Case No. 1

Sometimes, when other remedies have failed, all it takes from the BBB mediation department is a phone call or two.

This Washington, D.C., woman had a photo company take pictures of her grandson against a baseball-type background.

When the finished package arrived, the picture with the baseball background was not included, she said, and asked that the company refund $203.

She said the company told her that the reason it wasn’t included was because her son’s eyes were closed.

The company then told the BBB in correspondence that that particular pose was not in the negatives and that no picture could be sent.

Case No. 2

Unfinished home repair work is the source of many complaints filed with the BBB, such as this one.

This Pine Lawn, Mo., woman paid a contractor $750 on a $1,500 contract to rebuild a deck and repair a fence, with the remainder due on completion.

She gave the contractor the remaining $750 when he said he would return the following day to finish the job. But he didn’t return. She wanted a refund of $1,000.

A company spokesman told a BBB mediator that he felt the job was completed, and that he didn’t know why the woman was complaining.

He promised to call the customer to discuss the matter with her.

But the customer told the BBB mediator that he didn’t call, and the case was closed as unresolved.

Case No. 3

In another home repair complaint, the issue was shoddy workmanship and a warranty.

A St. Louis clinic hired a roofing company to patch four areas where water was coming through the roof, paying $1,000.

The roofer provided a 15-year warranty on the work. But a little over a year after the job was completed, the roof leaked.

More repairs were made, but after more rain, the roof again leaked so bad that ceiling tiles were falling. The clinic wanted the $1,000 refunded.

Tired of dealing with the company, the clinic hired another company to repair the roof.

The company told a BBB mediator that it was a 6-month guarantee, not a 15-year guarantee, that time had already expired, and besides, if the clinic hired another company to make repairs, that voided whatever warranty there was.

The company remained adamant,

Lawyer, Teacher, Mediator--A Perfect

It seemed the perfect fit—a law professor and administrator of a university’s alternative dispute resolution program working as a volunteer mediator for the BBB.

But it shortly became more than that as C. J. Larkin is training her law students to be volunteer mediators at the BBB as well.

And the marriage has worked out well, according to Melissa Giffhorn, mediation administrator, who notes, “We’re pleased with the professionalism of the student mediators.”

For Larkin, it’s another step in her long list of activities in the field of alternative dispute resolution.

This perky mother of two also is a board member of the international group, Mediators Without Borders, a senior mediator and trainer for the Community Conflict Services of Metropolitan St. Louis; and a trainer and consultant with the Ethnic Mediation Council in collaboration with the International Institute.

She also is involved in mediation with the Equal Employment Opportunity Commission and the St. Louis City and County family and juvenile courts.

Through them all, Larkin has performed more than 500 mediations in the areas of family, land use, employment, personal injury, attorney-client, juvenile victim-offender, and community/neighborhood disputes.

But it seems the greatest satisfaction for Larkin is teaching others to follow in her footsteps, if only for a little while. (Along the way, she also picked up a master’s degree in political science because she wanted to teach.)

Before bringing her students to the BBB (there are 10 at the moment), they must undergo 20 hours of training, sometimes working in small peer critique groups.

Regardless of whether they’ll become active in the dispute resolution field later, the experience is beneficial for the future lawyers.

For example, in mediation it’s often necessary to clarify the issues separating the two parties, and this skill is very important in attorney-client relationships, she notes.

Earlier in her career, Larkin spent time in the death penalty appeals section of the public defender’s office and practiced law in the fields of family and domestic violence.

What’s next? Larkin has already completed BBB training to be an arbitrator, and upon certification will venture into that field.

Why? “Mostly because it’s different than what I do,” she says.

In her little spare time, Larkin does yoga every other day in her home in University City where she lives with her daughter, Rachael, 18, and son Benjamin, 11.

Sign Up for BBB E-News

If you aren’t on the BBB E-News list, it’s easy to sign up and it is just one of the many benefits of membership!

Just send the desired e-mail address to bbb@con-tactbbb.org. If you have staff that could use information of this nature, sign them up too.

It’s quick, easy and we promise not to inundate you with junk, just things we think are in the public interest and of special interest to you as a valued customer!

The BBB’s Hot Line processes consumers’ complaints through mediation. Following is a sampling of cases handled by the BBB staff and volunteers. If you have a complaint, call the BBB Hot Line at (314) 645-3300.

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Contacted by a BBB mediator by telephone, the company immediately agreed to retake the pictures at no charge, and the complaint was closed as resolved.

By

Melissa Giffhorn

Thank You

Thank you very much for your report on (name of company). I received advertising from them and was a bit suspicious because the product was not defined and the name of the company was not given except in initials. A search of the net for the address, however, yielded your most excellent report of February 2006.

Appreciative in California.

Frederick Hollander

BBB Statistics

January, 2007

Services Provided: 186,696

Business Reports: 165,574

Industry Tips: 7,659

Alerts/Warnings: 1,999

Complaints Processed: 2,266

The Bridge