

Political Penguin

By Duane Plank

Did you see the picture of our Secretary of State, Hillary Rodham Clinton, wearing a stylish blue hoodie, confronting some in the Pakistani government with her opinion that members of the Pakistan hierarchy aren't exactly being helpful in locating the murderers from Al Qaeda who are thought to be receiving safe haven inside their borders?

The morning that I filed this column, reports emanated from Pakistan that another suicide bomber had unfortunately been successful in his or her mission, killing 35 people outside a bank in the capital city of Rawalpindi.

Mohammad Mushtaq was a witness to the senseless carnage. "I was sitting on the pavement outside to wait for my turn," he said. "The bomb went off with a big bang. We all ran. I saw blood and body parts everywhere."

Clinton, who was a Senator from New York when the Twin Towers were torpedoed on 9/11, has been somewhat outspoken in her new diplomatic position in the Obama administration. Good for her. No need for country ass-kissing, no matter how "diplomatic" a position that the Sec. of State holds. Something needs to be done to root out these murdering desperadoes.

Said Clinton regarding the Al Qaeda criminals: "It is hard to believe that nobody in your government knows where they are and couldn't get them if they really wanted to."

Bingo. And if we hadn't castrated the snipers working for the CIA many years ago, maybe a lot of these barbarous murderers wouldn't be allowed to walk around unscathed? Maybe they wouldn't be walking around at all?

And Mrs. Clinton, who was supposedly in Pakistan to make nice and mend some fences, also took a shot at the business folks in the region, who apparently aren't all that interested in collecting taxes from their citizenry. Something about rampant tax evasion and fraud seems to permeate the

Pakistani culture. "At the risk of sounding undiplomatic, Pakistan has to have internal investment in your public services and your business opportunities," Clinton said. And then she added that the U.S. government "taxes everything that moves and everything that doesn't, and that's not what we see in Pakistan."

Nice shot, woman. A Democrat mentioning taxes. Whoooooooooooooo.

Then the following day, a still fired up Clinton continued to speak her mind concerning the terrorists as she hung out in the country. "Somebody, somewhere in Pakistan must know where these people are," Clinton said. "And we'd like to know as we view them as really at the core of the terrorist threat that threatens Pakistan, threatens Afghanistan, threatens us, threatens people all over the world." Thirty-five more corpses as of Monday kinda proved her point, didn't it?

Good for you, ma'am. And if you ticked off a few mucky-mucks in Pakistan, so be it.

Speaking of snipers, good news for us law-abiding citizens. Remember back in 2002, when the Washington, D.C. area and close environs were terrorized by a couple of rifle-wielding madmen? Since the powers that be couldn't really tell "we the people" what the hell was happening, folks from D.C. all the way to the City of Angels were looking over their shoulders when entering a convenience store, or stopping on the highway to pump gas.

Sentenced to die next Tuesday is one John Allen Muhammad, who along with his sidekick, Lee Boyd Malvo, was convicted of killing 10 innocent people in their shooting spree seven years ago. Muhammad was also considered a suspect in assassinations that took place in Tacoma, Washington, Montgomery, Alabama and other areas near D.C.

At this time, it appears that Muhammad will be offed by lethal injection, although his

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Dear Carol



Dear Carol,

My husband retired about a year ago. After he finished the projects he had around the house he settled into a life of reading the newspaper, looking at the computer, playing golf and puttering in the yard. He has started drinking earlier and earlier each day, gained weight, started taking sleeping pills and is often critical of me and what I do. One of my friends thinks he is depressed. I hate to mention that because he'd probably go to the doctor and get more drugs. How can I get him to be the happy, interested and interesting man I married?

Watching him Fade

Dear Watching,

Your husband may well be depressed. This often happens to people who retire from a job where they met challenges, had social interactions and felt like they were productive members of society. If we do not use our abilities they become stagnant and clog our mental, emotional, physical and spiritual arteries. He needs an outlet for his physical and mental energies. Find a way for him to volunteer his time and talents. Schools and non-profit groups always need help. Can

he join a service organization? Delivering Meals on Wheels, helping seniors prepare tax returns, a soup kitchen or homeless shelter all need his support. A machine that is not used rusts and declines.

Dear Carol,

I am under a lot of stress at work and at home. Two people in my office have been laid off and I've been given their responsibilities along with my own. My daughter is having a hard time adjusting to middle school and my husband's mother is ill and needs more and more of our attention. I took my blood pressure the other day and it is getting high. I don't want to start taking medications because they have so many side effects. Do you have any idea how I can get it down without taking pills?

Stressed Staci

Dear Staci,

Please go to the doctor for an exam to be sure your blood pressure increase hasn't been caused by something other than stress. If it is all right with your physician, before you fill a prescription, try conscious breath control. Take long, slow breaths. Count slowly to five as you inhale and to five as you exhale. Do this all day, every day, as often as you can remember to breathe this way. You might put a sign or item on your desk and in your car to remind you to maintain this practice. You have survived tough times before and you will make it through this challenge as well. Take a walk every day, breathe deeply, free your mind of worry and repeat a phrase that brings you peace. You might try phrases like, "This too shall pass. I am healthy, happy and strong. Everything is working for my good." Putting your attention on peace instead of worries will help your heart.

Send questions to askcarolnow@gmail.com or mail to Herald Publications.

Carol is a Life Coach available for private consultation in person or on the phone. •

Organization Helps Residents Resolve Disputes for Free

By Evan Ortega

Several months ago, residents distributed flyers on their street accusing their neighbor of stealing people's cats and leaving it at an animal shelter. Their neighbor accused them of vandalizing his house.

It was the latest battle of an ongoing war between the feuding neighbors. Police advised they call Lance Widman, Executive Director of the South Bay Center for Dispute Resolution. "Just when you think you've heard it all, something new comes up," Widman said.

Widman, a Hermosa Beach politician and longtime political science professor at El Camino College, founded the non-profit organization 10 years ago to help people resolve their problems in an affordable, confidential manner. "A mediator isn't there to decide on a dispute like a judge; the mediator is there to help people decide their own agreement," Widman said. "We take their words and put it on paper and when they are satisfied that those words on paper are what they agree to, they sign it."

The Center and its volunteers have helped residents resolve civil matters including landlord and tenant quarrels, construction disturbances, noise complaints, blocked views and property line disputes. "You get into a mediation meeting, which is very informal and they're all confidential, so you can feel safe in saying what you'd like to say in a civil fashion," Widman said. "Hopefully the communication can be reconnected and people can find a way of coexisting at some level as neighbors. That's what mediation means; it means healing."

When somebody contacts the Center for

mediation, Widman will first gather information by talking to all the parties involved before working on a solution. If he is unable to resolve the problem over the phone, Widman uses a more formal process where everybody meets face to face. "I'm not there to say who is right or wrong," Widman said. "I have my own feelings but I'm not a judge. I'm neutral. I try to keep the information flowing and the communication going."

State laws are in place to ensure the privacy of people involved in the Center's mediation sessions, Widman said. "During the course of the mediation meeting or while I'm talking to people over the phone, all of those conversations are protected by the California Evidence Code, which means neither me or my files can be subpoenaed in court," Widman said. "I've had to remind a couple of attorneys that. The [State] Supreme Court has been very clear that what happens in mediation stays in mediation."

The cities of Manhattan Beach, Hermosa Beach, Redondo Beach, Torrance and Hawthorne all have contracts with the Center to provide residents free or low-cost mediation services. "Mediation is far more informal and costs a lot less than getting an attorney and going to court," Widman said.

Widman added that he fields several hundred calls a year from residents and that the Center works on about three dozen Manhattan Beach cases a year. "Better than 70 percent of the time, people come to an agreement," Widman said. "...It's their agreement, it hasn't been forced on them, they help to write it and they sign it, so there's very few occasions where the parties don't carry out

the terms they agreed to."

Different City departments will refer the Center to residents when they determine the dispute to be a civil matter. "I work closely with the Police Department, Community Development Department, Code Enforcement, the City Attorney's office," Widman said. "And of course members of the City Council often get calls from people and refer them my way so we stay really busy."

As a building official in the Community Development Department, Carol Jacobson estimates she refers two to three residents a month. "When someone has difficulty talking directly with their neighbor or landlord, or say the contractor next door, sometimes it helps to have a neutral third party to help facilitate that communication," Jacobson said. "They're very helpful with that; they're very effective."

Jacobson said City staff works closely with the Center to make sure the needs of residents are met. "I've been very impressed with their effectiveness rate of agreements and helping most of those involved reach reasonable compromises and agreements," Jacobson said.

Problems between neighbors will sometimes start because of simple misunderstandings or thoughtless comments before evolving into outlandish disputes over issues like loud wind chimes, Widman noted. "Sometimes takes a while to disentangle all of that stuff," he said. "Sure the dog may be barking, but it's something you said to my wife two years ago that's really at the core of the issue."

Although Manhattan Beach residents might be more territorial because of property values,

Widman said people throughout the South Bay deal with similar disputes, whether they involve barking dogs or blocked views. "[There's] Neighbors who feel they are entitled to a view so they lean over the fence and they just hack and slash their neighbors' trees," Widman said. "They're probably at work during the day so they don't know what's going on or maybe they're on vacation. I've had a few of those."

Widman often receives referrals from the police, who often are called to resolve problems that the Center doesn't have the authority to handle. Manhattan Beach Police Lieutenant Andy Harrod said Widman will visit the Police Department once a year to remind officers about the program and answer questions. He also meets with new officers to explain the Center. "It provides law enforcement with another avenue to help work on a problem and solve it," Lt. Harrod said. "Sometimes it takes another person other than a law enforcement officer to sit down with the folks who are in conflict to listen to what the issues are on both sides... Sometimes all people have to do is talk things out and it helps tremendously."

Harrod said he has received phone calls from people who have been able to resolve problems through the Center. "It's not a cure-all, it doesn't solve everyone's problems, but it goes a long way in providing us with another tool to provide a service to our community."

To contact the South Bay Center for Dispute Resolution, call (310) 376-7007. •