

LOS ANGELES

Daily Journal

FRIDAY, JUNE 18, 2010

VERDICTS & SETTLEMENTS

Artistic Bent

Just as she looks to create harmony in her artwork, Linda Meyer aims for the same result in mediations.

By Susan McRae *Daily Journal Staff Writer*

LOS ANGELES — If life imitates art, mediator Linda E. Meyer fits the bill.

A painter, poet, potter and jeweler, Meyer looks for spontaneous harmony in whatever she creates — whether it's resolving heated disputes between warring litigants or bending 14k wire into an earring of multicolored, semiprecious stones.

"Art is like a part of life," Meyer said, sitting in the living room of her Spanish-style, canyon hideaway, filled with colorful rugs, paintings and sculpture from her travels. Even though she's minutes from the busy Pacific Coast Highway, a Zen-like silence permeates the outdoors.

"When I'm making a piece of jewelry, I never know exactly how it's going to turn out," she said. "All I want to do is create some beauty. So I'm in the moment with it. I'm dealing with bending the wire one way or the other. What you're looking for is a harmony of the parts."

The same holds true for her mediations. "I never go in with an agenda," she said. "After I've read the briefs, and everyone's told me what their positions are, I still look at the landscape with a fresh eye because the briefs don't tell you so much of what you need to know if you're going to get through the conflict."

"So, I can look at the stones. I can look at the wire. It's all there. It's clear what it is. But how it's going to work together and fit in to create a whole, you've got to be in the moment. You've got to trust you can navigate it."

"And in my work, if I can bring people to even a small solution, I don't think it's necessarily going to fix their lives, but I think I've done a little bit to help in terms of harmony."

A former litigation associate, Meyer, 55, became a mediator in the early 1990s. She said she never felt comfortable in the advocacy role. So after eight years, she left the practice to do some soul searching. During a two-year hiatus, she worked in a Santa Monica pottery shop while figuring out her next move.

Mediation was just getting started. The only similar things she'd done were voluntary settlement conferences as a lawyer. She took a course at the Los Angeles County Bar Association's Dispute Resolution Services. What she liked about the new system was that the parties were involved in the process. It created a different dynamic.

The first two years were lean. She mediated a total of three paying cases and lived off her savings. But in her third year, she landed a bunch of small cases from the Chubb Insurance Group. After that, her mediation practice took off.

She quickly gained a reputation for her unique approach. At the time, she had an office on the beach in Malibu. (She now leases space from a law firm on the city's west side.) She charged top dollar and used a technique called "restatement," but added an emotional component that was all her own.

The way it worked was the parties would come together. Each would describe their
(Continued)



Linda E. Meyer, Esq.
Full-time Mediator
since 1990

100 - 150 cases per year

Areas of Specialty:
Employment, Business,
Commercial, Real Estate,
Entertainment, Toxic Tort,
Professional Liability,
Insurance Coverage,
Professional Malpractice
and Class Actions

Rate: \$8,000 a day

www.lindameyer.com

view of the dispute. Meyer would quietly absorb the account, then turn to the other party and restate it, but embellishing it with all the pent-up rage she felt the narrator was suppressing. Then, she'd do the same with the other side.

Some people likened it to method acting or channeling, a practice that rose in popularity during that time. Lawyers who participated in the process, however, said it was very effective. Others simply shied away from her services.

Dan Stormer of Hadsell Stormer Keeny Richardson & Renick is a lawyer who admired Meyer's technique. He still uses Meyer's services to this day, he said, although he hasn't heard of her employing the restatement method lately. In fact, he added, she always sees his clients in private session now, without the other side being present.

It is a method most mediators use today. "When I started using mediation in the early '90s, [restatement] was a novel way of getting people to get their emotions out and work through things," Stormer said of Meyer's early technique. "It was a collaborative event with emotional traction for resolving one's issues. I think for the time period, it was amusing, but effective."

Stormer called Meyer an "outstanding mediator. She understands people's motivations, the process and also knows how to cut to the chase," he said.

Another lawyer who has used Meyer's service since the beginning is Nathan Goldberg of Allred Maroko & Goldberg. Over the years, he's hired her in employment, contractual and high-profile disputes. He said Meyer is on the top of his list of mediators.

"She's able to relate to everybody," Goldberg said. "She has an instant rapport with the parties, the lawyers. Everyone trusts her to guide them toward a resolution. She understands people intuitively, manages expectations and is able to deliver a settlement."

Over time, Meyer said, her approach has evolved and matured. Along with the profession. She still uses the restatement method, but only if lawyers ask for it. More often, she uses a number of other tools and techniques tailored to the case at hand. And she rarely holds joint sessions.

She also has become more efficient in her approach, she said. In the last year, she's

never gone over the allotted eight hours, and she's been able to settle every case.

Since shutting her Malibu Beach office in April 2002, Meyer has done her own administrative work. She reserves two days a week for it and to handle emergency cases, leaving the other three days open for her regular mediation scheduling.

Another new aspect Meyer has introduced, in light of the falling economy, is a bargain special each month of \$5,750, for the first five cases booked, on a first-come, first-served basis. Her regular rate is \$8,000 for an eight-hour day. She doesn't offer half-day sessions.

The scheduling changes allow her to see people on short notice, while the lower rate brings in some new clients.

What hasn't changed, she said, is her intuition. She's had it as far back as she can remember. Through the years, she's honed it with therapy and a lot of self-awareness work. "I'm a strange combo of introspective and practical, in-the-world, get-it-done mix," she said.

Born in what then was called Bombay, Meyer lived in the Indian city until she was 13. Her father, a marketing representative for Gulf Oil, was transferred to the company's Southern California office, and the family moved to Beverly Hills.

Meyer began painting when she was 9. She started making pottery in high school and later began selling her work on Melrose Avenue to get money to go East to visit potential schools. She picked Wellesley College, earning a bachelor's degree in English literature and history in 1977.

She was inspired by a professor to go to law school. She moved to Ann Arbor, where she taught pottery and established residency so she could attend the University of Michigan Law School. She supported herself through loans, grants and working odd jobs 40 hours a week.

After graduating in 1982, Meyer moved to Boston and worked briefly as an associate at Peabody & Brown, an employment law firm. She broadened her experience by joining another Boston firm, Warner & Stackpole, handling securities, insurance, products liability, real estate and employment cases.

Meyer returned to Los Angeles in 1988 to work for White & Case, a New York-based firm, where she spent the next two years handling complex insurance cases and other

commercial litigation.

Now, as a mediator, Meyer believes, at least for the moment, she has found her niche.

Besides the art – her own and others – that adorns her house, she also displays inspirational writings of people she admires, from musings on peace by early American management theorist Mary Parker Follet to Jack London's quote that begins, "I'd rather be ashes than dust."

"I think we are here to help," Meyer said, "I feel deeply that I want to be of service. Because I'm paid a lot of money for my work, people don't think of it that way.

"The reality is I give everything to my work and the people I'm working with. I wouldn't be doing this work if it didn't give me a very, very strong feeling of satisfaction, if I didn't care about what I was doing."

Here are some of the lawyers who have used Meyer's mediation services:

Nathan Goldberg, Esq.

▪ *Allred Maroko & Goldberg*

Dan Stormer, Esq.

▪ *Hadsell Stormer Keeny Richardson & Renick*

Howard Weitzman, Esq.

Shawn Chapman Holley, Esq.

▪ *Kinsella Weitzman Iser Kump & Aldisert*

Marty Singer, Esq.

▪ *Lavelly & Singer*

Christopher Caldwell, Esq.

▪ *Caldwell Leslie & Proctor*

Elena Baca, Esq.

▪ *Paul, Hastings, Janofsky & Walker*

Michael Bononi, Esq.

▪ *Bononi Law Group*

Steve Rubin, Esq.

▪ *Rubin Law Corp.*

Jeffrey Thomas, Esq.

▪ *Duran & Thomas*