

MEDIATE THIS !

A DEVIOS BEDSIDE VISITOR WITH A HIDDEN AGENDA?

BY STEVEN P. DINKIN

Dear Mediator,

My father is terminally ill, and my mother is his 24/7 caregiver. Many years ago, my father had a business partner who cheated him out of thousands of dollars. The two men severed ties. An intermediary just contacted my father to say the former partner wishes to visit. My father has a big heart, and he wants to grant this request. My mother is opposed. She thinks this is a devious man with a hidden agenda, and she doesn't want him in the house.

*Caught in the Middle,
Carlsbad*

Dear Caught:

Your poignant situation captures why a harm inflicted directly on us is easier to forgive than a harm inflicted on someone we love. Your task is to navigate this challenge in a way that supports your father, whose wishes must be paramount, and gives your mother some peace of mind.

It may appear that your family has only two choices: the ex-partner will be welcome to visit, or he will be barred from seeing your father. Neither is a good option.

In your assigned role as family mediator, you are empowered to

broaden the selection. You can do this by using the "caucus approach" and meeting separately with all parties to probe underlying issues.

Start by asking your father a series of questions. Does he have a genuine desire to see his ex-partner? Would such a meeting benefit him? Would it carry any risk of dredging up old anguish?

The conversation with your mother should follow parallel lines. What are her specific concerns about this visit? Why does she think your father is open to it? Would she consider setting ground rules that would limit your family's exposure to added stress?

A phone chat between the two men could be an alternative to a visit. Or, if your father really wants to see this man, talking by phone could set the stage. If the man stops by and your mother doesn't want to encounter him, enlist a friend to take her on a much-needed outing.

Once you have a clearer grasp of your parents' underlying issues, you will be ready for a conversation with the ex-partner.

Conflict resolution differs from litigation in several important ways. One is that we don't reopen old wounds by reigniting past



GETTY IMAGES

This week, the adult child of a terminally ill father and caregiver mother questions whether the father's former business partner should be allowed to visit.

grievances.

After you ask the ex-partner if he has any particular reasons for wanting to come by, emphasize that your father is frail and your mother is weary. Under the circumstances, you are requesting that all visitors stay only briefly and keep the mood upbeat.

It would be appropriate for you

to sit in on this meeting or to be in an adjacent room within earshot.

Can you be certain this or any visitor will honor your "no drama" ground rule? No. Professional mediators sometimes halt settlement talks when one of the parties reneges on a pledge to remain civil. If that occurs, you can end the visit by announcing

your father needs to rest.

For now, remain optimistic, and give the ex-partner the benefit of the doubt. He and your father once had a strong bond. They probably still have happy memories to share.

This man may want an audience to express remorse for past misdeeds. Even though your father's health is declining, he sounds strong enough to extend an offer of absolution that would release both men from lingering pain.

In his best-seller "The Book of Forgiving," Nobel Peace Prize winner Desmond Tutu observed that "forgiveness is the journey we take toward healing ... It is how we become whole again." That core principle of conflict resolution has value at every stage of life, even at the end of it.

Steven P. Dinkin is a professional mediator who has served as president of the San Diego-based National Conflict Resolution Center since 2003. Do you have a conflict that needs a resolution? Share your story with The Mediator via email at mediatethis@ncrconline.com or as an online submission by visiting www.ncrconline.com/MediateThis. All submissions will be kept anonymous. If you have questions, email me at lora.cicalo@sduniontribune.com

NOTEBOOKS

From Union-Tribune reporting staff

OUTDOORS: ERNIE COWAN

Trip to see aurora worth frigid temps

The need to devise a plan to sell my wife on the fun of a spring break vacation should have been the first clue that this was not one of my better ideas.

"Kati, it's been a wet, cold winter, and I think we should get away for a little spring vacation," I boldly declared.

I could see the sparkling gleam in her eyes. "That's a great idea. Are you thinking of exotic birding and the beautiful beaches of Costa Rica, or maybe wreck diving in Florida, or wildlife photography in the Galapagos?" she asked.

Not exactly.

"My plan would let us see one of the true great wonders of nature," I said, trying to stoke her enthusiasm.

I could see her wheels turning as she envisioned the tropical rainforests of Belize, colorful wild parrots in the jungles of Brazil or perhaps manatees in the clear, warm waters of Florida.

It was time to spill the beans.

"I've booked a trip to the Arctic to photograph the northern lights," I said.

The gleam in her eyes changed to an icy stare.

"But honey, as a photographic artist, just imagine the possibilities. The aurora at night and the unique daytime beauty of the ice-clad forests should really inspire you," I said, offering my best sales pitch.

"I was born in Canada," she said. "I've had all the inspiration I need."

She was also quick to point out that I am not fond of cold.

That's very true. As a Florida native and mostly lifelong California resident, I could be the modern version of Sam McGee, that character of Robert Service poetry who wanted to be cremated upon his death because he could not stand the Arctic cold during the Klondike gold rush of the 1890s.

My wife reminded me that I whine when temperatures get into the 50s.

Eventually my powers of persuasion won her over, and she agreed to go.

As we began our journey, the flight attendant made the usual announcements ending with the advisory that passengers should notify the crew if they noticed any "disturbing behavior."

"I'd like to report that my wife keeps complaining about going to Alaska for spring break vacation. Can you do anything about that?" I asked.

"I can't help you with that, sir, but you do



ERNIE COWAN

Some native cultures refer to the aurora as the Happy Dancers.

realize Alaska flies to Cabo," the flight attendant said with another icy stare.

I had done my homework. March is the best time to see the northern lights. Generally clear spring weather ensures crystal skies, and aurora activity seems to peak around the vernal equinox.

The weather in Fairbanks when we arrived was not favorable for aurora viewing. For Californians, the 18 degrees was a shock, but the cloudy weather at least gave us time to do some of the tourist things like sled dog tours, ice fishing, and hikes through the spectacular winter forest that included an encounter with a moose.

Finally conditions improved for a night out to see the northern lights. We followed the North Star from Fairbanks many miles until arriving at a frozen lake surrounded by the boreal forest. We were prepared for the 12-degree temperatures.

In this great white wilderness the heavens began to dance above us. I can see why some native cultures refer to the aurora as the Happy Dancers.

The beauty was overpowering. There is movement and color and a silence almost deafening.

Even Kati hugged me tightly and whispered, "I am so happy to be experiencing this with you."

Boarding the plane for our flight home, Kati did turn to me to say it had been a fun trip.

"But you still owe me a summer vacation," she said.

I've already started planning our next trip. I've always wanted to photograph penguins and, besides, December is mid-summer in Antarctica.

Email ernie@packtrain.com

THE READERS' REPRESENTATIVE: ADRIAN VORE

Should lawsuit have been covered?

Reporters will routinely check public documents on their beats for news to publish.

That is how South Bay reporter Gustavo Solis discovered a case of a Chula Vista police officer suing the city over veterinarian bills for his family pet.

"At least once a month I check the San Diego Superior Court's website to see if any cities in the South Bay have been sued," Solis said. "I check for Chula Vista, Imperial Beach, Coronado and National City. If someone filed a lawsuit, I go to court and read the complaint to determine if the suit merits coverage."

Solis felt this case did. A reader disagreed.

The officer's canine partner became sick about a year ago with what turned out to be a fatal infection contracted while being boarded by the city. The officer said in the lawsuit that the infection was passed on to his family pet dog. The officer said vet bills came to about \$1,700 for the pet. While the city paid for some initial care, it would not pay for more, causing the officer personal expense. He sued the city to recover the cost.

Solis used the lawsuit, a public document, for the reporting. The city and officer declined to comment. The story appeared in the Local section March 8.

Also, a bit of background: The U-T published a story in March 2018 on the death of the police dog, based on information provided by the Chula Vista Police Department.

Reader Laurie Orange of Chula Vista emailed saying the U-T should not have published the story on the lawsuit because the officer deserved privacy.

"Why did the Union Tribune publish this article?" she wrote. "... Police do not give up their civil rights when they pledge to serve the public. This officer should be entitled to both protect his pet from negligent conduct, and to his privacy in enforcing those rights."

Solis responded: "Why are we covering the lawsuit? ... It involves a city, and if Chula Vista decides to defend themselves in court they will pay for that legal defense with taxpayer dollars. The people of Chula Vista have a right to know how their city spends their hard-earned tax dollars. Additionally, it is rare for a police officer to sue a city. In this case, it is after the tragic death of a police dog." Solis also noted the story from a year ago on the police dog's death.

Orange expanded on her argument in a follow-up email, saying the U-T would not

have written a story if the plaintiff had been non-government employee, and the lawsuit being public is not a valid reason for publishing.

"Yes, a lawsuit is a public document. However, the vast majority of legal actions never see the light of day. ...

"Government workers simply do not give up their right to seek justice, or their right to privacy, because they work for the government. I do not understand why you feel it is right to intrude into the private affairs of a bereaved family," she wrote.

"I believe this is a matter of simple fairness and courtesy. ... I suspect most of us would find it inappropriate to have their sorrow and subsequent financial losses made public."

I feel reporting this story is valid. A police officer suing his city is newsworthy. The lawsuit, a public document, involves a public employee, a public entity and public money. Also the death of the police dog, which is part of the suit, had been reported in the U-T.

This is not say that all lawsuits, or other public documents, filed by a person who happens to be a public employee are fair game on which to report and publish stories. Some might have no news value. Some might not involve public agencies. Also, ethics come into play. Why report private details, let's say, in a public document that will only humiliate a person?

What do you think — should the U-T have reported on the officer's lawsuit? Email your thoughts to the readers.rep@sduniontribune.com

U-T's journalism scholars

The U-T Community Journalism Scholars program is accepting applications. The program begins June 17 at the U-T's downtown San Diego offices.

Students must be at least 16 years old by May 1, 2019, enrolled in a county high school, and must have a legal right to work in the U.S. Not only will students be paid, they will have a chance for a \$5,000 scholarship provided by the U-T.

The deadline to apply is April 10. Applications are available on the U-T's website, sandiegouniontribune.com/journalism-scholars. For more information, contact oped editor Blanca Gonzalez at (619) 293-1241.

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FROM THE ARCHIVES

1904: ARBOR DAY CELEBRATED

On Saint Patrick's day in 1904, thousands of schoolchildren turned out for the planting of 60 pines and cypresses on the west side of Cabrillo Canyon (today's state Route 163) as part of San Diego's first Arbor Day celebrations. Governor George Pardee and President Theodore Roosevelt endorsed the event.

From the Evening Tribune, Thursday, March 17, 1904:

ROOSEVELT AND PARDEE

Hearty Greetings from National and State Executive to Jolly Tree Planters

On the verdure-covered slopes of a pretty canyon forming one of the most sightly bits of nature in San Diego's great park, were carried out this morning the Arbor-day exercises of the city schools.

The day was perfect. The cloud-flecked sky just tempered the heat of the sun, and the ocean zephyrs stealing through the hills helped to make the climb up and down the slopes more easy to those whose school days have been long over. At the same time the ground was warm, and the sides of the natural amphitheater, carpeted with green, and almost free from brush, offered comfortable reclining places for all.

Some time ere the hour for opening the exercises, the people commenced gathering. The school children, under charge of their teachers, streamed down the pathways in moving, changing waves of varied colors.

Grouped on the south slope, beneath the banners of their schools and classes, with here and there the larger United States flags of their buildings waving a full 2500 children

made one kaleidoscopic mass of bright colors. Closely crowning the crest above them, all manner of vehicles stood out against the sky, each filled with eager spectators. Others, coming by street car, or straying up the newly built drives and footpaths, dispersed themselves in groups over Pine Point, which forms the north slope of the canyon. Pupils, citizens and tourists — a crowd of at least 4000 persons — were in attendance, by conservative computation.

On this north slope were grouped the members of the park committee, city board of education, and the Russ High school orchestra which accompanied the chorus singing of the schools.

From here the scene on the opposite slope was bright and moving in the extreme. Russ High School had the right of the line under the national colors and their huge blue and white banner. On the left was Sherman Heights with their red and white emblem. Between were Middletown with red and gold. B street with blue and gold, H street and green and yellow,



East with red and blue, Fifth Ward and University Heights with blue and white. In addition to their large banners nearly all the pupils carried small pennants. All were enthusiastic and each "recurring pause" was improved by the cheers and chants of the different classes.

Promptly at 10 o'clock Cornetist Frank Wyatt sounded the "reveille," and as the last clear notes died away, President Baker of the board of education who presided over the ceremonies, announced "America." The national anthem was rendered with a will and with inspiring effect, the mass of spectators generally joining in. Throughout the exercises City Superintendent F.P. Davidson led in the singing.

MR. MARSTON SPEAKS

George W. Marston, chairman of the chamber of commerce park improvement committee was then introduced appreciatively by President Baker, and responded in

a graceful speech. His name and appearance was greeted with hearty cheers and hand-clapping by school children and citizens alike. He said, in part:

"Scholars of the public schools and all friends of San Diego the park improvement committee gives you cordial greeting. I wish you a 'good morning' in this sweet spring time as we come together to celebrate this beautiful day in this beautiful place. We want you to love this park more and more, and now the park committee extends you a hearty invitation to take part in these tree-planting exercises, and work toward the clothing of all the barren hillsides." Mr. Marston, in the course of his remarks, referred briefly to the plans for the work of transforming the tract and pointed out the places where the morning's planting would be done.

CLEVELAND'S ADDRESS

Following Mr. Marston's address, the children of the schools again united in singing "The Flower of Liberty," after which Daniel Cleveland was introduced to speak in behalf of the board of education. He said:

"The City Board of Education heartily approves of the program today; it is along the right educational lines. It is a good thing for the children of our public schools that they are here at this time, and it is a good thing for this community to have them here, to take an active part in this tree planting, in the beautifying of the public park, and in making our city more attractive.

HISTORICAL PHOTOS AND ARTICLES FROM THE SAN DIEGO UNION-TRIBUNE ARCHIVES ARE COMPILED BY MERRIE.MONTEAGUDO@SDUNIONTRIBUNE.COM. SEARCH THE U-T HISTORIC ARCHIVES AT NEWSLIBRARY.COM/SITES/SDUB.