

NO STRINGS ATTACHED

The Facts

Howdy Doody was a delightful, freckle-faced puppet who entertained children in the early days of television. In 1975, Rufus Rose, the creator and puppeteer of Howdy Doody, died. Following his death, a great dispute ensued over who had custodial rights to Howdy Doody. The famous puppet was estimated to be worth at least \$50,000 and was held in limbo in a Rhode Island bank vault for 25 years. The Detroit Institute of the Arts currently maintains a large, historical puppet collection. Following the death of Rufus Rose, the Institute claimed that Rose had promised to donate the original Howdy Doody puppet to their collection. While the custody of the puppet had not been specified in Rose's final will and testament, the Detroit museum presented letters that had been written between Rose and NBC stating that the puppeteer wanted Howdy Doody to be housed at the Detroit Museum of the Arts. The Rose family claimed that Rufus Rose would have wanted Howdy Doody to be with them. They questioned the authenticity of the letters.

You Be the Judge

Who should have been given custody of the famous puppet Howdy Doody?

The Outcome

In January 2001, a federal judge ruled that Howdy Doody be removed from his Rhode Island bank vault and sent to its rightful owner, the Detroit Institute of Arts. The judge believed that the letters between Rufus Rose and NBC were valid and clear in the puppeteer's intent to donate Howdy Doody to the museum.

Let's Talk About It

- Do you remember seeing Howdy Doody on television in the 1950s? Did you enjoy the *Howdy Doody Show*? What do you remember about Buffalo Bob, Howdy Doody's real-life friend on the show? Did your children watch the *Howdy Doody Show*?
- What was your favorite children's show on television or radio? As a child, did you enjoy the early radio shows for children such as *Jack Armstrong the All-American Boy*, *Little Orphan Annie*, or *Tom Mix*?
- Did you ever play with a puppet? Was it a hand puppet or a stringed puppet? Did you ever put on a puppet show? Did your puppets have names?