

Late Night's **Conan O'Brien** gets the last laugh

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Jennifer Aniston's
Sudden split

Paul's Tragic Loss

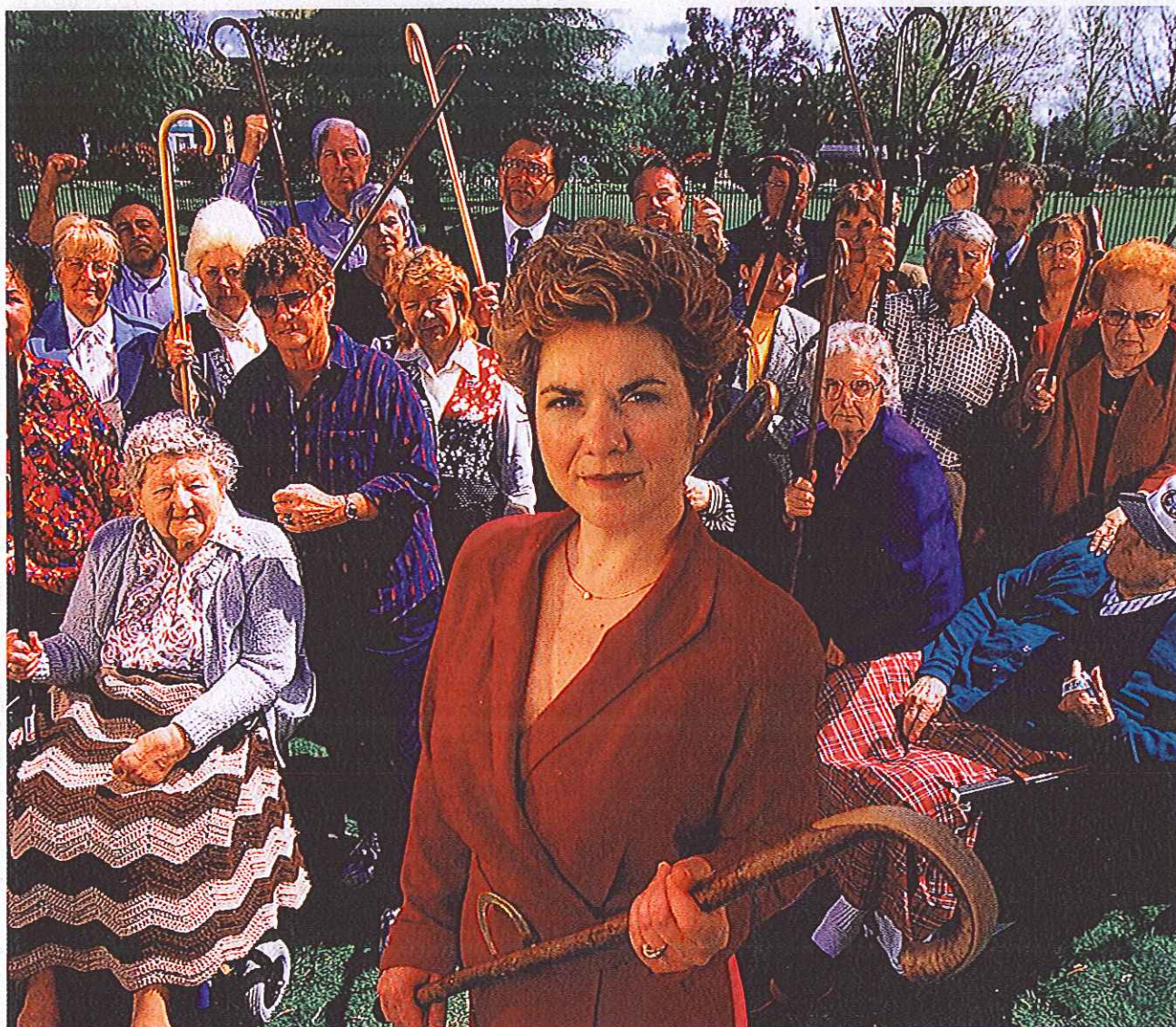
'The Love of My Life'

In 29 years of marriage, Paul and Linda McCartney spent only 11 days apart. Friends talk about her final courage—and their inspiring love story

\$2.79



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"Some people have a calling in life," a friend says of Clement, defender of senior citizens, "and I think Lesley is one of them."

The Guardian

Lawyer Lesley Clement
fights nursing homes
that, she claims, mistreat
their patients

There was blood dripping from 83-year-old Dorothy Palmer's face and ear, an eggplant-size bruise on her arm and gashes on her legs that night in 1994 when she wandered into a garage near her San Rafael, Calif., nursing home.

Photographs by Acey Harper

"Oh, my God!" cried the neighbor she walked in on. "What happened to you?" Palmer, an Alzheimer's patient, couldn't explain. Determined to find out, Palmer's great-niece was on the case within days. "I just jumped in with both feet," says lawyer Lesley Clement, 36. "I said, 'We're going to get to the bottom of this.'"

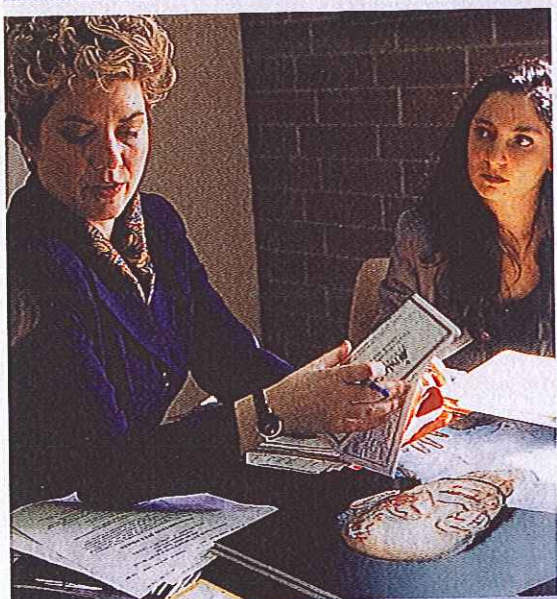
She did. Clement has since won substantial financial awards for a number of elderly clients and has emerged as one of the nation's leading fighters against nursing-home-patient abuse. "An entire nation is

growing outraged," says former California supreme court judge Armand Arabian, who has assisted her in suing a nursing home, "and Lesley is on the cutting edge of those who protect the needy."

Clement had been handling mundane business-law cases for a Sacramento legal firm when her aunt Pamala Pedrazzini left her an anguished phone message about Palmer, whom Clement has always called Grandma Dorothy. Pedrazzini and her family had done careful research before placing Palmer in the \$2,200-a-month Elderhearth



"She's principled and passionate," says beau Gary Gallawa [on Lake Greenhaven].



"What makes Lesley [with staffer Victoria Wilhelm] stand out is that she's unrelenting," says a colleague.

nursing home in January 1993.

"Things looked really great on the surface," Pedrazzini says.

In court, Clement charged that, on the night her great-aunt wandered away, a single nurse's aide with a history of getting rough with residents had been overseeing more than 40 dementia patients. Clement alleged that the aide beat Palmer and then locked her out to make it seem as if the elderly woman might have been mugged. Clement made her argument so persuasively that

the nursing home agreed to a hefty settlement before the case went to the jury. Her success drew attention—and clients. "I thought, 'My God, this is happening everywhere,'" she says.

Until recently, few lawyers would bring personal injury or wrongful death suits on behalf of nursing-home patients, since juries seldom placed a high cash value on the lives of people with no earning power. But as baby boomers find their parents needing care, attitudes are changing.

Clement has taken advantage of the new climate for clients such as Ben Bretz, 90, a retired oil driller who had been living on Medicaid at Covenant Care in Sacramento for four years when his daughter Juanita Daniels discovered on a 1995 visit that he was dehydrated and nearly unconscious. Rushed to a hospital, he never regained the ability to stand or to swallow liquids. Clement found that Bretz had been severely underfed and given mood-altering drugs without his family's approval. Suing in 1996,

she won a \$1.5 million settlement, enough for Bretz's family to hire private caregivers.

Such awards have fueled criticism that suits like Clement's benefit relatives and lawyers more than elderly victims, but Clement says she carefully screens clients to make sure their concerns aren't merely financial. "That's not what these cases are about," she says. "They're about trying to bring change."

That sense of mission comes as no surprise to Clement's mother, Joan, 66, who, recalling her daughter's strong personality, says, "She's always been a crusader." Born in Tokyo, where her father, Jack, now divorced from Joan, was an Air Force captain, Clement moved in 1967 with her mother and her sister Michele, now 39, to Petaluma, Calif., where Lesley became close to her maternal grandmother, Beatrice Pedrazzini. After graduating from Sacramento State University, Clement went on to the University of San Diego law school. Her first job, for the Sacramento law firm, left her unsatisfied. "It was just about money," she says, "and it's hard to get a jury too excited about that."

Moving jurors has been less of a challenge since 1994, when she began working exclusively on elder-abuse cases. "Who the hell is going to sit on a jury and vote against your grandmother?" asks Newcastle, Calif., lawyer Thomas Kristof, who lost a \$350,000 case to Clement in 1995.

But Clement's enthusiasm has also been crucial. "She doesn't hide her feelings about her case—or much of anything, that I can tell," says boyfriend Gary Gallawa, a defense lawyer who shares a lakeside home with her in Sacramento. Knowing that Clement loved to garden with her grandmother as a girl, Gallawa is planting flowers to distract her a bit from her all-consuming solo practice. "I made a New Year's resolution to work 10 percent less," says Clement. "So far, that hasn't happened." Bad news for Gallawa; good news for abused senior citizens.

- Thomas Fields-Meyer
- Suzanne Marmion in Sacramento