

Chapter 25

The Universe Will Return My Money!

June 2005

“Lost” money will always return to those with “clean” hands.

Back in the spring of 2004, I had signed a contract with a computer consultant to design, develop, and write games for my children’s website. This man was an acquaintance, and I thought I could trust him. I was wrong! He demanded \$2,000 up front as a down payment, which I paid him at the signing of the contract. When Dale got wind of what I had done, he “hit the roof.” I got a big lecture about not giving someone money before the job was finished. Of course, he was right.

Just as Dale predicted, the computer consultant changed his tune as soon as he received the money. If I would not have called the computer consultant and pestered him, I would never have heard from him again. However, when I did get through to him, he was always too busy to do the programming for me.

The last straw was when he stood me up for the fifth time, again without even phoning to cancel. It began to look as if Dale was going to be right. He believed the computer consultant was just giving me the run around, hoping I would just give up and forget about him. BUT, the computer consultant did not know me. I wasn’t about to let him cheat me out of \$2,000. If I had to, I *would* get my money back, and I *would* have the last word.

Again, Dale criticized me for picking this guy to do my website. Rubbing it in, Dale predicted, “You’ll never get your money back. This guy is a deadbeat, Linda! He can’t even hold a job!” Dale made me feel even worse by saying that the computer consultant had confided in him (Dale) that he had three DWI’s under his belt. Dale educated me again by saying that after the next DWI, the computer consultant would go to jail. Dale then informed me that even if I were to sue the guy and win, it would be impossible to collect the judgment.

My only defense was to say, “You’ll see, the Universe will return my money!” Dale scoffed at this and just shook his head meaning I didn’t have a prayer of ever seeing my money again. But I had no

doubt in my mind. I knew I would somehow get it back. The Universe would return my money, because I had “clean” hands. All I had to do was “ask” for its return, and it would come back. However, I couldn’t convince Dale of this. He wasn’t a “believer” like I was.

On May 18, 2005, I filed a lawsuit in St. Louis County small claims court. What a coincidence! Within two weeks, a producer from a major TV studio called me. She asked if I would be interested in settling my lawsuit on a national TV judge show that was debuting this fall. Of course, I said yes, but that didn’t seal the deal. I had to wait for the producers to contact the computer consultant, and he had to agree to appear on the show, too.

Up until now, the computer consultant had no idea that I had filed a lawsuit. The papers had not yet been served, and they weren’t scheduled to be served until around the 12th of June. All I could do was hope that he would agree to appear on the show.

Fortunately, the producers talked him into it. It was actually a “no brainer” that he would agree to do this. By appearing on the judge show, I had everything to lose, and he had everything to gain. He had a win/win situation. Even if he lost, he still got to keep my \$2,000. On the other hand, if I lost the case, I walked away empty handed. However, if I won my case, the show would pay me whatever the judgment was. There was still another risk. We both had to sign an agreement with the studio to accept the judge’s ruling as final, which meant neither one of us could appeal.

I always wondered if there was an incentive to get people to appear on TV judge shows so they can make fools of themselves. There is. On this particular judge show, the computer consultant and I each received \$150 for appearing on the show. The production company also paid each of our air fares (separate flights), paid for our hotel lodging (separate hotels), and paid for our meals.

The judge show I appeared on was pure reality. There were no dress rehearsals nor was there a script. I had only one chance to prove my case. There were no second or third takes. Also, everything was based on law. If I won, it would be based on the evidence I presented to the producers. (Note: I must add that neither the defendant nor I had any clue what the other had submitted to the producers.)

The production company did not offer to pay for any witnesses to fly down with me to testify. This disappointed Dale tremendously, because he had witnessed everything that had taken place. But Dale

wasn't going to miss this opportunity for the world. He went with me, but he had to pay his own \$450 airfare.

Poor Dale! When we arrived at the studio, the producers asked the studio audience if someone would give up his or her seat so Dale could sit in on my case. Surprisingly, not one person volunteered to give up their seat, so Dale had to watch the taping on a TV monitor in the producers' break room.

I was fascinated with the "behind the scenes" production of a TV judge show. Three hours before the taping, a limo picked Dale and me up from the hotel. We were then taken to the studio where I had to sign lots of paperwork and releases. I was then escorted to a trailer where a makeup artist applied "pancake" makeup to my face. She then pulled my long hair back so tight that I swear I could hear my skin and hair stretching! It hurt, but it had one nice effect. It pulled my skin back so tight that all the wrinkles on my face disappeared. I was told later that I looked 15 years younger on TV. But what a price to pay! It was painful to even laugh! The producers insisted that this had to be done, because they were afraid my long hair would brush up against the microphone which would then cause static.

Since the defendant and I stayed at separate hotels, we never saw each other until the show. Our first glimpse of each other was when we each separately walked into the courtroom.

I also found out I was extremely lucky to even be there that day. Before the show, my associate producer told me I was the second last taping of the season. She also told me that after the last taping, there was going to be a huge production party. She then added that all of the executives from the studio were there that day watching the tapings. They had all flown in to attend the production party that night.

From what my associate producer told me about the judge ahead of time, I believed this judge would be under pressure to give it his best shot to impress the studio executives. After all, it was his first season, and everyone knows, it's all about ratings. Therefore, I had no idea what to expect, so I prepared myself for the worst. I decided this new judge could swing either way. Maybe he would punish me for being so stupid, or maybe he would be on my side and see through the computer consultant and rule in my favor. I realized I was at the mercy of a judge I knew nothing about or had not even seen on TV yet. Would he be another Judge Judy or a loveable Judge Joe Brown? All

I could do was hope that justice would be served and he would rule in my favor.

One hour before the taping, the producers, the director and the judge met behind closed doors to go over the evidence. Thank goodness I was a good record keeper and had given the producers sound documentation. I believe that the strategy and outcome of the cases are decided behind those closed doors. I must add that both the defendant and I were clueless as to what their strategy was. Again, I had no idea what evidence or defense the computer consultant had given to his own producer and vice versa. We each walked into the courtroom “cold.”

Finally, the show was almost ready to begin. As the defendant and I stood quietly waiting for the proceedings to start, the crew did last minute adjustments to the cameras. Fortunately, all six cameras were hidden, which kept me from being even more nervous. While the crew was making their final adjustments, the audience was standing in the background socializing. Finally, everything was set and ready to begin. I took one deep breath and let it out as the bailiff told everyone to rise as the judge made his entrance.

Immediately, I could tell this judge was a no-nonsense judge and would be in control of his courtroom. From what I had learned, he was an experienced judge. Incredibly, he had worked his way up through law enforcement and law school, and he was now a full-fledged criminal court judge in real life.

When it was my turn to speak, my part turned out to be easy. All I did was tell the truth. However, the defendant wasn't so lucky. His only defense was to lie. He also underestimated this judge and thought he could outsmart him. (Note: Was he in for a rude awakening!)

The judge turned out to be my hero. I could tell from the beginning that he was on my side, and he was actually winning the case for me. I did keep my composure, too. Unless asked a question, I kept my mouth shut, did not interrupt the judge, and acted like the perfect lady.

Throughout the 51-minute taping, the judge continuously made a fool out of the defendant, along with keeping the studio audience laughing. The judge had me laughing so hard, that I found it difficult to keep a straight face during the trial. I knew I had to be careful, though, because I didn't want to upstage this judge or attract

unnecessary attention to myself. At this point, I just wanted to win and get my money back.

It immediately became apparent that the defendant and I did not share the same experience/story. Even if he had to lie, the defendant was determined to win the case, but obviously he was no match for this judge. Right off the bat, the judge saw through him. Then, because of the evidence, the judge was able to set the defendant up, catching him in lie after lie after lie. It had turned into a real cat and mouse game, and the rat had walked right into the trap!

Finally, the judge put the defendant out of his misery and ruled in my favor. As for the defendant's character, the judge made him appear to be a crook and the village idiot. As the decision was being handed down, the defendant just stood there in a daze, looking "whooped" with his head hung down in defeat. On the other hand, the judge proved to be charming, clever and witty, and the audience (including me) adored him. After it was over, we all gave the judge a standing ovation.

Later, Dale told me he was proud of me. I confessed that I was relieved that it was all over and just glad to get my \$2,000 back. (Deep down inside, though, I was also proud of myself. I had kept out of trouble by keeping my mouth shut.)

However, I also got the last word in, just as I had predicted. At the end of the show, the defendant and I were each separately escorted out of the courtroom and asked several questions in front of a TV camera.

I went first. Oops! (Note: I had forgotten all about this part of the show and was totally unprepared. I had no clue what questions were going to be asked and had not rehearsed my answers to any possible questions.) This was an entirely different situation than in the courtroom, where all six cameras were hidden. Now, the camera was right smack dab in front of my face. For me, this was terrifying, and I felt as if I were a deer caught in headlights. Fortunately, I was able to regain my composure, stay calm, and answer all of the questions.

After my Q&A was over, I was disappointed that I didn't get to hear what the defendant had to say. Unfortunately, we were whisked away, because Dale and I had to catch our flight back to St. Louis, which was scheduled to leave in two hours.

I didn't get to see the final "cut" either until I watched it on TV in my own livingroom. Editors are amazing. They edited our 51-minute

taping down to 7.5 minutes (without commercials). Yet, none of the show's impact was lost.

In the final scene outside the courtroom doors, the editors had reversed it. Now the defendant was first. It was obvious he was very angry about the outcome of the show. As the camera zoomed in on his face, instead of attacking the judge, he vehemently bad mouthed me on national TV. Actually, his words backfired on him. None of his comments were credible, and his bad attitude just re-enforced that he really was a scoundrel and was guilty as sin.

As I had predicted, I did get the last word. Even though I went first, the producers were clever in asking me the right questions. Unbeknownst to me, my answers to their questions were a perfect rebuttal to the defendant's hateful remarks. The show ended with a closeup of me saying, "I wrote the program myself in just four hours, what he couldn't do in eight months. The game....it's up and running. The website....I'm doing it myself."

Later on that evening after the show, as Dale and I were sitting on the plane waiting for takeoff, I could tell Dale was still upset about not being part of the studio audience. It was just the opposite for me. I was exhilarated! I had come out smelling like a rose. Here, I had gotten all my money back and, at the same time, had appeared on national TV!

As the plane was taking off, Dale was staring out the window. Smiling, I looked over at him and reminded him of what I had told him one month earlier. "See, didn't I tell you the Universe would return my money?" I could tell he heard me, but he was intentionally ignoring me. Once the plane was in the air, though, he finally turned his head around and looked at me, and that's when I got in the last jab, "And guess what?" Dale then rolled his eyes and said, "What?" Now grinning from ear to ear, I announced, "Today, I got something I could never afford to buy! I got to mention my trademark on national TV!"



AUTHOR'S NOTE: Sure enough, my request to the Universe had manifested. Exactly one week later, the check came in the mail. My two thousand dollars had returned to me!