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PRESS RELEASE

JUDGE WALKS ON FIRE

BUT NOT ON WATER

I, like many mediators, have been told a few times that I must walk on water when I settle one of those “impossible” cases. Naturally, I have to deny that, but I can now boast that I do walk on fire. I recently walked bare-footed on a 20-foot-long bed of 1,200-degree coals.

Since retiring from the Sacramento Superior Court eight years ago, I have resolved hundreds of legal disputes, and I continue to take every opportunity I can to enhance my mediation skills, my communication abilities and my understanding of human nature. Research has shown that the mediator’s experience in mediation and his or her self-confidence are the most critical factors in a successful mediation. Recently, I decided that, if I could walk on fire, my confidence would be boosted even higher which would result in an even greater success rate in mediations.

In April, I contacted Tolly Burkan of Twain Hart, CA, who has taught firewalking for the past 37 years. Unfortunately, he no longer teaches typical 3-hour firewalking seminars to the general public. He does, however, teach three-day-long seminars to select groups of people from all over the world intended to teach them to be firewalking instructors. I considered my options and decided if I was going to trust my safety to someone, I wanted the best in the world. Consequently, I am now a certified firewalking instructor. One of the best things about the course was that my 29-year-old son, Jeff, of Roseville, took the course with me.

Walking barefoot on 1,200-degree coals does not involve any “trick” or “illusion.” The coals are actually that temperature, and will, in fact, severely burn one who is not mentally prepared and properly focused on the task. I walked on the coals multiple times each of the three nights of the course and found that my experience differed each night depending upon my degree of concentration. The first night I was very focused and I felt no heat whatsoever each of the six or seven times I walked on the coals. The second night, I was distracted just before the walk and it felt like I was walking on very hot sand. (Later that evening I discovered that I received a couple of minor blisters.) The sensation was the same each time I walked that night. The third night I was again very focused except for the last two steps of the twenty-foot walk. I felt no warmth or discomfort for the majority of the twenty-foot walk on the third night, but I suddenly felt fairly intense heat on the last two steps. Each time I walked on the coals that third night the sensation was the same, i.e., no feeling of heat until the last two steps. Looking back on the experience, I have concluded that I was probably prematurely relieved to reach the end of the walk and my concentration slipped a little. This variation from night to night confirmed my belief that the key to firewalking truly is state of mind because my degree of concentration was the only variable from one night to the next.

The total course involved many hours of classroom lectures and exercises plus other “events” intended to overcome fears and anxieties or to simply teach you that you can do things that may seem impossible or dangerous if you simply focus on what you are doing and make up your mind that you are going to do it. These activities included: breaking boards and concrete blocks with my bare hand; walking on a bed of broken glass bottles; bending a 10-foot-long piece of steel rebar by having two people face each other, placing an end of the rebar at the base of their throats, then walking firmly toward each other until the bar bends into a “U” shape. Other exercises included rappelling down into a 200-foot-deep cavern; breaking the shaft of a target arrow by placing the metal tip against my throat and the feathered end against a wall, and then stepping firmly toward the wall until the shaft of the arrow snapped. The final exercise involved pushing a 5-inch-long (and proportionately thick) sewing needle through the web of skin between my thumb and first finger.

On this last event with the needle I assumed that if I concentrated that there would be no pain, similar to the no burn on the coals. However, I discovered that this was **very** painful and that the lesson to be learned was to persist and work through the pain until my goal was accomplished.

The entire event was very much a spiritual experience because we spent 12 hours a day with 30 people from all over the world with very different backgrounds and goals, but they were all there to learn the various forms of meditation, concentration and formation of intention. Some of the events were very emotional for some participants, depending on their specific fears or phobias. Some people would cry, whoop or just be extremely quiet after accomplishing a particular feat.

I, personally, had no great epiphany after any one specific event, but reflecting on the entire course I found it was very empowering, and it has made me realize that I can accomplish nearly any goal if I just focus my energy, believe in myself and be persistent regardless of the pain, resistance or disbelief that I, or others, may have.

This experience did, in fact, increase my self-confidence and persistence in achieving resolution in mediations. I know that my self-confidence and inner belief that resolution is possible will transfer to the parties and attorneys in a dispute and will result in more signed agreements. I truly believe that my confidence and my strong intention to reach resolution is felt by the participants and, in turn, it increases *their* creativity, confidence and determination to reach resolution even in the most difficult of cases.

If you wish further information on firewalking you may consult Tolly Burkans’s website www.firewalking.com. My website is www.MediatorJudge.com.