

MEDIATE THIS !

THE WEARY TRAVELER AND THE PASSPORT FIASCO

BY STEVEN P. DINKIN

Dear Mediator,

I paid a passport services business to help me file my application to get my passport. Several months went by and I never received it. I have talked to the business representative, and they claim that the issue is with the State Department, not with their services. I have reached out to the State Department passport bureau and they claim that my application was not filed correctly. I am now filing the application on my own, and I want a refund, but the business refuses, claiming no fault.

*Out of Luck
in Scripps Ranch*

Dear Out of Luck,

Summer is fast approaching and finally the season of uninhibited travel is upon us, with 68 million Americans planning on taking summer vacations this year. While your passport is your key to the world, it can also be the only thing preventing you from reaching that tropical paradise or that African safari.



GETTY IMAGES

This week’s problem deals with a passport service’s alleged filing error and the client’s pursuit of a refund.

Consumer disputes such as yours can easily embroil you in the legal system, depending on the nature of the problem and where the transactions took place. To mention the most obvious option first, you have the ability to pursue a small-claims case against the business in question, though this requires you to pay a filing fee to the court

and arrange your schedule around your court date.

If the filing fee sounds less than appealing to you, there are other options available. Another simple yet possibly effective tactic is to speak with the owner of the business. The owner may or may not be involved in the day-to-day operations, and may very well not be aware of your situation.

The error that caused your predicament could have been the result of a negligent employee, or even worse, an improperly trained employee, and you might help shed some light on this issue.

It might take a bit of time to have a face-to-face interaction with the owner, but the result of a more personal approach can truly have an impact on the situation. If it

turns out that the owner is, in fact, the person you are in conflict with, then your approach may turn into a negotiation of sorts.

Think about using the Internet as a bargaining tool. The Internet has revolutionized a business’ ability to market itself to potential customers, and, as a result, many of us jump online before jumping in the car to figure out where we will spend our money. According to Forbes, 65 percent of people see online search as the most trusted source of information about people and companies.

You, of course, have the option of going online and writing a bad review of this business, shouting from the digital rooftops about the headache they’ve caused you. While this may be tempting, it most certainly will not get you your money back and will only serve to hurt the business.

Rather than wielding the heavy-handed stick of writing a bad review, consider informing the owner that you’d prefer to reach a resolution in a mutually beneficial manner by writing a

positive review. If the owner was willing to provide you a refund, you would write a review informing everyone of how the business helped you. This is a win-win situation where the business gets a unique review that highlights its ability to solve issues in the customer service department, and you get your refund.

“What do we live for, if it is not to make life less difficult for each other?” This quote by the Victorian-era novelist George Eliot captures the unique overlap between successful mediation and successful business. We should all walk away from a transaction, as well as a resolution, feeling as if life is just a little less difficult.

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.

NOTEBOOKS

From Union-Tribune reporting staff

POLITICS: CHARLES T. CLARK

Dems focus on District 3 supes race

The District 3 Board of Supervisor race is expected to have a major impact on the future of San Diego County. After all, a majority on the county Board of Supervisors is at stake.

If Democrats oust Supervisor Kristin Gaspar from her seat representing part of San Diego and the cities of Encinitas, Escondido, Solana Beach and Del Mar, the party will claim a Democratic majority on the board, possibly for the first time ever.

But before the party can focus on Gaspar, it has to figure out who its champion will be.

Right now Gaspar, who should emerge as one of the top two vote-getters in the primary because of a consolidated Republican vote, has drawn three Democratic challengers: Terra Lawson-Remer, an economist and attorney who was a former senior adviser in the Treasury Department under the Obama Administration; Olga Diaz, an Escondido City Council member and interim Dean of Counseling at Palomar Community College, and Jeff Griffith, a fire captain and member of the Palomar Health Board of Directors.

Lawson-Remer and Diaz are widely regarded as favorites. Some of the region's most prominent Democrats are already weighing in on their behalf.

Back in February when Diaz announced her candidacy, she picked up endorsements from Encinitas Mayor Catherine Blake-spear, Assemblywoman Tasha Boerner Horvath, and Assemblywoman Lorena Gonzalez, a San Diego Democrat who chairs the powerful State Assembly Appropriations Committee.

In March Lawson-Remer announced that she had received an endorsement from one of San Diego's most influential voices in Sacramento, Senate President Pro Tempore Toni Atkins. Lawson-Remer already was endorsed by Rep. Juan Vargas, D-San Diego.

Now another prominent San Diego Democrat has weighed in. Supervisor Nathan Fletcher, the lone Democrat on the county Board of Supervisors, endorsed Diaz on Wednesday.

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OUTDOORS: ERNIE COWAN

Anza-Borrego is like a time machine

I have discovered a time machine. It's not an expensive or sophisticated device and is simply driven by foot power and the mind.

My time machine allows the modern traveler to extend the powerful wings of imagination and soar to long-past times and events.

And for me, it seems to work best in remote places, away from the ever-changing urban world.

Years ago, I discovered this wonderful device when hiking in one of Anza-Borrego Desert State Park's most remote areas. Half buried in the dirt beneath a scrub oak was an olla, the utilitarian earthen pots made by the native inhabitants of the area.

Delicately lifting it from the ground, I reached inside, and my fingers fell into the fingerprint impressions left by the pot maker. It was an instant connection between past and present.

The wings of my time machine spread wide and I was carried back a thousand years or so to a time when the residents here followed the seasons, moving from mountains to desert in search of food or more hospitable weather.

With the olla's wide mouth, I could envision it filled with acorns, berries or seeds as the Indians roamed to gather their food or were perhaps seasonally relocating from summer to winter villages.

I was hiking with the park superintendent, so we carefully recorded the location and carried the pot out to be added to the park's cultural collection.

What my time machine could not tell me was why this olla was here? Who made it, who left it behind or why?

I traveled in time again a few years ago when hiking some arid canyons in Imperial County.

At a junction where three deep, narrow washes meet, I found several rock circles measuring about six feet in diameter.

The rocks were deeply set into the sand, indicating they had been there a long time. Wind and water had nearly buried the rocks in shifting sediments.

Archaeologist Malcom J. Rogers located more than 500 rock circles in the Colorado Desert that he called sleeping circles. Since then, archaeologists differ on the reason for these circles, with some saying the circles and other rock patterns may have been temporary camping locations, ceremonial sites or even natural formations created by wind, vegeta-



ERNIE COWAN

Grinding holes in the rocks in the Anza-Borrego Desert State Park.

tion growth or animal digging.

But my time machine painted a more vivid picture.

Since the circles were at a place where travelers from different directions would meet, I could see native people building a temporary camp while waiting for others to arrive.

I could easily sit here in the desert quiet and imagine a small band of ancient desert travelers waiting for their companions to arrive.

Yes, my time machine is imaginary, but triggered by a physical connection to history that only comes from being where history occurred.

In dusty sections of Carrizo Creek there are remnants of the Butterfield Overland Stage route left by travelers seeking a new life in California in the mid-1800s. If I close my eyes and activate the time machine, I can clearly hear the chains of the singletree rattling as the creaky stage coach passes by.

Desert canyons hold rocks dimpled with the grinding holes left by Native Americans while grinding acorns or seeds into a usable meal.

There are few places left where you can do this, but I've cast my mind to the wind while perched on a wilderness mountain, knowing I was perhaps sharing the same, unchanged, view of the first people to leave footprints here. Thank goodness for large, wilderness parks.

The scholars and scientists can provide the dry, historically accurate details of these places and things, but your time machine can bring life to this connection with the past.

So, lace up your boots, fire up your time machine and head into the wild places to connect with history. It's a spectacular journey.

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SAN DIEGO: JOHN WILKENS

Library gets grant to celebrate Breed

A nonprofit humanities group has given San Diego library officials a \$20,000 grant to celebrate the life and legacy of a children's librarian who stood up to injustice during World War II.

The money will be used for a month-long series of academic and cultural programs next March centered on Clara Breed, who openly opposed the internment of local Japanese Americans during World War II.

Breed, who knew many of the affected families because they were regular library users, sent dozens of care packages to children in the camps: clothing, shower caps, pencils, candy, hair curlers. And books. Always books.

Decrying internment as a gross injustice, she also wrote protest letters to government officials and penned critical articles for magazines. Democracy, she wrote, "must be defended at home as well as abroad."

Many of the children never forgot her. In 1991, at a reunion for those imprisoned at

the Poston camp in Arizona, a crowd of 700 people gave the librarian a standing ovation. When she died three years later, at age 88, one of the internees gave a eulogy. To them, even as adults, she was always "Miss Breed."

The library events next March, known collectively as "Remembering the Rebelious Miss Breed," will include scholarly presentations, author talks for children and adults, film screenings, exhibits and displays, dramatic performances and scholarly book discussions, according to project directors Marc Chery and Monnee Tong.

The \$20,000 for the project came from California Humanities, a nonprofit partner of the National Endowment for the Humanities. It was one of 11 "Humanities for All" grants distributed through a competitive process by the organization, which seeks to promote "understanding and empathy among all the state's peoples in order to cultivate a thriving democracy."

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FROM THE ARCHIVES

SEND IT IN A LETTER

In June 1930, a crowd of people showed up to watch the first U.S. air mail shipment leave San Diego. Although the U.S. Post Office inaugurated regular airmail service on limited routes in 1918, it was a dozen years before San Diego became a stop on air mail routes.

From The San Diego Union, Monday, June 2, 1930:

THOUSANDS SEE FIRST AIR MAIL LEAVE

HAS 24,220 LETTERS ON FIRST PLANE

San Diegan Pilots Huge Tri-Motored Ship on Trip Opening Line Here; Cargo to Reach New York Tomorrow

Thousands of citizens crowding Lindbergh field and the nearby hills, saw the air capital of the west become a part of Uncle Sam's far flung air mail network yesterday when a great tri-motored Western Air Express plane roared away with 24,220 pieces of air mail.

A mail truck bearing the air mail letters in five sacks pulled through the crowds and onto the flying field a short time after 5 o'clock. Postmaster E.W. Dort turned the mail over to Pilot H.B. "Hap" Russell, the engines of the plane were started and at 5:30 the big craft began to roll down the field kicking off at 5:34 p.m.

SPEECHES CALLED OFF

Russell circled the field once for altitude and then headed northward for Alhambra, where at 7 o'clock the mail left for Salt Lake on another plane.

There was little ceremony attending the realization of the city's hope of years — a place on a transcontinental air mail line. Speeches which had been planned were called off at the last moment, due to the noise of several tri-motored planes which arrived at the time. But Mayor Clark, Postmaster E.W. Dort, Hall Hotchkiss, and E.J. Fluke, district air mail superintendent of the Western Air Express, asked The Union to express to the people their appreciation for the backing given the first air mail out of San Diego.

This morning San Diego becomes attached to the westbound line with the arrival of the mailplane at 5:35 a.m. This mailplane left Salt Lake City at 9:30 o'clock last night, opening the Salt Lake City-San Diego run.

The mail which left San Diego yesterday will be in New York tomorrow morning, that is the parts of it destined to the eastern



seaboard. Mail addressed to San Diegans will be taken off at Los Angeles and sent back. If it bears double air mail postage it will come back this morning on the air mail. Otherwise it will come by train.

CROWDS ARRIVE EARLY

Crowds began assembling at Lindbergh field and the neighboring hills before 3 o'clock yesterday afternoon. The marine corps band arrived to furnish music and just before 4 o'clock a squadron of navy planes appeared over the field.

After going through evolutions, the navy planes left and their places were taken by two squadrons of army planes, one composed of small, fast, fighting planes and the other of Uncle Sam's greatest bombers.

These ships had hardly completed their evolutions when a roar was heard in the skies and observers looking eastward saw a red plane coming. It was the Western Air Express plane from Dallas, which was to pick up the air mail.

It touched Lindbergh field at 5:05 p.m. and taxied up to the deadline. As it went by the crowd that lined the rail, hats and scarfs went into the air and spectators on the hills, seeing this display, also waved hats. It must be explained in the interest of verity, that the hats mainly went off because of the wind from the airplane's propellers. That is, the hats of spectators near the plane. A number of spectators, at first indignant when the stream of air and dust hit them, were mollified when it was explained that they were receiving tangible souvenirs of the first air mail out of the city. After this explanation few flinched when the mailplane hurled sand at them.

PILOT SIGNS LETTERS

Pilot H.J. Kelsey brought the Dallas plane into San Diego but a native born San Diegan had the honor of piloting the first air mail out of the city. He is H.B. "Hap" Russell, Western Air pilot, who came here specially for the first air mail flight. He arrived on the eastbound plane yesterday morning and for several hours afterwards was busy signing his name to air mail letters. He estimated he signed more than 500 of the letters at the request of senders who wanted the pilot's name on their missives.

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