

## MEDIATE THIS !

## THE CHRONICALLY EARLY, CLUELESS DINNER GUESTS

BY STEVEN P. DINKIN

## Dear Mediator:

Because we have a large home, we regularly host dinners for our extended family. One couple always arrives 40 minutes ahead of time. When we point out that they are early, they say, "Don't worry about us" and grab seats in the kitchen. If we gave them a false time (7 p.m. when we really mean 6), they would learn the true time from the others. We're ready to stop hosting because of this. How do we break their habit without hurting their feelings?

Baffled in Bird Rock

## Dear Baffled:

Experts in social etiquette, a field steeped in conflict resolution principles, all agree that invited guests should arrive 10 to 15 minutes after the designated start to give hosts a little extra prep time.

Arriving any later is deemed inconsiderate. But arriving *early* when even the most organized hosts are swamped with last-minute tasks is a faux pas with tangled origins.

Sometimes early guests just got the time wrong. Once they realize their mistake, swift apologies are in order. But your repeat offenders don't seem to know or

care that they are imposing on you at the worst possible moment.

Past columns have talked about "high-conflict individuals," people who thrive on anger and animosity. Today, we'll address another group mediators routinely encounter: "high-maintenance individuals" whose constant demands exhaust the good will of the people around them.

Setting clear boundaries is a necessary first step in corralling both groups. But these individuals are prone to crash through sensible social ramparts. So you'll need a more assertive plan of action for enforcing the rules you set.

And you should take action before your next dinner, and definitely before your exasperation builds to the point of eruption.

Placating high-maintenance people may seem like an easy way out. If we can just learn to tolerate their passive-aggressive encroachments, we can keep the peace.

Robots could pull this off. Humans seldom do. We often mediate disputes where Unreasonable Person A has inflicted too much stress on Reasonable Person B. When B's pent-up anger was finally triggered by yet



GETTY IMAGES

**This week, a host asks how to approach a guest couple who make a habit of arriving too early for dinner parties.**

another vexation, the resulting outburst made A the victim and B the meanie.

Your goal here is to head off an unpleasant showdown by communicating clearly to your guests what your expectations are.

That means stipulating in your next group invitation that you cannot accommodate early arrivals. A few days before the dinner, call this couple and tell them you look forward to seeing

them. Then remind them that you won't be ready for guests until the specified start.

If they ignore your wishes and show up early, greeting them with an angry face will get your evening off to a bad start. So implement your plan. Come to the door, apologize profusely, and ask them to please come back in a half-hour so you can get ready.

Will they be hurt? Of course! High-maintenance people are

fragile when thwarted, and they may fire back with recriminations that ricochet around the family.

Don't take that bait. You asked everyone to comply with a reasonable request. Then you took steps that you clarified in advance to carry out your hosting duties. That's your mantra. Repeat it as needed.

Admittedly, this is a draconian strategy. Sometimes clueless people are plagued by emotional neediness. These two may show up early to get your undivided attention. This doesn't make them less annoying, but it puts their conduct in a more sympathetic light.

If you can't bring yourselves to lower the boom, and you still want to include them, go to Plan B. When they arrive ahead of time, tell them you desperately need them to run a last-minute errand, and send them to a store that is a good 15 minutes from your home.

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?** Please share your story with The Mediator via email at [mediatethis@ncrcnline.com](mailto:mediatethis@ncrcnline.com). All submissions will be kept anonymous.

## NOTEBOOKS

From Union-Tribune reporting staff

## OUTDOORS: ERNIE COWAN

## Angry seas show off nature's power

"I must go down to the seas again, for the call of the running tide is a wild call and a clear call that may not be denied."

Those were the eloquent words of poet John Masefield.

For the nature lover who prefers to be out in less than bluebird conditions, Masefield's poetic plea was a clarion call last week during our dramatic king tides.

Not only were ocean levels extremely high, but distant storms and locally high winds had churned crashing waves into a wild and angry sea.

My visit was not a day of singular discovery or to study nature up close. Tide pools or visiting winter birds would have to wait.

Rather, this was a day to stand back and see the whole grandeur of heaven and Earth, sun and moon as they dance in the limitless universe and control the mighty seas.

It was also a chance to see how others are attracted to the extremes of nature, how they react, how they interact and perhaps how they are affected. The insight was deep.

Even though I was wandering about, this was like one of my sit and see adventures, where I plant myself in one place and just enjoy observing as nature happens around me.

As with most days at the beach, there were lots of people attracted by the huge seasonal tides. Most were content with just watching the powerful display from a safe distance. A few walked or cycled along the boardwalk, dodging the occasional boiling wave that would crash over shoreline rocks or low seawalls.

A single hearty surfer bobbed about in the rolling waters, waiting for the perfect wave, and farther down the beach several kite surfers were dancing over waves as the strong on-shore winds provided plenty of lift.

As the peak tide began to recede, the power of the angry ocean became apparent. In some places as much as 4 feet of sand had been washed away, exposing cobbles. The broken ends of metal stair railing slapped about in the continued buffeting of waves.

Seagulls and terns were huddled in tight clusters on the few patches of open beach, but one of the resident ospreys continued to hunt, snagging a hefty fish in Oceanside Harbor at lunchtime. A night heron sought shelter from the stiff wind in an alcove of one of the pier buildings and the few pigeons that attempted to fly discovered they could



ERNIE COWAN

**Powerful waves were seen last week along the coast.**

only go in the direction the stiff wind was blowing.

What seemed unchanged was the passing flights of pelicans as they cruised along the beach in formation without wingbeats, perhaps enjoying the same benefits of wind that the kite surfers were.

At one end of the beach there was an attempt at a sand volleyball game. But the stiff wind put enough curve on the ball to challenge even the best player.

Tourists were huddled in warm jackets with hands jammed into deep pockets as they walked along the pier. You could feel the power of the ocean as the pier shuddered from waves crashing against the mussel-covered pilings. There were a few fishermen on the pier, but it looked more like an excuse to be there than a real focus on catching fish.

Today the Pacific was not calm and blue. There was no rhythm to the waves, and the churn was seafoam green as sand and water mixed in the surf zone.

It's hard not to be awed by nature at its most dramatic. There is something bonding about such events of natural power. People stopped to chat, share impressions or talk about a huge wave that rained on them.

The king tides and the power of the seas are a reminder of who or what is in charge.

We tinker with nature, but the mighty natural forces are supreme. No doubt, that is the attraction and perhaps why the poet Masefield was inspired to pen, "And all I ask is a windy day with the white clouds flying, And the flung spray and the blown spume, and the sea-gulls crying."

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## DOING GOOD: GARY WARTH

## A history of fighting for social justice

Emily Howe is still new at her job, but she's on familiar ground as the new executive director of Think Dignity, a San Diego organization that provides services for people living on the street.

"I've always been motivated by public interest, having a heart for underrepresented groups and vulnerable populations," said Howe, who took over the helm of the nonprofit last month.

She replaced Anne Rios, who left in November to work for Al Otro Lado, a binational legal services organization serving refugees and asylum-seekers in Tijuana and San Diego.

Howe, who earned a law degree from the University of San Diego in 2011, also has advocated for refugees and said that as a South Korean who grew up in the northeast United States, she had identified with underrepresented groups much of her life.

"It wasn't until I moved to San Diego that I saw people who looked like me," she said.

The nonprofit Think Dignity, which began in 2006 as Girls Think Tank, operates several services for homeless people in San Diego, including a storage center for their belongings, mobile showers, a legal clinic for homeless youth, a Street Boutique for women and a mobile Street Cafe that provides nutritious food.

Howe has dedicated much of her life to working for social causes, a motivation she said may be in her blood.

"My whole family has served in some type of service," she said.

Adopted as a baby from South Korea, Howe said her father was an attorney and her mother's family roots can be traced back to the American Revolution.

Looking into her family's roots, Howe also discovered that her great aunt served in the Army during World War II and was a Red Cross staff member, a grandfather was a prisoner of war in World War II, an uncle served in Vietnam and a great-great grandfather was a police chief in Massachusetts.

"It was so interesting because it almost felt like some universal sense of purpose to why I've had some experiences," she said.

Howe's interest in public service was sparked in 1998 as a high school intern for Rep. Jim McGovern, a Democrat who represents a congressional district in Massachusetts.

"He had raised awareness about human rights issues in El Salvador, and I really gained an interest in human rights advocacy," she said.

Partly inspired by her family's history of service, Howe joined the Peace Corps after college and served as a health program manager in Benin, West Africa, from 2005 to 2007.

While abroad, she took the Law School Admission Test and was accepted at a school back home. Once returning to the cold Northeastern winter, however, Howe said, she began to have second thoughts.

She headed west and began a master's program in public administration at Middlebury Institute in Monterey. While there, she became involved with Global Majority, an international conflict-resolution organization created by one of her professors.

She put her master's pursuit on hold after less than a year in the program after earning a scholarship and being accepted at USD.

While at the university, Howe also worked on the Distinguished Lecture Series at the Joan B. Kroc Institute for Peace, helping bring the Dalai Lama and a representative of the United Nations' General Assembly to campus.

After earning her degree, Howe worked for a law firm and for a legal assistance program in City Heights. She also was active in the campaign to lift the cap on the number of taxi permits in the city and the campaign to provide earned sick leave for part-time workers.

In a cause that felt closer to home, Howe most recently worked as an advocate for people born in foreign lands who were adopted by American parents.

Some adult adoptees in that situation are at risk of being deported because they never acquired citizenship, she said.

"It's one of those things that should be such a simple fix," she said. "If children of U.S. citizen parents are not protected, then how is anyone protected?"

Looking ahead, Howe she is excited about working with the Think Dignity staff, which includes several new faces, as well as newly elected officials on the San Diego City Council and county Board of Supervisors.

She only recently discovered some of the programs at Think Dignity, which in April will introduce a new career fair.

"I love the mission of Think Dignity," she said. "To inspire, empower and organize our San Diego community to advance basic dignity for those living on the streets." Each of us have basic dignity and basic human needs. All of our clientele have stories and sorrows and hearts and aspirations."

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## FROM THE ARCHIVES

## 1974: RAY KROC GIVES SAN DIEGO PADRES A SECOND LIFE

In January 1974, McDonald's mogul Ray Kroc bought the San Diego Padres baseball franchise from local financier C. Arnholt Smith for \$12 million.

Forty-five years ago, the 5-year-old expansion team was on the verge of being moved to Washington, D.C. when Kroc stepped in. The sale saved professional baseball for San Diego, and made Kroc a local hero.

In this column, Jack Murphy, the San Diego Union's legendary sports editor, invited Kroc to talk about baseball.

From *The San Diego Union*, Jan. 24, 1974:

## PADRES BECOME KROC'S HEREAFTER RIGHT NOW

Ray A. Kroc is so daft about baseball he is eager to buy the team with the worst record in the National League and operate it in a city with matching excitement. I asked Kroc if he could explain why he finds baseball so fascinating.

"Because," came the reply, "it convinced me there is a hereafter." Kroc is an uncommon man who says surprising things. He was thinking of the summer of 1929 when he was a paper cup salesman with a sample case who found a way to sit in the bleachers and watch his

beloved Chicago Cubs almost every afternoon. "I was the most sunburned man in Chicago," he remembers.

And the most heartbroken. His Cubs were playing the Philadelphia Athletics in the World Series and fell behind three games to two. Then, in game six, they jumped on the A's for an 8-0 lead. Kroc was filled with gladness. But, alas, the A's scored 10 runs in the eighth inning and the Cubs were ready for the coroner. The Cubs, and Ray Kroc.

"I died," he says.

But there is a hereafter and, for Kroc, it may include ownership of the San Diego Padres. He has a tentative agreement to purchase the club from C. A. Smith, and he must obtain a lease from the City of San Diego and approval by the National League.

## HIS WEAKNESS: BASEBALL

Every man has character defects, and Kroc's weakness is baseball. He has been trying to buy the Chicago Cubs ever since his brainchild, the McDonald's hamburger chain, went public. The idea of purchasing the Padres came one morning while he was reading a newspaper in Chicago.

"I read that the National League



had rejected Mrs. Everett (Marjorie L. Everett) and I turned to my wife and said, 'honey, what would you think if I bought the Padres?'

"I would say," answered Joan Kroc, "that you are nuts."

Nevertheless, Kroc is in San Diego with his lawyers and his checkbook. He is optimistic about becoming the team's new owner and, if the negotiations go smoothly, he'll be the central figure in a press conference today at 4 p.m. at the Cuyamaca Club.

"Mr. Smith is very emphatic about wanting to keep the club in San Diego," says Kroc, "and I'm 100 percent cooperative. We have 17 McDonald's restaurants in this area and we expect to put in another 12. If I moved the team, I'd have to answer to those people."

Kroc is a small, intense man who seems charged with energy in his 71st year. He is chairman and largest stockholder of a great hamburger empire which will gross \$2 billion this year. A year ago, on the occasion of his 70th birthday, he and his wife made gifts totaling \$7.5 million to hospitals and museums. His Kroc Foundation, with headquarters in Santa Barbara, concentrates on combating such diseases as arthritis, diabetes, and multiple sclerosis. "The diseases that kill you inch by inch," notes Kroc.

## HIGH SCHOOL DROPOUT

He is a high school dropout who lied about his age (15) to join the Red Cross ambulance corps during World War II. His mother had taught him classical piano and he

turned to music and radio after the world was declared safe for democracy. He became musical director for a Chicago radio station and, for \$5 per show, hired a team known as Sam and Henry. Later they became Amos 'n Andy.

He subsequently sold paper cups for the Lily-Tulip Cup Co. and then acquired exclusive sales rights to a machine which mixed five milkshakes simultaneously. That led him to a restaurant on E street in San Bernardino where he met the McDonald brothers and was impressed by their restaurant and golden arch.

Kroc made a deal to use the name and the arch and went into the food franchising business.

"What are you going to do with a name like Kroc?" he reasoned.

In time he paid the McDonalds \$2.7 million for proprietary rights and he prospered astonishingly. He had given his secretary 10 percent of the business in lieu of salary. Now her stock is valued at \$64 million.

He would give the Padres the stability they so desperately need. This is a team that died and was reborn; one can hope the Padres and Ray Kroc will enjoy the hereafter together.

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