

She won't pay back her loan...
they ruined our wedding reception

When to Talk and When to Sue

By Glenn Plaskin

In a joint interview with FAMILY CIRCLE, the charismatic Judith Sheindlin, who reigns over *Judge Judy*, the number-one-rated daytime syndicated TV show in America, and her husband, Jerry Sheindlin, a former New York State Supreme Court judge now retiring after two seasons on *The People's Court*, maintained that many litigated disputes can be resolved without judicial intervention, just by using common sense and diplomacy. Holding court out of court, Judges Judy and Jerry ruled with aplomb on eight commonplace disputes.

The Case That Should Never Go to Court

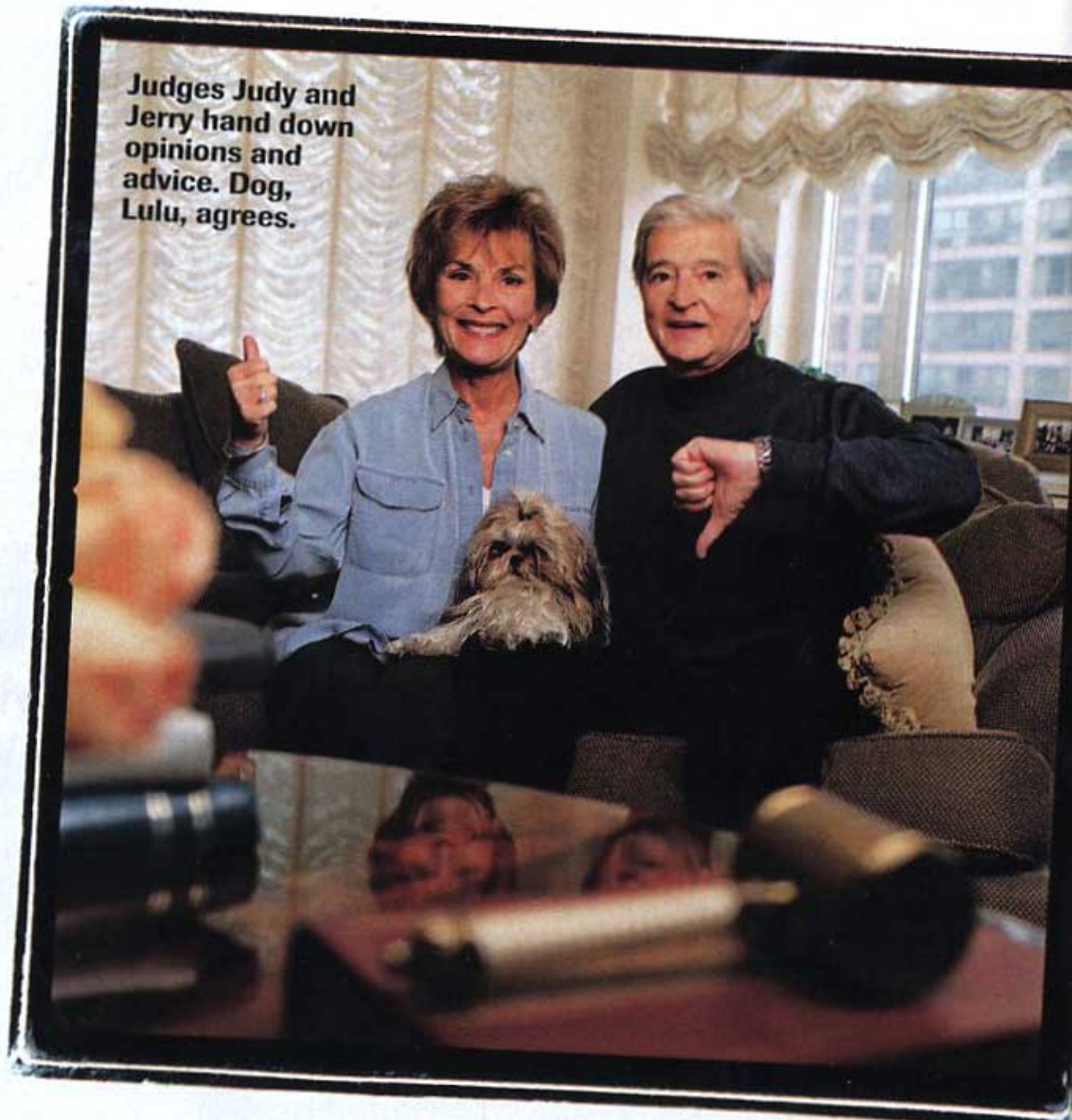
FC: A mother is suing her adult daughter for \$1,000 she says she lent her to help with bills. The daughter used the money for a vacation and now won't pay it back. The daughter says the money was a gift, not a loan. How do you rule?

Judy: If it was a loan, it has to be paid back. Period. I'd have to question both parties about the circumstances under which the money was given.

Jerry: Look at the emotional impact. The mother is so irritated with her daughter that she feels she has to sue to validate the oral agreement. She may get satisfaction in court, but the relationship may be destroyed.

Judy: I think there's much more going on here than the \$1,000. These kinds of disputes are often a catalyst for an underlying dysfunction in the relation-

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Judges Judy and Jerry hand down opinions and advice. Dog, Lulu, agrees.

ship. Probably the mother was angry when she found out her daughter went to Hawaii instead of paying bills. Then maybe the daughter said, "You've controlled my life all these years; you can't control me anymore." Those kinds of things go into the mix of why a case ends up in court.

If you're making a loan to a relative, put it in writing. If you're the parent, tell yourself: "I'm making this as a loan, but if she doesn't pay it

back, I'll let it go—but I won't do this again. If she comes to me for money, I'll say, 'I can't give it to you.'"

The Case of the Antique Tablecloth

FC: A woman is suing her daughter-in-law for damage to an antique linen tablecloth that she lent to her for a party. The plaintiff says that although it was returned to her laundered and pressed, it had sev-