate access to the cash surrender value or the ability to borrow against the policy.

Court’s Reasoning

The court re-examined its prior holding in *Blaffer v. Commissioner*, considering more recent Texas court decisions, particularly *Berdoll v. Berdoll*, *Locke v. Locke*, and *Womack v. Womack*. These cases establish that life insurance policies purchased with community funds are community property. The court quoted Huie, Community Property — Life Insurance, stating that while a divorced wife cannot wait until the insured’s death to claim her share of the proceeds (due to public policy concerns), she should be compensated for the loss of her community interest. Because all premiums were paid out of community funds, the court concluded that the gift was only of Joe’s one-half community interest in the policy. Regarding the gift tax exclusion, the court determined that Lois received a future interest because she did not have immediate access to the policy’s cash surrender value or the ability to borrow against it, thus not qualifying for the exclusion.

Practical Implications

This case clarifies the application of Texas community property law to gifts of life insurance policies for federal gift tax purposes. It dictates that in community property states like Texas, the taxable value of such gifts is limited to the donor’s community share. Attorneys advising clients in community property states must consider this when planning gifts of assets acquired with community funds. This ruling informs gift tax planning involving life insurance policies in community property states. It also illustrates the importance of analyzing state property law when determining federal tax consequences. Later cases would likely distinguish this holding if separate funds were used to pay the premiums.

